

On the Bias

These articles were recently called to my attention by readers and friends.

Fava GA. Conflict of interest and special interest groups: the making of a counter culture. *Psychother Psychosom* 2001;70:1-5.

This is a call to arms against the influence of corporate money on research, which is the scientific correlate of campaign finance reform. The call is issued in the form of an editorial by Giovanni Fava, the editor of *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*. Fava contends that the problem is so subversive that even the World Health Organization has fallen under the spell of the pharmaceutical industry. Interestingly, however, Fava credits the cradle of capitalism, North America, as the model for resisting influence through the institution of disclosure statements. Medical associations in Europe, he says, have yet to follow suit. Disclosure statements, however, are only a first small step, according to Fava, who ends with a list of recent developments representing a growing counterculture of resistance to undue influence. Such developments, Fava argues, are necessary to preserve intellectual freedom.

Graff G. Scholars and sound bites: the myth of academic difficulty. *PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America)* 2000;115(5):1041-52.

We're shocked, shocked: There are people who defend ponderous and obscure academic prose! Graff to the rescue. Even if such a writing "style" were based on scientists' fear of oversimplification, Graff shows with real-life examples that they need such reductionism. Therefore, the practice of writing difficult text is hypocritical at best and self-defeating at worst. Although this article is preaching to the choir for editors, they can find vindication here and useful tips. Buried in the middle of all this is "some of the oldest and simplest rhetorical advice: 'First, tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; then tell 'em; then tell 'em what you told 'em.'" Graff also touches on the zen of writing: "Every writer has had the experience of becoming aware, deep into preparing an essay, that the amassed examples and evidence not only do not clearly support the writer's thesis

but could also be used to support an opposing thesis." (Note: I thought that happened only to me!) By the end of the article, Graff softens his tone and entreats academics not to "exaggerate the distance between the academic and the popular"—for their own protection. He ends with nine points for academic writers, which include the following gem: "You'll be surprised to find that when you restate an academic point in your nonacademic voice, the point is enriched (or else you see how vacuous it is), and you're led to new perceptions."

Wallraff B. What global language? *Atlantic Monthly* 2000;286(Nov):52-67 and www.theatlantic.com/cgi-bin/o/issues/2000/11/wallraff.htm.

(Note: It may be worth comparing the print version with the electronic version to see the advantages of the latter: accompanying the online article are a readers' forum on the topic, links to related Web sites and articles previously published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and e-mail interviews by the author with a person featured in the article and a specialist with relevant views.)

Despite appearances to the contrary on news shows, where it seems everyone in the world speaks English, the prediction that it will become a global language is far from certain. Wallraff provides a different perspective on language here and abroad through wide-ranging statistics on how many people speak what language, where, and why.

And speaking of language, a scholar in multidisciplinary studies sent me the following article, which includes the elements dear to any science editor: a story about science that revolves around language—it's the bees' knees.

Veldink C. The honey-bee language controversy. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 1989;14:166-74.

From interviews with key figures, personal correspondence, and a survey of bee scientists, Veldink constructs a case history of the rise and slow demise of a theory about bee language. Scientists were reluctant to accept evidence against a favored theory even though the issue had little practical or political import. Thus, there appeared to be no logical reason for the bias.