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Toward a Proper Understanding of Gibberish

or those who speak a particular language, it is easy to extract meaning from its expressions, but for those who have not learned the tongue, it all seems to be just noise. I can still remember how as a child, upon hearing incomprehensible talk in another language, I thought I could fool others into thinking I understood by making up my own gibberish. Alas, the tactic didn't work and I remember only blank stares for my pains. Eventually I learned that one man's eloquence is another man's gibberish. The difference is understanding. Multilingual C-3PO and



3PO and R2-D2 in Stars Wars (20th Century Fox)

sidekick R2-D2 demonstrated the possibilities for Hollywood-style confusion of robotic tongues in Star Wars, but now a couple MIT grad students have taken the theme to new heights in the real academic world. In April Reuters reported that the students had successfully passed off a bunch of computer-generated gibberish as an academic paper. Using a program which they had written to generate fake research complete with nonsensical text, charts and diagrams, they submitted two of their papers to the World Multi-conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics (WMSCI), scheduled to be held in July in Orlando, Florida. To their surprise, one of the papers—"Rooter: A Methodology for the Typical Unification of Access Points and Redundancy"—was accepted for presentation.

The episode reminded me of a personal experience when as a college freshman, many years ago (at a school that shall here go nameless), I criticized the quality of writing in the school's poetry journal. Someone told me that, if I was so smart, I should try submitting something myself. I said I would. Forthwith I produced what I considered to be a really bad poem, but of the type the journal seemed to like, and sent it in. To my amazement, my entry was not only printed, it was featured on the front cover. My case was made.

The intention here is not only to suggest that many of the so-called arbiters of knowledge occupying the seats of authority in today's citadels of scientific authority may actually be faking it but also, to point out that their criticism of many in the alternative science community, many of whom really do know something should, perhaps, be taken with a grain of salt.

Over the years I have noticed that many who think they actually know the rationales of alternative science often respond with talking points which skirt the real issues and focus mostly on trivialities. The so-called skeptics of CSICOP, and like organizations, seem incapable of understanding the language they are offering to translate. Or as John Anthony West is fond of saying, "They just don't get it." All that is thus demonstrated is their own ignorance. (For more on this phenomenon in the field of Egyptology read Will Hart's comments elsewhere in this issue.)

Another dimension of the problem is in the business world, where some look at a magazine like Atlantis Rising and see what they take to be simple niche publication. Mystified by the actual content, these observers then conclude that a similar result can be achieved by simply compiling a collection of gobbledygook. Our fundamental coherence seems to have been missed, and they think they can match it with gibberish. They may be surprised to discover what you, our faithful readers, already know: Atlantis Rising is more interested in making sense than making money.

Publisher