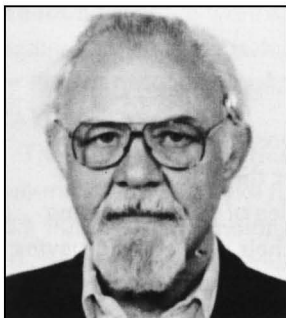


PUBLISHING IN MOSCOW

Edwin Shelock

How is a learned journal in English from Russian sources published in the international market? The organisation of scientific publishing, the commercial practices for foreign companies within Russia in an evolving legal situation and the problem of production, equipment, training and communication are all touched upon.



Edwin Shelock is a Director of Turpion Ltd and General Director of Turpion-Moscow Ltd. He was previously Chairman of ALPSP and Director of Turpin Distribution.
E-mail: edwin@turpion.demon.co.uk

By 'Publishing in Moscow' I mean publishing in English, for international sales, the journals of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and similar organisations. This can include journals published directly in English with the cooperation of such institutes, such as *Mendeleev Communications*. It can also include books. If you are interested in publishing books, there is plenty of enthusiasm and material for books in Russia. It does not include publishing scientific material for the Russian market. Whilst some effort has been made to improve the economics of newspapers and the like, the subscription price of a Russian scientific journal does not always cover the cost even of the postage. My experience and practice in this business is essentially of scientific journals for learned societies, so I will be concentrating on these aspects of publishing in Moscow.

The Russian editions in the past were always subsidised by the Academy, and they still are to a large extent. There is much said about stopping this practice but the decision is always put back to the next year.

As an outsider from the Russian Academy's own publishing house Maik/Nauka you would be required to ensure that the Russian edition was supported without the assistance of the Academy, which means that the 'profits' would have to be arranged to cover these costs. This is one of the factors which makes these journals expensive in comparison with like journals in the West. Another factor is that authors are paid for their work.

Whilst one can be purist and say that these are not legitimate charges on the English language production, they are not new, and they represent a lifeline for Russian scientists, who derive a supplement to a very small income as a senior scientist, and who then have access to the science of their own country in their own language.

The problem of language is another factor. With the separation of the old regime from the rest of the world for so long, there was not the use and practice of English to establish a body of good practitioners in the language. The scientists understood enough English to have a passive command for reading in their own subject but not enough to be able to prepare documents in that language to the standard required for scientific communication. Now that the world is open to them there is a need for direct communication in English, and, unfortunately, there is a lack of understanding of how weak is their use of the language.

I propose to divide this article into three parts, the first will deal with the organisation of scientific publishing, the second with commercial practice for foreign companies within Russia, and the third with the problems of production across two cultures, for this is not a foreign country operation so much as a cross-culture operation.

The organisation of scientific publishing

In the days of VAAP publishers made contracts for the publication in translation of Russian language journals. The Russian journals were sold at a very low price in Russia and their production was subsidised by one of the organs of State. The royalties paid to VAAP for the permission to publish the English edition was for the payment of authors. VAAP was an authors agency.

When all changed with the fall of the old regime the culture did not change. There was much debate about the ownership of titles previously the property of the State, and who had the rights to publish their own journals. All were seeking to control the immense profits from publishing! There was no real understanding of the state of ownership and absolutely no understanding of the process of publishing in the West. After about a year and a half of argument and discussion the Academy of Sciences laid down that the Academy was the first owner of all their journals and the second owner was decided historically, normally the Department or the editorial board. The Academy also decided that all contracts signed by VAAP would be honoured. New contracts would be negotiated at the end of the old contracts and no contract could be valid unless countersigned by the President of the Academy.

The Academy set up its own publishing house with some American publishers, called Interperiodica. This eventually went into partnership with the old Academy publisher/printer Nauka to form Maik/Nauka. This house will publish all Academy owned journals by default. Not to be published by this company requires that the partner is an appropriate learned society and that the contract is financially better than that offered by Maik/Nauka and that provision is made within the contract for the support of the Russian language journal.

This applies only to the Russian Academy of Science and does not apply to other academies such as the Ukrainian, nor to non-Academy publications such as those of learned societies within Russia, nor other state organisations which publish.

When negotiating always remember that Russia always was and still is hierarchical. You start at the top and if your proposal is considered worthy of discussion then the discussion starts lower down the hierarchy, but finally ends at the top again. It is most important to understand the structure of the organisation you are approaching and to make the appointments with the right people.

Russian lawyers are much like lawyers from all over the world, they are much concerned with detail and ignore the main principles of the contract, the first one being that one wishes to publish. It is essential, more so in Russia than elsewhere, that the discussions start with your form of contract which should be clear as to the purpose and management of the publishing process, then let the detail be added, using the main outline as a guide to what detail is logical and permissible.

Russians like doing business with faces, particularly faces that they know, so do not be too surprised if the first stages are slow and very drawn out and that you are expected to return several times to go over seemingly the same ground, before the real work starts. And then it often moves so fast that you are taken unaware of the importance and consequences of what is happening.

Commercial practice for foreign companies

Inevitably there was no consistent body of law concerning commerce after the change in government. There are tales of people walking about with dollar bills in their pockets and paying as they go. This sort of frontier town commerce is a thing of the past. It is illegal to pay a Russian citizen in any currency other than rubles for work done in Russia. Russian citizens may work for foreign companies and the foreign companies may pay them in hard currency but through a bank.

