

MYCOSPEAK AND BIOBABLE

“There are at least thirty kinds of biologist, each with a mutually incomprehensible ‘biobabble.’
James Lovelock (*The Times* 65257 (3 May): 23, 1995).



Mycologists are often accused of using terminologies that are not immediately understood by biologists as a whole. A topical example is that of *anamorph* and *teleomorph*, rather than either the immediately understood *asexual* and *sexual*, or the now less-used alternative *mitotic* and *meiotic*. In descriptions, there is also a tendency to follow tradition. Some commonly used adjectives likely to be understood by those with some knowledge of Latin or Greek, but not so readily by others. Amongst numerous examples are *coprophilous*, *corticolous*, *epiphyllous*, *lignicolous*, *mycobiont*, and *saxicolous* rather than *on dung*, *on bark*, *on leaves*, *on wood*, *fungus partner*, and *on rock*. In descriptions examples are manifold, such as *moniliform* for *in chains*, *punctate* for *spotted*, *reniform* for *kidney-shaped*, and *verrucose* for *warty*. It is good practice when editing or reviewing papers, to always ask “is that term really necessary or appropriate?”

Rambold *et al.* (2013) have argued for the recognition of mycology as a separate field in biology, and one element of establishing that distinctness is the use of special terms where they are justified. This point is stressed by Jens H. Petersen,

author of *The Fungal Kingdom* (Petersen 2012), in an interview on pp. (21)–(22) of this issue of *IMA Fungus*: “We have to insist that fungi are not ‘Lower Plants,’ their occurrence in nature should not be called *flora* but *funga*, they are not kept in *herbaria* but in *fungaria*, etc. We have to insist on their uniqueness, . . . “ – although I personally prefer *mycobiota* to *funga* (and also avoid *mycota* as a term indicating the rank of phylum). As many mycologists will perhaps be aware, I have also refrained from publishing on mycological matters in journals and books which have ‘botany’ in their titles since IMC5 (Vancouver) in 1994 to help address this issue of subject identity (Hawksworth 1995), and this practice is advocated for adoption by all mycologists in the MycoAction Plan (Hawksworth 2003).

At the same time, the adoption of terms from other areas of biology for dissimilar structures can mislead, and even give subliminal impressions of affinity where there is none. One term which continues to mislead, and is still in widespread use by mycologists, is *fruiting* and *fruiting body*. This is so entrenched, and surely was an oversight in Petersen’s book, but persists in conveying the subliminal connotation that these structures are comparable to the fruits of plants. A *fruit* is a “seed bearing organ, with or without adnate parts” (Beentje 2010). Fungi do not have seeds, so cannot have fruits, so why do many mycologists persist with using this anachronism? What fungi do have is spores, so logically we should always adopt either *sporocarp* or *sporophore* for *fruit body*, and *sporing* for *fruiting*? The term *carpophore* is better avoided; it has been used both for the stipe region of basidomes, and also the carpel-bearing structure in some plants.

Communication amongst mycologists, with other biologists, and also citizen

scientists, will surely be facilitated if we all resolve to: (1) use ‘mysospeak’ terms when they are necessary, for either features unique to fungi, to enhance precision, or to assert the identity of the discipline; and (2) simultaneously eliminate biobabble that merely obfuscates.

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Clavaria argillacea: fruit-body or sporophore?



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