



From the Editor's Desk: Celebrating Linguistic Diversity

by Barry Drees

Greetings fellow members,

The observant among you may have noticed that the title for this issue has changed from what it was in the "Coming Next Issue" page from last issue. What started out as "Non-native English Speakers as Medical Writers" has transmogrified into "Celebrating Linguistic Diversity". I can imagine that your first reaction is probably to think that I have sold my soul to political correctness, but I have been looking for a better way to describe this important segment of EMWA's population for a while. First of all, call it political correctness or spin making if you will, characterising any group of people as "Non-somethings" is a failure of the imagination, not to mention poor writing. Do we define ourselves by what we are not? Much as I tried though, I just couldn't seem to come up with something better.

The idea for linguistic diversity (one person I asked suggested "Euro-babble") only came to me while working with Susan Quinn, our new Artistic Director, on an idea for an image to put on the title page. When she suggested using translations of "*The Write Stuff*" into various languages, it suddenly occurred to me that other languages are a resource, not a handicap. Rather than harping on the fact that many medical writers in Europe are not native English speakers, what we should be doing is celebrating the diversity of linguistic backgrounds and viewpoints that these members bring to EMWA and to medical writing in general. As some of our contributors note in this as well as previous issues, writing in English when it is not your native language brings a different perspective from which even we native speakers can definitely learn. As I often stress in my workshops, the most important thing about any task is to think about it before starting, and probably no one thinks about their writing as much as one who writes in a foreign language. Witness the many examples we all know of native speakers who think that being a native speaker makes them good writers even though they are actually appallingly bad writers.

I think that this principle of diversity as a resource is not just pertinent to language, but rather it is a basic law of the universe.

Diversity is one of the cornerstones of evolution by natural selection. Without species diversity arising from random mutation, natural selection has nothing to work on and evolution ceases. Species that become too specialised to a specific way of life are inviting extinction, since the conditions in which they live and to which they have adapted will inevitably change. To survive, a species needs a healthy range of variation in behaviour and physical attributes.

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The Write Stuff

From the Editor's Desk

Similarly, diversity is one of the essential ingredients in making a great and lasting society or civilisation. Diversity, therefore, is the key to long-term survival for anything, whether species, society, or institution and it should be celebrated wherever it occurs.

Speaking of diversity, what better symbol of diversity is there today than the internet. The feeling had been growing in me that we really needed to follow-up on our previous article about websites of interest to medical writers (TWS 1999; 8 [3] 22-23) on. It seemed that every time I turned around, I was looking at a journal or magazine with a regular column on websites of interest. And if ever there was something pertinent to and of interest to medical writing, then it is the Internet. So, using the method that I've learned in this job as editor, I decided that what we needed was to find someone for web editor. I was thinking about running an advertisement in TWS. However, as luck would have it, someone wrote to me right then and asked how they could help with TWS. Imagine my delight when they replied that the web editor would be just the thing for them! Thus, I'm happy to introduce Amanda Bennett, our new TWS web scout, who will search out, evaluate and describe websites of interest to medical writers every issue.

This could even form the basis for the EMWA style guide that a number of members are dreaming of creating in the future.

And finally, how about sampling EMWA's diversity! Yes, it is that time of year again – time for another EMWA questionnaire! This year we've even introduced a section on EMWA style and usage. I'm

hoping that this will provide us with an interesting glimpse of how medical writers do things throughout Europe. There are only a few questions this time, but if it works well, I would like to expand it. Eventually, this could even form the basis for the EMWA style guide that a number of members are dreaming of creating in the future. Yes, I know that it takes a whole 5 to 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire and send it back to me, and that you're all terribly busy. Please remember, however, that the information we collect from this helps the EMWA Executive Committee decide in which directions to take EMWA and helps me to decide what to do with TWS. As I've said many times before, it's the members that make EMWA great, but this only works when we have your input. Many people give selflessly by serving on the EC, the Education Committee, or by working on TWS; the least the rest of you can do is fill out the questionnaire and send it back to me!

Barry Drees
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Editor-in-Chief

Several people wrote asking for more information about "The Physical Side" (TWS 2000; 9 (2):22-23). The article was actually derived from a book, *The Disposition of the Musician* by G.O. van de Klashorst; published by Broekmans & Van Poppel, Amsterdam (in press). Details can be obtained by contacting Diana Klein-Franke (g.klein-franke@excite.com).

I would like to thank the various EMWA members with translating and linguistic skills who did the translations of "The Write Stuff" for our cover image: Anne Bartz, Elena Guardiola, Alistair Reeves, Cito Habicht, Ernesta Palombo-Kinne, and Anne-Marie Delay. What a perfect demonstration of EMWA's linguistic diversity! I would also like to express my deepest gratitude

The Write Stuff

From the Editor's Desk

to Hilde Joosen for helping me conceive of and develop something for TWS to reach out to non-native English speaking medical writers.