ISMTE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF MANAGING AND TECHNICAL EDITORS

EON
Editorial Office News

SOCIETY UPDATE

ISMTE 2010 European Conference Summary

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The ISMTE European Conference once again took place at St Hugh's College, Oxford, where the sun shone even though it was mid-October. This was particularly fortunate as the fire alarm went off just as we were about to start, giving the delegates a little extra networking time on the lawn. There was a brief but heavy rainstorm during the day: after last year's thunderstorm, is this going to be a characteristic of the European meeting?

The morning session comprised two highly instructive presentations on plagiarism screening. Kirsty Meddings, Product Manager at CrossCheck, summarized the development of CrossRef, described case histories of publishers who had been using it, and reminded us that not every case of overlapping text was necessarily deliberate plagiarism. Kirsty was followed by Alice Malhador from Institute of Physics Publishing, who reported on IoPP's implementation of CrossCheck. She explained that her colleagues had taken different approaches depending on the needs and nature of each journal. Although there was an impact on workload, rewards included better-quality articles, better-educated authors, and also some time-saving later in the editorial process as time spent on decisions was reduced.

Irene Hames then led a workshop session in which groups discussed two case studies on issues raised by the use of CrossCheck. Irene gave us some useful pointers about how to avoid running foul of libel laws: for example, we should not accuse someone specifically of plagiarism, and we should avoid sharing information about possible cases with too large a group.

In the afternoon Geoffrey Bilder

In this issue:

European Conference Summary

continued

gave his hugely entertaining and enlightening views on social networking, in particular the relevance of Web 2.0 to scholarly publishing. In his wide-ranging talk, he emphasized that the challenge for publishers was not how to get more content to more readers but how to help readers minimise their reading load. The value of social networking was in helping researchers help each other discover what they should pay attention to. He also introduced many of us to

Figure 1. Attendees network on the lawn.

Web 3.0: helping researchers use machines to discover what they should pay attention to. He noted that this required publishers to structure text and publications so that information could be automatically retrievable.

Mark Patterson described how PLoS facilitates rating, commentary, and bookmarking of articles. He also explained

Figure 2. Irene Hames was recognized at the ISMTE European meeting for her years of service to the ISMTE Board of Directors and her leadership in our industry.

Figure 3. Participants attending a session at the beautiful St. Hugh's College.

how PLoS is moving beyond the confines of the traditional journal through initiatives such as PLoS Hubs (which aggregate and build communities round open-access content) and PLoS Currents (which uses a web-based authoring tool and small review boards to facilitate very rapid publication). Mark proposed that the level of commentary – such as social bookmarking and blog coverage – was a new way of measuring research impact. He suggested that publishers should not try to build artificial communities themselves but instead should ensure that their content is open to and is picked up by existing social networks.

After these two stimulating presentations, Davina Quarterman from Wiley-Blackwell introduced and facilitated a breakout session in which delegates discussed how two different journals could face the challenges and seize the opportunities of social networking tools. In the context of the afternoon session, we were delighted to find that Davina, Kirsty Meddings and Alice Ellingham had all tweeted about the meeting, and Kirsty commented on it in the CrossRef blog. Many thanks for that!

See picture galleries from the North American and European conferences at www.ismte.org

Contexts and Tools for More Effectively Managing Submissions from Chinese Authors

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Editors in many scientific, technical, and medical (STM) journals today are well aware of the deluge of papers starting to come in from researchers in mainland China. There are multitudes of problems with many of these submissions, some typical of authors writing in a second language, others particular to authors submitting from China, and others in line with the more usual problems that typify journal submissions.

These days, it's reasonable to assume Chinese authors who submit to STM publications are highly motivated to publish, perhaps more so than their counterparts from developing countries. Authors in China are under extraordinary pressure, with intense competition for scholarly success and recognition, if for no other reason than the sheer number of people in the academic job market there. In many fields, researchers cannot receive their final PhD degree until they've published in a journal deemed by their institution to have enough status (*e.g.*, a high impact factor). Some universities also award success in publishing with financial prizes, sometimes quite significantly.

