

Scientific Editing Around the Globe: Medical Editing in China

Zhong Zihong

Deputy Director, Editorial Department
Acta Academiae Medicinae Sinicae and
Chinese Medical Sciences Journal
Associate Professor
Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and
Peking Union Medical College
Beijing, China

Within the Chinese biomedical community, as in many Western countries, the “principal goals of editing biomedical publications are to select, improve, and disseminate information that will advance the art and science of medicine to the eventual benefit of patients and the public health” (1).

However, some aspects of medical editing differ in China. For example, most Chinese medical journals do not use copyeditors. Copyediting is the responsibility of the medical editors. These editors are in charge of editorial review to assess submissions for their overall quality and appropriateness for the publication’s readership, and they are in charge of selecting peer reviewers; they also copyedit manuscripts to ensure clarity and to conform with journal style. They are even responsible for reading proofs at some small journals. Chinese medical journals have 4 editorial job titles: “senior editor”, “associate senior editor”, “editor”, and “assistant editor” (from top to bottom).

Backgrounds of Editors

Most editors of medical journals are graduates of medical schools in China. Some editors previously served biomedical institutes as researchers, and some served hospitals as practicing clinicians before they began working for medical journals; some went directly to medical journals after graduation from medical school. They all have the specialized medical knowledge related to their specific journals.

In China, a commonly held belief is that editors of medical journals must have medical backgrounds because people who do not

know medicine have no interest in biomedical articles and because they might introduce mistakes when they edit manuscripts. This does not necessarily mean that people who do not have a medical education cannot edit medical manuscripts;

it might simply reflect the traditional views of the Chinese medical community. It is worth mentioning that Chinese physicians do not make much more money than medical editors, so some graduates of medical schools are willing to be editors.

Chinese medical editors can encounter problems in copyediting manuscripts. Although they possess medical knowledge, they often lack language training and knowledge of grammar, syntax, and usage. Fortunately, the articles most frequently published by Chinese medical journals are original contributions (average publication, 56%) (2), including articles on the clinical application of original research. Typically, these articles do not need substantive copyediting, and they usually follow the standard IMRAD (introduction, methods, results, and discussion) format.

Training and Standards

To improve copyediting skills of medical editors, Chinese professional editorial organizations similar to CBE—such as the Chinese Scientific and Technological Editorial Association, the Chinese Editorial Association of Scientific and Technological University Journals, and the Chinese Editorial Association of Medical School Journals—often conduct short courses lasting 2-10 days on the copyediting of manuscripts. In addition, the China Bureau for Standards has formulated 26 criteria for writing, editing, and publishing scientific papers and books. The criteria



Zhong

include standards on editorial format of scientific and technical journals, the format for writing and editing scientific and technical manuscripts, rules for writing and editing abstracts, SI units and application, and rules for listing references (3). Some criteria are based on international documents (ISO8-1977, ISO/DIS690, ISO1000:1992, and so on). The criteria are followed by more than 700 Chinese peer-reviewed biomedical journals (4). In addition, the Chinese government uses the criteria to evaluate journal quality in consideration for the Chinese Scientific and Technological Journals’ Award, which is given every 4 years. In recent years, some scientific universities (for example, the Chinese Science and Technology University, Hefei) have offered a new field of study: scientific and technological editology, intended to provide professional editors with both scientific and language knowledge necessary to edit scientific journals.

I thank Annette Flanagan, RN, MA, associate senior editor, Journal of the American Medical Association, for critical review and editorial assistance.

References

1. Iverson C, Flanagan A, Fontanarosa PB, Glass RM, Glitman P, Lantz JC, Meyer HS, Smith JM, Winker MA, Young RK. American Medical Association manual of style: a guide for authors and editors. 9th ed. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins; 1998.
2. Zhong ZH. Effect of several factors on informational amount and transmitting velocity of journal. *Acta Editologica* 1993;4: 235-7.
3. Wang LM. Editorial course of study of scientific and technological journal. Beijing: The People’s Medical Officer Pr; 1995.
4. Li DY. Chinese data retrieval system of biomedical literature CD-ROM. *Medical Information Work* 1996;1:1-5. ■