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The politics of English, language and uptake

The case of international academic journal article reviews

Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry

The Open University, UK / University of Rochester, US

Drawing on 95 text histories from a longitudinal project on writing for publication in 4 national contexts, this article analyses the language ideologies enacted in referees' and editors' comments on articles submitted for publication in English-medium 'international' journals. It considers how orientations to 'English', 'language' and 'language work' are enacted in practices of reviewer uptake and the consequences of such practices for knowledge production, evaluation and circulation. In exploring evaluation practices, the article problematizes three foundational categories in applied linguistics: (1) The treating of English as a single stable semiotic resource over which the 'native' speaker is attributed a privileged evaluative position; (2) The overriding transparency approach to language and communication; (3) The focus on *production* as distinct from *uptake*.

Keywords: peer review, politics of English, language ideologies, academic writing, uptake, multilingual scholars

Introduction: Applied Linguistics, resistant foundational categories and the study of uptake in 'peer review' of academic journal articles

This paper explores the evaluation practices surrounding a high stakes aspect of academic labour: the production of academic journal articles for publication. In doing so it problematizes three specific 'resistant categories' in Applied Linguistics (AL) (Lillis 2012; see also Introduction to this AILA Review). These are: (1) The treating of English (and other nation-state languages) as a single stable semiotic resource over which the 'native' speaker is attributed a privileged evaluative position; (2) The transparency approach to language and communication; and (3) The focus on production as distinct from uptake. Whilst empirical warrants to challenge these foundational categories and orientations in Applied Linguistics are

increasingly evident in studies of everyday or ‘vernacular’ practices of production and uptake, including, increasingly, the use of new technologies, grassroots political activity and multilingual activity in superdiverse contexts (Blommaert 2010; Lillis & McKinney 2013), they continue to exert a powerful influence in socially prestigious language practices, such as ‘peer review’ evaluations of academic journal articles, the focus of this paper, as well as linguistic analyses of such practices. We argue that continuing to work with/in these resistant categories not only obscures understandings about the nature of the phenomenon (see also McKinney et al. this issue) but has important consequences for reaching understandings about ‘applications’, in this case for how work in AL might lead to recommendations for intervention or action in academic writing for publication.

The paper begins by offering a review of existing work on ‘peer review’, characterising three main foci — evaluative stances, the content of comments, authors and/or reviewers’ perspectives — followed by an overview of the study on which this paper is based. Key tools of analysis used in this paper are introduced — uptake and indexicality — followed by an analysis of reviewer orientations towards ‘English’, ‘language’ and ‘language work’, the focus of this paper. Three text histories are then discussed in detail to explore the nature and consequences of orientations towards English and language work for uptake of articles. The paper concludes with a call to make the politics surrounding orientations towards English, language and language work an explicit focus of debate.

Existing work on ‘peer review’ of academic texts for publication

Many studies, often inspired by the work of Swales (1990), have examined the genre/textual features of published articles (e.g., Aktas & Cortes 2008; Harwood 2005a, 2005b; Hyland 2004, 2005; Shehzad 2006) and, to a lesser extent, related academic genres, such as grant applications (Connor & Mauranen 1999), and journal editorials (Giannoni 2008). This predominantly textualist lens is also employed in much of the small, but growing research literature on ‘peer review’ — what we call ‘post-submission official journal brokering’ (see below) — with the emphasis on analysing the key features of reviewer commentary. A review of research indicates that the analytical goal in existing studies can be categorised in the following ways:

To characterise reviewers’ evaluative stances: Studies examine corpora of reviews to characterise linguistic, rhetorical, and pragmatic patterns of evaluation. For example, Kourilova (1998) identifies ‘patterns of compliments and criticisms’ (p. 108) and evaluative features (politeness pragmatics) among 8 ‘discourse features’ in 80 reviews of medicine articles submitted by Slovak researchers. Fortanet-Gómez (2008a) analyses the linguistic patterns in 50 reviews of applied linguistics

and business manuscripts by Spanish scholars to create a taxonomy of ‘formal and functional features’ of evaluation (p.27), ranking the most frequently occurring (from highest to lowest) as criticism, recommendations, and requests and found minor disciplinary differences. Exploring 95 reviews written for *English for Specific Purposes Journal (ESPJ)*, which he co-edited, Paltridge (2013) uses speech act analysis to categorise revision requests as ‘directions, suggestions, clarification requests and recommendations’ (p.6), with ‘directions’ found to be the most common type.

To characterise reviewers’ comments on content: While a general tendency is to analyse linguistic and rhetorical elements, some studies focus on reviewers’ responses to content. For example, Gosden’s (2003) analysis of 40 reviews written for a natural science journal by 15 Japanese and 25 presumed ‘English native speakers’ (p.91) uses coding categories including ‘technical detail, claims, discussion, references and format’ (p.92). In analysing 33 reviews of 17 articles submitted by Italian medical researchers, Mungra and Webber (2010) found that 56% of the reviewers’ comments took account of article content ‘dealing with scientific data’ such as ‘sampling errors, scientific reasoning errors of own data, incorrect scientific interpretation of other authors’ (p.46). Their analysis also focuses on the 44% of comments about language, using categories of ‘lexis/syntax’ and ‘discourse & rhetorical comments’ (p.47) identifying the most frequent types of the former comments as ‘not well written’, ‘lack of clarity’ and ‘incoherent’, while the latter included reviewers’ ‘observations on text structure pertinent to improving readability’, (p.49), and requests to mitigate claims.

