



Editing in U.S.-Based International Publications: A Position Statement

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The authors in this collection come from multiple language traditions as well as multiple academic and discourse traditions around the world. As we worked through chapters, and reviewers' comments about this diversity, we began to discuss between us (Gannett and Donahue) and then with the editors of the WAC Clearinghouse International Exchanges on the Study of Writing series editors what we might do to consider the best "policy" to guide our editorial choices at the linguistic level.¹ This short text describes that approach and what it means for the chapters presented here. We hope that our decisions will serve future editors and the field as a whole.

Our questioning began with some simple exchanges. Confronted with reviewers' requests to "light edit" we began to wonder about not *how* we might edit, but *why* we edit and *what* we edit—on what principles we base our editing. We could state that editing is needed for clearer meaning-making. But most of the edits we could have made in the chapters weren't needed for meaning. And even the concept of "clear meaning" can be problematic. As a Slovakian colleague noted recently, "My experience is that they [edits] are made for meaning but in the sense of making it clear for a wider audience. My very recent experience is that as an author I assumed the expert reader would understand what I meant but the reviewer/editor wants me to elaborate on it to make it obvious what is meant, which I, an author of a research paper, find confusing as adding that kind of clarification would turn a scholarly paper to a text typical of coursebooks. At least, in Slovakia we are strongly encouraged to differentiate the two text types."

1 Note that we are focused here on linguistic/sentence-level editing. There are deeply significant discussions to be had about discursive and rhetorical choices writers make from the ground of different traditions.

We could state that editing serves authors who seek the opportunity to learn more about standard written US English conventions. But even if that were true, what kind of framing would editing in line with US English academic norms require, and are we sure we want to endorse that framing? If we state instead that it is simply for respecting standard/conventional usage, we are immediately faced with the question of whose conventions to apply, among the many Englishes available to us. It's a well-established linguistic truth that no one English is linguistically superior or has more meaning-making value than any other variety, including the varieties produced by "second"- or twentieth-language users. So that leads us to think we are choosing the US or perhaps UK conventions for other reasons—geopolitical, or social, or ...? And this is whether editing is considered "light touch" or heavy-handed. The degree changes but the underlying principle does not. Whose standards are we choosing, actively, to uphold? We emphasize that we are not referencing only official "other Englishes" and their standards but in fact any use of English in play.

The dialogue with this series' editors raised the same questions and more: who are publishers imagining the audience, the readers, to be? What are those readers' meaning-making expectations? Do the readers accept that no one use of English is linguistically superior? Is the imagined audience amenable to engaging English as it is lived and used, or do the editors think that printing varieties of English-in-use in an academic text diminishes the credibility of the text, the author, the editors, the series, and the publisher?

In the past twenty years or perhaps more, scholars in several traditions—at least those working directly on text production without translators involved—have been arguing for a different approach to language, linguistic valuing, and re-definition of the "norm." Just a quick review surfaces perspectives from multiple scholars on the topic. For example, drawing on Bakhtin's distinction between a unitary language in the abstract and lived heteroglossia, Turner foregrounds "the tensions between the assumptions of a unitary English, dominant in the contemporary neoliberal discourse of transnational higher education, and the on-the-ground, more heteroglot, diverse, and uncertain reality." Bruce Horner has suggested that:

English in its practice as a global lingua franca is not merely plural but in constant flux. This is the finding of scholarship on English as a lingua franca. While initially that scholarship appeared to be directed toward identifying English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a particular variety of English, studies have made it increasingly clear that *ELF is, instead, a function*

(Friedrich and Matsuda 2010) [emphasis mine] whose *formal characteristics are under continuous revision*, contingent on its specific occasions of use. Indeed, researchers find that “[ELF] never achieves a stable or even standardized form.” ELF, they find, “is intersubjectively constructed in each specific context of interaction ... negotiated by each set of speakers for their purposes” (Meierkord 2004, p. 129 qtd. in Canagarajah 2007a, p. 926). In fact, as Nicos Sifakis has explained, “[V]ariability in the communication between different [ELF speakers] renders any attempt at codifying [and teaching] the various uses of English in [ELF] situations difficult, since we would have to know in advance many things that are situation-specific and user-dependent” (Sifakis 2006, p. 155)—and not just the forms ELF takes, but “even the enabling pragmatic strategies do not have to be the same” for its speakers (Canagarajah 2007a, p. 926).

