

CAN LANGUAGE EDITING IMPROVE MANUSCRIPT ACCEPTANCE RATES?

An Editage Report





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BACKGROUND

Non-English-speaking countries such as India, China, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil have gradually secured their positions as being among the top global producers of research, together with traditional Anglophone research-producing countries. This shifting demography has been posing tough challenges that are impossible to ignore.

Lack of English proficiency is a major stressor for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) researchers. In the recent Editage Global Author Survey Report, featuring almost 7000 authors' responses on various aspects of academic publishing, a whopping 76% authors reported that they find preparing a manuscript in English challenging, and as expected, authors with poorer



self-reported English proficiency found the manuscript preparation process more difficult. Several respondents felt that they were at a considerable disadvantage as non-English speakers.

Poor language is usually not the primary reason for manuscript rejection by journals; nevertheless, manuscripts from non-English-speaking countries

What respondents said in the Editage Global Author Survey

"I have many experiences to be rejected that only one comment to say 'English is sufficient' [sic] led to a final rejection even if other reviewers made a good evaluation."

"...being a native English speaker means you start the racing far ahead of non-native speakers."

have previously been reported to have higher rejection rates than those from English-speaking countries (e.g., Ehara and Takahashi, 2007).

In a book authored by Editage and published by the Japan Times in 2016, we reported an analysis of 100 manuscripts written by Japanese researchers: we found that incorrect grammar accounted for 49% of writing errors; lack of clarity, for 15%; and incorrect word choice, for 10% (Editage, 2016).

All of these are problems that can seriously affect the readability of research papers and attract negative comments from journals.

Our experience with editing manuscripts written by ESL authors from countries other than Japan suggests similar patterns in grammar and writing errors.

Because of the immense pressure to publish, many ESL authors rely on colleagues with good English proficiency or on professional editing services and often spend considerable time and resources to ensure good language quality in their manuscripts.

Therefore, we examined whether pre-submission editing can improve the acceptance rate of manuscripts written by ESL authors.



WHAT WE DID

We examined the fate of manuscripts that were submitted for editing to Editage under the Wolters Kluwer (WK)–Editage partnership. We compared the percentage of edited manuscripts that were accepted by WK journals with the typical overall acceptance rate of all WK journals combined.

Under this partnership, pre-submission editing services are offered irrespective of which journals authors intend to submit their manuscripts to. For this analysis, we selected only those manuscripts for which

authors had indicated clear intent to submit to WK journals and for which we could retrieve publication data.

The final sample pool comprised 191 manuscripts from the total number of manuscripts edited by Editage under the partnership between April 2015 and June 2018.

We then determined the publication fate of each manuscript. For this, we retrieved the name of the journal in which it was published and the publication date. The details of how this was done are provided in the “Methods” section at the end of this report.



WHAT WE FOUND

Of the 191 manuscripts, 114 (60%) were eventually published in the WK journals of the authors' choice, the remaining being published elsewhere. Further, 103 of the 191 manuscripts (54%) were published in WK journals within 1 year from the time they were edited.

Both these acceptance rates (60% overall, and 54% within 1 year) are considerably higher than the overall acceptance rate (36%) for

manuscripts that were submitted to and published in WK journals in a single year—2017 (Fig. 1; overall acceptance rate for 2017 was provided by WK).

Thus, papers edited by Editage had a 24% greater acceptance rate overall and an 18% greater chance of publication within 1 year, when compared with the average for papers submitted to WK journals.