Belcher (2007) explores both “content and tone” (or, ideational and interpersonal features) of reviewer commentary in *ESPJ* (p.6), focusing on 9 ‘submission histories’ (p.5) of accepted and rejected articles by speakers of various languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, English, Spanish) and 29 reviews written by referees with English, Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish language backgrounds. Her analysis indicates that 9 text features elicited the most frequent comments: 8 features address content (i.e., topic, audience, purpose, literature review, methods, results, discussion, pedagogical implications) and the ninth ‘language use (or style)’ (p.7). In overall positive reviews, the category of *topic* received the most attention (72%), followed by *audience* (28%) and *language* (21%); whereas 90% of overall negative reviews commented on *language*, 66% on *methods* and 62% on *purpose*. Likewise taking reviews written for *ESPJ* as data, Hewings (2004) analysed a corpus of 228 reviews to determine which aspects of text received negative or positive evaluations, including both what was evaluated (e.g., the research, the paper, the method) and how (whether negatively or positively). He nests language/style within his overall framework, finding an equal proportion of positive and negative comments in his category of *language, presentation and style*. However, in the category of *expression*, which included evaluative comments on ‘specific wordings’, comments were overwhelmingly negative.

To characterise reviewers' or authors' perspectives: Less common are studies which explore reviewers and authors' perspectives on production and evaluation processes. A number of the above studies use questionnaires to explore authors' and reviewers' perspectives on reviews received or produced. Kourilova's (1998) questionnaire asks for article authors' 'subjective assessment of the reviewer's competence in the given problem area' and 'the nature of the reviewer's comment' (p.108). Fortanet-Gómez (2008b) sent questionnaires to, and conducted semi-structured interviews with, the 'colleague researchers' who had provided the reviews for the corpus she analysed in Fortanet-Gómez (2008a). She noted some differences between 'novice' and 'senior/experienced' researchers' reactions to peer reviews with, for example, novices wishing for more positive feedback, while senior researchers considering negative criticism to be essential (2008b p.12). Finally, it is worth pointing out that researchers who have also been editors of journals such as *ESPJ*, often have insider knowledge of the outcomes of submissions and use these in framing their research and making claims. For instance, Belcher (2007) purposefully sampled submissions to *ESPJ* to include as data both accepted and rejected manuscripts and related reviews.¹

The research base on reviewing practices is relatively small but given the significance of such practices for individual academics, institutions and fields of knowledge globally, it is likely to grow. Now is a good time therefore to critically consider approaches and methodologies used in this field and here we signal several aspects that we consider to be problematic:

1. Research tends to focus on individual reviews, providing taxonomies of features, rather than analysing sets or clusters of reviews relating to each paper and the consequences of these clusters in uptake (for exceptions see Belcher 2007 discussed above; Englander 2009; and Lillis & Curry 2010 and the text history approach we illustrate below).
2. Research overwhelmingly works with a bounded notion of English and invokes a clear dichotomy between 'native' and 'non-native' users of English in classifying journal reviewers and authors, using this distinction as an explanation for differences in reviews.
3. There is often implicit slippage between 'non-native' English users and novice writers/scholars, reflecting a common positioning of multilingual scholar-authors as 'apprentices', and thus positioned as more junior in text production

1. While knowing the language background of reviewers may be salient to understanding the evaluation practices of academic article production, few researchers apart from those working as editors themselves have access to knowledge about reviewers' language backgrounds. As the majority of reviews in our dataset do not include specific information about reviewers' backgrounds this information is therefore not part of our analyses in this paper.

practices. Conclusions reached on the basis of research, therefore, are often framed in terms of their pedagogic or induction value, that is as teaching novice researchers about writing for publication practices. This ideological/interpretive orientation/assumption can — implicitly — mask the contested nature of academic production practices and construe reviewing as a relatively fixed and homogeneous practice.

In this paper we seek to contribute to understandings about academic text production by focusing on post-submission official journal brokering — ‘peer review’ — as one key moment of text production, focusing specifically on orientations to English and language. We quantify and illustrate the significance attached to English and language from across the data set before then exploring three text histories in more detail. Adopting a text history approach involves analysing *sets* of reviews as constituting a ‘reading/evaluation’ and is therefore an important way of exploring overall uptake.

The data on which this paper is based: Exploring evaluators’ comments in post-submission official journal brokering activity

This paper draws on a longitudinal research project, Professional Academic Writing in a Global Context (PAW), exploring the writing for publication practices of 50 psychology and education scholars based in four distinct national contexts, Slovakia, Hungary, Spain, and Portugal. For over 10 years we have collected extensive interview, observational and textual data about scholars’ experiences with, and perspectives on, submitting articles for publication with a focus on English-medium texts. A key unit of data collection and analysis has been the ‘text history’, which involves the collection and analysis of multiple drafts of texts written by participants, correspondence with journal evaluators (see discussion below), and interviews discussing the production of specific texts (see Lillis & Curry 2010 Ch. 1, on the study’s methodology).

A key finding from the PAW project is that the production of academic texts involves considerable amounts and types of ‘brokering’ activity (Lillis and Curry 2006b). ‘Peer review’-comments made by editors and reviewers — is one type of high stakes brokering activity, leading as it does to publication or rejection and therefore to the global circulation of particular kinds and forms of knowledge, as well as having a significant impact on academics’ careers. We refer to peer review as ‘post-submission official journal brokering’ activity to signal: a) that this is one, albeit important, way in which academic text production is mediated and brokered globally; b) to gain analytical distance from the insider-familiar category

of ‘peer review’ (based on our own experience, e.g., as reviewers and as authors) and to adopt an open inquiring stance — to ‘make the familiar strange’ (for ethnographic discussion of this concept see Agar 1996).