The experience of Turpion Ltd, which is a partnership between the Royal Society of

Chemistry and Pion Ltd, now joined by the London Mathematical Society, will indicate the problems. Turpion started before the changes to alter the publishing practices of the past to a more western form. They started with a bioscience journal directly into English. It was inevitable that this would fail, it was the first of its kind and there was no understanding of the depths of non-understanding of the other side. But things were changing quickly and a decision to continue with the attempt to publish meant being properly established and legal.

Turpion-Moscow was founded, a company wholly owned by Turpion but registered under Russian law. This enabled the company to employ people, pay salaries, taxes, health insurance, pension funds etc. An office was established at the Institute of Organic Chemistry in Moscow. At the time we had only a vague idea of the importance of this move. It was expensive and like all offices had a basic core of throughput to make it economically viable. The risk was that we would not achieve that viability, and in fact it took a long time. But we now know that without it there would have been nothing. After a little difficulty our English auditors began to have faith in the Russian organisation and we now pass through the Russian and the English audit without more than the usual minor problems.

The staff includes a Russian qualified accountant, a secretary with good English for translations, and an office manager who speaks English and was well versed in the bureaucracy of old Russia from long experience in the Academy. We found that we were able to do for ourselves, legally and properly, what was partially offered by the new free style agency version of VAAP, RAIS.

The RAIS service is fine to pay authors honoraria and such like functions for a charge of 15% but if you are moving the whole production process back into Moscow and you need to pay printing contracts, typesetters wages and buy equipment then you will need more than this service, and having more than the service offered there is no need to use it. It still does have the old stigma of VAAP attached to it which is a pity as it is now doing useful work in this brave new world for those who have not gone the whole way as Turpion has.

As Russia began to find out what was necessary in the way of commercial law, laws were changed suddenly with the minimum of notice. As an example of the problems which arise, on January 1st this year all foreign companies with a bank account in Russia had to register this with the taxation authorities. The only surprise with such a request is that such registration did not exist before. The catch came with the announcement. Turpion heard on the 2nd January, and it was forbidden to use a foreign account with an international bank without the registration number, and implementation was immediate, no period of grace to fulfil the bureaucratic requirements. The effect was to close down all foreign business. The legal department in our bank was openly weeping. As Turpion-Moscow was registered as a Russian company it was able to hold Russian bank accounts which meant that it was able, by being very precise in how it did it, to transfer money from England to the Russian account, and so maintain production.

Apart from much patience, there is a need for inside knowledge. This is no place for the ill informed. On the other hand with the correct organisation life is possible in Moscow. If I may be allowed a commercial here, the Turpion-Moscow office facilities are available for a fee through the Royal Society of Chemistry's commercial organisation, Turpin Distribution Services Ltd.

Production across two cultures

If production work is to be done in Moscow, the divide between Moscow and London must be as transparent as possible. Communications must be the most sophisticated possible, and that means equipment and training. At the beginning Turpion established a training centre providing training within the publishing contracts for editorial staff. When there was sufficient competence the work such as typesetting was paid for. The rates of pay were the same as for the UK but at UK standards, so the work was judged on a percentage basis and a percentage of the rate was thus paid. This was again income for hard pressed scientists so it served a double purpose. Prompt payment was also essential, which was

where the Turpion office made a large contribution.

Inevitably there is argument about what is allowable and at what price so it is essential that even as there is an administrator in Moscow representing the company, so there must be one person representing the company for production, and that person must have a good technical knowledge of equipment and typesetting programs. Also he must have a clear idea of what is possible in Moscow. It is he who will provide the thread through the maze between the two cultures.

There is a passion for new equipment, the latest, the biggest, the BEST. Not always properly used, so there has to be strong supervision. This is not merely training in new technology, this is a fundamental change in culture. Under the old ways all was provided, one clamoured for the better slice of the cake, and the slice one received was the measure of one's status. So a Pentium put one far above a 386 even though the work requires only a 386.

It is the same with translations. Everyone is paid for everything they do, so authors' translations get payment for author and for translation. That the translations are poor is disregarded, the work was translated, the quality is not within the equation. There is no

understanding that it is not just a matter of editing for good English. The structure of sentences and the use of bizarre terms make the science beyond understanding. A sentence changes from positive to negative with a disastrous effect on the science. It is not that these problems are not inherent in all translations by foreigners to the language but they seem to be exaggerated in Russia because of this old culture of fulfilling 'norms'. It takes three times as long to edit a bad translation as it does to translate it again properly.

There is also no understanding of the effect of bad English on the usefulness and therefore the sales of the journal. It is stated simply and clearly that weak sales are the fault of bad marketing and publicity, and that a good leaflet, sent round to all libraries, would improve the sales. It is not the fault of the poor English.

The simple answer is to take all to the UK and not allow the Russians to touch it, as in the past, but that is only the commercial function and not part of the process of transferring 'know how' and expertise. I am not saying that commerce is a bad thing but help in modernising, 'westernising', and supporting those scientists who stayed at home, or who came back makes for a stronger science in the future, and if good science is the basis of sales then it is good long term commerce.