

Discussions and Research Notes

ESP in the Big World of Reprint Requests

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The background to this research note is quickly told. In 1985 I published an article in *Scientometrics*, a journal devoted to quantitative studies in the sociology and history of science (Swales, 1985). The article reviewed current evidence regarding the proportion of research papers published by non-native speakers, proposed a text-scrutiny procedure for ascertaining the NS/NNS status of authors, and applied the procedure to a trial selection of papers. The paper, in my considered view, was rather ordinary; its limited virtues were that it offered an alternative methodology to Baldauf and Jernudd (1983) and produced a little more evidence about the diminished visibility of NNS researchers in the research world.

Although the paper was ordinary, one form of response was, in my experience, quite exceptional. As a fairly regular contributor to journals in ESP and allied fields, I have received occasional reprint requests (perhaps an average of one per paper). In the case of the *Scientometrics* paper I have to date received 35 — a phenomenon sufficiently outside my previous experience to seem worth investigating further. Aspects that I have examined include the provenance of the reprint requests (RRs), their form and the language(s) used, the language status of the requesters, and their motivations for requesting reprints both in general and in terms of the particular *Scientometrics* paper.

The RRs were in fact extremely widely distributed, emanating from 20 different countries. The major groupings were Eastern Europe (including Yugoslavia) 14, Western Europe 12, Latin America 5 and four others — Canada, Japan, Turkey and the U.S.A. (one request each). As far as I can tell all the requesters were non-native speakers of English except for three. Rather more surprising were the research areas of those who had asked for reprints. A massive majority (24 out of the 32 that could be identified) apparently worked in institutes or departments that were concerned with the medical or biological sciences, six with other sciences or branches of engineering, one in agriculture and one in psychology. Only the last could be considered as a person with a direct scholarly interest in the topic of the paper. This was Dr. Joachim Becker of Trier University, West Germany, who had already published several articles on the role of German and English in disseminating Western German psychological research. There were no linguists or sociolinguists, nor anybody working in information or library science or in any branch of ESP.

Thirty-two of the RRs came in the form of printed cards, one was a picture postcard from Turkey and two were the peelable Request-A-Print cards available from the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia. The language(s)

TABLE 1
Language(s) Used in Reprint Requests

	Monolingual	Multilingual				Total
		1st lang.	2nd lang.	3rd lang.	4th lang.	
English	23	0	10	2	0	35
German	0	7	1	3	0	11
French	0	5	0	2	3	10
Russian	0	1	1	1	0	3

used in the RRs are shown in Table 1. In cases of multilingual texts, the languages were always consistently ordered; that is to say, one language always occupied the top line, another the second line and so on. This order is shown in the table by "1st lang.," "2nd lang.," etc.

A number of observations are worth making on these figures:

- (a) 65% of the cards were monolingual English. No other cards were monolingual and all cards contained an English language RR.
- (b) All the cards from Latin America, Spain and Italy used English only, as did the two cards from Lithuania and one of the two from Estonia.
- (c) If the card was multilingual, English was *never* the first language.
- (d) As might be expected the Francophones (France, Switzerland) placed French first, whilst German speakers did the same for German.
- (e) Only three RRs included Russian (East Germany (2) and Estonia); in all three cases French occupied fourth position.

The printed cards clearly constitute a genre (Swales, 1986). They have a recognized and shared public purpose; they have a generic name (reprint request); and they exhibit an appropriate degree of standardized structure and of stylistic conformity. In effect the English RR is typically realized as a printed form letter consisting usually of four sequenced parts with an optional part in the middle.

- I. *Opening Salutation*. Occurs in 28 out of 32 cases; commonest realizations "Dear Sir" (16) and "Dear Dr. . . ." or Dear "Doctor . . ." (6).
- II. *Request*. Occurs in all 32 cases. In 28 instances realized by the verb *appreciate* and having the following predominant form:—I would (greatly) appreciate (receiving) a reprint of your paper/article . . .
- II(a). *Further Request* (optional). In eight cases the request was followed by a request for reprints "of any other papers of similar nature" or "of any other papers you have published on the same general topic," etc.
- III. *Gratitude*. In 22 cases the addressee was then thanked. In 12 cases this was expressed as: Thank you for your courtesy/co-operation/kindness. And in seven cases: Thank you in advance/anticipation.
- IV. *Closing Salutation*. In 26 cases there was a closing salutation. In 17

instances this took the form of "Sincerely yours" (American influence) and in five instances "Yours sincerely" (British influence). There was no apparent correlation between "influence" and provenance; for example, the 'yours sincerely' cards emanated from Argentina, the GDR, Italy, Romania and Spain.

