

# Letters

## Do Plant Pathologists Need Foreign Languages?

While I would agree with C. Lee Campbell that language expands our horizons and that all *young* students should learn at least one additional language (PLANT DISEASE, Vol. 67, No. 3, page 251), I think his argument for the importance of foreign language to the plant pathologist is indefensible. There are many good counterarguments, including:

1. Which language to choose? If one is competent in French or German, of what value is this in dealing with Russian, Chinese, or Japanese? Surely, Dr. Campbell is not suggesting that every student know many languages well.

2. English is the major language of science. Although I do not have documentation, it is my opinion that the majority of major contributions to plant pathology are published in English and many of the world's prestigious foreign-language journals do include English summaries; few have Chinese or Russian summaries. Dr. Campbell seems to agree with this point, at least in part. He discusses the second-language capabilities of scientists in other countries but fails to note that in the majority of cases, the second language is English.

3. The most potent counterargument is the necessity for plant pathologists to develop a widely diverse background in a number of scientific disciplines. I think most would agree that biochemistry, statistics, plant physiology, bacteriology, immunology, entomology, computer programming, and many other courses would have a higher priority than foreign language. After all, even if one could easily translate a foreign publication, it is valueless without an understanding of the biology, chemistry, or statistics therein.

Scientists can communicate in languages more universal than native tongues, such as mathematics and chemistry. Those graduate departments that have eliminated the mandatory foreign language requirements have a good perspective of the changing needs of scientific training.

Dr. Campbell's statement concerning our diminished competitiveness in world markets and world technology due to language deficiency is not supported by fact. Problems that we have in these areas are more probably due to economics than to linguistics.

Dennis E. Mayhew, *Plant Pathologist  
Analysis and Identification Division  
of Plant Industry  
State of California Department of Food  
and Agriculture  
Sacramento*