This leads us to thinking about the way English is used in world-wide publication, not as a transparent medium of scholars’ thinking in a particular fixed “lingua franca” type of English, but as a constantly-in-flux, user-driven negotiation that ultimately implicates readers as well. In this case, the writer is negotiating with the language itself.

Arguments have been made as well about scholars’ rights, at conferences, to work in a language that is not English and to use cultural rhetorical practices that are not grounded in Anglo-Saxon models (Navarro et al., 2022), which suggests they also have the right to use English in the forms that work for them. In this case, like conference-goers encountering presentation languages they may not know, readers might need to do harder work in the interest of maintaining just and equal access to publishing—let alone in the interest of ensuring we hear not only the meanings but the rhythms and voices of world-wide writers working in a language they have not lived in always.

Takino’s study of Japanese writers has “showed that processes of accommodation are more important than linguistic correctness” in business English, an attitude of accommodation that builds, of course, out of frequent interaction with all forms of linguistic usage. This case has been made by multiple authors who argue that discursive and linguistic flexibility (of both writers *and* readers) is ultimately the key to negotiating meaning among interlocutors (see, for example, Kramsch, 1998; Canagarajah, 2007; and Donahue, 2018.).

We found ourselves asking, when do we start actually living by these language arguments that have been made? Are we thinking that in practice, they can’t or shouldn’t be followed? When we talk with students about the

norm being translingual, linguistically heterogenous, we tell them we want to help them question currently-imposed standards. They say, “But the world demands I know the standard, to succeed and advance—to get published, to get promoted” But does it? What if our starting-point was instead “How can we change the world?”

There are plenty of quite successful people who communicate without applying these standards; as a small example, see Wolfe et al.’s 2016 article on the value of factors other than linguistic “correctness” in business correspondence written by multilingual peers. There is also evidence that editing can be “in the end, the proofreader’s suggestions [that] represent just a different way of saying something. Istvan Kecskes speaks of ‘formulaic’ preferred ways of saying things and preferred ways of organizing thoughts (2021)—... it is often the case that editing is understood as making preferential choices” (Tereza Kacmarova, personal communication, 2024).

The same can be said for authors who *want* to be edited for “standard” English. Are they stating it because they don’t see another way to be allowed into the currently-dominating discourse? Because they have adopted/inherited the hegemonic discourse of expectations? What if this weren’t the only reality? My (Donahue’s) French colleagues for many years have echoed the going Anglo-Saxon theme that there is no teaching of writing in French higher education (an idea that still circulates). But when research started pointing to all the ways writing *was* being taught in France, they said “Oh—yes! I hadn’t thought about it that way” and reinvented their perspective. Can we provide authors a way to wonder? In this case, to wonder whether the language editing they thought they needed may not be? To reconsider their stated need for editing? If not us—publishers, editors—then who? When does meaningful revolution begin? Why not with the WAC Clearinghouse, as it strives to serve the international, to be international? And further, why not with this collection?

In some ways, what we are calling for is not just a change in editing practices and publication expectations, but a change in who we are as editors and readers. I personally do not *want* to join the writing/editing equivalent of the industrial-military complex in the world (an “Anglo-linguistic hegemonic complex”?), though perhaps not all authors in this collection would agree, for complex reasons that might include pressure from colleagues or supervisors, or simply different beliefs about English.

Maybe most important of all, if people read linguistic variation, and understand (or learn to understand) it over time, they’ll change over time. After all, we’ve all learned how to read and value multilingual texts, and multimodal texts. We call for reading and valuing students’ linguistic worlds, so

why not our own? Additionally, what seems a “typical” or “well known” way to express something is terribly culture-bound. Readers from other contexts may well find certain syntaxes easier to process than the typical reader well versed in Western Anglo-Saxon discourse would. While some non-edits will seem an affront to some readers’ expectations, they will open the door to others. Readers need the opportunity to be confronted with new textual norms and to learn to do the work of making sense of them. We, as editors, have to create those opportunities.

For this collection, we decided to only edit if a non-US-standard convention created actual meaning difficulty, not if it was simply a sensed affront to our long-developed editorial instincts. In the current volume, you will thus read chapters with a variety of usages, in line with a variety of versions of English, and many phenomena you might consider to be “errors” based on your sense of English. These are quite different from the translingual “rarified” examples so often critiqued as representing only translingualism in its beauty and poetics. They are instead “working” English examples—English as it *is*, produced by English users doing the work of writing research around the world.

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