The pressure is not just from within the academic community, but comes down from even higher levels. In a 2009 article in the Harvard Business Review, John Kao noted some of the indicators of the intensity of China's drive to excel in the international arena in science and technology including that the Chinese Politburo has set a national goal of turning China into an innovation-driven country by 2020. To support this goal, China has doubled the number of its institutions of higher education from 2,000 to 4,000 between 2002 and 2005. A study from the National Science Foundation also reported China was awarding new PhDs in the areas of science and technology at much greater rates than its nearest competitors in Asia. (See Figure 1.) These are only a few of the indicators that, one way or another, Chinese researchers will continue to submit articles for consideration in English language journals for some time to come.

The increasing number of submissions from China is in turn putting new pressures on STM editors, their offices, and their reviewers. These editorial offices already have a tremendous amount of work processing submissions and separating the wheat from the chaff in identifying the best science that is the best match for the scope of their particular journal. With the very best journals accepting less than 5% of the articles they receive, editors need to sort through vast numbers of manuscripts to weed out articles that do not fall in the scope of the publication, do not adhere to the guidelines set out for authors, have weak scientific arguments or weak writing, or have any number of other problems. Once the potential candidates for review are chosen, many other steps must be

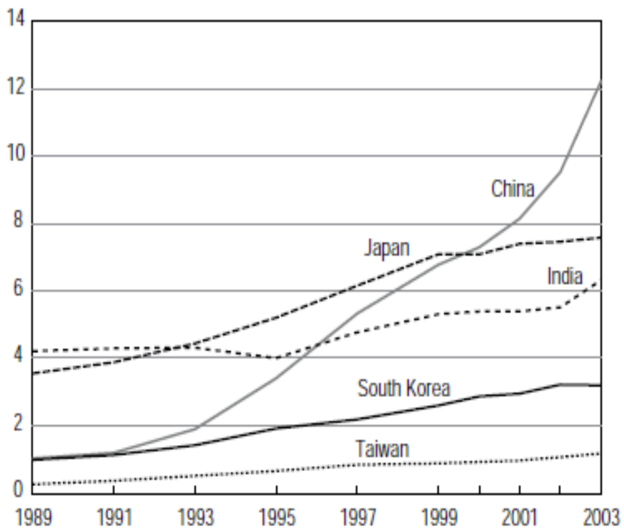

Figure 1.
Trends in Ph.D. awards in Asia in the fields of science and engineering, 1989-2003
Source: National Science Foundation: *Asia's Rising Science & Technology Strength: Comparative Indicators for Asia, the EU, and the US*

taken to funnel articles to the appropriate associate editors and reviewers, to track reviews and their outcomes, to correspond with authors, and eventually to publish final manuscripts.

Editors have to deal with yet another layer of complexity when they are faced with assessing manuscripts written in problematic English by authors who are largely unfamiliar with Western journal publishing practices. If the problems in papers submitted by nonnative speakers of English become too many in kind and number, editors may decide by default simply to put these manuscripts into the 'reject without review' pile. While editors may not feel wholly 'good' about making such decisions, given their workloads and priorities, the reject pile may seem the most viable recourse. This unfortunate situation begs two questions: first what can an editor do to better and more fairly handle the onslaught of submissions from China and second what can be done to make these submissions better over time?

The Challenge of Experts Writing in a Foreign Language

One step to understanding why papers come in from China the way they do is for editors to consider the background and context of the Chinese authors who are doing the writing. For example, it is highly likely the vast majority of authors submitting articles to western STM journals learned both their spoken and written English from teachers who were not themselves native speakers of English. Although there are now many native English speakers in China, some of whom teach English, there are few English speakers in China who are trained to teach writing (composition) and even fewer who are trained to teach scientific writing. Textbooks and classes in writing for science and technology are very, very few and far between.

