Scientific Editing in Bosnia and Herzegovina: a personal journey (1975 - 2011)

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The most encouraging aspects of being an editor are respect and honour, which can be achieved by devoted and highly professional or qualified work. Qualification in scientific editing is a life-long achievement and a result of continuous learning for objectivity and clarity of publications. On the road towards qualification, an editor might find many supportive friends and "foes". The latter is inevitable when a journal editor reaches a certain level of proficiency and becomes more selective about what is published.

During my lifetime, editorial work has been an inseparable part of my professional activities on many occasions. Surprisingly for most, I learned how to edit in elementary school, then improved my editorial skills after high school, back in the early 1970s. I was involved in editing a school newspaper in grammar and high school, and, as a result, became one of the state's leading experts on standards of writing in my mother tongue.

In every young person's life there comes a moment when he/she must make a crucial decision. For me it was the choice of undergraduate studies at Sarajevo University. Despite my parents' advice to choose only one course, I was thinking about studying medicine, philosophy and journalism, without giving up writing, my "true love". In the end, I opted for medicine and writing. As a student, I paid much attention to rare and unique medical cases, trying to produce case reports.

Luckily, I was given a chance to edit a newsletter for students in 1974. It was a popular and highly informative newspaper (Glask medicina) founded by my beloved University tutors back in 1961. Many similar editions are still published by other medical faculties. It was my first step forward in former Yugoslavia. Medicine, Medicine (Zagreb), Medicinski pmolodânik (Belgrade), Medicinski razgledi (Ljubljana), Naučni podmaladak (Nis), etc.

Publication of the student medical journal suffered interruptions, but despite difficulties, I "revived" it several times. Unfortunately, it is no longer published, and perhaps awaits fresh enthusiasts with an understanding of its importance to students, future physicians, researchers and academics. Still, my dear colleagues from Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina published something in this newsletter, which became a starting point for their later academic career. Unfortunately, all these authors felt bound to the first, and possibly key publications of their lives.

Later on, being passionate about editorial work and having a certain amount of experience, I founded a new journal, Acta medicinae (founded in 1978), for 15 medical and dental faculties of the former Yugoslavia. The journal was successful for a long while, and continued to be published for four years after my term as editor. It was highly reputed among professional associations such as the World Association of Medical Editors (WASE) and the European Association of Science Editors (EASE). Networking among local scientific editors is gradually increasing but there is still a lack of scientific and academic collaboration with colleagues from the mainstream science countries. More educational programs are needed for both novice and senior science editors.

I have been editing three indexed journals out of the 14 medical journals published in my country, namely Medicinski arhiv/Medical Archives (founded in 1947), Materia Socio Medica (founded in 1978) and Acta Informatica Medica (founded in 1993). Based on my experience, an article quality evaluation scale was developed and this template is now available on the website of the Medical Archives journal. Editors are asked to assess submissions using the scale which includes the following five components: 1. Scientific merit of a submission 2. International importance and potential impact 3. Originality of method and results 4. Technical quality 5. Quality of language.

A major achievement was the adoption of an electronic editorial management system, which has been used to coordinate the submission, peer review and editing of these three journals. However, some other local journals still do not use such a system, putting the journal production at a disadvantage.

Unfortunately, most authors do not follow the instructions for authors and available guidelines, such as the recently published EASE guidelines for authors and translators.

As a result, nearly 40% of the submissions are rejected. The remaining 60% of the submissions are accepted. A large proportion of these (40%) undergo extensive technical and linguistic editing by the editor and a few of his associates over the past 20 years.

The efforts of an editor should be encouraged and supported by proper funding. Lack of funding ended the publication of numerous journals in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the same time, many motivated and skilled editors who started new journals were frustrated and forced to give up just a few issues.

For most local journals, the quality of the peer review and availability of highly skilled referees have been a major problem for decades. It has been an uphill struggle for most editors to find unbiased experts, both local and international, who are willing to accept responsibility and stand behind the quality of an article. Local reviewers, as well as editors from the small scientific community, have always faced the dilemma of being objective and criticizing poor papers, or "harming" their friends and making "enemies". In a small country, local authors and reviewers easily recognize each other, even when their identity is hidden. For our journals, most locally submitted articles are in Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian. It means that we cannot use reviewers from outside the country owing to the language barrier. Local submissions in English are still not up to a high standard, which also makes it difficult to use international reviewers who are willing to accept responsibility and stand behind the quality of an article. A separate and significant issue is the qualification of local editors. Most editors have improved their knowledge and skills through trial and error, a few have joined international professional associations such as the World Association of Scientific medical journals in Turkey: current state and goals

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Abstract This article evaluates Turkish indexed journals and the impact factors on local and international databases. Fifty five medical journals are now indexed in Science Citation Index Expanded, with the highest 2-year Journal Impact Factor being 0.873. The medical journals were mostly published in English. Though the number of articles is increasing, the impact factors for most Turkish medical journals is still low, presumably mainly due to the language of publication. Increasing the number of articles published both in Turkish and English along with training of science editors and authors, and wider indexing of journals in international databases may improve the quality of Turkish journals.

