

NEGOTIATING PUBLICATION: AUTHOR RESPONSES TO PEER REVIEW OF MEDICAL RESEARCH ARTICLES IN THORACIC SURGERY

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ABSTRACT

A variety of genres can be found within the genre cluster of journal article publication. Some of these genres are open to public view (e.g. the research article). Others such as peer review comments, however, are occluded or visible only to the authors themselves and tend to be under-researched. Although peer reviewer comments have been the focus of increasing research, little work has been done on author responses to reviewers (ARRs) and editor commentary. This paper presents an initial analysis of a corpus of author responses in thoracic surgery and attempts to highlight some key characteristics of these texts.

KEY WORDS: Peer review, publication, medical research article, author response, genre cluster.

RESUMEN

Dentro del macrogénero vinculado a la publicación de artículos científicos pueden distinguirse diversos géneros, entre los cuales algunos son de libre acceso al público (el propio artículo, por ejemplo) y otros, como los comentarios de los revisores, son, sin embargo, privados o sólo accesibles para los autores, por lo que generalmente no son objeto de análisis lingüístico. Aunque existe un interés cada vez mayor por los comentarios de los evaluadores, aún son escasos los estudios sobre las respuestas de los autores a los comentarios de revisores y editores. Este artículo presenta el análisis preliminar de un corpus de respuestas de autores en la especialidad de cirugía torácica con el objetivo de describir los rasgos característicos de este tipo de textos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: evaluación por pares, publicación, artículo médico científico, respuesta del autor, macrogénero.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1996 the term “occluded genre” was introduced by Swales to describe academic texts that were hidden from public view, but were nonetheless an important part of the genre network of scholars and researchers (Swales 46). Today one



might reasonably argue that truly occluded genres may be few in number since it seems almost any kind of text can be found on the Internet. Even so, whether a genre is fully or partly occluded, the challenges of composing such texts remain. Academic genres that have been identified as occluded include personal statements (Ding 369), tenure reports (Hyon 176), and letters of recommendation (Precht 242), some of which may be part of a larger cluster of occluded texts contributing to hiring, promotion, or tenure decisions. Yet another occluded genre cluster is that associated with the publication of research articles (RAs) (See Fig.1).

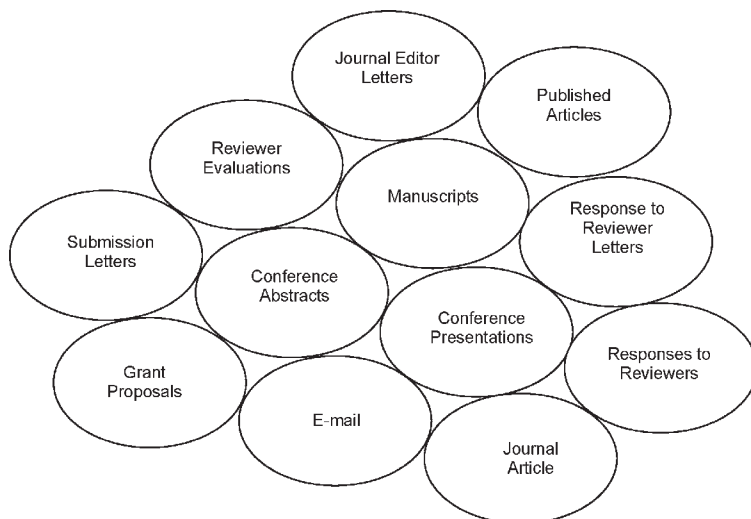


Figure 1. A Possible Publication Genre Cluster.

