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InDesign and World Languages

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The ability to design and publish documents in non-English languages has been possible from the Macintosh desktop for quite some time. Industry standard QuarkXPress is essentially a single-language product, but for years, Quark Passport has provided language support for most European languages, and there are QuarkXPress versions for publishing in East Asian languages, including Japanese, Chinese and Korean.

However, if you want to produce more than one of these various languages in one document, it has not been easy at all. Quark Passport supports multiple European languages in one document, but to maintain that support, a document must be saved in a multi-language file format that cannot be opened by the English/International or other single-language versions of QuarkXPress. And while a Quark Passport file can be saved in a single-language format that QuarkXPress can open, doing so causes the file to lose European language support.

When it comes to East Asian languages, each requires its own version of QuarkXPress, including one for Japanese, one for Traditional Chinese and another for Simplified Chinese, and one for Korean, and you can't include two languages, Japanese and Korean, for example, in one document. Add to that these East Asian language versions do not have the European language support, and none of the East Asian files can be opened by the English/International version of QuarkXPress. Confusing, huh? And from experience, we can confirm it's a pain, too!

Ah, but hope is just around the corner. Apple has made an enormous contribution to the situation by making OSX a Unicode-based system. This means that instead of having to rely on multiple language encoding systems, OSX can now handle most of the world's languages. This also means that applications can now take advantage of Unicode to provide the capability of publishing various languages side-by-side, all in one document.

Unicode-based OSX lets you input characters from many different languages.

We're not there yet, but InDesign has taken us closer than ever with its support for Unicode and its extensive support for Unicode-based Open Type fonts. With InDesign English/International version, you can input text in any language that is supported by OSX, as long as it reads left-to-right and is not a "complex script" needing special composition treatment. (Complex scripts include the Indic languages, Arabic, and the languages of Southeast Asia.)

This is my language.

Éste es mi lenguaje.

To jest mój język.

Αυτό είναι η γλώσσα μου.

これは私の言語である。

You can type multiple languages in one document using the English version of InDesign.

However, while the ability to input a language is the first necessary step for multi-lingual publishing, input of characters alone does not constitute full language support. Just because you can input a language in an application, it doesn't mean you can realistically publish multiple page documents which are typographically correct in those languages.

Language Support for Western European Languages

Language support means several features need to be available within an application. For most languages, this means hyphenation and spell checking dictionaries must be available. Language support can also include the ability to alphabetize lists correctly, such as table of contents and indexes, and the availability of additional import filters to handle language-specific characters.

Western European Romance and Germanic languages are the group of languages most fully supported by both InDesign and Quark Passport. Both InDesign and Quark Passport can create files with several different European languages in one file. But unlike the English/International version of QuarkXPress, every English/International version of InDesign ships with spelling and hyphenation dictionaries for most Western European languages. No special version of InDesign is required, providing a clear and distinct advantage over QuarkXPress, which on its own ships only with an English dictionary; instead, the rather pricey Quark Passport program is required for European language support.

In both InDesign and Quark Passport, the basic steps to assign language dictionaries are the same: select the text to which you wish to apply a special language dictionary then simply indicate what language you want to assign to it. In Quark Passport, languages are assigned to text using the Paragraph Formats dialog box. Once the language is specified, the text automatically has the appropriate hyphenation dictionary applied, and when spell check is run, the text is checked by the appropriate dictionary.