As discussed above, only a limited amount of research on evaluators’ comments in post-submission official brokering has been carried out. To a large extent this is because reviewing has been an ‘occluded’ practice, that is, involving texts and practices ‘that are hidden and out of sight to all but a privileged and expert few’ (Swales 2009: 6) and, we would argue, taken-for-granted by academics rather than considered important for critical analysis. This combination of being visible to a privileged few and taken-for-granted can also lead to ethical concerns about who ‘owns’ texts and has the right to share them for research purposes. In our research, most authors viewed the reviews of their manuscripts as their property and willingly shared these with us (most were already anonymised during the review process and, if not, we anonymised; see Lillis & Curry 2006b, 2010).

The 95 text histories that constitute the data set for this paper involve 95 articles submitted for publication to English-medium ‘international’² journals and which have had an outcome at the time of writing this paper (e.g., published, rejected). They are text histories for which we have comprehensive data, including interviews with authors, copies of several drafts of the texts, written copies of reviewers’ and editors’ comments. Of the 95 text histories, 78 are from the field of psychology and 17 from education.

Tools of analysis: Uptake and indexicality

Whilst an obvious point to make, the very existence of journal articles lies as much in their uptake as in their production: if they are not recognised and evaluated as successful articles, they are not published and therefore literally do not come into existence (although this is beginning to be challenged via digitally mediated practices, see e.g. Mauranen 2013). As discussed, studies of peer review have overwhelmingly focused on single reviews, adopting a largely taxonomic approach and thus offering a restricted view of overall uptake. This view is signalled in some work, notably Hewings, who points to the analytic danger of reaching conclusions about reviewers’ practices based solely on the analysis of particular features in single reviews (2004: 268).

2. ‘International’ is a highly contested notion in the context of academic publishing (see Lillis & Curry 2010). In this paper we use it to refer to English medium journals from Anglophone-centre countries, predominantly the United Kingdom and the United States, and distributed worldwide and/or English medium journals listed in indices such as the SCI and SSCI.

The importance of ‘uptake’ has long been emphasised in applied linguistics, with analysts building on Austin’s core work on speech acts (1970). It has been given particular impetus in work on writing which seeks to track entextualisation and re-entextualisation practices, such as studies of applications for asylum (Blommaert 2005), medical certification practices (Berkenkotter & Hanganu-Bresch 2011) and work-based writing (Fraenkel 2001).

How journal articles are taken up affects whether they get into circulation and become part of global knowledge exchange (Lillis, Hewings, Vladimirou & Curry 2010). Analysing what’s involved in uptake is therefore crucial. In this paper we explore one key dimension to uptake in reviewing articles written by multilingual scholars: the attention paid to English, language and consequently, language work. We approach analysis of data with both a referential (or denotational) notion of meaning as well as an indexical: that is, we focus on what is said and referred to — such as ‘English’ — but also more importantly on what is indexed by a reference to English, as evident in reviewers’ orientations to papers overall. Approaching analysis in this way is important for two reasons: 1) all acts of communication produce indexical meaning (see Blommaert 2005: Chapter 4; Lillis 2008); 2) by exploring indexicality and orientation in specific instances it is possible to trace how small and apparently idiosyncratic or inconsequential comments on language reflect and enact specific patterns of uptake in reviewing practices.

The politics of English, the politics of language

Whilst recognising that orientations towards *English* cannot be completely separated from orientations towards *language*, it’s useful to make a distinction in order to tease out how ideologies of language shape uptake in academic article evaluation. In our analysis, in the category of ‘English’ we include all explicit references to English. In the category of ‘language’ we include references to ‘language’, ‘style’ and ‘writing’, which often include clusters of more specific categories such as ‘grammar’, ‘organisation’ and vaguer categories such as ‘oddities of expression’. In quantifying the significance of attention to English or language in evaluations, we have not counted comments which signal that attention has been paid to language or rhetorical issues but where these are clearly backgrounded, through, for example, a list of what are labelled as ‘minor edits’. Rather, we have quantified comments in reviews which foreground language and English as a significant problem, through, for example, being positioned first or second in a list of main issues or through an explicit statement that language/English is a major problem.

The first question to ask is whether English or language figures at all as a significant issue in uptake. Of the 95 text histories (TH) in this dataset, in 58 (61%)

significant problems with the language or English of the text are foregrounded: that is, at least one of the evaluators — the editor and or one or more reviewers — foreground English or language as a significant problem with the article. Of those 58 THs where language or English is foregrounded as a problem, 47 (81%) are explicitly marked as related to English being used as a ‘foreign language’ or by ‘second language users’. Findings from the quantitative analysis therefore indicate that English and language are indeed construed as a problematic issue.

The second question to ask is, what is the significance of the explicit noting of problems with English and language, that is, how do orientations to English and language shape uptake? In the next sections, we illustrate how English and language are marked as problems in comments by reviewers and editors — referred to throughout as evaluators — followed by analysis of three text histories to consider how comments on English and language are nested within the overall uptake of specific articles.

The politics of English

The ideology of English within reviewer evaluative commentary is overwhelmingly one of English as a stable standard semiotic resource. This is most obviously evident in evaluators’ comments on the authors’ use of English, illustrated in the extracts below.

Extract 1: The author is clearly well-versed in this area, but the manuscript needs quite a bit of work on its English grammar and spelling. [TH51 Psych]³

Extract 2: The English language should be improved. [TH95 Psych]

Extract 3: The English has to be revised and worded in a more idiomatic and simple way. [TH66 Psych]

That evaluators are working with a notion of one English, a standard stable English — even if expressed in vague terms as in Extract 3 ‘more idiomatic and simple’ — is also evident in judgements about whether English is the writers’ ‘first’ or ‘second’ language.

Extract 4: The author(s) of the paper are clearly struggling with English as a second language, which is an issue in itself. But there are many statements and assertions in the paper which simply don’t make sense, arguably for logical as well as language expression reasons. [TH48 Psych]

3. The source of data extracts is indicated by TH (text history), the number of TH in our dataset (e.g. 51) and disciplinary field: Psych (Psychology) or Edu (Education).