1.1. THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Peer review is a “resource intensive process” that relies on the efforts of unpaid, expert volunteers to evaluate manuscripts submitted to a journal for publication (Jefferson, Wager, and Davidoff 2790). As a gatekeeping activity, peer review has been part of the journal publication process for over 200 years and has “achieved near universal application” (Jefferson et al. 2787) among journals. While there is some variation in how journals conduct peer review, most aspects of the process are similar from one journal to the next. The review process begins when an editor receives a manuscript, at which point there may be a “desk rejection”,¹ perhaps

¹ Desk rejection practices vary according to discipline. While in the humanities only roughly 10% of journal editors accept or reject manuscripts without peer review, in medicine editors likely review all manuscripts (Mulligan 137).

based on a reading of the abstract alone (Swales and Feak 2). Reasons for desk rejection include excessive length, a topic of little current interest, and, most important, a poor fit between the content of the submitted manuscript and the focus of the journal (Shugan 592). Top journals, such as *Nature*, reject nearly 60% of manuscripts without further review (Greaves et al. n. pag.). If a manuscript survives this first stage, it is then sent to typically two or more reviewers, ideally experts in the specific content area of the manuscript, chosen by the editor “to comment anonymously and confidentially” on the merits of the paper (Greaves et al. n. pag.). Manuscripts may undergo double-blind review (the manuscript author and the reviewers’ names are not revealed), anonymous review (the author’s name is known to the reviewers, but the author does not know the reviewers’ names),² or transparent review (the manuscript author and the reviewer names are revealed) (Fortanet 27). The manuscript is evaluated by the reviewers, often based on a set of criteria or questions provided by the journal, prompting the reviewer to consider such aspects as potential interest among journal readers and the contribution of the work to the field. After considering the reviewers’ comments and recommendations, the editor then decides whether to accept the manuscript as is or with minor revision (very rare) (Jackson 908); reject (the decision for 90% or more of papers submitted to some journals [Miller and Harris 76]); or “invite” the author to revise and resubmit (with the likelihood of a review of the revised paper).

While most authors would like to have their work accepted as is or with only minor revision, most papers that are eventually published fall into the “revise and resubmit” category. An invitation to revise is not a guarantee of publication; rather it is an indication that the manuscript has the potential to be published, if it can be sufficiently improved to meet the expectations of the reviewers and editor. Upon receipt of the reviewers’ and editor’s comments, the author must decide whether to pursue publication in light of the commentary or withdraw the paper from further consideration, a decision that depends on whether the amount or nature of the revision is deemed reasonable, feasible, or worthwhile. If the author chooses to revise, the revision is eventually again submitted along with a response that outlines how the manuscript was revised. This response along with the revised article is generally sent to the original reviewers who re-evaluate the manuscript.

In order to successfully revise their manuscripts, authors who receive a “revise and resubmit” evaluation must, of course, understand the motivation underlying the comments and the exact nature of the changes being suggested (Gosden, “Give” 88). Overall, the editor’s goal in obtaining reviewer comments on these papers is to improve their quality and maintain the quality of the journal (Belcher 4). To this end, the one section of the RA that receives the greatest scrutiny is the discussion of the study findings. Gosden (“Give” 93), for example, found that nearly one-third of all reviewer comments focused on that section of the papers in his study. The next largest group of comments focused on technical details (confusion,

² Authors who are well known can often be identified despite blinding (Justice et al. 240).



errors, or insufficient detail therein), followed by questions regarding claims. References are also sometimes the target of questions, while formatting and organization less so.

Other studies of reviewer reports have characterized the discourse of gatekeeping as contentious (Gosden, “Thank” 5) and questioned the effectiveness and the fairness of peer review (Belcher 4). Still others have examined reviewer reports with a view toward helping researchers understand and interpret them (Fortanet 29; Gosden, “Thank” 88). While these studies have raised some very interesting issues in relation to peer review, the reviewer report is only one text in the genre cluster connected with the review process. Indeed, other texts relevant to the peer review process include the submission letter and more important the author’s response to the reviewer comments. Although this latter text may be considered secondary to the more central task of writing the RA, the response is nonetheless a significant part of the publication process as it can and does influence the likelihood of publication. General advice as to how to respond to reviewers’ comments can be found by searching the Internet or reading the author guidelines of some journals. Typically, this advice encourages authors do the following in their responses.

