

A look in the OED for the word 'geron' yields this string as an alternate spelling for 'gyron', a triangular piece. This somehow seems fitting in deciding among these three spellings, but offers us little guidance.

So, whether to push for gerotechnology, gerontechnology, or gerontotechnology becomes a matter of taste. Gerontotechnology seems to defy parsimony with all the extra letters. Gerotechnology runs the risk of modifying the term technology to make it 'old technology' somewhat of a paradoxical result for the modified term, given the unavoidable association of the term technology with the meaning 'new'. Gerontechnology runs the risk of tying technology to males, somewhat true in research findings, where men are more likely to seek out and use technology, but not desirable given that the older population is primarily female. Perhaps 'gerontotechnology' would be the more accurate term for this sense.

In the end, it may come down to a factor that is central to technology. In technology, as some have commented in the sub-field of software development, it is more important to be first than to be best. It is also important to be 'backward-compatible'. Given that the journal *Gerontechnology* is the first of its kind using 'gero' and 'technology' in its spelling, and that the first use of a term with these roots appears to lie with its Dutch originators in the inaugural conference on this topic, perhaps we can all be content with that spelling.

Reference

1. <http://dictionary.oed.com/> (Accessed March 15, 2004)

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A plea for gerontechnology (Reply)

Of all the terms that were coined or invented to describe the domain of scientific and technological developments for the benefit of aging and older people it was gerontechnology that saw the light first in 1989¹ as proposed by Graafmans and Brouwers. But, being the oldest term in use in itself is not a strong argument to promote gerontechnology as the best and only one.

When creating the domain of activities and building up a network of scientists and professionals to further elaborate this field it became clear that an interdisciplinary collaboration between gerontology and technology was a *conditio sine qua non* for progress in the future. Of course other disciplines had to be taken on board as well to create truly interdisciplinary and comprehensive teams for the work at hand. It was therefore that gerontechnology was chosen.

The term gerontotechnology as a grammatical or linguistic more correct one was also considered but so difficult to pronounce in for example English, German or French that it was not opted for. The activities under this heading are also only a subset of the bigger domain.

Furthermore, it was discussed whether any term ending with -technique or -tech would be an option, but these terms would only cover technical products and services for the target group and exclude scientific research.

It is interesting to compare all the terms and then make an analysis what type of activities are really carried out by the groups or associations that use these terms. This has been done quite well by Van Bronswijk in the correspondence submitted to this issue of *Gerontechnology*

(see above) and I fully agree with her preference for gerontechnology being the word that encompasses all the relevant activities and therefore can serve as an umbrella for all the other ones.

It is my sincere hope that in the near future we do not have to use the Google search engine to find our work in the field but that gerontechnology will become a scientific key-word in bibliographic databases. We do have the society and the journal with this name so this promotion of the term would only be a logical next step.

References

1. Graafmans JAM, Brouwers A. Gerontechnology, the modelling of normal aging. In: Perspectives, Proceedings of the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Human Factors Society. Denver, Colorado, USA, 1989

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BEST PRACTICE

Bicycle transport for elderly

In the Netherlands car and bike are the two most important short-range transport vehicles. Cars' perceived advantages include comfort, safety and security, and rapidity, although in urban Netherlands environments biking is best time-efficient for transport between living, shopping, and recreational environments, since distances are short. By itself the bicycle is safe. Casualties among cyclists are normally collisions with cars¹.

As a group, elderly are becoming more mobile. At the same time they are the least mobile part of the population. Therefore, next to road safety, experience and quality of the living environment should be taken into account. Currently the private car is still the main means of transport for elderly in the Netherlands². Only 3 out of every 10 person's of 75 years or older cycle at least 1 hour per week. However, a doubling of this time seems possible.



Bicycle transport on market day in the town of Culemborg, The Netherlands (Photo by J.E.M.H. van Bronswijk)

Community and Environment

As to environmental and community effects, cars cause more inconveniences than bikes. Accidents –when occurring– have a more severe outcome in case of cars. In addition cars produce noise and vibrations, and take up more space both during transport (20-30 times as much) and parking (12 times as much); and roads for cars are mono-functional, while bike-roads can also be used for walking.

Space is limited in cities. Its use needs to be optimised. This is especially the case for shopping centres and places of social gathering that profit from a good accessibility for older persons. Unfortunately, the success of the car has diminished the car-accessibility of city-centres, where most Netherlands shopping centres and cultural activities are located. Bike accessibility of city centres has remained high. So how, do we get older persons out of their car and on their bikes?

Urban Planning & Technology

Good accessibility, completeness and coherence of cycling-networks and a high level of perceived safety and security should help. In addition, modern bike design evolves towards car-related comfort. The urban bike rider is assisted with light (electric) motors and comfortable seating.

Future Dutch traffic regulations are expected to further limit car speed in the city, thus improving bike safety and increasing the time-efficiency gap in favour of bikes. To further enhance older persons' use of bicycles, Netherlands urban planners will make the bike leading in designing traffic systems, instead of