Passport allows you to apply different languages to different paragraphs within the same text box. And, since it is a paragraph format, language can be specified as part of a style sheet, too.
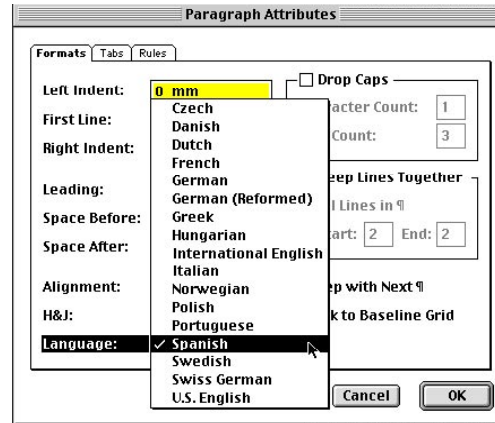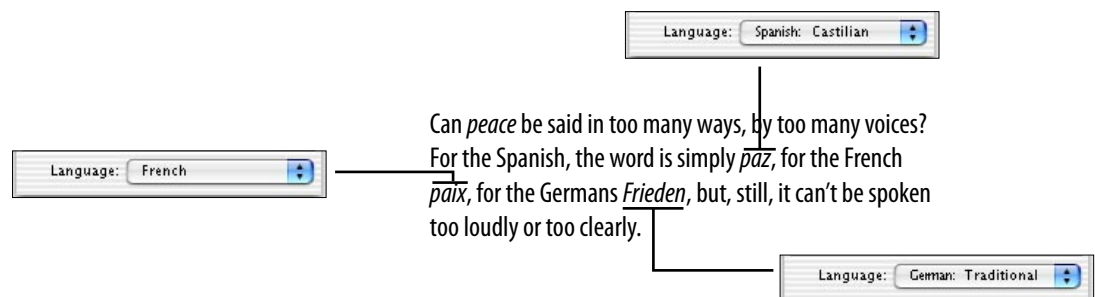

Quark Passport assigns language as a paragraph-level attribute.

In InDesign, the basic steps are the same, but language can be assigned at the character level, using the character palette.
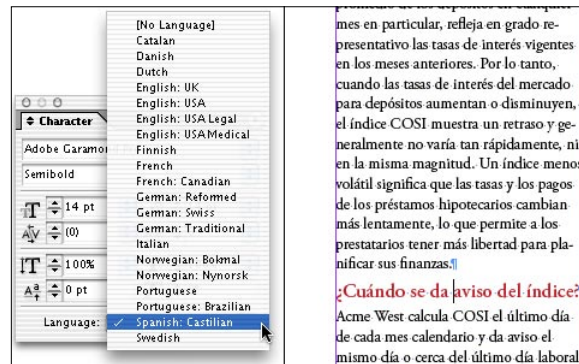
InDesign assigns language as a character-level attribute.

And while the language attribute in many documents might most commonly be applied at the paragraph level, InDesign's character-based approach means you can mix words of different languages in the same paragraph and have them spell checked by the appropriate dictionary.

Can *peace* be said in too many ways, by too many voices? For the Spanish, the word is simply *paz*, for the French *paix*, for the Germans *Frieden*, but, still, it can't be spoken too loudly or too clearly.

InDesign lets you assign multiple languages within the same paragraph.

Another, less obvious advantage for InDesign over Passport relates to file format compatibility. With InDesign, every user already has multiple language dictionaries, and even if the dictionaries have not been installed, a file containing Spanish and Italian text, for example, can easily be opened by any other version of InDesign, and the text will not reflow (unless it is edited).

With Quark Passport, in order to utilize the spelling and hyphenation dictionaries for more than one language in the same document, Passport must save the document in a "multiple-language" format. This format cannot be opened by the English version (or any other single-language version) of QuarkXPress. Passport does give you the ability to save your Passport file in a "single-language" format that can be opened in QuarkXPress, but because the language dictionaries are not available, when you open the file in QuarkXPress, a prompt displays warning that the text to which non-English dictionaries have been applied will reflow. So, Passport files can really only be used by Passport. That means everyone involved in a Passport workflow, from designer to pre-press service bureau, must invest in Quark Passport.

A Passport file using multiple language dictionaries has to be saved in a special format that cannot be opened by QuarkXPress.