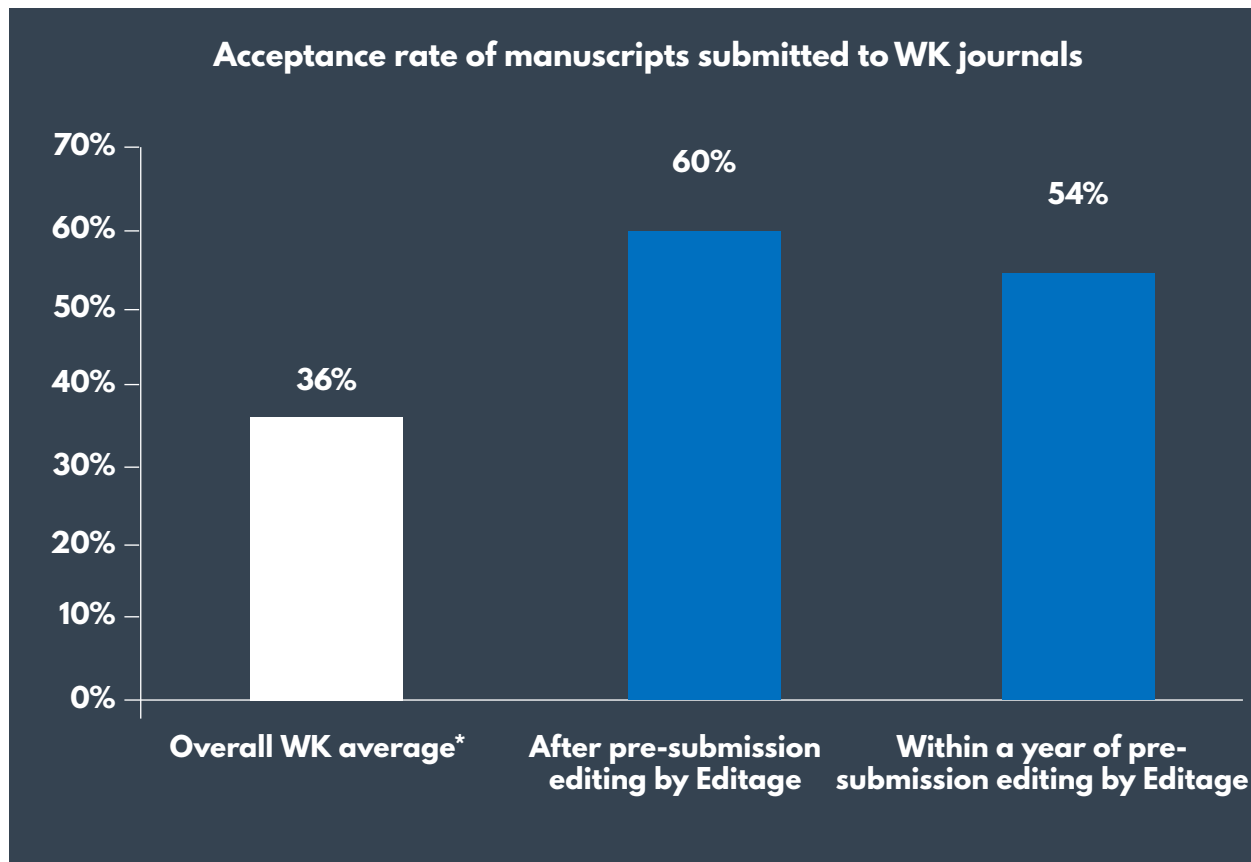


Fig. 1. The acceptance rates of manuscripts that underwent pre-submission editing by Editage are greater than the typical acceptance rate for WK journals.

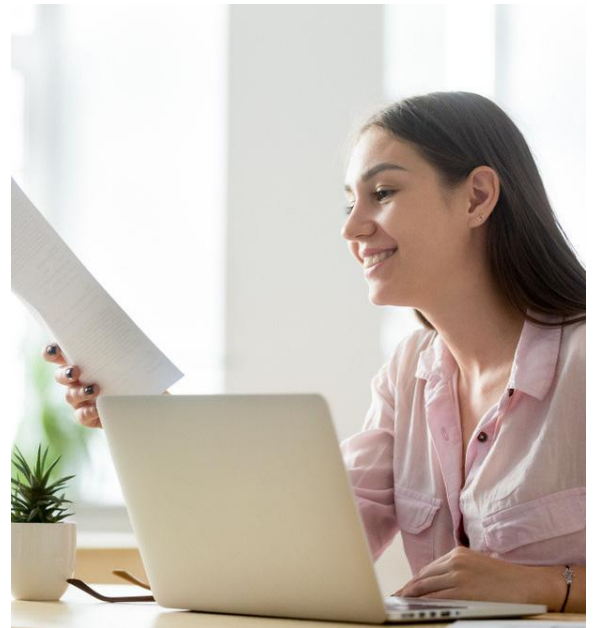
*The overall average is based on manuscript acceptance data provided by WK for 2017.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to our Global Author Survey Report, pressure to publish in high-impact journals is the most urgent issue that authors believe needs to be addressed in scholarly publishing (Editage, 2018).

