Language and the Gatekeepers of Academic Publishing

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Language plays an important role in the world of academic publishing. Academics are under increasing pressure to publish in high-profile journals and the nature of scholarly publishing often means that these high-profile journals are English language ones. This presents a considerable challenge to many non-native English speakers as they are faced with linguistic injustice and discrimination and have to work considerably harder than native English speakers to publish in these journals (Hyland, 2016). Native English speaking academics have a natural advantage as they acquire the language naturalistically, whilst non-native English speakers have to invest considerable time, effort and money into acquiring English language skills (Hyland, 2016; Salager-Meyer, 2014). In addition, non-native English speakers often have to hire English language editors to help edit their manuscripts and guide them through the peer-review process, which can be costly and sadly, many academic institutions from developing countries often simply do not have the resources to do this. Writing for publication in academic English is a specialization that takes a considerable time to learn and therefore, non-native English speakers are at a considerable disadvantage. The sense of isolation felt by non-native English academics and researchers, who often live in less developed countries and work at poorly-resourced institutions with small research and library budgets when trying to compete as academics in the international arena, is apparent (Hyland, 2016).

Research suggests that acceptance rates at journals are higher for submissions from countries where English is the native language and countries like the United States and Canada are particularly favoured (Okike, Kocher, Mehlman, Heckman, & Bhandari, 2008; Saposnik, Ovbiagele, Raptis, Fisher, & Johnston, 2014). Furthermore, second-language English academics, who submit articles for publication in English-medium journals often receive vague and unhelpful comments in their reviews regarding their misuse of grammar and improper use of academic English (Hyland, 2016). Reviewers often assume that the authors should be inherently aware of the style of academic English they are referring to and do not provide sufficient guidance that helps prospective authors remedy their mistakes. Peer review is never perfect, however, there needs to be a concerted effort from Anglophone reviewer to provide more concrete feedback to second-language speakers if any change is going to take place. There also needs to be more multilingual scholarly journals, which include languages other than English.

The gatekeepers of scholarly journals must acknowledge the power of language in academic publishing and its ability to reproduce enclaves of inequality in higher education and research. Academic publishing is not just for an elite group of native-English speakers and choosing to publish in your mother-tongue should never be looked down on (Hyland, 2016). In fact, the contributions of academics and researchers from developing countries should be highly valued because they offer expert, insider knowledge on the problems facing the developing world. Their contributions are greatly needed in academic publishing and priority should be given to building a research culture and adequate research capacities in the developing world (Salager-Meyer, 2008).
Psicología Iberoamericana now publishes papers written both in Spanish and English. We are opposed to linguistic discrimination and acknowledge the many challenges Spanish-speaking academics in Latin America face when attempting to publish internationally. We provide support for second-language English speakers, who wish to publish in English with us because we believe in developing our authors.

REFERENCES


