



# European Association of Science Editors

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welcome, see Duncan Nicholas, Joan Marsh or  
Dalibora Behmen

**Pre-submission  
copyediting for non-native speakers:  
language concerns and ethics**

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# Culture

- Non-linear
  - to show the author's knowledge and expertise
  - assumes reader is intelligent
  - Invites discussion
- Linear
  - informs
  - Persuades

But

*Academic writing is rarely persuasive*

# How important is the English?

- Scientists view publication as a line in their CV
- Their main aim is to be cited —not read
- Little research on whether badly written papers are rejected *Coates et al Cardiovasc Res (2002)*

# Journals and editors give little guidance

- 82% of 500 instructions to authors gave no helpful guidance on writing style John Kirkman
- Editors (and editor organisations) do little to encourage clarity

# But a lot of fuss is made about it

“The quality of written English still needs some language corrections before being published...

In this sentence the cited literature is incomplete and misunderstanding...

It is more clearly when information for the age group 0-5 years will follow this Figure.”

*Reviewer comment*

# Appealing style is discouraged

I wrote an article for a research journal on raw seafood borne viruses. I was told to make the information accessible to lay readers. But they found my article too whimsical, too funny, although technically accurate and well documented. They made me revise it twice until it was completely juiceless and not even an oyster would read it.

It's No Joke: Humor Rarely Welcome in Research Write-Ups by Tom Bartlett: Online comment by Jane Andrews

# Reviewers won't have it

Reviewer reprimanded author for “colloquial expressions”

- *we guess*
- *huge difference*

# **ESL authors have difficulty understanding papers**

I have read your article.... I read the article again and again. Your examinations are very fine, but I cannot find out the most important reason why you wanted to do the research on this topic and why this examination means a lot. Would you tell me about it? Thank you.

*Email from Taiwan*

# ESL authors can write plainer English

What does this mean?

Also, results of age and refraction, which showed a slight accumulation of emmetropic to hyperopic cases.

Reply

I wanted to say that for demographic data: sex, age we found similar results to study results. And additionally the refraction was rather emmetropic to hyperopic and not myopic

# Academic style is archaic

Objective articles damage the scientist's image, because the scientist's humanity is suppressed and the public is left with the impression that scientists are dry and insensitive people who remain within a jargon-barricaded world and do not deign to explain their work to the public in terms that the layman can understand.

Roald Hoffman (Nobel Prize in Chemistry 1981)

# ESL influence on English

*“ The mere fact that we have been using the wrong word for a long time does not exonerate us from recognizing that it is indeed wrong, and should certainly not override the basic premise that the language we use needs to be within the reach of our target readership.”*

*European Court of Auditors publication Misused English words and expressions in EU publications*

# Examples

- ‘At present, the statistics available do not allow to take account of all these situations’
- ‘the fund can be mobilised in case the damage caused by a national disaster exceeds the threshold’
- All purpose ‘of’: ‘communication of the Commission’ instead of ‘communication from the Commission’

# Examples in science

- A decrease of complications was reported
  - English version: A decrease in...
- Animal organ finding table (AOFT)
  - English version: A Table of findings in animal organs
- IS/OS line
  - English version: IS-OS line

# Plain English

A suggestion for how to remove publication barriers for ESL authors

“Making the publication process transparent, with explanations in plain English, would be a first step”

Publishing challenges faced by authors with English as a second language Lane T and Tang J *ESE* May 2016

**Instead the first step should be to allow manuscripts to be written in plain English**

# Individualist vs Collectivist

- Ownership of text is mainly a Western notion
- Knowledge belongs to societies and is to be shared for the benefit of society as a whole
- Changing or modifying an authority's word is disrespectful

# Plagiarism

## **The intracellular enzymatic response of neutrophils and lymphocytes in patients with precancerous states and cancer of the larynx**

Gierek T, Lisiewicz J, Pilch J

In patients with precancerous states and cancer of the larynx prior to and after radiotherapy exhibit the decreased activity of neutrophil beta-glucuronidase. Moreover patients treated by radiotherapy before the age of 6 to 9 years demonstrate deficiency of N-acetyl-beta-glucosaminidase in the above cells. The main finding in lymphocytes of the patients studied was in the appearance by diffusion of the above enzymes and of acid phosphatase in the cytoplasm, reflecting their release from lysosomes and immunological mobilization of these cells. The authors discuss the possible role of neutrophil enzymatic deficiency in lowering the antitumour cytotoxic effect of these cells.

J Maxillofac Surg. 1979;7(3):172-6.

PMID: 291676

## **The intracellular enzymatic response of neutrophils and lymphocytes in patients with precancerous states and cancer of the uterine cervix**

Jendryczko A, Drózd M

In patients with precancerous states and cancer of the uterine cervix prior to and after radiotherapy exhibit the decreased activity of neutrophil beta-glucuronidase. Moreover, patients treated by radiotherapy before the age 6 to 9 years demonstrate deficiency of N-acetyl-beta-glucuronidase in the above cells. The main finding in lymphocytes of the patients studied was in the appearance by diffusion of the above enzymes and of acid phosphatase in the cytoplasm, reflecting their release from lysosomes and immunological mobilization of these cells. The authors discuss the possible role of neutrophil enzymatic deficiency in lowering the antitumor cytotoxic effect of these cells.

Zentralbl Gynakol. 1991;113(21):1175-81.

PMID: 1755256

# Template plagiarism

## Template plagiarism

Similar structure and wording  
but different data

- Jendryczko: data identical only larynx changed to uterine cancer
- Pan Aihua: language plagiarised but research data original

# Avoiding plagiarism

- Place verbatim text in quotes + cite
- Paraphrase the original text + cite
- Paraphrasing should be **substantial**

“When paraphrasing, you state an author’s ideas in your own words. A good paraphrase retains the organization, emphasis, and often many details of the original”

(Donald Kennedy *Science* editor 2000-2008)

# Paraphrasing is hard for ESL authors

“Many authors ask themselves why, if the originality of their scientific article needs to be in its content rather than its wording, should they not borrow part of a well-written phrase or even a whole sentence (with appropriate citation of course) from another published article to better express what they want to say?”

Plagiarism: the emperor's new clothes, Farrokh Habibzadeh, Harvey Marcovitch, *ESE* August 2011

# Common authorship questions

- Does my supervisor/head of department have to be listed as an author?
- All our co-author did was provide the patients but she demands authorship, how can we get rid of her?
- Our colleague hardly did any on the current study but demands first authorship

# A story about authorship

