

With Compliments

Brian Harris

Volume 21, Number 2, juin 1976

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/003033ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/003033ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

1492-1421 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Harris, B. (1976). With Compliments. *Meta*, 21(2), 161–162.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/003033ar>

WITH COMPLIMENTS

The paper armoury of no anglophone office is complete without *With Compliments* slips. People clip them to documents for politeness when they have no time or no inclination to write anything to the addressee. Consequently they are much in use. The English of these slips hardly presents any problem : « With Compliments » is enough in itself ; though I must say that if details are to be added I prefer the more concise « With X's Compliments » to the more grandiose, and therefore slightly less personal, « With the Compliments of X ».

What to do about it, however, in a bilingual office ? We are immediately on guard against a *faux ami*, forewarned by the mention of « Les compliments de la saison » in Colpron, p. 200, although Dagenais for once is silent. True, Harrap's offers us « *With the publisher's compliments/hommage de l'éditeur* » ; and I am proud to have a few off-prints on my shelves inscribed « *Hommage de l'auteur* ». Yet I feel the latter belongs to a more gracious *register* than applies to everyday office papers.

Daviault too warns us that « COMPLIMENT n'a pas toujours le sens de *compliment* ». However, he lends his authority to : « *With the compliments of.../Hommage de...* »

Why quibble any further ? Nevertheless, I determined to see what the French manuals of commercial style had to say when unmotivated by the English. Clas and Horguelin, in their chapter on « La correspondance commerciale », say nothing ; and nor did any of the guides for « le parfait secrétaire bilingue » that I consulted. On the other hand there is a full-size illustration in *C. & H.*, p. 315, of something often received from France but never from Anglo-Saxons : a personal card bearing just the name and title of the sender. The tone is better still if the card is engraved. The sender usually adds, as in the example mentioned, a few polite words in his or her own handwriting. At least one French-Canadian colleague of mine also uses this kind of card ; but then he did his doctorate in France and married there.

The conclusion I come to — or rather *came* to — was it is not a matter of language but of custom. The English use *With Compliments* slips ; the French do not, although they have their personal cards which perform the same social function. One solution for the bilingual correspondent would therefore be to keep a stock of both. But in the interests of economy and in the fashion of Canadian bilingualism we might follow Daviault.

Indeed I had already ordered 5 000 slips printed « With the Director's Compliments/Hommage du Directeur », and had barely initialled the proof, when a packet of reports was delivered to me from a highly respected colleague at the University of Grenoble. It was he who on hearing a technical neologism proposed by an equally respected colleague at the University of Ottawa had once remarked ruefully, « Eh bien, si c'est comme ça que vous le dites au Canada... » On the front of the papers this card was clipped and nothing more :

Avec les compliments du C.N.R.S.

BRIAN HARRIS

REFERENCES

Colpron, *les Anglicismes au Québec*.

Clas et Horguelin, *le Français, langue des affaires*.

Dagenais, *Dictionnaire des difficultés de la langue française*.

Daviault, *Langage et traduction*.

Harrap's Shorter French and English Dictionary.