

Editorial 29(4): 'The last month' copy editing and formatting

Why this editorial about copy editing and formatting, only three years after our 2016 editorial [1] on copy editing in IIER 26(3)? It's because we should share with authors and readers some additional perspectives, especially relating to *the last month* workload preceding the publication of a new issue of IIER, which for us is dominated by copy editing and formatting activities. To illustrate the time frame for 'the last month', IIER 29(4) contains articles for which the submission date range was 18 November 2018 to 29 April 2019 (about 5 months), and the acceptance date range was 8 March to 28 August 2019 (about 6 months). The next major stage in publishing 29(4), copy editing and formatting, commenced with the receipt of revised versions of accepted articles, for which the date range was 30 May to 21 September 2019. Although this period was about 4 months, receipts were mostly (14 of 20) in August-September, and consequently our copy editing and formatting for 29(4) became concentrated into 'the last month', September. Thus, September became a peak workload month.

This concentration into 'the last month' is due partly to our despatching of copy edited and formatted articles to authors for proofreading, for which we must allow some time for author responses, and time for us to incorporate any changes they may request. Another reason for concentration into 'the last month' is that the final versions of all article files are required in order to create each article's html abstract file, and revise the html files that provide volume 29's table of contents and the IIER home page's table of contents, which are also time-consuming activities [2]. Yet another reason is that usually 'the last month' has been preceded by a lengthy period of catching up with review process duties.

Commencing an editorial about copy editing and formatting with an outline of time and workload limitations that we face is appropriate and important. Looked at from the perspective of journal editorial staff, we can advance a proposition about journals adopting one of three main approaches to the problem of copy editing and formatting workloads. These are not clearly delineated, and whilst the evidence is mostly anecdotal, it does indicate that IIER tries to sustain a supportive and inclusive (though labour intensive) approach. The three kinds of editorial approaches to copy editing may be characterised, in a somewhat colloquial way, as (a) little or no responsibility; (b) mainly author responsibility; and (c) mainly publisher responsibility. Very approximately, the editorial staff workloads are low, middling and high, respectively.

Little or no editorial responsibility for copy editing

To illustrate the first, 'little or no responsibility', which may be broadened to include other descriptors such as 'inadequate', 'error-prone', 'unskilled', etc., many examples could be cited for diverse subcategories. One unusual example was reported in IIER Editorial 27(2), concerning the sentence "600 teachers, from both Government and Private Schools, have been drowned by random sampling" (over two years later, it still awaits correction - *Google* the exact phrase) [3]. Perhaps the most frequent instances of 'little or no responsibility' for copy editing may be those associated with 'predatory journals' [4].

Authors responsible for obtaining copy editing services

The category 'author responsibility' is larger and also not clearly delineated. Perhaps the central characteristic is the setting of high expectations about the standard of academic English which authors must attain, with modest assistance, or little assistance, from a journal's copy editing process. Another typical characteristic is "... recommending that ESL [English as a second language] authors should engage commercial translation and copy editing services prior to submission" [5]; a characteristic also identified in IIER Editorial 26(3), "Some publishers encourage ESL authors to pay for specialised translation and copy editing services prior to initial submission..." [1].

Publisher advice from Springer Nature provides a good example in which the publisher's own copy editing has a limited place after other actions have been taken [6]:

For editors and reviewers to accurately assess the work presented in your manuscript you need to ensure the English language is of sufficient quality to be understood. If you need help with writing in English you should consider:

- Asking a colleague who is a native English speaker to review your manuscript for clarity.
- Visiting the English language tutorial which covers the common mistakes when writing in English.
- Using a professional language editing service where editors will improve the English to ensure that your meaning is clear and identify problems that require your review. Two such services are provided by our affiliates *Nature Research Editing Service* and *American Journal Experts*.

Please note that the use of a language editing service is not a requirement for publication and does not imply or guarantee that the article will be selected for peer review or accepted.

If your manuscript is accepted it will be checked by our copyeditors for spelling and formal style before publication. [6]

The Springer Nature example can be explored further via the websites for "our affiliates *Nature Research Editing Service* [7] and *American Journal Experts*" [8], looking for the most important information relating to copy editing, namely pricing for English language editing. For a 7500 word article, Springer Nature's price is from US\$464, AJE's price is from US\$380. Clients may add formatting for US\$125, and in the case of AJE, may add services for figure formatting (US\$70 per figure) and for tables (US\$30 per table). Having no experiences with these kinds of commercial services for aspiring authors, we cannot comment on the question, 'Are these offers good value for money?' What we can do is contrast with IIER's price for these kinds of services, namely no charges, which leads us into questions about the generosity and sustainability of IIER's 'publisher responsibility' approach to copy editing services.

