

Editorial

Although when C. P. Snow described his two cultures he intended to highlight two different systems unable or unwilling to understand or participate in the world of the other, in the intervening years it is the scientific world that seems to have suffered in the inevitable comparisons. Scientists are often seen as having narrow interests, being obsessed in those interests and often completely ignorant of literature, politics, art and music. Scientists use long technical words that no-one understands and therefore are to be ignored or treated as illiterate weirdoes (a word, incidentally accepted by both the new Shorter Oxford English Dictionary and my spell-checker!).

On the other hand, writers on arts subjects feel quite entitled to use obscure words that no-one understands (including *recherché* words from foreign tongues) to display their erudition. Sports commentators actually take pride in their inability to subtract one number from another and will insist on describing simple arithmetic as complex mathematics.

A learned scientific journal, such as the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology*, ought to represent a point where the two worlds can touch, even if they could not be said to actually meet. The scientific content of articles in the journal must be accurate, yet lucid in its presentation. I do not mean that it has to be understandable to the completely lay person—that is not the purpose of a learned journal—but the arguments must be presented with clarity, the words used must be appropriate to the language being used, and the entire article must be logically constructed without tedious repetition. It should be inevitable that good scientific writing should follow from clear thinking and good science.

Some will say that the usual run of writing in research papers is boring and impersonal, that the authors' own personality should be allowed to show through. This I would not deny, and this journal does not discourage the use of the active voice, even if some authors seem to want both informality and formality by writing "we" when it should be "I". However, there is a problem for an international journal in allowing too much of an author to show. A glance at any issue of the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* will show that most of our authors are using English as a foreign language. In original typescripts submitted to us, English phrases are often used inappropriately or phrases or sentences are constructed according to the writer's native language. This does not matter in oral presentation and has a certain charm in the spoken form, but it must be remembered that subsequent authors will use published papers as models for their own writing and the Japanese author may be misled into thinking a German construction is perfectly acceptable English. Hence the need to ensure a consistent standard of English in the *Journal*.

Even English speakers will have conflicting ideas on what should be allowed. Certainly one generation's slang may pass into standard English, but this is not inevitable and the rush to use the latest buzz-word may look embarrassingly dated in a few years time. It is as wise to avoid these as it is to avoid

the shorthand that may be used in some laboratories that does not translate into other laboratories, particularly for a journal such as this which covers a relatively broad field. What, for example, will different readers understand by PG, BSA, NA, EC? Research workers who deal day in and day out with, say, chlorpromazine may see no problem in abbreviating the name of the drug to CHLOR throughout a paper (diligently defining the abbreviation at first mention, according to the journal's instructions, of course) but this is of little help to the casual peruser. Indeed, a plethora of abbreviations makes some papers almost unreadable and often incomprehensible. In these days of computer typesetting, no service is performed by unnecessary abbreviations and it is the *Journal's* policy, when reasonable, to use full words—such as prostaglandin, adrenaline, chlorpromazine—rather than abbreviations.

The caution against the use of transient slang and its subsequent period flavour does not apply only to everyday speech, but also to new science words being coined. Authors making new discoveries may be anxious to put their mark on them by dreaming up new words. All too often some new discoveries turn out to be different manifestations of already described phenomena and the literature becomes confused with a proliferation of names for the same thing. It is better to stick to the factual descriptions using the well-established words until there is a general acceptance by the scientific world for a neologism. The trick, of course, is to identify the first occurrence of a new discovery and be the originator of the new name.

It may be thought that the use of Latin phrases should solve some of the problems of misunderstanding in language. Here again, the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* has its own policy. It is not particularly useful if the Latin phrase is an unusual one and sadly some useful phrases are recognized by fewer and fewer people. The *Journal* no longer uses "ibid" in reference lists to avoid repeating the name of the *Journal* in successive citations since one author complained that the readers would not know where the reference was to be found. In this case the charge was, I believe, justified as there is no need to save the labour or cost of typesetting using modern processes. We do try to avoid the use of Latin phrases where there is a perfectly good English equivalent—"per se" is a Latin phrase that does not perform any better than "itself". However, there are phrases which are fully accepted into scientific language and are acceptable when used in that context, the most obvious being the family encompassing "in-vitro", "in-vivo", etc. You will notice that the *Journal* retains the indication that these are not English words by hyphenating the phrase, a practice not approved by everyone.

These are just a few of the guidelines that are used by the Editorial Office to ensure that good science is conveyed by good science writing and a consistent approach is taken to articles published in the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology*.

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