

A new world record

by Edgar L. Andreas (eandreas@nwra.com)

The paper that Shen et al. (2006) recently published in *Geophysical Research Letters* has just been included in the *Budweiser World Book of Records* as the best example for the misuse of acronyms and abbreviations ever to appear in the annals of science. In announcing the award, *World Book* spokesperson Gobb L. de Gook commented that, "We could not let this article fade into posterity unheralded. The Shen et al. paper is nothing short of reader abuse."

In a paper of only five pages, Shen et al. introduced the following 28 acronyms and abbreviations: AIR, AOML, CCM3, CP, DE, fvGCM, GCM, GFS, GFDL, IC, MM, MPI, MSLP, MSW, NASA, NCAR, NHC, OBS, PP, RH, RI, RMW, SST, TC, T384, WRF, UTC, and ZETAC. De Gook elaborated that, "The two-letter abbreviations, especially, caught the attention of *World Book* scouts because they are clear evidence of lazy authors."

R.A. Day (1998, p. 222) advises that, "You would be wise to keep abbreviations to a minimum. The editor will look more kindly on your paper, and readers of your paper will bless you forever." He further concedes, however, that some recognizable acronyms and abbreviations are acceptable. Therefore, to authenticate the merit of the Shen et al. paper for recognition, *World Book* staff showed the above list of acronyms and abbreviations to 50 scientists whose demographics mirrored the readers of *Geophysical Research Letters* and asked them to identify as many as they could. One respondent actually got 19 correct, but he turned out to be a junior author of the Shen et al. paper. Among uninvolved respondents, the average number of correctly identified

acronyms and abbreviations from the above list was 11.

To conclude, de Gook pointed out that Shen et al. cannot take full credit for their *World Book* recognition. They were helped in getting their manuscript into print by the technical editor and the reviewers for *Geophysical Research Letters*, who judged their science to be good but turned a jaded eye from the low quality of their presentation. The copyeditors for the American Geophysical Union also contributed notably to this world record by denying their professional training for the sake of expedience and to keep papers short. Ω

References

- Day R.A. (1998), How to write and publish a scientific paper. 5th ed. Oryx Press, Phoenix, AZ. 275 p.
- Shen B.-W., Atlas R., Reale O., Lin S.-J., Chern J.-D., Chang J., Henze C., and Li J.-L. (2006), Hurricane forecasts with a global mesoscale-resolving model: Preliminary results with Hurricane Katrina (2005). *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 33:L13813, doi: 10.1029/2006GL026143.

Edgar L. Andreas (eandreas@nwra.com) is a senior member of STC. He has a Ph.D. in physical oceanography and M.S. and B.A. degrees in physics. He has been doing research on turbulent exchange processes over land, oceanic, and sea ice surfaces for over 30 years; this research has taken him inside the Antarctic Circle twice and inside the Arctic Circle four times. He is the lead author for 67 papers published in refereed scientific journals. Some of these articles have won STC publication awards at both chapter competitions and at the International Technical Publications Competition.

"Science quite appropriately acknowledges that error should be assumed, and at best it proceeds by a continuous process of criticism meant to isolate and identify error... [but] as the history of eugenics proves, science at the highest level is no reliable corrective to the influence of cultural prejudice but is in fact profoundly vulnerable to it."—Marilynne Robinson, *Hysterical Scientism: the Ecstasy of Richard Dawkins*

—
"It is diversity that makes any natural system robust, and diversity that stabilizes culture against the eccentricity and

arrogance that have so often called themselves reason and science."—Marilynne Robinson, *Hysterical Scientism: the Ecstasy of Richard Dawkins*

—
"More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."—Woody Allen, author, actor, and filmmaker (1935–)