

Eh? *B* be ‘ABC’, see?

Lambert Meertens
CWI

In the last issue of the Newsletter, the question was raised which name to give to the definitive version of the *B* programming language, after revision. (See the article ‘What is in the name of *B*?’.) We received several reactions, some just expressing (dis)like of one or more of the proposed alternatives, some offering new proposals. Among the new proposals were ‘Bravo’ (from the way of spelling the alphabet: ‘Alpha Bravo Charlie ...’), ‘Best’, ‘QUI’ (sounds like ‘CWI’) and ‘Lingo’ (twice). One proficient name finder offered us no fewer than eleven suggestions, and her list suggested to us some more possibilities, such as ‘Love’. (Why ‘Banana’, though? In honour of Steven Pemberton’s predilection for this fruit?) Some of these proposals we discarded forthwith. Although we wholeheartedly agree with the sentiment expressed by ‘Bravo’ and ‘Best’, we feared that such a name might be perceived as a form of boasting that could have an adverse effect on reaching our objectives. Better to have a slightly more neutral name, and let the language speak for itself.

Although ‘QUI’ sounds like ‘CWI’ if ‘CWI’ is pronounced like ‘QUI’, no-one here pronounces it that way; we say ‘Say Way Ee’ or ‘See Double You Eye’, depending on whom we are addressing. As to ‘Lingo’, I have seen several languages tagged with that name – although I am not sure any of them are in active use, it seems better, after our previous experience, to avoid another potential conflict.

Considering all, and counting noses (including those of our own), we decided on ‘ABC’. The merits of this name have already been expounded in the previous article and will not be repeated here. To avoid confusion, we shall keep referring to the present, unrevised, language as ‘*B*’.

Some people expressed the fear that ‘ABC’ might give legal problems, e.g., because of the broadcasting corporation, or because of a line of computers with that

name. We are not really worried about that. In the first place, 'ABC' is just the name of a language, which by itself is not a tradeable commodity, and our understanding is that you can name such things as you please, just like you could name your daughter 'Ada' as long as you do not try to sell her. The 'ABC' of the broadcasting company is not a name by which they trade, either. Also, if you look in the yellow pages of the Manhattan telephone directory (and presumably of most other places), you will find that 'ABC' is one of the most common names given to businesses. Since these are obviously left alone, we don't see how we could be bothered, especially since there are no conflicting interests. There is even a second television company calling itself 'ABC'; British based I think.

As to the line of computers, I have a leaflet describing a line of computer terminals called 'ABC'. Maybe the two companies involved (both European) can fight this out between themselves before they descend on us. Also, there is a line of computers called 'Basic' (where have we heard that before?), and a new line of terminals called 'Elan', which, as a language, has been in use at least in the FRG and the Netherlands for a long time. By the way, we have a line of products in the Netherlands for fixing things around the house, called 'Rambo'. Not a bad name for *B* either. ('Rambo, the programming language that shows no mercy.')