

EASE-Forum Digest: March to June 2016

You can join the forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Send in plain text, not HTML. Details at www.ease.org.uk/node/589.

Do authorship criteria exclude authors whose first tongue is not English?

Andrew Davis asked if a non-native English speaker whose ability in English was insufficient to meet the ICMJE and EASE guidelines' authorship criteria (a substantial contribution to drafting or revising the manuscript for intellectual content, approving its final version and being accountable for all aspects of the work) could still be considered as an author. He thought excluding such a person from authorship of a paper in an English language journal would be unfair but suggested the author's limitations should be indicated in the contributorship statement or made known to the editor.

All those who took part in the ensuing discussion agreed exclusion from authorship would be unfair. Tom Lang thought a distinction should be made between content and presentation. When a scientist is able to participate closely enough in the research, his or her literacy in the published language is not a criterion. However, the ICMJE had become more restrictive in its latest recommendations on being accountable for all aspects of the work. As a result authors should:

- understand the full scope of the work
- be able to say which co-authors are responsible for each part of the research
- have confidence in the integrity of the contributions of all co-authors.

Andrew pointed out that the crux of his question had not been about the contributing aspect of the guidelines but whether someone who couldn't read the final version could ethically approve it. His arguments suggested to Amanda Morgan that having the final version translated or an English-speaking co-author explain the final changes would be unethical, but this could not be right as everyone has to rely on a teammate's word for something. Was Andrew saying there were situations in which translations and editing support would invalidate authorship and was there any consensus on how language support should be acknowledged?

Translation was what ensured authors were fully involved in the work in Liz Wager's view, which she supported by quoting section 2.4.2 of the Good Publication Practice (GPP3) for company-sponsored research, "If needed, translation services should be provided to authors to ensure they can provide detailed feedback and contribute fully." (<http://annals.org/article.aspx?articleid=2424869>). She was aware of drug companies translating manuscripts to meet these criteria. But Andrew thought a translation was not sufficient to allow potential authors to critically revise the manuscript or approve its final version because they could

not know if the translation was accurate. Even though accuracy could not be guaranteed, Amanda and Sylwia Ufnalska rejoined, you have to depend on teammates knowing their job and doing it well.

Sylwia saw a good translator's job as discussing ambiguities with authors and helping them to structure manuscripts properly. She accepted finding a good translator was not always easy and misunderstandings were possible because all human communication is faulty. However, Andrew believed the other discussants were missing his point as the guidelines were not about collaboration; rather than depending on teammates they require an author to assess their abilities and assess the manuscript. He could not read a manuscript in Arabic or Chinese and it would be unethical for him to agree to something he could not read himself—according to the current guidelines.

Tom thought it unlikely co-authors would write an article so different that non-native speaking authors would not be able to approve it in translation, a view shared by Sylwia who considered, despite translations never being perfect, the essence of the message would be transmitted. In the same vein, Liz suggested most researchers were able to read English manuscripts well enough to discuss the key messages, structure and figures with a translator in their own language and thus make a substantial contribution to writing a manuscript, but it would be harder for them to revise the manuscript, and translation was the best that could be offered.

In Mary Ellen Keran's view, Andrew was wrong to equate a translation of a paper he had written in English into Chinese or Arabic with one published by native speakers of those languages in English. While in the first instance the reader would need to know the paper had been translated from English and the translator named it would be rare for any non-native English speaking scientist not to be able to make sense of data presented in English. They would only need a translator to make sense of subtleties in a translation. She thought it wise for a translator to back-translate tricky phrases into the author's native tongue, even when the author had not asked for this help. So, she distinguished between a non-native English-speaking author remaining the author of a manuscript written in English and a native English-speaking author published in another language which she or he could not understand, when the translator would need to be named. She did query, however, what might happen when the translator in the first instance was from an Internet service and did not have close contact with the author.

Andrew picked up on it being rare for scientists not to be able to understand English. He had encountered scientists in China, Japan and Central America who were unable to understand English well enough to meet the authorship criteria. The guidelines needed to be changed to accommodate these authors. Amanda suggested focusing firstly on which criteria in the ICMJE guidelines were introduced by 'and' vs 'or' and secondly on the different ways

authors could review the final version of the manuscript, including with the help of a translator. She thought the fourth ICMJE criteria, which required assessing ability of co-authors, was already covered because delegation could not be avoided.

Sylwia pointed out acknowledgment of translators was still uncommon in scientific articles even though it was advocated by international guidelines including those from EASE. She asked for ideas on how more acknowledgement could be encouraged. Liz proposed EASE lobby the ICMJE to add translating to its list of “writing assistance, technical editing, language editing and proofreading” requiring acknowledgement. This provoked the lament from Sylwia that the EASE guidelines, which apply to all scientific disciplines, already include translators but many scientists were unaware of these guidelines.

Some translators and authors’ editors on the forum were uncomfortable with acknowledgement because subsequent changes made by the author could damage their reputation. This issue has already been discussed on the forum (see ESE 2015, 41(2):50-51). Andrew resolved the problem by phrasing his acknowledgements, “A previous version of this manuscript was edited for English by...”

Is helping students to achieve academic grades by editing their papers/theses ethical?

A client had asked Amanda Morgan to copy edit a manuscript which was to be published in an academic journal and would contribute to his PhD. Normally she would edit a paper for journal publication beyond the language edit she did for student course work. She asked how other editors dealt with such requests and if successful publication in an English-language academic journal was a common requirement for obtaining a PhD.

Pippa Smart and Tom Lang had heard of this practice, in particular in China. Mary Ellen Kerans assured the group that the practice was worldwide with one to three published papers constituting a “compilation thesis.” The manuscripts were often copy edited and she understood that papers at the undergraduate level were also being edited nowadays, even for English-speaking candidates.

In Christine Graham’s experience, PhD candidates in science normally publish papers arising from their PhD and these were edited for non-native English speakers. She thought a request to edit a thesis, where the writing itself was also examined, more problematic, although as in a journal paper the student could acknowledge such assistance.

Amanda was aware of guidelines for editing theses. (These are usually produced by universities and can be accessed by goggling ‘guidelines for editing theses.’) However, Amanda did not know of any covering the work she had been asked to do, which could also result in academic credit.

As Mary Ellen pointed out, the ethics of editing that helps students with their grades and degrees is a hot topic among copy editors. For example, see the METM14 (<http://www.metmeetings.org/en/:703>) and Margaret Cargill’s upcoming plenary lecture at the METM16. There will also be an opportunity for further discussion at the panel session “Detecting misconduct: role of technical and managing editors” at the EASE meeting in Strasbourg.

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Discussion initiators

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EASE Conference 2018

Bucharest, Romania

No firm date yet for your diary,
but probably in June.

Ideas for topics welcome:
overall theme
plenary lectures
parallel sessions
workshops
any other ideas?

Please send all ideas and suggestions to Joan Marsh
joan.marsh@lancet.com

New EASE members

Welcome to the following new EASE members:

- Diane Kelsall, Canada
- Chris Palmer, UK
- Jae Hwa Chang, South Korea
- Jadranka Stojanovski, Croatia
- Kathryn Wright, UK
- Bernard Pochet, Belgium
- Joanne Moore, France