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Technical Writing – the SIMPlE way February 16

Recently a *History Today* reader wrote in about having seen a modular system for creating sentences guaranteed to be grammatically correct, if not particularly meaningful. This rang an historical bell: among the many handouts of a decades-old cryptanalysis class, we remembered seeing a similar system.

From 1956-1977, Lambros Callimahos taught the Intensive Study Program in General Cryptanalysis (CA-400), a celebrated 18-week mid-level course in cryptanalysis. He was famous (if not infamous) for providing students an enormous number of handouts designed to save time and therefore to allow him to pack more content into the class. As would be expected, many of these were technical cryptanalysis documents. However, Callimahos also felt a duty to develop his students as professionals in general. To this end, he included handouts to improve writing and logic skills. Some handouts were to be taken seriously; others indulged Callimahos's well-tuned sense of the ridiculous.

Into this latter category falls a CA-400 handout entitled "Intensive Study Program in General Cryptanalysis: Technical Writing Aid." The system comprised four "Tables" of ten elements each, the theory being that any set of four elements – one from each list – could be randomly assembled to create a sentence. For example,

"In particular," + "a constant flow of effective information"
+ "adds explicit performance limits to" + "the total system rationale"

add up to a sentence. The handout noted that 40,000 such sentences could be created.

This handout obviously had been physically cut and pasted from another document; normally Callimahos would attribute such borrowings, but did not in this case. A little digging revealed the original source of the SIMP concept: Brian J. Ford, a British research scientist and also radio and television personality, introduced the system in his 1971 book with the short title of *Nonscience* (a play on "nonsense"). Known for his inventive use of language as well as for his ever-growing subject lines, Callimahos would certainly have admired any book with a

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full title of over 40 words beginning with *Nonscience and the Pseudotransmogrificationalific Egocentrified Reorientational Proclivities Inherently Intracorporated In Expertistical Cerebrointellectualised Redeployment ...* .

History Today thought our readers might enjoy keeping this technique handy for the days when the words just don't seem to flow. (Whether you should actually use the resulting sentences is entirely up to you; *History Today* assumes no responsibility for the propagation of such sentences.)

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Intensive Study Program in General Cryptanalysis

Technical Writing Aid

This technical writing aid is based on the Simplified Integrated Modular Prose (SIMP) writing system. Using this aid, anyone who can count to 10 can write up to 40,000 discrete, well-balanced, grammatically correct sentences packed with aerospace terms.

To put SIMP to work, arrange the modules in A-B-C-D order. Take any four-digit number, 8751 for example, and read Phrase 8 from Module A, Phrase 7 from Module B, etc. The result is a SIMP sentence. Add a few more four-digit numbers to make a SIMP paragraph.

After you have mastered the basic technique, you can realize the full potential of SIMP by arranging the modules in the orders D-A-C-B, B-A-C-D, or A-D-C-B. In these advanced configurations, some additional commas may be required.

SIMP Table A

1. In particular,
2. On the other hand,
3. However,
4. Similarly,
5. As a resultant implication,
6. In this regard,
7. Based on integral subsystem considerations,
8. For example,
9. Thus,
0. In respect to specific goals,

SIMP Table B

1. a large portion of the interface coordination communication
2. a constant flow of effective information
3. the characterization of specific criteria
4. initiation of critical subsystem development
5. the fully integrated test program
6. the product configuration baseline
7. any associated supporting element
8. the incorporation of additional mission constraints
9. the independent functional principle
0. a primary interrelationship between system and/or subsystem technologies

SIMP Table C

1. must utilize and be functionally interwoven with
2. maximizes the probability of project success and minimizes the cost and time required for
3. adds explicit performance limits to
4. necessitates that urgent consideration be applied to
5. requires considerable systems analysis and trade-off studies to arrive at
6. is further compounded, when taking into account
7. presents extremely interesting challenges to
8. recognizes the importance of other systems and the necessity for
9. effects a significant implementation to
0. adds overriding performance constraints to

SIMP Table D

1. the sophisticated hardware
2. the anticipated third generation equipment
3. the subsystem compatibility testing
4. the structural design, based on system engineering concepts
5. the preliminary qualification limit
6. the philosophy of commonality and standardization
7. the evolution of specifications over a given time period
8. the greater flight-worthiness concept
9. any discrete configuration made
0. the total system rationale

Figure 1 The SIMP writing system, CA-400 version

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