

Mr. Scientist: Watch Your Language!

NOTHING is more disconcerting to a speaker than to suddenly realize that he has lost the attention of his listeners; that their minds are otherwise occupied by some subject far removed from the one he is discussing. Equally disheartening is the discovery that a comprehensive report on a research project, after publication, is gathering dust on some forgotten shelf, unopened and unperused, because it is "too hard to read." In either case the cause can usually be traced to the wrong choice of language.

Every research worker has an interesting story to tell. How well he recounts it is as important as the facts he has learned. To tell about his work fully, he must employ two variants of a single language. First, he must discuss his results in the

exact terminology of his profession, in a language fully understood only by his co-workers. Second, he should recount his findings in the everyday language which is universally understood in his community, state, or nation. It is at this point that the research worker runs into difficulties.

The fact that "in the genus *Canis* the posterior appendage oscillates rapidly from certain stimuli" is not particularly intelligible to the average listener or reader. However, everyone understands the more simple statement that "a dog wags its tail when excited, angry, or pleased." Many fine pieces of research written in technical form still await a more "popular" translation.

A part of the difficulty seems to lie in

our inability to transpose our thoughts from technical to common language with complete facility. In Range Management, for example, browse, shrub, brush, and coppice refer to woody plants with edible leaves, twigs, and shoots. To the British, the word coppice will most likely be understood to refer to a thicket of small trees which is used periodically as fuel. The American livestockman seems to prefer the all-inclusive term, "brush." Similarly in range management literature



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litter, mulch, residue, and debris all refer to dead plant material on the soil surface with the manner of deposition being qualified as natural or artificial. Cereals investigators use both residue and mulch to describe stubble left on the surface after a crop is harvested. Debris is generally thought of as rubbish. Hence, the

manner of presentation of subject matter depends upon the group we wish to reach. To fellow scientists it is important to express ourselves exactly in the language which conveys our ideas and research results accurately. To an infinitely larger group, namely the public, it is mandatory that our findings be presented in a common language, in an interesting form and in an enthusiastic manner.

We Americans live in a favored nation, in a country filled to overflowing with the results of applied basic research. We touch a switch and we have available an abundance of electric power, manufactured from the energy of some distant river. We mow and stack improved alfalfa and grass from irrigated meadows, graze our animals on fine pastures and fatten them on hybrid cereals. The bread we eat comes from high quality wheat developed in the laboratories of the plant breeders. Although these scientific wonders are relatively new, they have become commonplace because of their abundance and wide use.

Advances in the agricultural sciences have come mainly from basic research carried on at our educational institutions and governmental agencies. Such research agencies are supported largely by taxes. The American public is interested not only in enjoying the fruits of research, but also in hearing the story of how the results came about.

The man or woman who did the work is the one who can best tell about it. So, Mr. Scientist, please tell us about your research in everyday words, in our own language.—*John J. Sturm*, Student, University of Wyoming, Laramie. (Supt. North Montana Branch Station, Havre.)

Is Science Enough?

RANGE management is daily moving further into the realm of science; research findings are providing sound, accurate information as a basis for adminis-

trative decisions and ranch operation. The increasing value of our research program is being proven in its application. Gratifying as this technical progress is, another