Extract 5: It needs a language edit. By and large, the paper is scholarly, if a little laboured, which may be the result of second language difficulties, but not entirely. [TH58 Edu]

Extract 6: The writing style is quite deficient, with numerous typos, misspellings, strange uses of grammar, inconsistent style, citations missing from the reference list, and more — it is clear that these problems are not just due to the apparent fact that English is not the first language of the authors (by the way, I respect them for their effort to communicate in English). [Th69 Edu]

Extract 7: There are quite a number of instances in the text where it is clear that English is not the authors' first language. They cannot be blamed for that, of course, but it does make the text difficult to understand at times. [TH78 Psych]

Extract 8: Unfortunately, the writing is still [after revision] unclear and difficult to follow in many sections of the manuscript. I truly sympathize with you because I suspect that English may be a second language. However, the lack of clarity and jumps in logic make it hard for the reader to understand the basic message. [TH28 Psych]

The key orienting frame of authors as 'second' as compared with (usually) implicit 'first' language users of English enables evaluators to make accounts *of* what the problems are and offer accounts *for* such problems — the problems with English are the result of writers being second language users (for 'accounting', see Sarangi & Candlin 2003). However, this framing is not as straightforward as the labels suggest, even to evaluators, as evidenced in the hedging: for example, 'arguably' (Extract 4), 'but not entirely' (Extract 5) and 'are not just due to' (Extract 6) and in the use of vague but negative evaluation descriptors, such as 'laboured' (Extract 5). In seeking to articulate the 'problem with English', evaluators draw on the values of clarity and transparency (most obvious in Extract 8), powerful in scientific discourse (see Turner 2011).

There is also some important face work going on with evaluators seeking to distance their negative comments about English from what might be viewed as criticism of writers. In Extract 6 the evaluator orients positively to the writers — 'I respect' — and in Extract 8 — 'I truly sympathize' — whilst signalling major problems with English; the evaluator in Extract 7 frames this more negatively — 'cannot be blamed' — as if problems with language might be presupposed to be someone's fault. Such mitigating face work in part enables the evaluators to sustain an orientation to English as one monolithic resource.

The orienting frame of 'first' and 'second' language English is carried through to the most commonly proposed solution to identified problems with English, which is to have a 'native speaker' check and revise papers:

Extract 9: It is crucially important that the whole manuscript is proofread and edited by a native English speaker to make sure that all paragraphs convey the authors' intended meaning accurately. [TH83 Psych]

Extract 10: The paper needs to be corrected for English. It has many errors and uses words not appropriate in English. A native speaker should correct the manuscript. [TH75 Psych]

Extract 11: You may want to give your paper to a native English language speaker to language edit it, so that you will be sure that the meaning of what you want to say passes; surely I strongly recommend that you do so. I say this since I have traced some English language expression errors (syntactical or other). [TH13 Edu]

Extract 12: There are numerous small "oddities" in expression that are too numerous for me to fix them — the authors may ask an English speaker to go through the manuscript to fix these. [TH68 Psych]

Extract 13: The paper is weak in two main areas. The first is in terms of its language and style of writing. It comes across to me, and I do apologise if this is not the case, that the paper was written by at least one person who does not have English as a first language. Frequently, throughout the whole paper, there are problems with sentence structure, use of language, choice of words, and hence with the overall meaning of the paper. Hence, the paper would benefit enormously from input (either by co-authoring and/or proof-reading) from someone with English as a first language. [TH53 Psych]

The comments made in Extract 13 echo and underline those in many of the extracts. Firstly, they position English and language as a key problem, as constituted by a cluster of terms: *language, style of writing, English*. Secondly, problems are marked as being of a 'second' language nature, although this is hedged as we discuss below. Thirdly, they include the common recommendation — illustrated in Extracts 9–12 — that such problems be solved by involving a 'native' or 'first language' user of English. But two further points can be illustrated by focusing on Extract 13. The first is the face work surrounding the marking of a text as being written by a second language user of English. The apology the evaluator makes in Extract 13 in case s/he has made a mistake in construing the author (or one of them) as someone 'who does not have English as a first language' is surprising, as if it were an insult to refer to someone as a non-native speaker of English (but see Flowerdew 2008 on stigma and Casanave's 2008 response). Furthermore, such comments — like the hedging of comments discussed above — indicate that whilst an ideology of a standard or 'first' English prevails, reading off features from the text which can be identified as first or second language English is not straightforward, as signalled in the evaluator's lack of certainty: 'It comes across to me,

and I do apologise if this is not the case, that the paper was written by at least one person who does not have English as a first language.’

The third issue arising from Extract 13 and signalled in other extracts relates to what we call ‘language work’, that is, orientations towards the nature of work around language in the production of academic articles and who should be involved in doing it. Most evaluator comments point to the need for additional language work and suggest it be carried out by someone outside of the meaning-knowledge production process. Interestingly, in Extract 13 the evaluator mentions two possibilities for the work of language, ‘co-authoring or proof reading’, a point we return to below.