- Thank the reviewers and editor for their efforts.
- Respond to each point raised by the reviewers and editor.
- Indicate clearly how each point has been addressed.

Also, authors are reminded that their responses should be viewed as a polite conversation with the reviewers and editors in which changes are negotiated and discussed in a polite, professional manner (Benfield and Feak). Indeed, it has also been suggested that getting published involves a dialogue between reviewers and authors (Gosden, “Thank” 10). In the end the process is really all “about relationships and courtesy is appreciated” (Emerald Group Publishing).

While the recommendations are useful as an initial starting point, how they should in fact be implemented remains unclear. For instance, at a macro level the recommendations do not provide guidance regarding the extent to which a manuscript author should adopt the reviewers’ and editor’s suggestions for change. At a micro level, the recommendations give no indication of the characteristics of a good or adequate response to a comment. This lack of specific guidance to authors suggests the need for research that can shed light on the construction of these texts with a view toward providing assistance to those unfamiliar with their varied communicative purposes (Gosden, “Give” 88; Cargill and O’Connor 215). Indeed, as Gosden (“Thank” 4) points out, novices are at a disadvantage when expected to write a response to reviewer comments.

To address this need, this paper describes some preliminary research on the author response to reviewers (ARR). The focus of this research is a corpus consisting of ARRs written in connection with papers submitted to a top journal in thoracic surgery. Drawing from this small corpus of ARRs, this paper will discuss the place of ARRs within the RA genre network, propose a move structure, examine



some of their salient linguistic features, and offer some comparison of ARR's written by authors of different academic cultures.

2. THE CORPUS

The corpus is a subset of a larger collection of manuscript “jackets” (files) of published papers on a subspecialty of thoracic surgery that were submitted to the *Annals of Thoracic Surgery*³ between 1997 and 1998. The manuscripts, all of which were eventually published, originated from medical institutions in Anglophone and in non-Anglophone countries. The files include all letters, manuscript drafts, and reviews produced in connection with those manuscripts and were generously made available to the author for the purposes of preparing materials for a series of workshops on writing for publication in thoracic surgery. The corpus analyzed for this study consists of all (N=16) ARR's connected with published articles that were first submitted in 1997, but not necessarily published in that year. Of the 16 published articles 6 were submitted from Anglophone countries (3 from the United States; 2 from Canada; 1 from Australia). The remaining ten papers originated from institutions in the following countries: Japan (4), Taiwan (1), Austria (2), France (2), and the Netherlands (1).

3. ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

A cursory analysis of the ARR's pointed toward some potential categories that might reveal a move structure: greeting, expression of gratitude, response to reviewer comments, statement regarding “publishability”, statement regarding willingness to make further changes, and close. A closer analysis revealed, however, five approaches to responding to reviewers. Some ARR's are letters that include within the body author responses to the reviewer comments; some ARR's consist of a cover letter and a separate list of all responses to the reviewers; others are a hybrid in which some author responses are in the body of a letter (usually those to the editor and/or those addressing points easily dealt with such as shortening the title) and some responses in a separate list; finally some responses are merely lists with no accompanying letter and in this corpus one ARR was a resubmission letter with no clear response to any reviewer or editor comments. Given the differences and the small sample, a defensible move structure cannot be proposed. Nonetheless, it is still interesting to look at how the different ARR's that included letters were struc-

³ “*The Annals of Thoracic Surgery* provides outstanding original coverage of recent progress in chest and cardiovascular surgery and related fields. As the official journal of two of the largest American associations in its specialty, this leading monthly enjoys outstanding editorial leadership and maintains rigorous selection standards.” (<http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505747/description#description>).



tured. Table 1 shows the different kinds of responses along with the number of exemplars for each.

