

K513/1273



25, Argyll Road,
Kensington, W.

14 July 1874

Dear Sir

As the acknowledgement
of the receipt of my book
"Algebra identified with Geometry"
by the Hungarian Academy
of Sciences, ~~which~~ which you have
been kind enough to forward
to me, is expressed in English,
and as the printed part
contains a grammatical usage
unknown in our language,
I thought that you would not
be offended if I pointed it out
with a view to future correction.



as it is of course unpleasant
to print any language erroneously.
My own acquaintance with
Hungarian is about as slender
as possible not to be absolutely
nothing, but I know that you
do not distinguish genders, &
hence it appeared to me that you
probably attributed a feminine
gender in English to Academy,
which is feminine in Latin &
French. In English our feminine
& masculines proper are confined
to objects with a actual sex, altho'
in various occupations some
words are invested with gender.

To a sailor a ship & to an engine driver a train & are feminine. Often the sun is masc. & the moon fem., but not, ^{generally} in astronomical treatises, where both are it or neut., & all words not actually implying sex are now generally considered as neuter in ordinary prose & scientific work. In poetry & declamatory passages any amount of prosopopoeia & hence of sexual distinction occurs.

But when the word referred to is a noun of multitude, as Academy, Society, Council, Committee, College, University, usage varies as to whether the pronouns referring to them should be considered as neuter singular (it, & its) or plural genderless (they)

their.) So doubtful is usage upon this point that many secretaries contrive to word their letters so as to avoid the pronoun altogether, or else speak of the Members of Academy &c, to justify the their; but on the other hand some use it, its; the greater number I think use their. Having presented my book to numerous societies & libraries, I thought it might be interesting to you if I sent you the official (printed) wording of ^{some of} the acknowledgements I received classified according to the above usages. See annexed ^{step.}

Although this usage of her

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25, Argyll Road.

Bennington, Del.

is the most striking peculiarity in the wording, there are also two inversions of the usual English order of words, and the spelling Pest for Pesth. The latter is the English spelling, possibly to avoid any confusion with pest, a plague. Your letter runs

as follows, where the red ink shews the corrections which I beg to submit with a view of reducing it to English usage.

Pesth *not required*
Pest, (the) 18

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences has received ~~a~~ a packet (from you) containing:

which the undersigned is directed to express ^{their} her warmest thanks (for)

This would make the
letter run thus

Pesth 18

The Hungarian Academy of
Sciences has received from you
a packet, containing:

for which the undersigned is
directed to express their warmest
thanks.



As the passage original
stands, the words strictly
imply that "the undersigned"
is a woman, & that the
"thanks" are sent from "her"
personally, & not from the

Academy! Which, of course, is absurd!

Also "warmest thanks" are not usual words in an official communication. Allow me to suggest either no adjective, or "their best thanks" simply.

By reading the annexed transcripts you will see the ~~formulae~~ ^{formulae} which English Societies employ.

Of course this is a private communication to yourself, & not addressed to the Society, although perhaps it may lead your Council to change the English of its form of acknowledgement.

Feeling sure that you will

receive this communication
in the spirit in which it is
written — the desire of a member
of one learned society to assist
another — I remain with
great respect for the Hungarian
Academy & yourself



Very truly yours

Chas^r. J. Ellis.

~~W. R. S.~~

W. R. S. F. S. A.

Author of "Algebra identified
with Geometry."

Vice-President of the Philological
Society.

Although I do not read
Hungarian, French & German
are as easy to me as English.