

My Life as an Editor - Karen Shashok

After I got a bachelor's degree in Spanish in the USA in 1976, I worked in a hospital medical records department and occasionally substituted for the hospital's regular Spanish-English interpreter before I moved to Spain in 1977. In the early 1980s I became a translator and author's editor for researchers because I've always loved science and because there was a need for good academic research writing and publishing skills in Granada, where I settled. I've also worked as a translator, translation reviser and copyeditor for several publishing houses, and as a peer reviewer for several journals. In addition I've written about translation, author's editing, peer review and editorial ethics – often in *European Science Editing* – and have provided training for researchers and editors in Spain, Latin America and the Eastern Mediterranean region.

When I learned about the inequities in research publication I realized that factors unrelated to science can affect reviewers' and editors' evaluations of manuscripts from developing countries and emerging research centers. As a participant in professional development organizations for journal editors such as the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) I've tried to make Western, English-speaking experts in research publication and ethics more aware of the perspectives of researchers and editors from resource-limited research communities where English is not the main language.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to publicly thank many colleagues who were inspiring sources of knowledge and guidance. Among science editing's pioneers when I started out were Ed Huth, Mariam Balaban and Maeve O'Connor. Despite their status and authority, they were not only tolerant of my relatively youthful yammerings but unfailingly helpful and encouraging. In particular, without Maeve's support I would not have had the confidence to contribute to the EASE conferences or to *European Science Editing*.

Many colleagues were already authorities on working with authors when I started out. Outstanding among those I have learned from are Martha M Tacker (whose classic 1980 article about author's editing remains relevant today: Tacker MM. 1980. Author's editors: catalysts of scientific publishing. *CBE Views* 3(1): 3-11), Joy Burrough-Boensich, Sheila McNab, Barbara Gastel, Ruth de Wijs Christensen, Carol Norris, Rita Lazar, Eduard Schönbaum, Marie-Louise Desbarats-Schönbaum, Elizabeth Heseltine and Kathleen Lyle.

Researchers sometimes receive irrelevant or unhelpful feedback from reviewers and editors, and often consider this as evidence of a negative bias. From Richard Smith, Richard Horton, Stephen Lock, George Lundberg, Andrew Herxheimer, Bruce Squires, Iain Chalmers, Michael Callahan and Steven Shafer I learned that some gatekeepers (the type I wish there were more of) refuse to let their editorial power and authority blind them to the challenges faced by scientists who work outside the main, English-speaking centers of research prestige.

From Liz Wager and Tom Jefferson I learned the importance of raising tough issues that many of those to whom they should matter prefer to ignore.

Under the rigorous yet always generous and respectful guidance of María Luisa Clark, an editor at the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, I acquired technical editing skills that I had feared were beyond my ken.

From Mary Ellen Kerans, Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry I learned about academic research in languages and written communication that is directly relevant to the work of translators and authors' editors.

Phyllis Freeman and Anthony Robbins are the originators of the AuthorAID concept, and Ana Marusic has long been a champion of author-helpful editorial policies. Admiration for their dedication to leveling the playing field for authors from resource-limited settings was a major factor in my decision to begin the AuthorAID in the Eastern Mediterranean (AAEM) project.

Thanks to colleagues in Iran and elsewhere, AAEM has helped researchers and editors at a number of centers throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region. This progress would not be possible without Dr Farhad Handjani's tireless organizational efforts and support. From members of the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) I have learned about the wealth of editorial expertise in the region – talent that deserves wider recognition and support to enable editors to share their knowledge with colleagues in other emerging research centers.

The evidence base for effective methods of translation, editing and peer review is still small. These jobs require communication skills and an understanding of what makes texts fit for purpose for different readers; basic language competencies and discipline-related subject expertise are not enough. Yet designing research to identify helpful methods of editing and peer review remains a challenge. Journal editors and publishers tend to rely on practices accepted empirically by their peer community as operational, while often ignoring potentially useful knowledge reported by translators and authors' editors, and disregarding insights from academic research in the language and communications disciplines.

Is clearer communication through better translation, writing, peer review and editing associated with greater impact in terms of gains in knowledge and human welfare? This hypothesis is worth testing. Meanwhile the commercial academic publishing juggernaut rolls on, powered more by profits than by the needs of researchers and the general public. In my view, the results of publicly-funded research should not be a commodity to be sold for profit. But how can the current system of publication, dissemination and access change while it is protected by institutional inertia and powerful industry lobbies? Perhaps one way is for research funding systems to investigate the viability of freely-available publication and dissemination through academic libraries or nonprofit society-based systems.

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