



Dirk Trauner  
Janice Cutler Chair in Chemistry  
Adjunct Professor of Neuroscience and Physiology

Department of Chemistry  
100 Washington Square East, Room 712  
New York, NY 10003  
P: 212 998 3747  
M: 917 207 7677  
dirktrauner@nyu.edu

New York, Spring 2018

## RE: The War Against the Latin and Greek Plural

Recently, I have come across the following phrase in a scientific paper: "*Unfortunately, these statements overlook a substantial body of literature unambiguously demonstrating that this phenomena is well known.*" This joins my growing list of Greek and Latin plurals that are abused.

Others include:

*A criteria*  
*A polyhedra*  
*A spectra*  
*A foci*  
*A fungi*  
*A paraphernalia*  
*A bacteria*  
*An equilibria*  
*An alumni*

Why is it that some of our colleagues and our editors show such a disregard for the correct use of the Latin and Greek plural? I know it is convenient to end every Latin and Greek word in "a" but this does not make it right. Is it because words ending in "-um" sound, ummm, a bit indecisive? Maybe the justification is that these languages are dead anyways and you can therefore safely disregard their grammar, since nobody (with the exception of a few powerless classicists) will get upset?

Yes, languages are ever-changing and evolving but that does not mean that you can mess with their grammar as you will. If we let this stand we will soon have to accept that "*the equilibria lies on the right side*" or that "*the foci of our investigation is...*". I have seen both in scientific texts already.

I know the war against the Greek and Latin plural has already been won in the case of "*visa*", "*data*", and "*media*". "*Bacterium*" is a seriously endangered species (I have heard Nobel Prize Winners speak of "*the bacteria Clostridium*"), and "*spectrum*" is also at risk. But I draw a line in the sand with "*phenomenon*" and "*equilibrium*"!

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dirk Trauner', written in a cursive style.

Dirk Trauner