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W. F. Hollander
Iowa State University

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On the Trail of the Decadent Polyglot

(*Pedanticus multiverbosus*)

W. F. HOLLANDER
Genetics Department
Iowa State University

At the risk of beating a dead horse to death, I desire to add my lick. Students are not adequately trained to communicate in science, and the objective-type test is not helping. When linguistic fluency is equated with drooling in one's beard, and semantics is some sort of erotic deviation, one must not be surprised to learn that etymology is the study of incests. Most of the kids have become aware that mini means small, and that lunar means moon, and we should be grateful for such small advances, but the slippage in other areas is less cause for a *gaudeamus igitur*. A *rara avis* indeed who knows the plural of data, media, algae, or compendia.

What can be done for the poor tyro who guesses that macro is merely a casual misspelling of micro, that hyper has something to do with injecting into one's skin, that a filament is where you stash a lot of records, that post means upright (unless lying down), and that an isotherm controls the furnace? Maybe by the time we encounter him it is too late, but hope springs eternal. At least we might try to wedge the notion into his cerebral hemispheres that there is more to Eng-

lish than Anglo-Saxon, and those four-letter words were dressed up by suave foreign imports, ages ago. Hip talk is demonstrably less conducive to peace and persuasion than diplomatic jargon, and computerese is often not as pertinent as a touch of romance language. And why stop there? Why not talk of roots?

Meanwhile, here is John Q. Malaprop trying to make sense out of a babel of lectures and lacunae by the literati, together with circumlocutory text and conundrums by cognoscenti. He is hopelessly crippled, but grimly pursues his degree. And we take pity on the struggling misfit, *magna cum laude*. Especially if he knows how to employ the subtle art of flattery.

He cracketh a book and discovereth that long words cover many sins; therefore he employeth the same wherever he sins. But ask him to interpret: woe unto ye pedagogue. Unfair. "Supererogation of adaptational analogy over anatomical homology is conducive to invalid taxonomy, e.g., in affixation of the terminology apinate avian to the pterodactyls, whose pentadactyl manus and saurian denotation indicate reptilian affinity, and

whose manipulation of atmospheric flux in circumnavigating as opportunistic predators was facilitated by an integumentary extensum rather than by muscular hypertrophy." It might as well be Greek, as well as Latin.

Yes, there I think is the key—those Greek and Latin roots. How can we get them across instead of trying to emasculate our scientific dialogues? Would it be too much to ask the overburdened English teachers to pre-

sent the kids with a thousand selected roots, and show them how to recognize them in their modern twiny combinations and excrescences? Then when the kids later encounter such words as decadent they will be able to see the meaning (obviously: ten teeth). I hope that this millennial message will appeal to all and be acted upon with celerity so that we can proceed to problems of logic.

Issues in Elementary School Science Raised in Publication

At which point does a child understand science? Should elementary school science serve his immediate interests or future needs? These are some of the questions raised by D. C. Ipsen, author of *Issues in Elementary School Science*, the latest publication of the National Science Teachers Association.

In a sixteen-page essay, Dr. Ipsen deals with the possibilities that may have been overlooked during the turmoil in elementary science education that began about ten years ago. The philosophy now is to give children the information they need as they are getting an idea of how scientists work. But what facts or concepts are

appropriate? Are they relevant to the life of the child? Can they be studied abstractly or must their development be experienced? What role should science play in other classes, such as writing or arithmetic?

Dr. Ipsen encourages the consideration of higher goals in this attempt to clarify some of the alternatives in attitude or philosophy that exist in elementary school science today.

Issues in Elementary School Science (Stock No. 471-14328) may be ordered from the Publications Sales Section, National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. The price is \$1. (Payment must accompany orders for \$2 or less.) Discounts on multiple orders: 2-9 copies, 10 per cent; 10 or more, 20 per cent.