Written English is usually assessed primarily for correctness of grammar and syntax; issues of coherence, readability, or style are much less often considered. In other words, in reviewing a text prior to submission, the nonnative English writer may not even detect weaknesses in logic or coherence (a problem not uncommon to native English writers either). Nonnative speakers of English writing in English about science for specific audiences in the specific formats required by STM journals have few textbooks available to them and few teachers or mentors to turn to for help with writing. In the end, the language in existing articles often ends up serving as the best models for successful scientific writing.

An editor might also consider Chinese researchers, like their counterparts, come to the task of writing English from the base of learning to write in their native languages. Written Chinese is a particularly difficult language to learn, in part because it is an ideographic language in which there is little correlation between the shape of the written word (orthography), the meaning of that word (semantics), and the sound of that word (acoustics). Learners must not only know a particular character has a particular meaning and sound, but also must remember how to actually write that character according to somewhat complex patterns of strokes that must be written in a very specific predefined order. (See Figures 2 and 3.) Although many cognitive skills are involved in learning to write in Chinese, developing basic literacy in Chinese requires learning to recognize and reproduce a minimum of 3,000 characters through sheer, massive memorization, reinforced through repetition.

Certainly, pedagogy in China heavily emphasizes rote memorization for language learning as well as for other kinds of information. To aid in this memorization, exact copying is used as a primary pedagogical method, particularly as students are learning to write characters. Copying as a regular and usual form of learning continues through primary grades and is generally considered an acceptable method of learning. As students progress through primary school, they are regularly asked to imitate style in writing and speaking, continuing the general attitude of acceptance towards copying. Although the value of originality comes to the fore as students enter higher education, the idea that 'original work' has a high value is not planted in the mind of Chinese students until much later in process of formal education than it is sown in the United States and elsewhere in the Western world. If students start with an understanding that some form of copying is acceptable in academic context, then

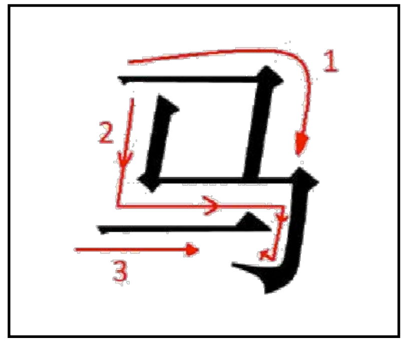

Figure 2.
Above, one Chinese character showing the required order of strokes in writing.

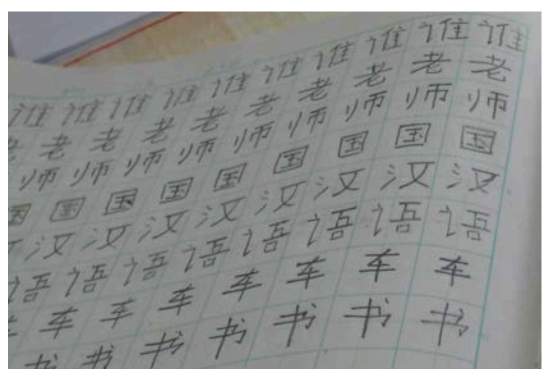

Figure 3.
Above, a typical practice writing notebook for elementary students of written Chinese.

understanding and avoiding plagiarism can be even more challenging.

All that being said, editors can have hope that instances of plagiarized text will lessen in submissions from Chinese authors. Authors in China and elsewhere have more and more information available on the Web about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it by citing ideas and text properly. Chinese researchers are increasingly aware journals use resources such as CrossRef's CrossCheck to scrutinize manuscripts and these tools are very good at picking up plagiarized text. They also know editors will immediately reject papers in which plagiarism is found and their records may be given a black mark in future consideration. Chinese websites that help students and others understand and avoid plagiarism are now quite easy to find and the understanding that copying is not acceptable in certain contexts is becoming better understood. Organizations, like The Charlesworth Group, offer training and language editing services that not only help them polish their language but also check to make sure that non-original information, ideas, and language is properly cited.

