

October 1, 1952

Dr. N. H. Horowitz  
Kerckhoff Biological Laboratories  
California Institute of Technology  
Pasadena, California

Dear Norm,

Your philological discoveries came to me as a complete surprise. I immediately checked the word "prototroph" in my copy of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1933. Perhaps this is the book Josh checked when he first suggested the term, for "prototroph" is not listed. Since I don't know all the words in this little book, I rarely use a bigger one.

From my admittedly barbaric viewpoint, it would seem that the usefulness of a neologism should justify its existence. There certainly was need for a word when "prototroph" was employed in its latter-day sense. And I have yet to learn that it confused rather than clarified. Had you missed the meaning when you read of "transducers" in that article on porpoises, I would perhaps have had more sympathy with your point of view.

I recognize the problem of priority you raise and admit my ignorance of the fact that our word "prototroph" was preoccupied. I feel, however, that withdrawal of our definition now would not improve the situation but would rather confuse. Should the occasion arise in the future, I shall adopt the procedure you recommend, if only to avoid your academic wrath.

Rather than hear what the French Academie would rule on the matter, I'd prefer to learn Josh's reaction.

Best regards,

Sincerely,

Francis J. Ryan

FJR:kk

c.c. Dr. Joshua Lederberg