

Another Kind of Translation

As well as helping the programmer who wants to use a language that is more economic than COBOL English, *Rapidwrite* comes to the aid of programmers who do not understand English. The basic sentences on the preprinted *Rapidwrite* cards might equally well appear in French or German. Moreover, provided they are made up from the set A to Z, 0–9 and hyphen, data-names may be invented that are mnemonic to the program writer in his own language. It requires only the replacement of the format dictionary table by a German one to give a printout at translation time which is readable to someone who understands German only. This kind of flexibility is worth thinking about. The synonym table could be used not only for the substitution of long English names for short English names, but could also be used, for example, to substitute long English names

for short Italian names. This would mean that an Italian organization where no English was spoken could enjoy the benefits of COBOL and, furthermore, it would only require one run using different dictionary and synonym tables to provide a complete English COBOL version of any of their programs, thus providing Readability and Compatibility over a much wider area. Is this not making COBOL truly international?

Conclusions

Anyone who has examined COBOL and liked it, and anyone who has examined COBOL and disliked it, should give it a fresh appraisal considering I.C.T. *Rapidwrite* as an alternative means of expression. I.C.T. *Rapidwrite* allows the programmer to write in a fashion convenient to him but provides automatically COBOL Compatibility and Readability even across natural language boundaries.

Bibliography

- “COBOL 60,” U.S. Dept. of Defense. (April 1960)
 “Rapidwrite Programming Manual,” I.C.T. Ltd. (Sept. 1961.)

Book Review

Automatic Control and Computer Engineering. Edited by V. V. Solodovnikov, translated 1961 (Oxford: Pergamon Press Ltd., £5).

This volume consists of translations of 24 assorted papers presented at a session of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR devoted to examining the problem of complete complex automation of manufacturing processes. We are unfortunately left to guess just when this session was held, but since the original Russian volume was published in 1958 and references up to 1957 are included in some papers, the meetings were presumably held early in 1958. This means that all the information contained in the book is somewhat dated, since the fields which the book covers are at a stage of rapid development, and three years have seen tremendous advances. Also, since the I.F.A.C. Congress held in Moscow in June 1960 contained many papers on the automation aspects covered in the present volume, workers in the field are quite well informed on Russian developments.

One interesting point arises from the references at the end of the paper by Kopai-Gora. The first seven refer to a report at an “All-Union Conference on the automation of manufacturing processes, Magnitigorsk (May–June 1948).” If this is the correct date it is quite remarkable that some of the present authors were able to give papers with almost identical titles ten years beforehand. If, on the other hand, the date is a misprint for 1958 then the date of the conference is fixed and we are left to wonder whether these authors wrote more than one similar paper for the conference, or whether we have been presented with different renderings of the same titles.

This raises a most serious criticism of the book. The translation in many places is of a most literal nature, presumably caused by a lack of familiarity with the subject on the part of the translators. The paper by Mamonov entitled

“The Use of Semiconductor Instruments in Computer Engineering” is about the use of transistors and crystal diodes. I suspect that the word translated (correctly) as “Instrument” is the Russian “pribor” which can also correctly be translated as “device” which would be more satisfactory. This is only a simple example. On pages 226 and 227 there are figures showing the “Registering numerical material from —” instead of “reading numerical data from —” and on pages 113, etc., we have a long dissertation on “Summators” using “cadence pulses.” However, this same paper also shows the reverse error which occurs throughout the paper by Zimin on logical circuits where we are introduced to the ILI, I, and NYeT circuits. These are transliterations of the Russian words for “or,” “and,” and “not” which, of course, are the normal terms for these circuits. There are many other such cases, and in fact I wonder if it is a waste of human endeavour to produce translations of this nature. Surely this translation suffers from exactly those faults which are supposed to beset present-day machine translation, and if this is so I would prefer the imperfect machine translation at an earlier date and possibly at a lower price.

Returning to the subject matter of the papers, it must be pointed out that there are interesting sections such as the group of papers on steel automation, but a large proportion of the book covers elementary facts in great detail. It is odd, and yet characteristic of Russian papers, that constructive work is often hidden amongst a mass of fundamental detail which might, translated properly, form a sound text-book.

On the whole I cannot see many individuals wishing to spend £5 and “500 pages” of reading time for the rewards contained in the book, but it may well be a useful acquisition for libraries as a background work.

LAURENCE CLARKE.