Of course the framing of the problem of ‘English’ as being resolvable through the involvement of ‘native’ speakers of English is hugely problematic. Firstly, many articles submitted for publication have already involved a ‘native’ English speaker — our research shows that a considerable amount of pre-submission brokering is going on (Lillis & Curry 2006b) often involving users of English as a ‘native’, second or international language. Secondly, the call to involve ‘native’ speakers presupposes that ‘native speakers’ engage with texts in a uniform way, regardless not least of linguistic and disciplinary knowledge/background. In this regard, consider the feature deemed problematic in Extract 14 from an evaluator who calls for a paper to be reviewed by ‘someone who is skilled in English’:

Extract 14: I recommend a careful proofreading by someone who is skilled in English punctuation and word use (especially prepositions). For example ... ‘catered for’ (vs. ‘catered to’) ... [TH63 Edu]

The mention of what we would argue is a trivial distinction between British and American prepositional usage raises questions again about the salience of particular features and how these get marked as problematic. It signals that the problem may not be with a feature in itself (for style or meaning) but rather with what a feature indexes to an evaluator — a paper written by someone using English as a ‘second’ language. How this orientation feeds into overall evaluation and uptake of a paper is considered in the discussion of three text histories below.

The politics of language and language work

Evaluators’ comments in the extracts above enact orientations to language and language work in academic text and knowledge production which are grounded in the European-based Enlightenment tradition of Science and knowledge (see discussion in Lillis & Curry 2010: Chapter 5). Within this frame, as Turner (2011) discusses, language is construed as something necessary for the communication of knowledge but something to see past — as a conduit for meaning rather than

constitutive of meaning — and language use only becomes visible when it is construed as problematic or faulty. Furthermore, language is construed as the possession of an individual, whether the author who has the wrong language (second) or an imagined other who has the right language (first), rather than as a networked resource forged in complex production practices, as we have discussed elsewhere (Curry & Lillis 2010; Lillis & Curry 2006a, 2010). For the most part language — whether labelled ‘English’, ‘language’, ‘writing’ or ‘style’ — is construed as an object governed by shared, easily identifiable and therefore non-contestable conventions. Only rarely does a reference to an evaluator’s personal preference reveal an important aspect to uptake:

Extract 15: Perhaps it is personal preference, but I find the writing style of this/these authors to be very flowery and containing an excess of verbiage. [TH10 Edu]

Such preference is — as in Extract 15 — marked as a personal rather than a social phenomenon and the politics of taste (Bourdieu 1987) are not held up for scrutiny as part of the evaluation process. We consider how this comment is nested within overall uptake in Text History 1 below.

Separating language from meaning enables evaluators to define their responsibility as strictly to do with meaning, and for language work to be the province of others — authors, ‘native’ speakers, proof readers, people we have called ‘literacy brokers’ (Lillis & Curry 2006a, 2010). While evaluators sometimes show sympathy to authors, as indicated in Extracts 6 and 8, they overwhelmingly view language as a reified object — with clearly defined form and boundaries — and language work as the responsibility of authors and others. In exploring how evaluators approach the language work involved in academic text production, we can identify three key orientations, illustrated in Extracts 16, 17 and 18 below.

Orientation 1: Concerned-deficit (It’s your problem)

Extract 16: While it is true that writing in a foreign language is a daunting task, the fact does not absolve the authors from having their work carefully copy-edited by a native speaker of the language in which the paper is written — of course it is unfair to add this burden to researchers who publish in English-speaking journals, but there is no alternative. I do not ever intend to recommend an article for publication which shows signs of being deficient in the language it is written. (emphasis added)[TH82 Psych]

Orientation 2: Concerned-resigned (I’m sorry it’s your problem)

Extract 17: I am very mindful of the fact that writing technically in a language that is not one’s first language must be a difficult task. I am humbly aware that I could not even attempt this myself! However, ... I am afraid, therefore, that it is an absolute necessity that papers are presented with an acceptable standard of English.

from which reviewers and editors can make more minor recommendations for improvement. (emphasis added) [TH83 Psych]

Orientation 3: Concerned-interventionist (It's our problem)

Extract 18: I have decided to move ahead with this manuscript now, and have taken a very careful look at the revision myself, and worked many changes into the manuscript directly. Please do not take offense at the liberties I took. I did so in the spirit of making this manuscript as sharp and influential as it can be. [TH31 Psych]

Extracts 16–18 illustrate three main orientations towards the problems of language work: *concerned-deficit*, as evaluators identify problems with the language but insist that standards need to be upheld, and it is the responsibility of the author to make sure this happens; *concerned-resigned*, whereby evaluators acknowledge the challenges authors face but insist that the standards must be upheld; and *concerned-interventionist*, whereby evaluators construe language work to be done as part of the forging of knowledge production and see this work as a shared responsibility. The most common orientation in single evaluations and in editors' summary evaluations in the 95 text histories is the first. However, in exploring sets of evaluations relating to the same submitted paper, what emerges is a more contested space with all three orientations often indexed across the evaluations.

The politics of uptake: Three text histories

In the previous sections we illustrated the ways in which English and language are foregrounded as a 'problem' in evaluators' comments. However, the significance of such comments in shaping overall uptake is hard to get at analytically and not possible if we only consider comments in isolation from other evaluative comments and overall decisions. We have already signalled the limitation in taxonomic approaches — that they tend to focus on specific features in individual reviews. To contribute to research on uptake, focusing on English and language, we track through evaluators' responses in three text histories in the field of psychology, each of which includes submissions to two journals.

Text History 1: What counts as 'well written' and uptake

This article was written by five co-authors in the field of psychology. The main author was a mid-career academic researching and writing with four junior academics. The main author had 17 journal article publications in English and 13 in the

national language. The article first was submitted to and rejected by one journal then submitted to a second journal where it was accepted.

The initial rejection is stated by the editor in a long covering letter (of some 95 lines) to which are appended three reviews. The decision to reject the paper is stated immediately, saying that the decision is based on the reviews and her own 'careful reading of the manuscript'. What follows are critical comments based on the editor's 'careful reading of the manuscript myself', signaled in her widespread use of the first person 'I' (I think, I felt, I can attest, I have information). The editor's critical comments centre on concerns about methodology, analytic tools used and forms of analysis, and are written in the register of hedged academic commentary ('it seems to place in opposition', 'you seem to assume', 'it seems to me that') with only one emotionally loaded negative evaluation, 'nonsensical'.