TABLE 1. RESPONSE STYLE

| | ANGLOPHONE (N=6) | NON-ANGLOPHONE (N=10) | TOTAL (N= 16) |
|--|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Letter including responses to reviewers | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| Letter (with no responses to reviewers) + separate list | | 1 | 1 |
| Hybrid (letter including some responses and separate list) | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| No letter —list of responses only | | 2 | 2 |
| Letter only with no discussion of reviewer comments | | 1 | 1 |

The choice of format seems to be largely dependent not so much on the number of actual changes made, but the nature of the requests for change. For ARR that included the response in the body of the letter, the number of changes addressed in the Anglophone letters ranged from 6-21, while for the manuscripts from non-Anglophone writers the range was from 6-14. Most of these changes were straightforward, focusing mainly on shortening the text, title, and abstract; reducing the number of citations; adding details on patients; changing figures; or rewording statements identified as being unclear. In many cases the responses consisted of as little as one word such as *done* or at most 3 sentences. As revealed in the Table, the majority of letters from Anglophone institutions were complete letters, suggesting that the manuscript authors had no significant changes to make to their texts.

The reasons for the choice of letter with a separate list or a hybrid could not be determined. However, for these two formats, authors wrote at least one lengthy response to a reviewer comment in the separate list, ranging from 5 to 12 sentences. The hybrids differed from the letter with list response in that the hybrids dealt with the more superficial or seemingly easy changes addressed in the body of the letter (similar to those found in the letter only form). Thus, in the body hybrid letters dealt with such issues as formatting, reductions in abstract or paper length as well as the number of references. More substantial issues, for instance why patients were not prone to developing a particular complication (i.e. air leak) were dealt with in the separate list. In regard to the last two approaches, why one author addressed no reviewer comments directly and why two authors wrote no cover letter for their lists of responses cannot be determined from the corpus.

Tables 2-4 show the organization of the three different types of response letter.

TABLE 2. LETTER WITH RESPONSES TO REVIEWERS IN BODY

| | ANGLOPHONE (N=5) | NON-ANGLOPHONE (N=3) |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Greeting | 5 | 3 |
| Opening | | |
| Statement of thanks | | |
| For revise and resubmit decision | 2 | 2 |
| For editor and reviewer comments | | 1 |
| Administrative | | |
| Enclosures* | 3 | 2 |
| Revision activity | 1 | 2 |
| Identification of manuscript by title | 4 | 2 |
| Identification of journal | 1 | |
| Response | | |
| Announce response | 2 | 1 |
| Explanation in relation to editor comments | 1 | 1 |
| Discussion of reviewer comments | 5 | |
| Agreement with reviewers | 6 | 3 |
| Disagreement with reviews | 3 | 2 |
| Closing | | |
| Discussion of other business | | |
| Improving figures | | 1 |
| Other papers submitted | 1 | |
| Statement that paper is ready for publication | 2 | |
| Statement of hope that paper is ready for publication | 3 | 2 |
| Statement of thanks | | |
| For revise and resubmit | 1 | 1 |
| For editor and reviewer comments | 2 | |
| Letter close | 5 | 3 |

* Note: All of the manuscripts were submitted in hard copy since electronic submission was not possible at the time.



TABLE 3. LETTER AND SEPARATE LIST OF COMMENTS INCLUDED
(NO SUCH LETTERS FROM ANGLOPHONE INSTITUTIONS)

| | |
|---|---|
| Greeting | 1 |
| Statement of thanks/gratitude | 1 |
| For revise and resubmit decision | 1 |
| For editor and/or reviewer comments | 1 |
| Administrative | |
| Statement regarding purpose | 1 |
| Enclosures* | 1 |
| Identification of manuscript by title | 1 |
| Identification of journal | 1 |
| Closing | |
| Statement of hope that paper is ready for publication | 1 |
| Statement of thanks | 1 |
| For revise and resubmit | 1 |
| Statement about further revision | 1 |
| Letter close | 1 |

* Note: All of the manuscripts were submitted in hard copy since electronic submission was not possible at the time.

