

Letters to the Editor

"Humanizing Language: Some Reactions"

I was delighted to read Patricia Masters' thoughtful editorial, "Humanizing Language." Although using general, nongeneric nouns and pronouns is such an obvious first step in integrating women into scientific and other fields, many of us have been negligent in our own writings, and I commend *ABT's* efforts to improve this situation. In addition, nonsexist writing can help to open up new fields to men by removing the implication of feminine only by the use of references such as "she" and "her." What we each must do is to change our own habits as a result of conscious effort. I found that at first I had to be sensitive to every nuance. After practice, however, I began to substitute words easily and to change singular references to plural ones. In fact, "his/her" (or "her/his") becomes less cumbersome each time one uses it.

Writing in this style is now the only format acceptable by many publishers. An excellent, quick reference to help authors in this transition is the American Psychological Association's Publication Manual Change, Sheet 2, June, 1977, "Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals." This brochure gives specific examples of common usage, suggests non-sexist alternatives, and comments on the suggested changes. It is clear and easy to use, and it provides references concerning the language controversy.

In my opinion, no one who has not been consistently excluded from many opportunities by the thoughtless application of language can really understand the subtle impact of such usage. Only when it hits home does it raise your conscious-

ness. For example, several years ago my colleagues (all male) and I were meeting to describe the desired characteristics of a new department chairman for education for the search committee. Every sentence began with "He." I wondered how my colleagues would feel if every sentence had begun with "She."

Perhaps, if enough publishers, enough journals, and enough editors require us to begin writing in a human, nonsexist way, we may even begin to think and to act that way. These changes are especially important for teachers.

Jane Butler Kahle
Departments of Biological
Sciences and Education
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907

I read "Humanizing Language" (*ABT* 40:[5]:267) with sadness and dismay. I was not sure I was reading a science education journal. My summary feeling is that the title should have been "*Politicizing Language*"; for that, in effect, is what your new, peremptory guidelines have done.

Your bolstering argument from Miller and Swift compounds a highly theoretical position to appear to be a scientific conclusion. Even the example of the fictional female child was a model of a simplistic elan. This child struck me as not too bright. You might have to search all of America to find such a confused and undiscerning girl.

Surely, I agree that gender qualifiers are patronizing and must be deleted. Surely, our substantive teaching should be carefully oriented towards the concept of sexual equality. Our textbooks must certainly depict females on rung-parity with males.

When we reach out for the for nuevo pronouns and eliminate the generic use of *man*, we are playing

politics, McGraw-Hill not withstanding. We have seen a similar move in our recent drive towards winning equality for minorities. Most keen observers know that in the "Harlems" of America, it matters little whether you are "black," "colored," or "Negro." What matters to minorities is equality in education, jobs, and civil rights.

So, too, in the drive for feminine rights, let's concentrate on the *equality* aspect. The pronoun paranoia can be a real diversion. When the feeling of euphoria dies down, the real struggle still remains.

I strongly protest your peremptory change in the style of our journal.

Joseph M. Oxenhorn
Pathways, Green River Hill
Hillsdale, New York 12529

Isosmotic and Isotonic: Clarifying the Differences

We would like to thank Gottlieb (1978) for his article in *ABT* (40:5) concerning isotonic and isomotic solutions. The generally poor textbook treatment of this subject has also frustrated us for some time. May we also refer readers to Prosser (1973) for a clear discussion of this issue.

Implicit in Gottlieb's article is another related problem that also receives inadequate clarification in a number of widely used textbooks (Jacob, Francone, and Lossaw, 1978; Tortora and Anagnostakos, 1978): the difference between semipermeable and selectively permeable membranes. According to Prosser (1973) a semipermeable membrane is one which only permits the diffusion of a solvent across it and, thus, most biological membranes are not strictly semipermeable. Instead they

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MULTIMEDIA PROGRAMS IN MICROBIOLOGY, by American Society for Microbiology. 1977. American Society for Microbiology, Washington, D. C. 1977. 75 p. Price not given.

ACTS OF GOD AND ACTS OF MAN, by Wesley Marx. 1977. Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., New York. 276 p. \$8.95.

CLEAN AIR—CLEAN WATER FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD, by Reed Millard. 1977. Julian Messner, New York. 189 p. \$7.29.

ANIMAL CARE FROM PORTOZOA TO SMALL MAMMALS, by Barbara Orlans. 1977. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading, Massachusetts. 374 p. Price not given.

BUTTER SIDE UP—THE DELIGHTS OF SCIENCE, by Magnus Pike. 1977. Sterling Publishing Company, New York. 223 p. \$7.95.

THE TOOLS OF BIOCHEMISTRY, by Terrance G. Cooper. 1977. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York. 423 p. \$19.95.

A LABORATORY MANUAL FOR GENERAL BOTANY, by Margaret Balbach, Lawrence Bliss, and Harry Fuller. 5th ed., 1977. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York. 393 p. Price not given.

FOUNDATIONS OF PARASITOLOGY, by Gordon D. Schmidt and Larry S. Roberts. 1977. The C.V. Mosby Publishing Company, St. Louis, Missouri. 604 p. \$19.50.

AT HOME IN THE WILD, by Frances and Dorothy Wood. 1977. Dodd Mead, New York. 64 p. Price not given.

GROWING WINGS: THE PERENNIAL CYCLE OF BIRD LIFE, by Sarita Van Vleck. 1977. William L. Bauhan, Publisher, Dublin, New Hampshire. 141 p. \$14.95.

WHAT'S THAT LITTLE THING IN THE WATER?, by Donald Humphreys. 1977. Xerox Education Publications, Middletown, Connecticut. 62 p. \$.60, minimum order, 10 copies.

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are said to be selectively permeable, allowing selected solutes to diffuse across them. It is interesting to note that in a system where a semipermeable membrane is separating two

solutions, isotonic solutions will also be isotonic. However, because biological membranes are selectively permeable and the two solutions may well have different solutes, isotonic solutions will commonly not be isotonic as Gottlieb states.

Lewis M. Lutton

Glen G. Wurst

Department of Biology

Allegheny College

Meadville, Pennsylvania 16335

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- PROSSER, C.L. 1973. *Comparative animal physiology*. 3rd ed. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company.
- TORTURA, G.F. and ANAGNOSTAKOS, N.P. 1978. *Principles of anatomy and physiology*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Canfield Press.

Gottlieb Comments

I appreciate Lutton and Wurst's comments and agree completely with their differentiation between semipermeable and selectively permeable membrane. I, too, draw the same distinction. That is why in my article (ABT 40:5) I use the phrases "take into consideration the permeability properties of a membrane" and "the differential permeability properties of the membrane."

A word of caution when using the phrase "selectively permeable." I have observed that a significant number of students think that "selective" implies permeability only to those substances that are "beneficial" to the cell and impermeable to substances that are "harmful" to the cell. It must be stressed that "selective" has to do with the physical and chemical properties of the membrane as well as the solute and may be independent of the welfare of the cell. It is understood that evolutionary forces helped select membranes with certain physicochemical characteristics.