In addition to this general pressure, ESL authors have to cope with the burden of writing in a language they may not be proficient in. From our experience, we know that poor language is rarely the sole reason for manuscript rejection by journals, but that it is frequently commented on by peer reviewers as an area of improvement in ESL manuscripts.

The subject of the linguistic burden imposed on ESL researchers in the publishing landscape has been receiving much attention and attracting debate in recent years (e.g., Hyland, 2016; Meneghini and Packer, 2007; Politzer-Ahles et al.,



2016; Vasconcelos et al., 2007). Publishers are increasingly considering how this burden can be reduced by providing adequate support to ESL researchers, for example by way of professional editing services.

A previous study showed that professional language editing improves the chances of manuscripts being sent for peer review (Bailey et al., 2015).

Our findings take this claim further and indicate that pre-submission editing can in fact improve the overall readability of manuscripts and in turn increase their chances of eventually getting accepted and published.

METHODS

To determine the publication fate of each edited manuscript, we considered the final title of the edited manuscript and—for measuring acceptance rates—the journal (and publisher) where the author intended to have the manuscript published.

An automated search was conducted through CrossRef for published titles that matched the final titles of the edited manuscripts. Since some article titles might have been slightly modified before submission, we included manuscripts whose titles showed an at least 75% word-level match with the corresponding edited titles.

This cut-off limit of 75% was established after a manual check of the entire main text (in addition to the title) was conducted on a sample subset of 200 papers to confirm the reliability of the automated matches.

Titles with lower match percentages were excluded. For cases with a $\geq 75\%$ title match, we retrieved the names of the journals (and publishers) that published the manuscripts and the dates on which the manuscripts were published.



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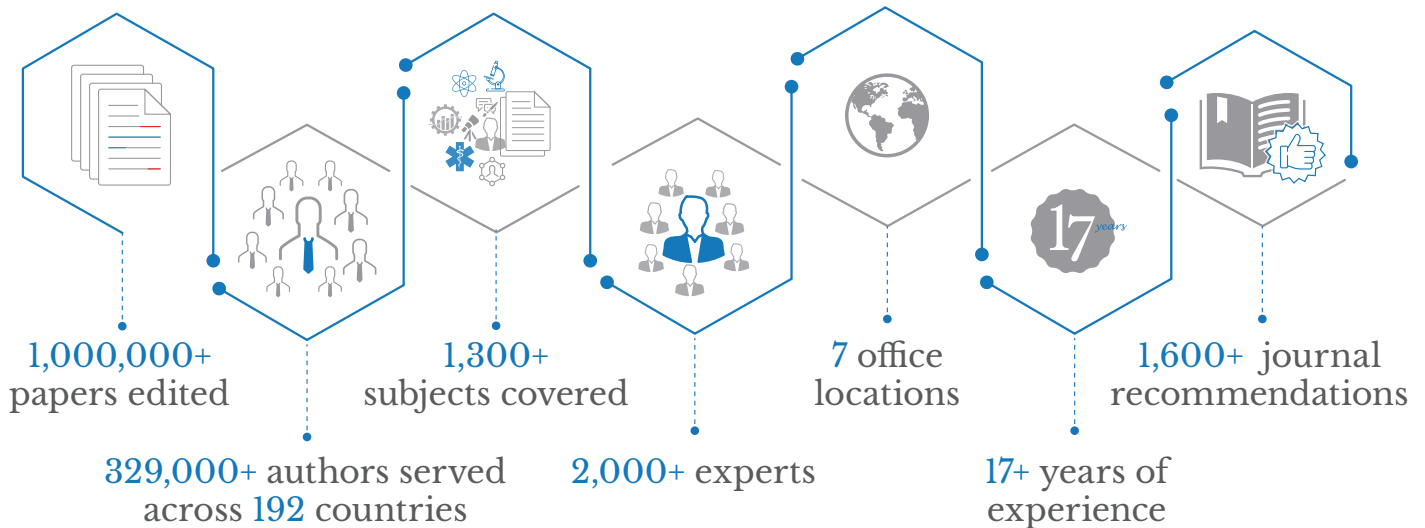
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