



Centre for Biosystems
Science and Engineering

Latin for Biologists

(and everyone else)

4 – 5 pm
30th May 2016

Seminar Hall, MRDG,
Biological Sciences

Magna pars novae scientiae vocabulorum a linguis Latina et Graeca trahitur. Haec vocabula, scilicet, primo vel primigenio sensu amisso, novum acceperunt, quia scientia hodierna iamdiu superavit veterem Naturae rerum comprehensionem. Scire tamen circiter centum verba et Latina et Graeca valde utile esse potest—et delectabile—omnibus hominibus rerum Naturae peritis et in primis biologis. Conaturi tum sumus hac acroase, ope lucis linguarum Latinae et Graecae, biologiam sive animantium scientiam illustrare.

Students of Biology—especially beginners—often find themselves startled by the barrage of strange words being thrown their way. “Can Biology not be rid of this verbosity?” is the oft asked question. However, this is impossible— the precise nature of science demands a large vocabulary with unambiguous and specific meanings. If each such word were actually a “new” word, dismay would be justified. Fortunately, scientific vocabulary mostly derives from a core set of Greek and Latin roots. These borrowings, of course, do not always retain the original meanings of the words. Tibia, for instance, no longer denotes what it once did— a flute. However, an acquaintance with these roots combined with clever guessing can throw surprising light on jargon. It can also be a source of amusement— who would have thought that the word muscle comes from Latin musculus “little mouse”, for the way it looks while flexing under the skin! This lecture will provide an introduction to this method of looking at Biology through the glasses of Latin and Greek. Some pointers will also be provided for other scientific disciplines.



Suhas Mahesh

Suhas Mahesh is a physics major at the Bachelor of Science programme of the Indian Institute of Science. Suhas’s academic interests broadly revolve around condensed matter physics and he has spent time working on Organic Electronics at the University of Groningen and the Italian Institute of Technology. Apart from being a KVPY fellow, he is also a Rhodes scholar (2016) and will be pursuing a doctorate in physics at the University of Oxford. Suhas moonlights as a lover of language and linguistics, with a special interest in Sanskrit and Latin. Much of his free time is spent on reading classical texts and writing about them. He also enjoys teaching and has served as instructor at several Sanskrit courses.