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ENGLISH - - AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE FOR SCIENCE?

For centuries men have discussed the need for, and potential value of, an international language. Artificial languages, such as Esperanto and Interlingua, have been invented to help overcome cultural, political and other obstacles hindering scientific communication. However, such efforts have had an insignificant effect on bridging the language gap. On the other hand, for all intents and purposes, in written communication English has become the international language of science.

The three separate editions of *Current Contents* list over 200,000 titles per year. Probably 50% or more of the articles themselves are written in English. In synthetic chemistry, 57% of the papers abstracted in the *Index Chemicus* were written in English. Last year over 75% of the titles listed in *Current Contents* were in English. And while many journals still use the vernacular for titles and/or articles, they do include English language abstracts or publish contents pages in English.

The acceleration of this process of establishing English as the international language of science conveys practical benefits which should be seriously considered by journal editors, publishers and authors.

For the average scientist today there is plenty of material to read, regardless of what his native language may be. Any impediment to reading, such as struggling with an unfamiliar second or third language, will often mean that the article will go unread. This is not to imply that an important article is deliberately ignored when it appears in a language other than English. Indeed, such material *when detected* will elicit the scientist's attention to such a degree that he will make considerable sacrifices of time, effort and money to read or have it translated. *Detectability*, then, is the key to whether an article will or will not be read. In *Current Contents* detectability is made easier when article titles appear in English. To scan a contents page quickly is quite a different activity than reading an article determined previously, from its title, to be of interest. Scanning provides awareness of what is going on - - of what must be read. Many readers tell me that they have little difficulty in reading a German or French article, but do find it difficult to scan title pages in these languages because scanning requires an entirely different type of linguistic competence. They also note that the function of scanning among many contents pages, as in *Current Contents*, differs markedly from the function of reading the full text of a selected article. With other items competing for attention, the importance of a title providing maximum *detectability*, or perhaps '*scanability*', is underscored. Optimal formatting helps, improves readability and speeds up the scanning process. *Current Contents* makes every effort to provide readable formats. Nevertheless, language is probably a critical factor for most readers.

Since *Current Contents* has an international audience, one might say that the ideal publication would be multi-lingual, listing all titles in five languages - - one or more of which is read by most of our subscribers, including German, French, Russian and Japanese, as well as English. This is, of course, impractical since it would quadruple the size of *Current Contents*. The publication of separate editions in each language would not solve the problem since the lower circulation of each edition would eliminate the economic advantage of larger press runs. *CC* would then be subjected to the same fate as the specialty journals which reach a smaller audience than a publication of wider appeal.

We conclude, for the present at least, that the only reasonable solution is to publish as many contents pages in English as is economically and technically feasible. To do this we need the cooperation of publishers and authors.

Many of the world's largest publishers of scientific journals have realized the value of publishing contents pages in English. For example, the Swiss firm, S. Karger, which publishes more than 40 journals, will list all titles on contents pages in English in 1968. As always, *Current Contents* will make every reasonable effort to assist editors and publishers in effecting this transition. As the ultimate users and originators of the articles listed in *Current Contents*, our readers can be of immeasurable help by providing English language titles and abstracts for their articles when submitting them for publication. They will also encourage greater readership by scientists throughout the world who have accepted English as the international language of science.