Keywords Periodicals as topic; impact factors; biomedical journals; Turkey.

Proper medical writing is encouraged by academic societies in Turkey. As a result, the number of articles and scholarly journals in Turkey is increasing rapidly, e.g. from 500 articles in 2000 to nearly 30,000 in 2010. Despite this impressive increase, the quality of the Turkish publications is still low. This is partly due to the effect of the civil war in the 1990s.

The latter is inevitable when a journal is founded by a small group of editors. The medical journals publishing in Turkey were started in 1947, and the number of publishing journals increased from 5 in 1948 to 8 in 2000. The number of Turkic journals was about 15 in 2005, and 36 in 2011. Some of the medical journals in Turkey are listed at http://www.elsevier.com/sdms/. In 2010, the number of articles published in Turkey was 10,600. The number of articles published in Turkey was 2,900 in 2000.

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An important factor influencing the rank and quality of local journals is the credentials of the Editors, who are mainly from universities. Strengthening ties with international publishers and professional associations, as well as regularly organising training or courses, may become a powerful tool for improving a journal’s quality.

To increase the number and quality of research articles, local learned societies and science editors should cooperate and adopt international standards of scientific writing. More incentives should be offered to Turkish researchers to publish their best articles in local journals. Editors and publishers should also arrange more training. Editors should improve the design and readability of journals. English language editing should be done by native English-speaking experts. Internationalisation of authors, reviewers and editors pool should also be encouraged. Finally, the journal’s contribution value needs to be revised to credit publications in local journals.

An invited lecturer, Prof. Armen Yuri Gasparyan, gave a talk “Current Principles of High Impact Science Editing and Indexing” at the conference. He outlined some ideas of his ‘Research Terms’ project, which aims to develop a nomenclature of keywords according to the standard regulations. Turkey Citation Index (TCI) was also introduced. TCI indexes 27 Turkish journals, of which 23 are medical journals, with the highest 2-year JIF (0.873). The SCOPUS database indexes 34 Turkish journals, of which 23 are medical journals, with experimental and clinical transplantation having the highest 2-year JIF (9.333).

Impact factors of the Web of Science-indexed Turkish medical journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Title</th>
<th>2-year JIF</th>
<th>SJR</th>
<th>h-index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental and Clinical Transplantation</td>
<td>9.333</td>
<td>6.099</td>
<td>2 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>14 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Sports Science and Medicine</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>16 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish Journal of Gastroenterology</td>
<td>0.642</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>12 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anadolu Kardiyoloji Dergisi</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>11 Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish Journal of Pediatrics</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>19 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, European Science Editing</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>12 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental and Clinical Transplantation</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>12 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish Journal of Cardiology</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>12 English</td>
</tr>
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One of the invited lecturers, Prof. Arman Yuri Gasparov, member of editorial boards of several high-rank Iranian journals and the chief editor of European Science Editing, gave a talk “Current Principles of High Impact Science Editing and Indexing” at the conference. He outlined the issues of funding, improving the qualifications of editors, networking with colleagues from the European Association of Science Editors and other professional associations, and widening visibility of journals. The indexing criteria of different databases and their relevance to the local community of editors were also highlighted. Most issues touched on during the talk were of interest to the editors of small journals, struggling to get indexed by prestigious databases and attracting citations. He also presented examples from the lecturer’s own editorial practice. Many points of the talk were elegantly presented in the recently published essay on journal editing. Dr. Karim Voss, one of the eminent radiologists, founder of medical journal in Iran, Editor-in-Chief of Iranian Journal of Radiation and member of the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences, presented a history of medical journalism in Iran and challenges with establishing and indexing journals in the Middle East. He was fascinated by the growth of science publishing and digitization in Iran and quite optimistic over the fate of local journals, some of which were indexed and succeeded under his guidance.

Continuous professional development of researchers and those involved in scientific writing and editing is of importance, especially for non-anglophone communities striving to advance in medical journalism. Though countries of mainstream research offer numerous academic courses and degree programmes on biomedical writing and editing, these are still not accessible for most non-native researchers and editors from developing countries. Besides, there is still lack of scholarly communication between experts in science editing from developed and developing countries. Information on current standards on biomedical writing and successful editing is scarce and is not properly distributed and interpreted. With that in mind, a group of medical editors, supported by Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, arranged a seminar on hot topics in medical journalism.

The seminar took place in the University Education Development Centre on 25 June 2011. It was well attended by academics, researchers from Haematology and Cardiovascular Research Centres, Publication Centre of the University, editors of the Iranian Cardiovascular Research Journal, Iranian Journal of Radiology, Archives of Iranian Medicine, Journal of Dentistry of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, International Journal of Organ Transplantation Medicine, and The International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.