In concluding the comments, the editor signals, however, that the paper could be publishable: 'I think it could be, but for me, and two of the reviewers, this would involve significant work'. The nature of this *significant* work is not specified but it is clearly not considered do-able by the editor. As indicated, the editor warrants the decision to reject by referring to comments by 'two of the reviewers'. But in fact only one of the three reviewers signals that considerable work is needed and offers a negative evaluation overall; one reviewer is explicitly positive; and the third reviewer, whilst writing only a brief report (12 lines), points to only one concern and concludes the brief comments with a request for further information: 'Please include a description ...', which signals that this reviewer might have recommended a revision rather than rejection. Using the reviewers' comments to support the editor's decision to reject does not therefore seem warranted by the reviews.

Interestingly, with regard to language or English, no mention is made in the editor's summary letter. Yet language is mentioned by two of three reviewers. Reviewer 1, whose evaluation of the paper overall is positive, opens her/his comments with a positive evaluation of the text.

This is a really interesting paper that touches on an area as yet unexplored. It contributes to the literature of both [XX] and [XX] and is generally very well written.⁴

This reviewer does mention 'some very long sentences that need to be polished' but does not foreground these as a significant problem or nest them in her/his overall evaluation of the writing.

Reviewer 2, in contrast, who evaluates the paper overall negatively, foregrounds concerns about language, style and organization throughout her/his review. Following the 8 opening lines which summarise what the reviewer sees as 'very interesting concepts' in the paper, the reviewer states:

4. Possible identifying features of extracts have been removed.

In order for the reader to make and [*sic*] decisions about these three concepts, the manuscript needs to be reorganized.⁵

Concerns about rhetorical organization, language and style are echoed across the review:

- I found the organization of this manuscript to be very confusing.
- This paper would benefit from significant reorganization.
- Perhaps it is personal preference, but I find the writing style of this/these authors to be very flowery and containing an excess of verbiage.
- The length of the sentence, the multiple embedding of concepts, and the way they “back into” an explanation reduces the “reader-friendliness” of the manuscript.
- This manuscript would benefit from significant editing to present concepts in a more straightforward manner.
- The author(s) also present a lot of redundancy.
- Throughout the entire document you create sentences that are so long that the meaning becomes obscured.

And the review concludes with:

I found numerous problems with language usage and punctuation. Rather than continuing to enumerate these, I would encourage the author(s) to do some extensive editing.

While the editor does not refer to the considerable number of negative comments by this reviewer on language, we suggest that they are likely to have influenced her overall evaluation, as indexed by a) her reference to the ‘considerable work’ needed to be done, and b) the fact that the editor’s decision to reject is not (as she claims) warranted by the reviews.

The paper was submitted to a second journal. The editor’s letter is brief and reports the acceptance decision impersonally, indirectly using the two reviewers’ comments as a warrant for acceptance.

The referees have recommended publication, but also suggest some minor revisions to your manuscript. We would like you to take account of the referee(s)’ comment and revise your manuscript accordingly.

There is no explicit statement of Reviewer 1’s recommendation (although we assume from the editor’s comment that publication was recommended). Whilst Reviewer 1 makes no explicit comments on English or language, some of the comments signal that revision is needed:

5. Our use of ‘*sic*’ indicates that missing words or typographical errors are in the data

I understand that —, however perhaps at the beginning you could —
I appreciate how well the writers describe —, but would like just a bit more on the settings —
I believe somewhere it might be helpful to mention when you begin discussion about —
I am uncertain if you intent [*sic*] to say —

Reviewer 2 opens her/his comments with a congratulations and an explicitly positive evaluation:

I wish to congratulate the author(s) on a well written and engaging paper. I have recommended it be accepted for publication pending revision.

Reviewer 2's explicit praise of a 'well written' paper echoes the praise of Reviewer 1 in journal 1, both of whose comments contrast strongly with the negative evaluations of language by Reviewer 2 in journal 1. Furthermore, here we see evidence not of different views about the language used, as much as different orientations to the language work required. For, the same reviewer in journal 2, Reviewer 2, who states that the paper is very well written also points to language work to be done:

The paper is well written overall. I noticed some errors in surface structure, but I will leave those to the journal's editorial staff and focus my comments on more substantiate [*sic*] issues.

Here the need for further language work is signaled, but: 1) doesn't lead to a negative overall evaluation of the writing; 2) remaining language work is not seen as a significant obstacle as but as work to be done; 3) the work to be done is seen, in part, as the responsibility of the journal. In the next text history the question of where the responsibility for language work lies is also foregrounded.

Text History 2: Language work and uptake

This article was written by two co-authors in the field of psychology. One author was a senior academic with publications including 26 journal articles in English, 4 in the local national language and 2 in a third language; the second author was a junior scholar with one publication in English and 4 in the national language. The article was first submitted to and rejected by one journal then was submitted to a second journal where it was accepted following revision.

The initial rejection by the first journal is stated by the editor in a cover note of 21 lines to which are appended two reviews.

The major problems with the study have to do with the statistical methods — (see Reviewer 1's comments). As Reviewer 1 also points out, it would appear that the data does not in fact support the main conclusions that the authors present in the

paper. This, of course, is a serious issue, as it renders the results at best unclear or inconclusive. Furthermore, the clarity of writing and the English language would require considerable improvement to meet the level expected in this journal.

English is foregrounded as a key problem, with comments on English being in a prominent position in the order of commentary — second only to what the editor sees as a fundamental problem with epistemological and methodological issues — and marked as a concern of almost equivalent importance by the use of ‘furthermore’.