Chinglish

Complicating the task of evaluating whether or not ideas or text have been drawn from unacknowledged primary sources, editors dealing with papers by Chinese authors often also have to slog through *Chinglish* to assess the value of the science being presented. Chinglish is generally defined as a mixture of Chinese and English that typically incorporates some Chinese vocabulary or constructions, or English terms specific to a Chinese context. Some problems with incorrect word choice or awkward grammar typical of Chinglish are not difficult to fix, while others are more difficult to edit because the base meaning is so unclear. Even senior editors are perplexed by a sentence like 'The beaker ran across the lab.'

To provide authors who are not confident of their English writing skills with editorial help before submission, many journals are providing links on their websites to language polishing services. Some journals promote just one or two trusted services, while others provide authors with a long list of service providers with no particular endorsement. One way or another, most journals do make clear having the English polished does not guarantee acceptance or guarantee a paper will make it into peer review. Authors will certainly gain some benefit from having their writing reviewed by professional editors who can point out where meaning is unclear or data poorly presented. However, these services come with a notable price tag, with costs ranging from US$150 for short articles to $300 or more for longer more complex texts, and may be beyond reach for many authors, particularly those starting off in their careers.

Come Again?

More than a few editors have also been perplexed by the persistence of Chinese authors in submitting what is essentially the same paper to the same journal time and time again. Again, bearing in mind the context in which Chinese authors are working may be helpful. As previously mentioned, many doctoral students in China, particularly those working in the sciences and engineering, will not be awarded their final degree unless they have published in an international journal that is considered to have a high impact factor in their field. In addition, Chinese authors are most familiar with the most famous journals, which are inevitably those with higher impact factors. At the same time, some young authors in China have real difficulty finding out about alternative venues for publication outside the famous high impact publications everyone strives for. Few of these authors have advisors or other resources that might be able to give them a broader view of publishing opportunities, steering them to perhaps lesser known journals that might be more appropriate for the content they want to publish about.

As a result of knowing of only a few journals in their topical area and knowing high impact journals are the best places to publish, some authors will take a manuscript that has been rejected, revise and polish it to the best of their ability, and submit to the same journal again. Without more information about why a paper was rejected and about different places they might try to publish, authors will submit and resubmit to the same publication in hopes that a bit more spit-polishing of the text might do the trick to get their paper at least into review.

The Role of Explicit Instructions for Authors

Understanding more about the contexts and constraints of Chinese authors may be interesting, but it doesn't really help solve the problem editors face in dealing with too many problematic papers from China. Unfortunately, there are no immediate solutions to coping with the flood of papers from the mainland, but there are steps that can be taken that will, over time, help Chinese authors, and in turn the editors who deal with their manuscripts.

A first step is for an editorial office to set a period of time for keeping detailed records of articles coming in from China and why articles are rejected. This kind of data collection can be done quite simply, particularly if an office uses a manuscript tracking system. When the kind of problems typical of manuscripts coming in from China are broken down by type, editors and editorial offices can develop specific and targeted responses to the problems by providing authors with information and resources to help avoid them.

Another step that can be taken lies in the critical resource of Instructions to Authors. Seasoned editors are well aware that authors from all kinds of backgrounds do not always follow the Instructions for Authors. At times, in fact, it may seem some authors don't even read the Instructions. However, this does not diminish the influence these guidelines can and should have on authors, particularly for nonnative speakers of English. Instructions for Authors can have greater influence and impact if they are written very clearly and specifically include instructional information about topics that are not easy for authors in nonwestern contexts to learn about. In addition, translating the Instructions into Chinese and other languages will also be of great benefit to authors, making the process of understanding the rules of the game that much easier.

What kinds of information would be helpful to less experienced authors, particularly nonnative speakers of English? First might be a repeated clear and explicit statement of the scope and purpose of the journal. Editors regularly put submitted articles on the reject pile purely on the basis that the content falls outside the scope of the journal. Having clear and unequivocal statements of the scope of the journal in multiple places across a journal website,

Submissions from Chinese Authors *continued*

including in the Instructions to Authors, may help reduce these kinds of submissions.