When it comes to working with the Western European languages, InDesign is easy to choose. Everyone who owns InDesign already has the tools necessary to publish typographically correct text in multiple European languages. And InDesign files with multiple languages don't require any special file format or special handling.
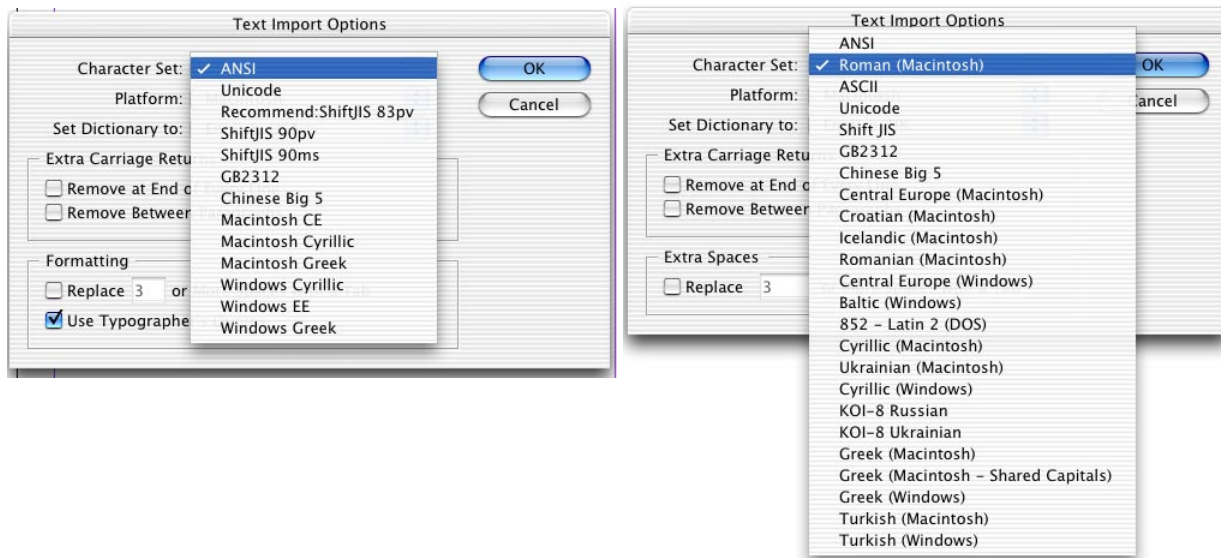
Additional European Languages

InDesign CE supports Greek and several Slavic languages

Moving east, to Central and Eastern Europe, there are other languages that have slightly different requirements from many of the Western European languages. These include Slavic languages, some of which require additional character sets and/or Cyrillic characters, Turkish, and Greek, which requires support of Greek characters.

Quark Passport supports some of these languages via a set of supplemental language dictionaries that are available with a custom install of Passport. The supplemental language dictionaries that can be installed in Passport include Czech, Polish, Hungarian and Greek.

InDesign addresses issues involved with these languages in a separate version of the program, InDesign CE (Central European). This product is developed by a third party company, Winsoft (http://www.winsoft.fr). InDesign CE ships with an extensive list of dictionaries including, from the South and West Slavic language group, Czech, Croatian, Bulgarian, Slovak and Polish, and from the Eastern Slavic language group Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarussian. Dictionaries for Albanian, Greek, and Turkish are also included.

In addition to hyphenation dictionaries for these languages, and spelling dictionaries for most of them, InDesign CE also provides additional import filters for placing text created in these various languages. Other language support includes generation of Table of Contents that can be alphabetized by the language specified in the Title field, and Index generation according to language.

Import options for InDesign English/International version (left) and InDesign CE version (right)

Japanese, Chinese and Korean

The differences between European languages and East Asian languages, such as Japanese, Chinese and Korean, could easily fill a book, and indeed, have filled many books. For the purposes of this paper, however, we'll just highlight a few of the most important characteristics as they relate to typography in InDesign.

Adobe has developed a separate Japanese version of InDesign that has extensive in-depth Japanese language support. The Japanese version, however, does not fully support Chinese or Korean. A third party product, the Asiaweb InChinese Plug-in, supports Chinese layout (http://www.inchinese.com). There is no version of InDesign that fully supports Korean. So our discussion from here will focus on Japanese layout.

Whereas most European languages can be represented with a few hundred characters or less, the minimum Japanese character set considered adequate for the most basic typesetting consists of over 7,000 characters. The ability to input these characters is more or less taken care of by Unicode support in OSX, InDesign, and Open Type fonts. In fact, the English version of InDesign ships with a full set of Japanese Open Type fonts, and Japanese characters can easily be input in the English version of InDesign. However, the English version is missing some essential language support.

The list of Japanese-specific features in InDesign is a long one. On the one hand, there's not really a concept of spell checking or hyphenation in Japanese. But, on the other hand, there are dozens of issues relating to Japanese typesetting that are some-what more complex. We'll highlight two of the more important ones.

