

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed May 11, 1932

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METEOROLOGICAL (AND OTHER) DATA

Meteorologists have a great deal to do, in one way or another, with statistics. Therefore they have especially favorable opportunities to observe the astounding, incredible extent to which the word "data" is misused by the American people. Theoretically, everybody who has had a common-school education knows that this word is the plural of "datum." Actually, the belief that it is a singular is entertained by the vast majority of American university graduates - if one may judge from their letters, publications and oral utterances. (The oral remarks frequently embody the additional blunder of making the first syllable of the word rhyme with "bat.")

Among the persons who write for weather data to a certain celebrated repository of such information in Washington are many professional educators, including professors in normal schools, where teachers are taught how to teach. It is a conservative estimate that nine-tenths of their letters contain such sentences as the following:

"I want this data for a study I am making on the climate of"

"I have not much data to use in my classes."

"Is there any data on the temperature of China?"

Confusion is worse confounded in such a gem as the following:

"Much valuable data have been collected."

The use of "data" as both singular and plural in the same sentence is not at all uncommon in letters and publications emanating from ostensibly well-educated Americans!

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