Another kind of contrast in pricing for editing services popped up recently in our inboxes, from "springereditors@gmail.com" ("springereditors" is not related in any way to Springer Nature), amounting to a price of about US\$135 for a typical IIER article:

It is okay to make mistakes but do not submit mistakes! Use our native English speaking editors to correct your documents. Proofreading (19 USD/1000 words), translating (25 USD/1000 words), and correcting for plagiarism (40 USD/1000 words). [email to us dated 23 August 2019]

Publishers taking responsibility for copy editing services

The category 'publisher responsibility' is probably relatively small, though also not clearly delineated. Perhaps the key characteristic is a willingness about "... offering their own copy editing services as a key contribution to improving articles accepted from ESL authors" [5]. Authors are not subjected to suggestions about "Using a professional language editing service". However, since the perspectives presented in 2013 [5] and 2016's Editorial 26(3) [1], our circumstances have changed considerably, with very large increases in editorial staff loads related to review processes (No. articles received) and to copy editing and formatting (No. articles published), as shown in Table 1. This prompts a reflective review of IIER's copy editing and formatting practices, which have not changed since the discontinuation of html versions of articles at the end of volume 27, as announced in Editorial 28(1) [9].

Table 1: IIER articles received and articles published IIER 2015-19

Year	No. received	No. accepted (b)	No. published (c)	% accepted (d)
2019	357a	-	71	-
2018	469	71	60	15.1%
2017	306	65	50	21.2%
2016	196	47	40	24.0%
2015	124	43	31	34.7%

a. To end September 2019.
b. The number of articles accepted for a particular year does not correspond to the number published in that year, owing to time taken for review and revisions, and fluctuations in the speed of these processes.
c. Includes articles in IIER 29(4); the next issue may be 29(5), or more likely, 30(1).
d. % accepted = No. accepted x 100/No. received

IIER's definition of copy editing and formatting

A discussion of IIER's practices in copy editing and formatting has been left until later sections of this editorial, to emphasise that IIER's practices have been *shaped by needs* as revealed in the submissions we receive (Table 1), as well as by advice in standard textbooks and manuals for academic publishing [10, 11]. Over the years, we have encountered many submissions that could be readily rejected owing to a poor standard of academic English, but if reviewed on the basis of extensive in-house copy editing being available for accepted articles, have much improved prospects for reviewer and journal acceptance. This perspective is one of the two major foundations for IIER's record on inclusivity towards ESL authors (the other is an inclination towards helping to give 'a voice' to countries of origin and contexts that are under-represented in the international literature in educational research).

Our primary text concerning how we define and implement copy editing is the *Style manual* [10], chapter 14, "Editing and proofreading", though with variations. Often we include

substantive editing actions, particularly in relation to titles, headings and paragraphing. We regard formatting as a complementary, second stage after copy editing, though *Style manual* includes formatting in "House style". IIER's formatting stage acts also as a first proofreading of the copy editing stage. In IIER's practice, the main proofreading is by authors, differing from *Style manual's* depiction of responsibilities. However, in one important respect, we follow *Style manual's* advice as closely as we can. This concerns 'author voice' or individual writing style. Repeating the *Style manual* quotation given in Editorial 26(3) [1]:

When copy editing a document by an individual author, an experienced editor will follow the house style intelligently rather than impose it rigidly. This is because each publication - even in the same subject area - has different characteristics and may need slightly different treatment. Authors also expect to be able to express themselves in an individual manner where this is warranted by the context or type of document. (p.258) [10]

The main secondary text is the American Psychological Association's *APA style* [11], a long established favourite for educational research journal editing, though again with minor variations, most notably some differences in punctuation, not italicising volume numbers, and not using "Retrieved from ...". Another important secondary or perhaps 'mandatory' text is Google Scholar's *Inclusion guidelines* [12], especially the specification of meta-tags for each article. Although *Inclusion guidelines* does not mention URLs in reference lists, we take great care to ensure that wherever available, a verified URL is appended to each reference, because that improves the accuracy of computer parsing for citation count purposes.

Looking through the reflections above, and seeking to continue the emphasis upon practices *shaped by authors' needs*, there are no radical steps we can take to contain copy editing and formatting workloads. The texts we consult set high standards, and through much reading of academic research articles other than IIER, we are well aware of best practices in contemporary publishing. So we strive to avoid a 'drop in standards', and instead we will continue with gradual adjustments to practices, such as marginally increased rates of rejection for articles that would require an excessive amount of copy editing time; holding articles published per year to modest increases; striving to increase our numbers of associate editors; expanding their roles to include 'taking turns' in fulfilling copy editing duties; etc.

On the more positive side, we have seen over the years an improving level of institutional and team support for ESL authors seeking IIER publication. Evidence is anecdotal, for example sometimes we can examine the author list for an article, and identify the name of 'the English expert' or 'the translator'. Sometimes, by comparing the standard of academic English within an article and English as used in an author's supplementary emails, we perceive evidence that the author used a translating and editing service (hopefully, less expensive, or better than, the examples cited above). Also on the positive side, we are beginning to place more emphasis upon authors learning from their proofreading of copy edited and formatted articles accepted for IIER. For example, we are beginning to use an explicit directive to find a colleague to *read aloud* from the proof reading version from us,

whilst at an adjacent computer the author makes a word by word, phrase by phrase comparison with their pre-copy editing version.

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Copy editor and formatting editor, IIER 29(4), 2019

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