One key issue has to do with spacing between characters and how lines break. Japanese presents some interesting challenges when it comes to typesetting text with a uniform look, or "color." For one thing, there are sentences, paragraphs and punc-tuation, but there are no word spaces of any kind. Further, there are several differ-ent kinds of characters that can appear in Japanese text. These include the complex Chinese ideograms, called *kanji*, that are the characters we usually think of when we think of Asian text. But there are also two sets of simplified phonetic characters, called *kana* that are used extensively, and it is also fairly common to have English, or Roman, characters interspersed with Japanese text.

The lack of word spaces, and the variety of characters that may be included in Japanese text present some extremely challenging issues when it comes to spacing all these characters, and breaking lines in a way that is both typographically correct and, essentially, pleasing to the eye (or at least to the Japanese eye).

Japanese text composed in InDesign without Japanese support (left) has three characters in one paragraph that are not considered acceptable to start or end a line; the paragraph is composed correctly in the Japanese version of InDesign (right).

Another key difference between typesetting Roman and Japanese characters is the direction in which type is set. While Japanese text is very often set horizontally, left to right, just like English, it sometimes follows the traditional convention and is typeset vertically, running from the right side to the left side of a page. Publications that are set vertically also have special binding requirements, as the first page is bound on the right, with odd numbered pages on the left, and even numbered pages on the right, exactly opposite of binding books in European languages.
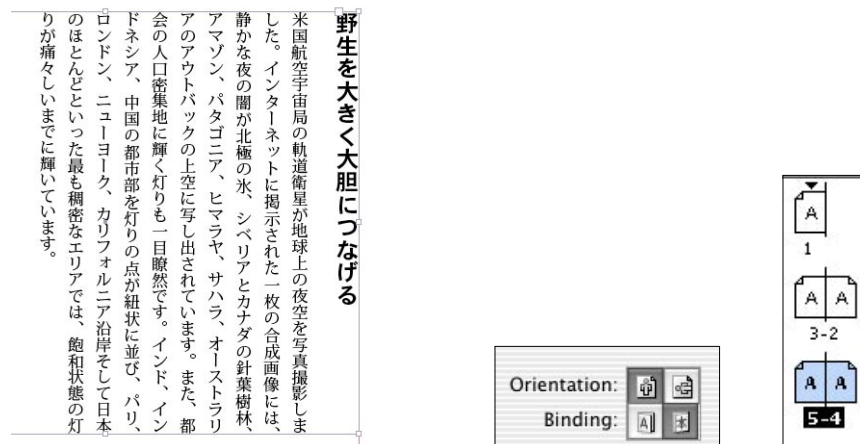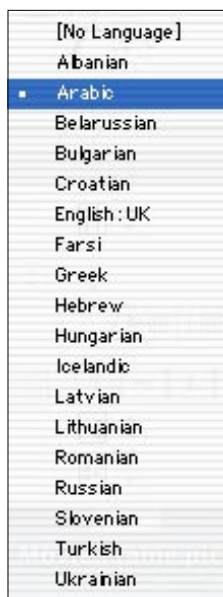

Japanese text is often composed vertically, right-to-left, and requires binding on the right side; the binding option can be set in the New Document dialog box (center) and is reflected in the Pages palette (right) in the Japanese version of InDesign.

There are many other issues involved with Japanese typography, but these two alone—correct composition for line breaks and spacing, and vertical composition—illustrate the profound difference between typesetting Japanese vs. Roman text.

The English version of InDesign allows you to input Japanese text, but it cannot compose blocks of characters correctly, and it cannot set vertical, right-to-left text correctly. Take care if using the English version of InDesign that you have someone who is a native Japanese reader check your layout to ensure there are no glaring errors in line breaks and spacing. And, if you typeset more than an occasional line or two of Japanese text, consider purchase of the Japanese version of InDesign. (available in the United States at http://www.asiasoft.com)

Indic and Middle Eastern Languages

As we continue to circumnavigate the globe, there are several other major language groups to consider. One is the Indic, or Indian language group, largely spoken on the Indian subcontinent, including Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati, to name a few. Alas, for these as well as many Southeast Asian languages, such as Thai, for example, there is scant support for these languages from InDesign and even the Macintosh itself. OSX supports many of these languages for input, but there is no Macintosh version of QuarkXPress that supports them, nor is there a version of InDesign that has language support features for them. For Indian languages, however, Quark does offer QuarkXPress Mudra, which runs on the Windows platform only.

