

Brian CJ Moore, or the Art of Scientific Writing

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As a young student, I figured out that psychoacoustics was a branch of experimental sciences aiming to reveal aspects of the human auditory mechanisms. This is in thanks to sophisticated theoretical models derived from signal-detection theory and rock-solid behavioural methods elaborated and refined for more than a century by generations of demanding empiricists. Performing “proper” research in psychoacoustics was thus about challenging models through well-designed experiments. Twenty-five years after having met Brian CJ Moore in Cambridge and after having collaborated with him for about fifteen years, I have realized how poor and partial my understanding of this scientific enterprise was.

It all started with a book. I vividly remember myself reading for the first time Brian Moore’s manual entitled “The introduction of the psychology of hearing” while I was a Ph.D. student. This book illuminated me, not only because of the knowledge that it presented in a very comprehensive and well-organized form, but mostly because it was concise and clear, or should I say, because of its “transparency”. Being a French-native speaker, reading scientific English at that time was not as easy as reading Albert Camus. However, to my great surprise, reading each chapter of the *Introduction to the Psychology of Hearing* proved to be effortless and as easy as reading *L’étranger* or *La peste*. There was something special in the way Brian Moore was writing that literally crossed the “language barrier.” What was it?



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Twenty-five years later, I have finally understood what made his book “transparent”, and much more. The reason was due to his unique ability to master words, grammar and punctuation, and his ability to tame the language to deliver a clear and intelligible message. In that respect, writing an article with Brian Moore sitting side by side in front of the keyboard, is an enlightening experience. Like a goldsmith, Brian Moore carefully weighs and sifts every sentence; he chisels each paragraph and polishes every section of the article several times until the whole text expresses his thought in the simplest and most concise manner. Nothing should overload the working memory of the reader. Nothing should interrupt or slow down the path of thought. But the art of writing elaborated by Brian Moore is not static; it is in a permanent evolution. From paper to paper, Brian Moore refines his writing style (in French, “sa plume”), paving the way for an even simpler scientific language.

So, I learned from Brian Moore much more than auditory models and experimental designs. Psychoacoustics, and more broadly Science, is as much about theory and methods as it is about language. To produce “proper” Science, one has to learn how to write down “clear and distinct ideas”. But it is not always very easy. This “Cartesian art” is difficult, demanding, effortful, and it requires carefully positioning the correct word in the right place in order to respect the logical reasoning of the scientist. Useless conjunctions of coordination, superfluous, catchy and purely decorative expressions, ambiguous notions; all this must be erased in order to open the way to a fluid thought. This requires a keen sense of proportion, an assertive taste for parsimony and above all, *elegance*. This is Brian CJ Moore.

