

## Tilting Against Transplant for Transplantation

In the January-February issue, Mary Knatterud claims that the editors of an unnamed journal “capriciously transformed” the word *transplant* to the “embarrassingly puffed-up *transplantation*” throughout a manuscript she edited.<sup>1</sup> She accuses the editors of “long-winded clumsiness” and an absent-mindedness so breathtaking it causes them to mix willy-nilly what she takes to be interchangeable words in the same sentence.

Most readers will have seen at once what the problem is—that *transplant* and *transplantation* mean different things. Unfortunately, Knatterud fails to perceive the distinction being made, not only in the manuscript she cites but even in the very style manuals she marshals as evidence for her view. The distinction, of course, is between the transplant itself—the organ being transplanted, a kidney, say, or a heart—and transplantation, the operation by which it is transplanted. It’s roughly analogous to the difference between *vaccine* and *vaccination* or between *artificial hip* and *hip replacement*. No one, I think, would argue that to write *appendectomy* is to “gratuitously elongate” *appendix* (though admittedly the analogy works here in reverse, with the organ coming out instead of going in.)

Knatterud cites sentences from the AMA style manual (“The patient received a trans-

plant” and “A randomized trial in recipients of lung transplants yielded similar results”), apparently unaware that they are entirely consistent with—and indeed partly illustrate the correctness of—the editing she assails.

I’m not familiar with the manuscript in question and had nothing to do with its editing. I can, however, hazard a guess about the identity of the “major medical journal” on which Knatterud heaps her scorn. Before I retired from the *New England Journal of Medicine* I was careful, as my former colleagues there still are, to distinguish between such confusing pairs as *transplant* and *transplantation*.

Still, I can see why an institution might prefer to use the shorter “transplant program”, especially since such a program deals with both organs and procedures. And as every editor knows, once it’s engraved in style-manual stone, any rule can sometimes be too strenuously applied. Indeed, one could reasonably debate the wisdom of continuing to preserve a distinction increasingly ignored by others. But any such debate would require an understanding of what the issue is.

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### Reference

1. Knatterud ME. Tilting against windy suffixes. *Sci Ed* 2001;24:14-5.

## In Reply

I stand by my original article. All of the phrases I cited from my colleagues’ manuscript were far more concise and idiomatic before the journal in question changed them. To reprise just a few examples, our “transplant centers” was changed to “transplantation centers”; “the transplant” to “the transplantation”; and “fourth transplants” to “fourth transplantations.”

One of Loviglio’s statements, in particular, reminded me that how she and some medical publications define the nouns *transplant* and *transplantation* is at odds with how the vast majority of my surgery colleagues and I do—a disconnect that I didn’t address head-on in my article, but will now. Loviglio writes, “The distinction, of course, is between the transplant itself—the organ

being transplanted, a kidney, say, or a heart—and transplantation, the operation by which it is transplanted.”

This is the root of our disagreement: I do not define either of those words the way Loviglio does, nor do 99% of the people I interact most closely with, professionally or personally. From my vantage point in a world-renowned Midwestern transplant center, at the turn of this century, “the transplant itself” means the *operation*—not “the organ being transplanted”. And in current parlance, “transplantation” does not mean an individual operation.

When someone tells me “I received [or had, or recovered from] a transplant last year”, I understand that he or she is talking about an operation—not a pancreas or islets

or a heart-lung en bloc. In the more formal context of written prose, of course, I would edit it to “underwent a transplant”, since that verb is technically more correct with that noun and renders the organ recipient less passive-sounding. When I need to refer to the organ, I use precise terms such as “the transplanted lung” or “the graft”—*never* “the transplant”.

*Transplantation*, as I mentioned in my original article, is a perfectly acceptable way to refer to “the overall process or subfield, as opposed to an individual operation.” In that sense, I see it used, properly and effectively, all the time. But nobody I know goes around saying “I performed a kidney transplantation” or “My transplantation used a living donor”; *transplant* is clearly the less wordy choice, whether on the street or on paper. (The plural *transplantations*, as I already sighed, is a nonword in my book.)

The fourth edition (2000) of the *American Heritage Dictionary* champions my definition of the noun *transplant* as the operation, not the organ. It first gives two general definitions that don’t directly apply to this discussion, but then its third definition is labeled “*Medicine*: An operation in which tissue or an organ is transplanted: *undergo a heart transplant; surgical transplant of a cornea.*” Interestingly, this medically oriented definition was not included in that dictionary’s second edition (1982), but was introduced in its third edition (1992). (Not to further confuse anyone, but that second illustrative phrase, “surgical transplant of a cornea”, brings up this point: The shorter *transplant* as a noun is also invoked, especially in non-US medical circles, for the overall process or subfield instead of *transplantation*: “Transplant is one of the 20th century’s most amazing miracles.”)

Unfortunately, some otherwise wonderful medical reference books—and the admittedly illustrious medical journal alluded to in my article—are simply not in sync with common usage (as accurately chronicled by the *American Heritage Dictionary* beginning in 1992). The 28th edition of *Dorland’s Illustrated Medical Dictionary* (1994) defines

the noun *transplant* as “an organ or tissue taken from the body for grafting . . .”; likewise, the 26th edition of *Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* (1995) equates the noun *transplant* with “the tissue or organ . . .”. The ninth edition (1998) of the *American Medical Association Manual of Style* follows suit, equating the noun *transplant* with “the organ or tissue that is transplanted” (p 259).

In my opinion, *Dorland’s*, *Stedman’s*, AMA, and the journal in question are out of step with the way the noun *transplant* is typically used, both in the real world and in the scholarly subfield of transplantation. Of the thousands of examples I could cite, note these phrases taken from Joseph E Murray’s Nobel Prize lecture, reprinted in *History of Transplantation: Thirty-Five Recollections* (edited by Paul I Terasaki, Los Angeles: UCLA Tissue Typing Laboratory, 1991). Murray’s very title uses the noun *transplants* to mean operations, not organs: “The First Successful Organ Transplants in Man”. He also writes “once the patients and the team decide to proceed with the transplant”; “the surgeon performing the transplant”; “the world’s first organ transplant (1954)”; and “more than 200,000 human renal transplants have been performed worldwide.”

Regarding *transplant* as an adjective, I am encouraged that Loviglio “can see why an institution might prefer to use the shorter ‘transplant program’ ” (rather than changing it to “transplantation program”, as the journal I wrote about did). So I won’t belabor that point here; suffice it to say that Murray’s text (and that of other au courant transplant surgeon-authors) abounds with *transplant* as an adjective. And the shorter, less stuffy *transplant* (again, instead of *transplantation*) is ensconced in countless organizational names, such as “International Renal Transplant Registry” and “American Society of Transplant Surgeons”.

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