

Variety is the Spice of Life -- Whether in  
People, Language, or the Contents Pages in CC

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One would think that the "syntax" (ordering of author, title, etc.) of the contents page "language" is so limited as to inhibit undue variety. Quite the contrary. The differences in the content and format of journal contents pages go far deeper than the superficial variety allowed by typography.

Typographical variety has distinct advantages. And a unique format helps to instantly identify a journal. Most readers can immediately recognize the contents pages of *Science*, *JAMA*, *Lancet*, etc. The journal "logo" adds to this quick recognition. But in CC<sup>®</sup> this variety is an important aid in scanning. Variety freshens the mind and stimulates the eye. Page after page of absolutely uniform type dulls the senses.

But contents-page variety has certain economic disadvantages. We hope one day to accomplish with one production operation what now requires two. One of the present operations is photographic, and results in a facsimile of the journal contents page in CC. The other operation involves a manual keying of each and every character or symbol in the titles, authors, addresses, etc. From this input we produce our various indexes. Presumably the optimum procedure would enable one

operation to satisfy the objectives of both. The photographic operation could be elaborated or enhanced by optical character recognition to handle not only the overall design of the page, but to process the symbols that make up the design. Alternatively, the data resulting from the manual keying could be fed to our computer-activated photo-composition equipment to generate a "facsimile" of the original page. In the latter case, you would not recognize the difference.

But we could improve upon sizes of type and spacing where we have been unsuccessful in convincing editors to do the same by manual methods. The complexities of the programming effort involved cause reverberations in our computer department but we have met even more difficult challenges.

Another element of variety in contents pages is offered by language: If we ever go as far as suggested above we must decide what to do with other-than-English contents pages. This reminds us to reflect as to why they are published now. Right now we translate thousands of titles every week so that they can be indexed in English in our indexes. If we decided to use only English titles on the contents pages, we might alienate readers of French, German, Italian, etc.

who find scanning in these languages easier than scanning English. It might annoy others as well. For many readers, the weekly encounter with foreign language titles in CC is their only regular *exercise* in maintaining fluency.

Whether such considerations can affect the ultimate economic decision is hard to predict. Without typographical variation CC might be a disaster. The complete elimination of foreign titles should be less traumatic but is not a trivial point. English is the most widely understood language of science. If so, then the non-English contents page or the multi-lingual contents page is self-defeating. What is the logic that recommends it to publishers?

The non-English title is problematical, or irksome for many who read English fluently, whether or not it's their native tongue. Here is such a reader's conversation with himself. "I may be able to figure out what this foreign title means. If I do, then I'll have to consider whether I'll have the time to work through non-English text. Hopefully, there'll be an English abstract that will allow me to decide whether it will be worth the effort to read or worth the expense to translate the full text." Whether such mental

gymnastics is common, as I believe it is, would be difficult to document. I suspect strongly that a well-designed study would verify it beyond a doubt.

I do know that in certain information systems users actually specify that if a retrieved article is not in English they do not even want to know it exists. Such users have an iron "discipline" that recognizes it is better to remain ignorant if knowledge produces frustration. And it can be frustrating to know information exists that is not accessible for whatever reason.

We have reached the crux. What therefore is the logic of the multi-lingual or bilingual contents page? Almost all CC readers who *can* handle non-English languages with minimal effort also can handle English titles equally well, or better. Why not use an English contents page, and be done with it. For any multi-lingual journal this seems mandatory. For a journal not published in English that claims to be primarily geared to its local audience, I must ask why it is so eager to be listed in a service like CC, which is geared to an international audience. If he can afford it, the solution for the publisher is to provide separate contents pages in each major language.