

**To the Editor:**

I read with interest that the June 1990 issue of the *MRS BULLETIN*, on p. 69, reported a scientific meeting held in Taiwan, China. As a Chinese, I congratulate such a scientific conference. However, I want to point out some serious mistakes in this report, and one of the pictures (Prof. R.P.H. Chang and Mr. Lee Deng-Hui) is totally irrelevant to this scientific meeting. To publish such a picture with the accompanying description in your *MRS BULLETIN* is indeed improper.

Taiwan is part of China, Taiwan is not a separate country, and there is only one China. This is the principle adopted by the United Nations and by your own U.S. government. I don't think *MRS* or the *MRS BULLETIN* should now chose to adopt a different one. Please be careful in this kind of report. The *MRS* or *MRS BULLETIN* should make every effort to keep out of politics and avoid being taken in. It is only by doing so that your Society and your journal can earn respect, certainly not by the contrary.

I do not believe that this particular report was the outcome of any well-considered policies made by the *MRS* Council or by the editorial board of the *MRS BULLETIN*. I tend to believe this was an unintentional, careless mistake, although very serious. I sincerely advise that the *MRS BULLETIN* take steps to avoid committing such kind of mistakes again by taking that report as a lesson.

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**Editor's Reply:** The sole purpose of the *BULLETIN* is to report on activities from around the world that pertain to the advancement of materials or that are of interest to the profession. Neither the Materials Research Society nor the *BULLETIN* supports any political position. We regret any perception this article may have given to support a particular political claim.

**The Verbal Couch**

*When in the Course of materials Events, it becomes necessary for Atoms of one Element to dissolve the chemical Bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the allowed States of Matter, the separate and equivalent States to which the Laws of Thermodynamics and of Thermodynamics' underlying microscopic Basis entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Theorists requires that they should declare the Causes which impel them to the phase Separation.*

*Theorists hold some Truths to be self-evident, that all Particles are created identical, that they were endowed at their Creation with certain immutable Properties, that among these are Mass-Energy, Charge, and the Statistics of Spin—That to relate these to material Properties, Laboratories are instituted among Researchers, deriving their just Support from the Consent of the Funding Agencies, that whenever any Form of Experiment appears to deviate from these Ends, it is the Right of the Agencies to alter or to abolish it and to institute a new Program, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its research Reports in such Format as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Return on Investment. Prudence, indeed, does dictate that Programs long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn, that Researchers are more disposed to persist, while Persistence is fundable, than to go off on a Tangent by biting the Hand that feeds them.*

You might say to write a parody of a well-known text is easy and, if it is a highly venerated text, a bit crass. But that is not the point. The message is the dissonance between the elegant style of prose, well suited to profound meaning, and the relatively pedestrian ideas (at least for us technical types) with which it was sullied. Mundane notions cannot be elevated by couching them in the verbiage of sages. It will at best come across as intentional satire but possibly as affected and pedantic pseudo-rhetoric. It is self-limiting in effect, however. The obvious discord sees to that.

The reverse phenomenon is the more insidious. To fail to convey the profound, the incisive, the deeply insightful because the innate power of the medium, lan-

guage, is not exercised borders on the criminal. Timidity may be one culprit, i.e., fear of being seen as ostentatious (ostentaphobia). There may be many closet orators and poets among us! But certainly part of the reason is loss of language competence—not merely in the rudiments of grammar and syntax without which the very notes of the scale are inaccessible—but in the composition of and appreciation for symphonies. With mastery of the whole comes license to judiciously mangle the rules for even greater effect.

Norman Cousins' recent complaint<sup>1</sup> applies: "Vocabulary, like blue jeans, is being drained of color and distinction. People communicate in chopped-up phrases, relying on grunts and chants of 'you know' or 'I mean' to cover up damnable incoherence. Neatness should be no less important in language than it is in dress. But spew and sprawl are taking over. The English language is one of the greatest sources of wealth in the world. In the midst of accessible riches, we are linguistic paupers."

We have, of course, been speaking of speaking in an Anglocentric frame. The nuance of meaning and the power of a well-turned phrase are tools of all languages, and borrowing liberally each from the other inserts colors not found on the standard palette. If we could only as easily also borrow the unique perspectives and patterns of thought behind each mother tongue.

You ask how would our technical community benefit if we reunited the melody and the words. Methinks not much in the archival research article or the technical talk where the perception and, it is hoped, the fact of objectivity requires only impartial syntactical accuracy.<sup>2</sup> But in singing the praises of science and technology, of humankind's thirst for knowledge and conquest of the environment, inspiration comes from linguistic sirens, not from drones.

Tonight, why not couch the intrinsic value and excitement of what you do in grand and lyrical prose. Tomorrow, play it for anyone who will listen until you see widened eyes and hear a chopped-up, grunt-like response like "golly" or "wow!" When that happens, you'll know all is not yet lost.

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1. *Time*, April 2, 1990, p. 78.

2. See "Voice Choice," *Postterminaries*, *MRS BULLETIN* XIII, No. 5 (1988) p. 52.