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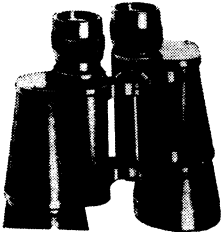
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## LETTERS

# to the editor

### Flyspecks well noted

On page 61 of SCIENCE NEWS of Jan. 18, I found a very well written article on neurophysiology, probably by Patricia McBroom, who interviewed me at Dallas.

I found the article very perceptive of what I was trying to transmit at Dallas, and very instructive. There are only a few small matters of fact which I should like to point out, not by way of caviling, for they could not have been generally known and might be overlooked by your readers. Nevertheless, they represent flyspecks which you might wish to avoid.

Paragraph 2: the weight increase of the brain is shared by neurons and glia; the neurons by elaboration and extension of processes, that is, by growth of the individual cells, and glia by multiplication. I suppose the weight increase is at least equal between these two, and certainly not dominated by production of glia.

Paragraph 4: the nuclei of neurons rotate rapidly, not the neurons themselves. The beginning of paragraph 3, column 2, reports the "effects of culture in the choice of color and form at about 3 years of age." I presume Miss McBroom learned this from some other source; in any event, I don't recognize the source of that idea and don't know whether or not it is true. At the bottom of that column, the light flash experiments (originated by Roy John and Keith Killam) were done in cats, although they may since have been done by others in dogs. At the top of column 3, the electrodes were implanted in the cat's lateral geniculate body, which receives from the retina.

I appreciate the privilege of being interviewed by a reporter of Miss McBroom's talent and integrity and I assure you of my desire to help SCIENCE NEWS and other media give an accurate report to the public.

*Robert B. Livingston, M.D.*  
Department of Neurosciences  
School of Medicine  
University of California  
San Diego, Calif.

### Accent on proof

In your article, "Culture Molds the Brain" (SN: 1/18, p. 61) you mention that "the ability to learn a new language without accent ends about the age of 10." Considering the view this state-

(See p. 182)

# soroban

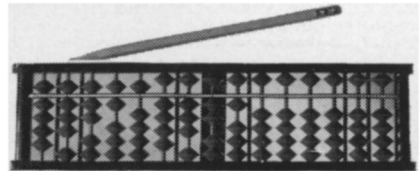
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*Letters from p. 181*

ment supports, I find it important enough to question. In my language studies I have come into contact with a number of people who spoke English without accents, so that they could not be distinguished from native speakers; but they had been born abroad and not begun the study of English until well into their teens. I once met a man whom I thought was a native speaker, and was surprised to hear him admit that he had forgotten his native language, Flemish, having begun to learn English in his twenties.

I take exception only to the statement that crosses my own experience, although I am led to doubt as a result much of what the article contains. For instance, "by age 20, many things, such as playing a musical instrument, have become difficult, if not impossible, to learn." What does this mean? Where's the proof?

I become very uneasy when conjecture, speculation and hypothesis are introduced as if they had conclusive empirical confirmation. If there is conclusive evidence of these opinions give it; if there is not do not introduce them as proven scientific facts.

*James H. McCormick  
Graduate student, English  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, Minn.*

*Address communications to Editor,  
Science News, 1719 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036*

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