I then sent out a short 18-item questionnaire to the 35 people who had asked for reprints and received 12 replies (a response rate of 34%). Although the questionnaire was flawed by the fact that I failed to include items about how the requesters noted the paper (*Social Science Citation Index, Current Contents*, the Journal itself, etc.), the responses were not without interest. The replies for section one are given in Table 2.

Although the sample is small, the replies suggest that the NNS medical and life science professors are interested in their NNS status in international scientific communication.

The second section dealt with uses of the paper, but the replies are more evenly distributed and thus less revealing. Only two of the respondents made reference to the language barrier issue: "to solve language problems"; "to further define my handicaps." The third section asked questions about their general practice vis-a-vis reprint requests. Eight out of the ten respondents said that they sent out between 20 and 200 reprint requests a year. One sent out a thousand and one, a Swiss medical professor, posted off the amazing figure of 10,000 reprint requests a year. In general, the respondents seemed to achieve very respectable return rates, generally about 70% and only one below 50%. The average length of time they had been using this system was about 13 years with a maximum of 25. On the basis of his replies, the Swiss medical professor referred to above should have received a lifetime total of some 150,000 reprints. The final question asked respondents to comment on the advantages of the RR arrangement. The most common types of advantages cited were access to papers that would otherwise be difficult to get hold of (not in the library, etc.) and the fact that the reprints were immediately available and to hand. A number of

TABLE 2
Reasons for Reprint Requests

1) *Reasons for Requesting a Reprint.* Check as many as appropriate

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|---|---|
| a) I always send a reprint request for <i>Scientometrics</i> articles | 1 |
| b) I selectively send a reprint request for <i>Scientometrics</i> articles | 9 |
| c) I sent the request because of my interest in international scientific communication | 8 |
| d) I sent the request because of my interest in the communication problems of non-native speakers | 8 |
| e) I sent the request because one or two of the references interested me | 0 |
| f) I was interested in the methodology | 2 |
| g) I was interested in the "political" implications | 5 |
| h) (Other) <i>NNS frequently publishing/published in this area/ "psychological" implications</i> | |

respondents also mentioned the time element (quick in contrast to interlibrary loan; time needed to travel to the library; time lost by xeroxing). The Polish respondent referred to the scarcity of photocopiers. There were, in addition, a number of more individual advantages. One person emphasized the much better quality of photographs in reprints rather than photocopies, another the fact that he often lent the reprints to his students, and a third referred to "the personal contact with colleagues" that the RR system engendered.

No sooner had I entered the world of reprint requests than I discovered that it was much bigger than I thought. Indeed 35 RRs for a paper turned out to be a low figure, especially in the biological and medical sciences. Garfield (1977) stated that the ISI organization sold a million Request-a-Print peelables a year.¹ On that basis, Oniugbo, the only active researcher that I have traced in the RR area, calculated that his receipt of 62 such cards out of a lifetime total of 2049 requests received would mean a world reprint request traffic of something over 30 million a year (Oniugbo, 1985). In another paper, he makes the following observation:

There is no doubt that preprinted request cards are part and parcel of the information traffic occurring in science today. Indeed they dominate the scene. For instance, so great is their predominance that I received only nine *letters*, in contrast to 1,014 *cards* from the United States.

(Oniugbo, 1984, p. 95)

Unfortunately, Oniugbo nowhere discusses the world distribution of his RR corpus, apart from mentioning the predominance of the U.S.A. and showing that only two of the 24 requests by individuals with Indian names came from within India itself—the latter observation made in the context of arguing that Reprint Request location provides information about the Brain Drain (1982). However, we can presume it to be low. If we further recognize (Bloor, 1984) that many NNS find it difficult to initiate academic correspondence with potential colleagues in other parts of the world, then we can see the reprint request as a mechanism for "breaking the ice." The evidence presented here suggests that a monolingual English pre-printed card is the norm and that the following is a suitable model:

Dear Sir,

I would greatly appreciate receiving a reprint
of your paper

Thank you for your courtesy.

Sincerely yours,

(Printed Name)

That model, its uses and consequences, could thus form a useful introductory component in Academic Correspondence courses for NNS research communities.

¹ In 1985 this had reached 1,340,000 (Garfield, personal communication).

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