TABLE 4. HYBRID

| | ANGLOPHONE INSTITUTIONS (N=1) | NON-ANGLOPHONE INSTITUTIONS (N=3) |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Greeting | 1 | 3 |
| Opening | | |
| Statement of thanks | | 2 |
| For revise and resubmit decision | | 2 |
| For editor and reviewer comments | | 2 |
| Identification of manuscript | 1 | 3 |
| Identification of journal | | 1 |
| Response | | |
| To editor | | 2 |
| Simple changes | 1 | 3 |
| Closing | | |
| Statement that paper is ready for publication | | |
| Statement of hope that paper is ready for publication | 1 | 1 |
| Enclosure (reference to list)* | 1 | 2 |
| Letter close | 1 | 2 |

* Note: All of the manuscripts were submitted in hard copy since electronic submission was not possible at the time.

Based on the data available, it seems a typical ARR would look something like this.

Dear Dr. _____

Thank you very much for your invitation to revise and resubmit our manuscript entitled PAPER TITLE. We have revised the paper in accordance with your comments and those of the reviewers. Specifically, we have done the following.

1. Explanation of how suggestion for revision was handled
2. Explanation of how suggestion for revision was handled
3. Explanation of how suggestion for revision was handled

(Alternatively: The changes are detailed in the separate list)

We hope that we have adequately addressed your concerns and that the paper is now ready for publication.

Sincerely,

Some tentative conclusions can be drawn from Tables 2-4 above. First, most authors include the titles of their papers in their ARRs. This, of course, is a great help to the editor as well as the original reviewers, who cannot be expected to remember which paper was written by a particular author, given the number of manuscripts they regularly deal with. Also, as indicated by Gosden ("Give" 11), an expression of thanks (either for the reviews themselves or the opportunity to revise and resubmit) seems to be part of professional etiquette. Interestingly, only one author, whose letter organization is given in Table 2, clearly indicated a willingness to make further changes to the manuscript, if necessary. Finally, disagreement with the reviewers is acceptable and will not prevent publication.

4. RESPONSE STYLE

Authors fashioned their specific responses to review comments in a variety of ways. As shown in Table 5, few authors elected to respond separately to the editor's commentary, which was present in the editor's decision letter. All but one of the responses from an Anglophone institution, but none from non-Anglophone institutions, were mixed, meaning that some responses were directed at a specific reviewer, while others were not targeted. Authors from non-Anglophone institutions instead opted to respond to each reviewer separately or respond on no one in particular.

While responding separately to each reviewer and his or her comments may initially seem like a good strategy, in two cases this resulted in responses of over 10 pages (nearly as long as the submitted article) that failed to synthesize comments. For instance, in one case three reviewers raised the same question regarding the medical procedure. Rather than responding to this concern once, the author did so three times. This lack of synthesis resulted in a tedious, repetitive response.



TABLE 5. RESPONSE STYLE

| | ANGLOPHONE SUBMISSIONS | NON-ANGLOPHONE SUBMISSIONS |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Separate response clearly directed at editor's comments | 1 | 2 |
| Separate response to each reviewer's comments | | 5 |
| Mixed Response (select responses to individual reviewer comments and responses not directed at any particular reviewer or the editor) | 5 | |
| No responses directed at any particular reviewer | 1 | 5 |
| Restatement of reviewer or editor request for change | 2 | 4* |
| Percent of restatements in relation to total number of comments from all reviewers | | |
| 10% or fewer | 2 | 2 |
| approximately 50% | | 1 |
| approximately 75% | | 1 |

* In one paper all nine of one reviewer's comments were restated, but no comments from other reviewers.