Instructions for Authors can also much more explicitly lay out some basics of science writing and publishing. Editors might assume authors know what would be in a 'Science Publishing 101' course, but the reality is many do not. Information on some basics can be very helpful to young authors, more so than editors may want to believe. For example, giving authors explicit definitions of plagiarism would be useful, followed by examples of how and why to cite sources. Telling authors to use active voice when possible can also be helpful as active prose tends to yield more clear and readable syntax. In countries where instructors of written English are not native speakers/ writers and are perhaps of an older generation, many teachers still teach that passive voice is the preferred style for scientific writing.

Journal websites could also provide examples of poorly and well written abstracts, introductions, and cover letters and explain how these parts of an article and an author's correspondence can play very significant roles in how an editor understands the gist of a submission on initial review. Examples and exemplars will draw potential authors to your site, which can never be a bad thing. Once a detailed analysis of some set of problematic papers is done, editors may be able to better understand what kinds of information they need to include more clearly in their Instructions to Authors.

The way instructions are written can also be flushed out to be more definitive and more helpful for authors. For example if your journal has strict word limits for articles, rather than just saying 'Articles should be no longer than 2,500 words,' the instructions could say 'Articles longer than 2,500 words will be immediately rejected without review. If you have trouble keeping your article under this required word count, you can consider hiring a professional editor to help you shorten your text.'

These are but a few tools editorial and editorial offices can use to help understand and manage the onslaught of papers from international authors, particularly those from China. Over time, Chinese authors will become more savvy about how and where to submit their science for publication and part of their education can (and perhaps should) come from journals themselves. In addition, a few specialized organizations such as The Charlesworth Group are uniquely positioned to help editorial offices understand and better address the unique, powerful, and growing audience of Chinese researchers. If editors beef up their instructions appropriately for authors as they learn what authors need to hit the target of submitting the right paper to the right journal at the right time, many problems will be lessened. The journal can use the Instructions as the home base for information and send authors back to the directives, advice, and models through editorials, information in correspondence to authors, and other communications.

Philippa lived in China for several years teaching scientific writing at a major University and studied China in Shanghai as well as in the United States. She works for The Charlesworth Group and closely with the Global Editing and Author Services team, which carefully tailors language polishing resources and training programs to match the needs of authors and publishers in specialty areas.

From a Day in the Zoo to the Journal Jungle

by Diana Epstein
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In my previous life I worked in the hotel business and was head of international reservations—that was many moons ago. I relocated to Cologne, Germany, had two children, and would meet up with ex-pats. We were an exclusive group of people all with young children and all from Britain/Northern Ireland/Eire and enjoyed speaking English and socializing.

In June of 1996 on one of our outings we went to the zoo, and between the flamingos at the entrance and the bear den I was offered a job at the local university. The job pitch went something like this '...it's a really boring job, 10 hours a week, lots of paperwork. Take it for six months and it will look good on your CV....' Well, since there was a pair of Armani jeans I desperately wanted I figured out that six months of work would just about pay for them. I had an interview with two lovely professors, the late Prof. Klaus Heimann and the lovely Prof. Krieglstein, recently retired.

I am unsure today who was more desperate —they for an assistant or I for my jeans—but suffice to say I got the job. My training by my predecessor went along the lines of 'OK, I've shown you the ropes (after 2 hours), call me if you have a problem.' In the days before mobile phones you can imagine what that was like, and so I learned mostly on the job.

The first six months were quite busy, since I was working with both professors. I remember one paper where one of my professors, after reading the reviewers' comments, recommended to reject, the other recommended to accept, then they both turned around and said to me, 'Well what do you think?' My first brush with peer-review and ethics.

