

Letter to the Editor

IT WAS WITH GREAT, UNCHANGED INTEREST that I started to read the article on *Sequential segmental analysis – description and categorization for the millennium* by Robert H Anderson and Siew Yen Ho (*Cardiol Young* 1997; 7: 98-116).

Suddenly, the pleasure in my reading was disturbed by a false term: ATRIUMS, the Latin word “atrium” used in the plural by adding a final ‘s’ as in most English words. I consulted the 26th edition of the *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary* and with great relief, at page 136, I read: atrium (a'tre-um), pl. a'tria (L; Gr. atrion hall) etc..

I'm not a paladine of our dead mother tongue, betrayed and forgotten also by the clergy. But there are few words which have remained in the current medical use and are so perfect that even a language purist such as the Editor-in-Chief of this journal is so benevolent to use in his beautiful written English. For those words I say: “please let's not distort them”.

As an alternative, one may use the English translation of atrium, which I would not dare anticipate, leaving the choice to our esteemed Editor-in-Chief.

With many thanks for your kind consideration.

R Margherita Bini
Cardiologia Pediatrica
Cagliari, Italy

Reply:

DR BINI MAKES AN IMPORTANT POINT which has been put to me by several others who are disturbed by the Englishing of an obviously foreign word. But the major beauty of the English language, now seen particularly in its American version, is the great facility it offers to move with the times. And beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder!

Presumably Dr Bini is equally disturbed to see the changes now made in words from her living mother tongue as they become incorporated into Anglo-American. How many times does she now hear concertos played in musical concerts, or listen to compact discs which include the four scherzos of Chopin? Lovers of antiques now buy bureaus, and keep their writings in portmanteaus, showing that the modernisation of foreign plurals is not confined to the Italian language. There is no excuse, therefore, for making exceptions for Latin which, as Dr Bini herself admits, has long been dead. This is already the case in America, where architects now design atriums in the many hotels, which often sit adjacent to the stadiums increasingly used for the holding of symposiums. As I'm sure Dr Bini also knows, words such as “agenda” have now been so well incorporated that I have seen reference to “agendas”, which Dr Bini will recognize as being entirely gratuitous. I have noted her objection, but will not be acting upon it. It seems to me that, in this instance, the English plural, is preferable to describing the forechambers of the heart!

Robert H Anderson,
Editor-in-Chief
Cardiology in the Young