Six of the sixteen authors opted to restate the concerns of the reviewers, a strategy which is quite helpful in clarifying what was changed and why. Restatement was reserved for issues that could not be resolved with a simple change such as questions regarding the interpretation of the results or the process of determining the severity of disease. In the restatements, the preferred approach was to reformulate the concern rather than to quote directly. For instance, if in the original review the reviewer stated that “the discussion is too long and wanders,” the author would write in the response, “Reviewer 2 thought that the discussion should be shortened and have a better focus.” Such reformulations are helpful in understanding how a suggested change was understood and how the manuscript was revised.

As Table 6 shows, the authors that restated chose the hedged performative verb *suggest*, as opposed to the more forceful *insist*, one-third of the time. Also used were cognitive verbs such as *believe*, *think*, and *wonder* in addition to reporting verbs.

Two of the six authors from Anglophone institutions and three of the ten from non- Anglophone institutions accepted all of the suggestions for change to their manuscript. As indicated in Table 7, the remaining authors rejected at least one suggestion; however, no author rejected more than three of the reviewer recommendations. All authors who responded to the reviewer comments complied with the editor's personal requests for revision, indicating that editor requests are typically not ignored.

Rejection of a recommendation, whether in an ARR or other kind of interaction, is not always easy. Given the importance of politeness in ARRs (Benfield and Feak), one might expect that authors would take pains to carefully explain why a recommendation was not taken up in the revision, perhaps following the last two of Leech's Maxims in doing so (32).

TABLE 6. RESTATEMENT STYLE

| | ANGLOPHONE | NON-ANGLOPHONE |
|---|------------|----------------|
| Reformulation | 2 | 2 |
| Quote | | 2 |
| Verbs in restatement (author characterizations of reviewer comment) | | |
| Believes | 1 | |
| Suggested | 1 | 2 |
| Thinks | 2 | |
| Mentioned | | 1 |
| Stated | | 1 |
| Wonders why | | 1 |

TABLE 7. REVISION ACTION TAKEN

| | ANGLOPHONE | NON-ANGLOPHONE | TOTAL |
|---|------------|----------------|-------|
| Some suggestions rejected | 4 | 7 | 11 |
| Suggestions accepted* | | | |
| Clear indication that a change was made | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| Unclear indication that a change was made | | 2 | 2 |

* Note: recall one author did not respond to comments, but merely submitted a revised manuscript. This author's letter is not included in the data here.

Politeness: Leech's Maxims

- Tact maxim: minimize the imposition or the cost to the other;
- Generosity maxim: minimize the benefit to yourself (don't emphasize how much you will personally benefit);
- Approbation maxim: minimize dispraise (i.e. criticism) of others;
- Modesty maxim: minimize praise of self;
- Agreement maxim: minimize disagreement between self and others;
- Sympathy maxim: minimize antipathy (i.e. bad will) between self and others; pay attention to the hearer's interests, wants and needs

When rejecting a reviewer's recommendation, two of the authors from Anglophone institutions and four from non-Anglophone institutions restated the reviewer's comment before explaining why the change was not made. Explanations varied considerably.



- (1) Comment: *Further details on the surgical procedure should be provided.*

Author response: The reviewer is welcome to come and observe the procedure at our institute.

- (2) Comment: *VATS lobectomy does not necessarily offer better pulmonary function.*

Author response: We disagree.

- (3) Comment: *I would suggest some further discussion on the benefits of VATS.*

Author response: The advantages of VATS have been very well documented elsewhere. Such a discussion would add to the length of the paper, which reviewer 2 has suggested reducing. We have added one reference that explores the advantages, but have not changed the text otherwise.

- (4) Comment: *I do not see how the authors can conclude from the data that posterolateral thoracotomy should be avoided. Studies have shown that the procedure does not result in a greater number of post-operative complications.*

Author response: The reviewer has obviously misunderstood our point here. We do in fact state that there were no significant differences in the posterolateral thoracotomy group and the VATS group. We do, however, believe that overall VATS is a better procedure.

