

Foreign Language Editorials Should Be Translated for the Web

By Eugene Garfield

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Over the years I've heard complaints from scientists abroad, especially those whose native language is not English, that their views are ignored by the English-speaking world. (British researchers often complain that their literature is ignored by Americans but certainly not for linguistic reasons.) I myself regularly encounter interesting editorial comments in Spanish, French, German, and other foreign language journals that I must ignore, simply for lack of fluency.

English has increasingly become the lingua franca of science and commerce, but we still have a way to go. While most foreign research articles are accompanied by short abstracts in English, most editorial comments are not. For some reason, editors assume that these commentaries will only interest the regular readers of the journal. It is understandable that they might not wish to devote space and cost to print complete simultaneous translations, but the failure to include even a few annotative sentences, no less a summary, in English is unfortunate. Indeed, a large number are published without any title at all.

The World Wide Web provides a marvelous opportunity to facilitate communication across language barriers. Apart from the reality that there is so much to be read in English, it is impractical of foreign editors to expect the English-speaking world to

comprehend material in so many different languages.

In my personal experience, most foreign editors, in fact, read and speak English quite well. Some may feel shy about translating their editorials into imperfect English, but they should be assured that we who do not read their languages fluently would be grateful for their rough translations. I have often received with gratitude such translations. In my own field of information science, I often post them to a Listserv (SIGMET RICS@listserv.utk.edu) of the American Society for Information Science (ASIS).

Now that there are several free translation services on the Web such as Systran and Babylon, it should be relatively easy for editors to input their editorials as Word or HTML documents to quickly acquire a rough translation. If nothing else, using these autotranslators to facilitate word for word translation saves a lot of time in looking up words the old-fashioned way.

As a footnote to this suggestion, I might remind these editors that it is archaic to assume that every reader has the journal in hand. So much reading today takes place in the form of photocopies, reprints, or electronic display. Therefore, it is not only unfair to publish editorials without a title, but equally inefficient to omit an E-mail address and a full bibliographic citation, including

pagination. I assume that most editors would welcome feedback on their opinions. After all, editors are supposed to be the gatekeepers in science.

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