For InDesign users, however, the picture is considerably brighter as we last consider creating documents that use Middle Eastern languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew. Like Japanese, these languages have their own unique, non-Roman character sets that can be input from OSX.

InDesign addresses issues related to typesetting these languages in a separate version of the program, InDesign ME (Middle Eastern). Like InDesign CE, this product is developed by a third party company, Winsoft (http://www.winsoft.fr). In addition to providing spelling and hyphenation dictionaries and import filters for Arabic, Hebrew, and Farsi, InDesign ME allows for the composition of text from right-to-left, as required by these languages. Text runs horizontally but in the opposite direction of English and other European languages.

InDesign ME supports Arabic, Hebrew and Farsi

Left-to-right paragraph direction

Right-to-left paragraph direction
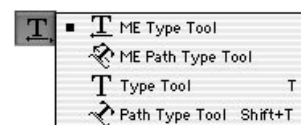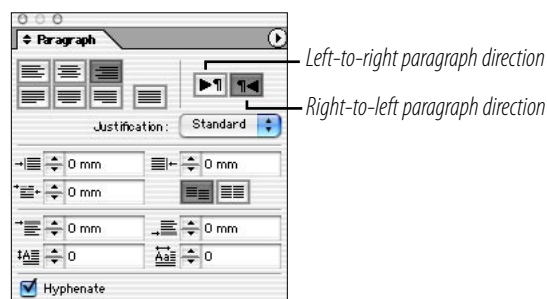
InDesign ME includes controls for changing paragraph direction (left) and a Type tool for creating right-to-left text frames (right).

Like Japanese, left-to-right composition also requires providing for binding on the right side of a page and the appropriate page numbering, and this issue is also addressed in InDesign ME through controls similar to the Japanese version.

InDesign: United Nations Version

As we said up front, the situation for seamless multi-lingual publishing has improved in the last couple of years, and Apple and Adobe have contributed a great deal to this improvement. But, of course, we want more: one application that provides support for all the world's major languages, in the same document. Is that too much to ask?

After all, as the world "grows smaller" and market globalization advances, there is more and more need for the publication of documents that are not necessarily in the tongue of the country of origin. Just ask the thousands and thousands of us working in translation companies, advertising agencies and corporations with international markets and relationships, with more than a passing interest in communicating globally!

Macintosh Product / Language Matrix	InDesign English	InDesign Japanese	InDesign CE	InDesign ME	InChinese Plug-in	QuarkXPress English	QuarkXPress Passport	QuarkXPress Japanese	QuarkXPress 4.1 Chinese Simplified	QuarkXPress 4.1 Chinese Traditional	QuarkXPress 4.1 Korean
Albanian			x	x							
Arabic				x							
Belarussian			x	x							
Bulgarian			x	x							
Catalan	x	x	x	x	x						
Chinese: Simplified					x				x		
Chinese: Traditional					x					x	
Croatian			x	x							
Czech			x				x*				
Danish	x	x	x	x	x		x				
Dutch	x	x	x	x	x		x				
English: UK	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				
English: USA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
English: USA Legal	x	x	x	x	x						
English: USA Medical	x	x	x	x	x						
Farsi				x							
Finnish	x	x	x	x	x		x*				
French	x	x	x	x	x		x				
French: Canadian	x	x	x	x	x						
German: Reformed	x	x	x	x	x		x				
German: Swiss	x	x	x	x	x		x				
German: Traditional	x	x	x	x	x		x				
Greek			x	x			x*				
Hebrew			x	x							
Hungarian			x	x			x*				
Icelandic			x	x							
Italian	x	x	x	x	x		x				
Japanese		x						x			
Korean											x
Latvian			x	x							
Lithuanian			x	x							
Norwegian: Bokmal	x	x	x	x	x						
Norwegian: Nynorsk	x	x	x	x	x		x				
Polish			x				x*				
Portugese	x	x	x	x	x		x*				
Portugese: Brazilian	x	x	x	x	x						
Romanian			x	x							
Russian			x	x							
Slovak			x								
Slovenian			x	x							
Spanish: Castilian	x	x	x	x	x		x				
Swedish	x	x	x	x	x		x				
Turkish			x	x							
Ukrainian			x	x							

bold indicates language dictionaries/composition that ship with InDesign's English/International version
x* = available with Quark Passport Supplemental Dictionaries