

## Publication Issues for Non-Anglophone Scientists

### Moderator:

**Jessica Ancker**  
Medical Editor and Writer  
New York, New York

### Panelists:

**Magne Nylenna**  
*Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association*  
(*Tidsskrift for den Norske Laegeforening*)  
Oslo, Norway

**Cristina Isabel Cann**  
Formerly with *Epidemiology*  
Newton Lower Falls, Massachusetts

**Miriam Bloom**  
SciWrite  
Jackson, Mississippi

**Waleria Mlyniec**  
Freelance Editor (formerly with  
*Journal of Applied Genetics*)  
Warsaw, Poland

### Reporter:

**Caroline Simpson**  
Canadian Forest Service  
Fredericton, New Brunswick

Many scientists believe that the only way to achieve wide dissemination of scientific results is to publish in English in international journals. However, not all English-language journals are international. A truly international journal, said Magne Nylenna, should publish papers of universal interest, have an editorial board comprising members in several countries, and solicit authors, referees, and readers from around the world. Editors of international journals face a complex problem: how to handle manuscripts by non-English-speaking authors that are of great scientific value but poorly written. Often, said Waleria Mlyniec, ESL authors

(those for whom English is a second language) find it necessary to have a British or North American coauthor if their papers are to be accepted.

The predominance of English in scientific publishing means that several languages are threatened with corruption or extinction in Europe and elsewhere. Nylenna felt that scientists should be encouraged to seek parallel publication of their work in non-English-language

*The temptation for ESL and native English-speaking scientists alike is that, although they want to read clear articles, they want to write complex sentences.*

journals whenever possible because these journals play a vital role in preserving and expanding specialized terminology. Mlyniec noted that national journals often have sections devoted to discussion and polemics of interest to the local readership.

Most scientists prefer to read in their native language. Mlyniec conducted a survey which showed that Polish readers (young scientists and students in particular) prefer to read papers in Polish but prefer to publish papers in English to achieve wider dissemination and enhance their professional status. She added that when a publication is available only in English, an abstract in the author's native language is appreciated. Nylenna felt that the Internet could be a useful tool for parallel publication in multiple languages.

Foreign submissions to English-language journals require special consid-

eration: Resources vary widely from country to country, as do social customs. Both Miriam Bloom and Cristina Isabel Cann noted that cultural differences influence how research is carried out and reported. Nylenna spoke of language bias: It has been documented in Europe that researchers tend not to publish negative findings in English. Other problems include translation errors, spelling errors, wrong word choice, and omission of information. Professional translators are often unfamiliar with specialized terminology, and this makes it all the more important that the editor understand the science. Compounding these problems is the unfortunate reality that many scientists do not know how to construct scientific papers. This is an issue not just for ESL authors; native English speakers often cannot write good scientific papers. It was suggested that all young scientists should be taught how to write scientific papers as a degree prerequisite. Mlyniec and Cann both suggested that CSE sponsor scientific-writing workshops in graduate schools or perhaps offer an Internet-based guide.

The temptation for ESL and native English-speaking scientists alike is that, although they want to read clear articles, they want to write complex sentences. Cann's advice to ESL authors is to pay attention to elements of style and structure (for example, active voice, short sentences, no jargon, actual data, and effective graphics) and to have their papers reviewed by English-speaking colleagues, both for the language in general and for the accuracy of technical terminology. She stated that the most important rule to follow is to make it clear. Use short sentences ("Dick and Jane" English). Bloom suggested using professional editorial services. Editorial services, said Bloom, should be written into grant proposals.

Language is not the only barrier to pub-

lication in international journals. Bloom gave the example of a Japanese author publishing on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who cited only literature concerning war and disaster survivors in Japan and China and did not mention the extensive literature on Holocaust survivors. Holocaust studies are a major component of Western literature on PTSD, and a paper that ignores them is unlikely to be considered acceptable by Western journals.

An editor can facilitate publication

of a poorly written submission that has valid data from a less-developed country by selecting reviewers who are willing to help other scientists succeed and who are not only knowledgeable in the topic under discussion, but also familiar with working under limited conditions in the field.

### Suggested Reading:

Rothman KJ. Writing for *Epidemiology*. *Epidemiology* 1998;9:333-7.

Schonbaum E. Manuscripts by non-English speaking authors. *Eur Sci Edit* 1993;49:13-4.

van Loon AJ. Correct English is not enough: a plea for more hyphenation. *Eur Sci Edit* 1990;39:5-8.



## Freelance Science Editor Listing on CSE Web Site

Seeking a freelance science editor? See the "Manuscript & Publication Services" page ([www.CouncilScienceEditors.org/service\\_jobBankServices.shtml](http://www.CouncilScienceEditors.org/service_jobBankServices.shtml)) on the CSE Web site.

Looking to publicize your freelance editing services? Contact Seth Beckerman, CSE Web editor, at [s.beckerman@cgnet.com](mailto:s.beckerman@cgnet.com) for information on posting an ad on this page.

## What's New

a new job?  
a prize?  
an award?  
publication of a book?  
a degree or certificate?  
recent retirement?

If you have something new in your professional life, we invite you to share the news with readers of *Science Editor*. Please supply a brief announcement to Barbara Gastel, Editor, *Science Editor*, Department of Journalism, Texas A&M University, 4111 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4111, fax 979-845-6887, e-mail [b-gastel@tamu.edu](mailto:b-gastel@tamu.edu).