I was then mentored by Prof. Krieglstein. We would meet in his office after surgery around 10:30 am, I would have a cup of tea and biscuit with him, and we would go through the papers, and I do mean papers—a lot of them! This was pre-Internet time! I used to have to beg the dinner lady at the eye clinic for her lunch trolley and promise her, cross my heart, that I would have it back in time for the patients' lunch. I would then stack it with papers and files, quickly say a wee prayer asking for divine help that the lift was working (I was on the third floor), and go to the editor-in-chief's (EIC) office on the first floor, loaded with paper. Usually he would see the amount of papers on the trolley and add another lump or two of sugar to his coffee.

Then the editorial office went online, and my mentor decided the time had come to pass on the reigns to a younger editor. I received a new EIC, but this time the roles were reversed and I became his mentor, explaining how to be an editor and what he had to do, such as why it was important that he log in and check his e-mails more than once a week.

In addition to managing the journal, I was also attending annual board meetings, updating outdated instructions for authors (the journal is the oldest journal in ophthalmology—unfortunately so were the instructions), and achieving my medical writer's certificate via EMWA (European Medical Writers' Association).

In January 2005 the publishers approached me and asked if I could take on a wee journal they just took over, which published four times a year. I agreed, and then a few months later they asked if I could take over another journal that published six times a year. I was just moving in June that year to Scotland and this latter journal was having a board meeting in Glasgow. Of course I said I would attend, though had I known it was to be at 7:30 am at Glasgow Caledonian University I may not have agreed so quickly.

So here I was, newly relocated to Glasgow and with three journals. I will spare you the details of setting up the Internet connection with British Telecom—that would be the topic for another article. Suffice to say it eventually happened and all was running smoothly, and I was quite happy with my journals, Then, in 2008, out of the blue, I received a cold call from someone from The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons saying this was an unofficial phone call but could I come to the office and discuss a journal. Well, my curiosity took over and I asked my friend Grace to come with me. The idea was she would call me after half an hour to make sure I was okay. I ended up having a meeting that took over an hour. After I got back to the car, I asked Grace why she did not call me and she said she was having a lovely coffee and did not notice the time. Let me tell you, if you ever have a meeting, do not take my friend Grace with you. I then met the outgoing EIC, who called me a 'godsend.' At that point in time I was really chuffed, but warning bells should have been ringing. I took over the journal in January 2009 and helped manage it to where it is today, which is not a bad accomplishment.

Managing four journals from my dining room was beginning to make my whole lounge look as if it was on the verge of turning into the office, not to mention the stress of managing the journals on my own and having a social life. Oh yes—don't forget the teenagers, partner, and cat.

I was approached last year and was asked to give a presentation in Berlin about ethics, I then Googled the Internet and discovered ISMTE and learned there was a meeting in Oxford. Unsure whether this was a real society, I contacted Irene Hames who participates from time to time in the EASE (European Association of Science Editors) forum. She advised by return that ISMTE was very much a 'kosher' organization and I should come to the meeting. Indeed I came and really enjoyed it. At the wine and cheese event, Jason Roberts mentioned the Resource Committee and there I am, on Jason's wee committee.

In August this year two major events occurred in my life: The first one was finding an office and the second was finding an assistant. I was quite fortunate in finding an office where there is parking space. I arrive early in order to avoid having to park between two cars in reverse! I have found a lovely assistant who is totally into Glasgow Rangers; if anyone should visit us in Glasgow, you will be grilled on your knowledge of this football team. I have certainly learned a lot about football in the past two months and I am happy to say my assistant has learned a lot about managing journals.

Calendar of Events

Project Management for Publishing
3 November 2010
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

Editing Medical Journals - Short Course
10-12 November 2010
Oxford, UK
www.pspconsulting.org/

Fundamentals of eProduction
24 November 2010
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

Journal Development
29 November 2010
Oxford, UK
www.alpsp.org

COPE US Seminar and US Forum
29-30 November 2010
Washington, DC
http://publicationethics.org/seminar/us2010

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A note on English: ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca, but we would like to stress that in materials published in EON *or online that variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.*

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