In rejecting the paper, the major warrant for the editor’s claim of insurmountable problems with the statistical method are the comments by Reviewer 1 — ‘as Reviewer 1 points out. Yet in her/his 106 lines of comments, Reviewer 1 does not indicate that the problems identified should lead to a rejection. Whilst listing that there are some problems with the paper, Reviewer 1 in fact explicitly recommends a resubmission: ‘I recommend that the authors ... expand and resubmit their paper’.

In contrast, Reviewer 2, whose comments the editor does not refer to at all, offers 19 lines of commentary which include a negative concluding evaluation: ‘As the data are presented they might just as well be explained by saying that [XX] tend to do the same thing to themselves as they are hoping to achieve in their participants’. Whilst there is no on-record recommendation, we assume from the brief response and the dismissal of the basic premise of the paper that Reviewer 2 is likely to have recommended rejection. Neither of the two reviewers comment on English or language, yet as shown above, English is foregrounded by the editor as a major obstacle to acceptance and is used as one of the two main reasons warranting a decision to reject the paper.

The absence of reviewer comment on English and language significantly contrasts with the reviewers’ comments from the second journal to which the authors submitted the paper. The paper was reviewed by three people, the editor and two reviewers. No explicit statement of recommendation is included in the two reviewers’ comments. The editor opens her/his review with the first of 8 points being a comment on language.

The prose does require editing. Statements are at times unclear and potentially misleading.

This is followed by seven comments on the substance of the paper (e.g., the need for more detailed description of the sample) and two minor edits (e.g., the need to reduce the length of a quotation).

Reviewer 1 opens with a generally positive overall evaluative statement: ‘I found the paper to be both interesting and informative. I applaud the authors for their careful consideration of limitations to their design and the use of corrected

significance levels.’ Reviewer 1 makes one substantive critical comment. No comment is made on English/language.

Reviewer 2 in contrast foregrounds English as a problem, the second item in a list of 11 points.

The English grammar is problematic, and the paper should be reviewed with an English editor. Prepositions are missing at times, and there are some awkward phrases.

And point 4 involves a comment on style:

The language at times seems a bit over enthusiastic (e.g., the [XX] ‘proved to be excellent’). A more scientific tone throughout would improve the manuscript.

Of the 11 points made, some indicate strong concerns about the paper, including about the methodology (e.g., ‘All [XX] sessions are laboratory experimental sessions on healthy volunteers — . Are lab sessions the appropriate place to study a clinical phenomenon? What is the expected generalizability?’) as well as questions about the epistemological principles of the paper and implications for intervention. And the final point of the list involves a negative evaluation overall, echoing the concern with English and linguistic style signalled in previous points:

Overall, this paper was extremely difficult for me to understand and interpret.

Although no explicit recommendation is made, the positive evaluation by Reviewer 1 signals that s/he would be likely to recommend (at least) a revise and resubmit. Reviewer 2 is more negative in evaluation overall and seems likely to have recommended a rejection.

In this instance, the editor accepted the paper and, made substantial revisions using the track changes feature of word processing, sending this version to the authors to approve. The main author was surprised at the amount of time and work the editor put in.

Look at what he did with our manuscript [*laughing*]. The content remained the same but he changed many things — I think this is, as I see it, it is a kind professional help for us because he understood the importance of the paper but apparently was not contented with the style. I think this is a lot of work. So we were very pleased to have his comments and even we offered that we could put his name [on the paper] but he didn’t want this. He said it is his job to do this. (Interview extract)

Given the amount of language work that the editor had done, the authors offered to name him as one of the co-authors but the editor seems to see the language work as his responsibility. Once again we see a range of views across the two journals, with some evaluators foregrounding problems with language and others not. What’s

important in terms of uptake — as in the previous text history — is how evaluators orient to the language work when it is deemed necessary. Whereas problems with English and language are a rationale for rejection in journal 1 (even though reviewers do not comment on language), in journal 2 language work is approached as simply work to be done and, furthermore, work to be done by the editor/journal.

Text History 3: Recognition, language and uptake

The article in this text history was written by a senior psychology scholar and two junior colleagues in his longstanding research group. The lead author had published 25 articles in English-medium journals and 16 articles in the local national language. The article was submitted to two journals: after two rounds of review and revision with journal 1, the authors decided to submit it to journal 2, where it was eventually published. The choice of journal 1 was motivated by its earlier publication of a paper by well-known researchers, whose work the submitted paper aimed to extend. Journal 1's standard practice is of open review — authors' names are known during the review process — though referees' names are not identified. Thus the authors were named on their submitted paper.

Reviewer 1 for journal 1 recommended the manuscript be revised and resubmitted, offering 6 pages of suggestions for improvement, including to differentiate the submission more sharply from the published paper that the authors were seeking to extend. Only one minor comment on language is made: 'p. 3, para. 2., sent. 1: to what results do "these" results refer?' In contrast, Reviewer 2 recommends acceptance, but notes the paper 'needs extensive revisions to improve clarity.' Reviewer 2 makes substantial comments on language, with the second half of his/her report including requests for 'much simpler language' to explain hypotheses and some shifts from passive to active voice. Reviewer 2 makes clear that s/he knows the authors' previous work and indicates that this familiarity helps overcome some of the difficulties s/he faces in understanding the submitted paper:

The manuscript is difficult to follow without first reading [lead author] et al. (2000). After reading the manuscript twice I still had to read [lead author] et al. (2000) to understand the objective of the present study and how it differed from the original study.

Reviewer 2's mention of the authors' work has two important aspects in the uptake of the submitted paper: it signals his/her recognition of the authors as accomplished scholars who had already contributed to the field; and it signals a willingness to look beyond any perceived language problems when evaluating the paper.

