

## Correspondence

### Appraisal of a good journal on science editing, communication and publication ethics

The availability of numerous information channels makes it critical to choose the most needed resources for scientific research and education. Researchers and science editors alike are now in dire need of innovative methodologies to adjust their practices to the accelerating pace of the digitization and generation of scholarly information.

As a researcher, editor and supervisor of scientific projects, I have contributed to numerous academic journals throughout my career. My writing, reviewing, and editing skills have been influenced by what I read and where I publish my papers.

Over the past decades, I've developed a strong interest in science editing, which is an emerging discipline, helping us to improve the quality of research at global and local levels.<sup>1</sup> And I find *European Science Editing* particularly helpful for the growth of the new discipline and for educating science editors. It is a great pleasure to recommend this journal to all my colleagues, who are seeking reliable sources on ethical writing and editing.

I learned about the journal when I joined the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) in 2011. At that time the journal took confident steps towards the internationalization and expansion of its scope by the newly appointed Chief Editor, Armen Yuri Gasparyan.<sup>2</sup> Since then, I've been following the progress and occasionally contributing to the journal as an author and reviewer. Importantly, the journal has become truly international, with papers being published from the USA, the UK, Croatia, Iran, Cuba, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, and Italy. All issues are distributed timely, which is unusual for small journals.

My busy academic schedule and numerous writing commitments leave no spare time for frequent contributions to the journal as an author. Besides, the ever-increasing priority to publish in journals with an Impact Factor (IF) takes its toll. These days most researchers and authors prefer to submit their best papers to the journals indexed by Web of Science<sup>®</sup> with a high rank on the ladder of the IF.

Having mentioned that, I find the quality of the journal high enough to meet the demanding criteria of indexing by Web of Science<sup>®</sup> and attractive for authors, who wish to publish in a good journal. As a contributing author, I was impressed at the friendliness of the handling editors and their swift responses to all queries at pre- and post-submission stages.

As a reader with an interest in publication ethics, I also found many thought-provoking essays published in the journal in the past few years, which alerted us to the threats of inappropriate authorship, plagiarism, and substandard peer review. These are perhaps the most pressing issues for the global publication ethics community.

The journal is published by and for EASE members, who are its main subscribers; open access to the global readership is offered 6 months after publication. I believe

that providing open access immediately after publication, will expand the circle of readers further and boost timely citations.

#### Competing interests

I am a Council Member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), Editor in Chief of *Daru Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* and *Journal of Medical Hypotheses and Ideas*. Opinions expressed in this letter are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of COPE.

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- 1 Abdollahi M. Perspectives on science editing and publishing in Iran: think globally, act locally. *European Science Editing* 2011;37(2):40-41.
- 2 Gasparyan AY. *European Science Editing* in a time of change. *European Science Editing* 2011;37(2):30.

### ESE as an educational resource: a view from Africa

Editors need to constantly keep abreast of progress in science communication. *European Science Editing (EurSci Ed)* is a well-designed periodical and the oldest on editing and writing that meets the ever-growing demands of the specialists in the field. It is truly one of the most highly informative and readable journals contributing to advances in editing.

The journal has many sections that I find important. Original research and essays on current situations within editing and publication ethics worldwide teach us a lot. The journal raises awareness of how editors can increase the scientific prestige and global influence of their publications. Numerous essays guide us on how to write for scientific journals. "My life as an editor" showcases the success stories of fellow editors from around the world. It shows that editors are dedicated to work for journals, and inspires others to write and learn.

The News Notes section is a channel to get the latest updates on science editing. It opens our eyes to things we may miss as editors. The Bookshelf section brings editorial articles of note, and enriches the knowledge of editors who lack access to a wide variety of scholarly journals.

The journal is truly international. It is a platform for sharing the thoughts of Cuban, Iranian, and many African editors.

Editors from middle- and low-income countries are isolated in their home countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The learned associations and their journals stand in a unique position to inspire editors globally. *Eur Sci Ed* brings one important message for us - build your own editorial networks and teach local editors.

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## Authors and editors, take references seriously!

In this issue, Salman Yousuf Guraya<sup>1</sup> presents a study on the accuracy of references in biomedical journals, with the disturbing result that 18% of the analysed references contained errors. Almost 5% of the references were not retrievable at all.

Incorrect references are not a new problem. Almost four decades ago, Goodrich and Roland<sup>2</sup> reported an error rate of 29% in the references of 10 major US medical journals. Despite a long array of subsequent studies showing the same pattern, partly documented by Guraya,<sup>1</sup> the general situation has not improved significantly. Guraya's finding of a declining error rate in the journals he examined is encouraging, but it needs broader confirmation.

Medical researchers are not the only sloppy authors, of course. Similar, or even higher error rates have been reported, for example in entomology,<sup>3</sup> paleontology,<sup>4</sup> and business and economics.<sup>5</sup> The references section of a scientific paper is often seen as a mere technical necessity or even a nuisance, something that needs to be done, but with the least time invested. References often get copied from bibliographic software where assistants have entered them in the first place, or out of other papers, or from online databases.

Why is this a problem? Quite often, incorrect citations suggest that an author has not read the cited paper. Following patterns of repetition of misprints in citations, Simkin and Roychowdhury conclude that 70–90% of scientific citations are copied from lists of references of other authors<sup>6</sup>. While I want to believe that this estimate is too high, other studies hint at the same trend. In his famous work *Sociobiology*, Edward O. Wilson used an incorrect word in the title of an important reference, a paper by W. D. Hamilton. Twenty three per cent of all subsequent authors who cite both Wilson's book and the Hamilton paper made the same mistake.<sup>7</sup> They have just copied from Wilson's book without consulting the original reference, which for pre-desktop computer times is an indication of a deliberate disregard of the source publication. Even more damningly, another study found one in four citations in marine biology papers failing to support the assertion for which they were cited, indicating that the cited papers were not read<sup>8</sup>.

How can we improve the situation? The whole citation

process is affected by citer motivations outside the scientific realm, be it friendship, animosity, or just convenience or sloppiness.<sup>9</sup> While authors are unlikely to suddenly turn into unemotional robots or saints in choosing references, we can at least avoid carelessness. The compilation of the literature list, even if typed from the cited papers *de novo*, only takes a negligible fraction of the time involved in executing and writing up a scientific study. Consulting the papers we cite and getting the citations correct, being essential parts of scientific diligence, are increasingly easy to do in the digital era, and absolutely vital in our era of metrical research evaluation.

Why is correct citation vital? Typos in author names or other crucial bibliographical details are likely to harm our colleagues if they are exposed to any sort of citation-based assessment. Different spellings of the same author name can lead to lower performance indicators, such as the *h* index,<sup>10</sup> as does the splitting of a reference into several spelling variants. By compiling reference lists, authors provide the raw data both for their own and for their colleagues' performance evaluations, be it for career purposes or just for an informal check of a colleague's Google Scholar profile.

Authors and editors, take the references section seriously! It is much more than a technical necessity and becomes a nuisance only if *not* taken seriously.

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