- (5) Comment: *A cost-benefit discussion would enhance the paper considerably.*

Author response: We agree that a discussion of cost-benefit would indeed be informative. Such information would allow others to better evaluate the benefits of the new procedure. However, such a discussion would really need to be undertaken in a separate paper given the scope of the issue. For our purposes here, then, we have added an algorithm that roughly provides a sense of the costs.

While an in-depth discussion of politeness is not possible here, it does seem that the author responses in examples 1-3 have violated Leech's maxims of agreement and sympathy. The response in example 4 could also be considered a violation of these same maxims because of the use of *obviously*, which portrays the reviewer in a negative light. Example 5, however, is noticeably different and may be viewed as a rather polite rejection since it first begins by agreeing with the reviewer and acknowledging the value of the suggestion. The use of *however* signals that the author may not comply, but at the end does offer a small revision in the direction suggested by the reviewer.

For some requests for change, it was unclear whether any change had been made. The unclear status of the request was generally associated with a particular



kind of reviewer comment —questions. Four of the authors from non-Anglophone institutions seemed to not recognize that reviewer questions were signals that a revision was necessary or being suggested. The authors answered the questions in their responses, but did not indicate that a change was made. For example, one reviewer asked, “were there any cases of prolonged air leak?” The author gave several paragraphs explaining why there were no cases, but, perhaps due to misinterpretation or inexperience, did not indicate whether this had been included in the paper. While the explanation is helpful, the reviewer likely expected the author to either add this information to the paper or explain why adding the explanation was unnecessary.

5. LANGUAGE OF THE RESPONSE

Since novice authors often have questions regarding sentence level aspects of their responses, I thought it would be worthwhile to look at some of these aspects of the ARR letters. For example, novice authors often have questions in terms of the use of I/we and tense. It was somewhat surprising to see that the ARRs from authors at Anglophone institutions were less likely than authors in non-Anglophone authors to use first person in their correspondence, as shown in Table 8. Another interesting difference between the two groups here has to do with verb forms. While the authors from Anglophone institutions had a strong preference for present and present perfect, those from non-Anglophone institutions tended more toward using present perfect and past. In terms of grammar or correctness, this difference does not matter, but it is interesting that the authors from Anglophone institutions clearly have a very “present” time orientation towards their texts and the publication process.

TABLE 8

| | SUBMISSIONS FROM ANGLOPHONE INSTITUTIONS | SUBMISSION FROM NON ANGLOPHONE INSTITUTIONS |
|--|---|--|
| First person only in opening and close of cover letter | 3 | 2 |
| Response to reviewer comments | | |
| First person used once or more | 3 | 8 |
| Voice | | |
| Passive only | 3 | 2 |
| Mixed active/passive | 3 | 10 |
| Passive majority | 0 | 4 |
| Active majority | 3 | 6 |
| Verb tense and aspect | | |
| Present | 4 | 2 |
| Present Perfect | 6 (1 exclusively) | 5 |
| Past | 2 (1 exclusively) | 8 (3 exclusively) |
| Future | | 1 |
| Linking As-Clauses | 4 (used 2 or more times in each of the papers) | 2 (one instance in each of the papers) |



Finally, two of the six ARR from the authors chose a variety of verbs in detailing the manuscript revisions. The combined number of verbs totaled over 100. Interestingly, as shown in Tables 9 and 10 the authors from Anglophone institutions used fewer different verbs (15) than did those from non-Anglophone institutions (27 different verbs) and they used the verbs designating revision activity with greater frequency. Only four verbs were used by both groups (see Table 11).

TABLE 9. VERBS OF REVISION ACTIVITY

| | ANGLOPHONE NUMBER OF USES |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Added | 6 |
| Now included/included | 5 |
| Shortened | 4 |
| Altered | 2 |
| Corrected | 2 |
| Explained | 2 |
| Has been left | 2 |
| Removed | 2 |
| Now specify | 2 |
| Defined | 1 |
| Described | 1 |
| Now listed | 1 |
| Redone | 1 |
| Reduced | 1 |
| Summarized | 1 |
| TOTAL | 33 |

Notes: No present tense; either past tense or present perfect, except for *specify* (We now specify the number...) and *include* (This information is now included).