Despite the open review process — through which referees knew the identity of the authors and their geolinguistic location — neither of the reports characterises

the authors as users of English as a ‘second’ language. Yet in inviting a resubmission of the paper after revisions, the editors of journal 1 identify the authors as users of a language other than English:

Finally, we wish to stress the importance of close copy-editing before the revision is submitted. Some of the text infelicities may be due to language differences; however others are simply oversights (e.g., page 15 “... socio-political movements in the 18th and 18th centuries”). (emphasis added)

Regardless of how they orient to the authors — as first or additional language users of English — in this TH the editor and reviewers clearly approach the text as work to be done, and do-able, although they see language revisions as the responsibility of the authors.

The authors responded to the reviews and resubmitted the revised paper. After 10 months, the editors invited another round of revision, citing persistent ‘micro level’ problems, including the article’s framing in relation to the published paper mentioned above, and significant concerns about language.

At a micro level, the language still presents a substantial barrier. There is far too much “empty” language, such as “this approach,” “this possibility,” “our prediction,” that requires the reader to make anaphoric reference to concepts introduced sentences and sometimes pages earlier. In addition, the phrasing is frequently stilted and leads to long, difficult syntax.

While language is still marked as an issue, however, the authors are invited to resubmit after another round of revisions.

Despite the option to revise again, the lead author decided to send the paper to a second journal. The reason for not resubmitting to journal 1 is unclear but it seems that after two rounds of revisions the authors felt they might stand a better chance of acceptance if they submitted their paper to journal 2, whose editor the lead author knew well. Journal 2 uses double blind peer review, yet two of the three reviewers recognised the paper as being written by the authors and these reviewers signed their reviews, thus disclosing their identities. Reviewer 1’s recommendation is not included in the reviews but her/his comments suggest a recommendation to revise and resubmit.

Reviewer 1 raised significant concerns about language:

- P. 21, the two paragraphs beginning with Positive effects ... are impossible to understand.
- P. 22–23, it is difficult to understand the last three sections of page 22, beginning with “Many of these” and continuing to the fourth sentence of page 23.

Reviewer 2, in contrast, made no specific comments about language and recommended acceptance of the paper ‘pending revisions’, commenting, ‘The manuscript is too long and it’s [*sic*] focus is not as sharp as it must be.’

While Reviewer 3’s report did not indicate recognition of the authors’ identities, the lead author felt Reviewer 3 had identified him, based on her comments and a self-reference she supplied. He further surmised that she was a co-author of the article originally published in journal 1, which the submitted paper sought to extend. Reviewer 3 recommended ‘accept with minor revisions ... [but not] few in number or superficial in nature’ — nonetheless, her 6 pages of detailed suggestions did not mention language. After responding to this feedback and engaging a language broker — in this case an academic broker (Lillis and Curry 2006, 2010) — to review the text, the paper was resubmitted to journal 2 and was accepted pending minor revisions.

This text history offers a glimpse into uptake in the peer review process of two journals with contrasting review policies: open versus blind. With both journals, it is significant that evaluators recognise a particular scholar’s work and therefore while they are willing to describe significant problems — including issues related to language — language by itself does not act as a warrant for dismissal or rejection. This text history thus highlights the ways that *recognition* functions as a type of social capital (Bourdieu 1985) which may incline reviewers and editors, in their uptake of a manuscript, to orient toward investing work in the development of a paper along a trajectory toward publication.

Conclusion

Our concern in this paper is not that reviewers and editors evaluate the language of academic texts: as Cameron has long since pointed out, we all constantly engage in evaluations or verbal hygiene ([1995] 2012). But what does concern us is that particular evaluative regimes (Lillis 2013) are in play and it is important to understand what these are and how they impact on academic knowledge production, evaluation and circulation globally.

We have emphasised the importance of empirically analysing uptake for understanding academic production practices. What gets produced — in this case written academic knowledge — is the result of interactions around texts and depends on specific instances of uptake. Elsewhere we have discussed how ‘brokers’ in general impact on knowledge production (Lillis & Curry 2010) and here we have specifically explored the evaluative regime evident in post-submission official brokering, focusing on ideologies of English and language. Findings indicate that the ideology of English as a single (rather than multiplex, Blommaert 2010)

semiotic resource is strong, as is the transparency approach to language which is further enhanced by the core values surrounding the evaluation of scientific and academic discourse — clarity and transparency. Within this frame, knowledge and language are construed as two distinguishable objects (Lillis & Turner 2001) which means that in evaluation practices, evaluators can claim to be able: a) to identify problems with language as separate from meaning — ‘the language needs fixing’; b) to identify problems with meaning as separate from language — ‘the meaning needs fixing’. The clear demarcation between language and meaning also enables evaluators to claim that language can be dealt with by those deemed to have the appropriate language knowledge (‘native speakers’) regardless of their specific linguistic or academic background.

We have focused on the uptake of reviewers and editors of scholars’ papers, treating them as equally significant in terms of evaluative voices shaping uptake. But of course editors have a particularly powerful role in shaping overall uptake, including, as discussed, interpreting reviews in relation to English/language to warrant their decisions as well as identifying where the responsibility for language works lies.

At the same time, the text histories illustrate that whilst there is a centripetal pull towards strongly normative evaluative regimes, this is a contested space, with evaluators who consider the same papers both within and across journals differing in how they orient to English, language and language work. Bearing this diversity in mind, it seems appropriate to conclude with a question (unique in our dataset) posed by one reviewer to the editor of a new international journal:

How are you planning to deal with the need for a “lingua franca” version of academic English? To me, this article would need labor-intensive copy-editing throughout. I don’t know how to solve the problem in an international journal without a discussion of whose/which standard. But I’m sure it has to be addressed — hopefully, right up front in an editorial statement in the first issue.

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