

LETTERS

Cat Signing?

In reading Terrace *et al.*'s (23 Nov. 1979, p. 891) otherwise impeccable article analyzing Nim Chimsky's utterances for evidence of grammatical competence, we were struck by their failure to note the fluent signing being made by the cat (Fig. 1, p. 892; see below) in Kitty Sign Language (KSL).

The first two photographs in the sequence are particularly clear. In the first, the cat is signing "lemme." In the second, we see an equally obvious "outa." The third is not quite so clear, since the cat, by now resigned to her fate, has been partially cropped from the photograph. However, we are fairly confident in interpreting this sign as "here." The sign appearing in the fourth photograph is, of course, "dirty," a sign apparently not in Nim's vocabulary, but one quite well known to fans of Washoe as an all-purpose expletive.

The most significant aspect of the frothing feline's utterances is that she is accomplishing all of this without prompting, unlike Nim. We feel that this apparent instance of grammatical competence on the part of the cat demands further investigation in order to more fully determine the extent of her linguistic abilities.

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Diet and Cancer

It is somewhat amusing to be accused by Melvin Benarde (Letters, 14 Dec. 1979, p. 1256) of making statements about food additives and cancer that lead to public fears and confusion. In fact, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* (1) apparently

quoted only a small fragment of my speech that was not unlike the argument Abelson made in his editorial (5 Oct. 1979, p. 11). To an audience that saw dangers lurking in every food additive, I maintained that the biggest problems with our food supply were not the additives and contaminants, but major ingredients and natural constituents. I highlighted the accumulated evidence that saturated fat and cholesterol contribute to atherosclerosis, sugar to obesity and dental caries, excessive dietary sodium to hypertension, and alcohol to cirrhosis of the liver and certain cancers. I also noted the increased attention being given to dietary fat and pyrolyzed protein as causes of bowel, breast, and certain other cancers.

Though my emphasis was on nutrition, I recognized that substances in food certainly do contribute to a modest, but unacceptable, number of cancers. Benarde is apparently unaware of the evidence that some food additives may be carcinogenic and otherwise harmful (2).