TABLE 10. VERBS OF REVISION ACTIVITY

| NON-ANGLOPHONE (N=10) | COUNTRY | SUBMISSIONS | NUMBER OF USES |
|-----------------------|---------|-------------|----------------|
| Changed | | | 25* |
| Added | | | 17 |
| Omitted | | | 14 |
| Revised | | | 8 |
| Shortened | | | 7 |
| Deleted | | | 6 |
| Rewrote | | | 3 |
| Corrected | | | 2 |
| Did not split | | | 2 |
| Will be written | | | 2 |
| Now Included/included | | | 1 |
| Removed | | | 1 |
| Discussed | | | 1 |
| Compared | | | 1 |
| Elected to omit | | | 1 |
| Simplified | | | 1 |
| Better identified | | | 1 |
| Addressed | | | 1 |
| Detailed | | | 1 |
| Eliminated | | | 1 |
| Further elaborated | | | 1 |
| Modified | | | 1 |
| Rephrased | | | 1 |
| Verified | | | 1 |
| Renamed | | | 1 |
| Reworked | | | 1 |
| TOTAL | | | 77 |

Notes: No present tense; either past tense or present perfect.

*One author used *changed* 17 times in the response.



TABLE 11. VERBS OF REVISION ACTIVITY USED BY BOTH GROUPS

| | ANGLOPHONE | NON-ANGLOPHONE | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------|-------|
| | Number | | |
| Added | 6 | 17 | 23 |
| Shortened | 4 | 7 | 11 |
| Now included/included | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| Removed | 2 | 1 | 3 |

Notes: No present tense; either past tense or present perfect, except for *include* (This information is now included).

A categorization of the different verbs offers some insight into the nature of rewriting for publication as well as some suggestions for verb choices in writing an ARR.

- Verbs associated with writing and non-specific revision activity: address, alter, change, modify, redo, revise, rewrite, rephrase, rework.

The discussion was revised in response to questions regarding choice of therapy.

- Expansion: add, include, now listed.

We have now included the discharge radiation instructions.

- Reduction: shorten, remove, reduce, omit, elected to omit, delete, simplify, eliminate.

The title has been shortened.

- Clarification: explain, specify, define, describe, simplify, compare, better identify, discuss, further elaborate, detail, rename.

We have explained the factors underlying poor pulmonary function.

- Non-specific revision activity: alter, redo, change, modify, address.

The tables have been modified to include the number of patients started on ETMV.

- Verbs associated with no revision: leave (left), did not split.

We have left all of the references.



6. FINAL THOUGHTS

Given the size of the corpus used in this study, the results should be treated with caution, as they may not be generalizable to other contexts. Also, the categorization of ARR as those from Anglophone and those from non-Anglophone suggests a difference between authors whose first language is English and those who use English as an international language (EIL). One can surmise that in many cases submissions from non-Anglophone institutions are from EIL authors; however, it is equally possible that authors of papers from Anglophone countries use English as a second language. Another limitation is that the publication experience of the authors is unknown. It is likely that experience would have an effect on the shape of the ARR, with more experienced authors being more aware of the need for clarity regarding the changes in the manuscript or knowing that reviewer suggestions can be rejected. Nevertheless, some of the preliminary conclusions can offer some guidance to authors writing an ARR. The ARRs show that author responses are not arguments directed at proving the reviewers wrong. On the contrary, as demonstrated by many of the ARRs, they are more like polite discussion in which professionals can agree to disagree. As such, it is important for authors to recognize the need to attend to both the research content revisions that have been requested as well as the dialogue with the reviewers with whom they are interacting.

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