

◆ Challenges in Publishing Multilingual Journals

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English is the language of science, but it is not universally spoken or read. Consequently, physicians and scientists worldwide struggle to access and understand the abundance of information published in English. Journals have responded by offering foreign-language editions and by publishing multiple languages in the same journal. Publishing in multiple languages increases international recognition but presents several challenges for the

journal and its authors.

For journals that publish translated editions, maintaining high standards of quality has high priority. The *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* has a set of quality standards to guide publication of its 17 international editions in 13 languages. Formal licensing agreements define the terms for publishing the international editions and include translation, distribution, royalties, ownership, and quality. The editorial director of the international edition appoints and chairs an editorial board of local physicians. He or she selects relevant articles from the original edition, according to local needs. Each republished article includes a complete citation to the original article. The editorial director determines the need for local editorials, identifies local authors, reviews local editorials for accuracy, and determines acceptance for publication. Although editorial content is the main concern, commercial content is also scrutinized.

Translation issues present unique challenges to the publisher of the international editions. For example, for *JAMA-Spain*, articles must first be translated by a medical translator and then be reviewed by a medical specialist. The accuracy of the translation is always a primary concern. Finally, standard copyediting must be performed by someone proficient in the local language. A journal that contains multiple languages, such as the *Pan American Journal of Public Health*, faces additional challenges. It may be necessary to provide the instructions for authors in multiple languages. The requirement for employees who are proficient in each of the languages presents additional staffing challenges. The question often arises as to which language to use in the peer-review process and in correspondence with authors. It is sometimes necessary to communicate with

authors in their native language, regardless of what language the article is in.

In multilingual journals, an article to be translated might contain items—such as authors' names, institution names, and reference citations—whose translation seems inappropriate, and a journal might decide to preserve the use of the native language. In such cases, it is imperative to represent all the elements accurately, including diacritics, to maintain the overall credibility of the translation and the journal. Multilingual spell-checking software is valuable in that scenario.

Journals began offering multilingual editions to provide broader access to their content. Having the option to publish in the local language often makes it possible for authors to get their work into print when it would not have been published otherwise. However, authors prefer to publish their work in high-impact-factor English-language journals to maximize their visibility and enhance their careers. Authors for whom English is a second language are faced with the added challenge that acceptance criteria must be met not only by the content but also by the writing. Some institutions provide funding for translators and author's editors to enhance the quality of the English in submitted manuscripts. Workshops on scientific writing and working with English-speaking mentors in the relevant discipline can be useful in improving authors' skills.

Even writing in English for English-speaking readers has its challenges. For example, should an article be written in American English or in the Queen's English? Should it follow Oxford or Webster spelling? The rule of thumb is to use whatever makes the most sense for the readership. Regardless of the choice, consistency throughout an article is essential. 