

◆ Training Non–Native-English-Speaking Editors

Moderator:

Adrian Stanley
The Charlesworth Group
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Speakers:

Tom Lang
Tom Lang Communications
and Training
Davis, California

Ana Marusic
Croatian Medical Journal
Zagreb, Croatia

Mauricio Rocha e Silva
Clinics
São Paulo University Medical College
São Paulo, Brazil

Reporter:

Barbara Gastel
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

In many countries, non-native speakers of English edit papers written in English, currently the international language of science. This session focused primarily on training such editors.

Tom Lang, who teaches regularly in China and Japan, strives to move editors from copyediting to substantive editing (for organization and logic) or analytic editing (for conformity with standards of complete reporting). He observed that the higher levels of editing increase the value of the editing and are easier to teach and learn because they are less language-dependent.

For Lang's students, barriers to accepting that emphasis have included the view that they were hired only to correct basic English, a reluctance to question authors, a lack of formal permission to make substantive changes, a lack of time to review articles thoroughly, and a lack of training

in what changes to make. Lang shows manuscript editors that they can and should make substantive changes by having students watch him edit a manuscript projected on a screen so that they can see the types of changes he makes and recognize their value.

Lang teaches editors to be aware of problems: the form and content of titles and abstracts, the organization of introductions, omissions in the reporting of methods, incomplete or misleading reporting of results, weak discussions, and errors in references. Describing how he teaches, Lang said he is highly organized, for example, saying beforehand how his information will be structured. He carefully controls the pace to accommodate difficulties in English comprehension and to allow for sequential translation. He also strives to keep information consistent to avoid confusion and to reinforce learning.

Ana Marusic discussed the *Croatian Medical Journal* (www.cmj.hr), which is published in English. She said that for this journal, which is indexed by MEDLINE and ISI, "language is the least of the problems." She noted levels of editing done, which include evaluating the research design and data analysis, improving conformity with norms of scientific presentation, and editing language—which she likened to the tip of an iceberg.

Marusic emphasized the teaching aspect of editing, and she noted the substantial commonalities of teaching editors and teaching authors. The minimal knowledge for science editors, she said, should be of terminology, abbreviations and units, reference use, and the IMRAD format (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion). In closing, she recommended *Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*.

Mauricio Rocha e Silva provided a Latin American perspective. Saying that he disagreed somewhat with the other speakers,

he stated that if a paper is badly written, editors and others will not read it. He then provided statistics on the scientific output of Latin American and other countries. He identified the "BRIC countries"—Brazil, Russia, India, and China—as emerging economically and scientifically.

Rocha e Silva said that since the advent of SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online, www.scielo.org), which provides open access to Latin American journals, these journals have improved, become more visible, and been increasingly published in English. Difficulties of native speakers of Portuguese and Spanish in writing English, he explained, result in part from differences between romance languages and English. He added that because these languages and English often use the same word roots, some Latin Americans think that their English is better than it is. He also identified cultural barriers to editing, such as discomfort in criticizing others' work because criticism tends to be equated with insult.

In addition, Rocha e Silva raised a dilemma of when to edit English: Editing before peer review means investing effort in papers that might not be published, but not doing so can hamper the review of papers. He also said that the "better journals" in Latin America use linguistics editors to polish English before publication. He noted that the Brazilian Association of Science Editors holds several courses per year for editors, that some editors-in-chief give seminars on English, and that SciELO plans to give scientific-English courses for authors. 📄