

In the Bookstores

Section Editors:

Alison McIntosh
aagmedicalwriting@btinternet.com

Stephen Gilliver
scgilliver@yahoo.co.uk



What Editors Want: An Author's Guide to Scientific Journal Publishing
by Philippa J Benson and Susan C Silver;
University of Chicago Press, 2013.
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-04314-2.
13.00 GBP. 178 pages.

An indispensable guide for PhD students and a treasure trove of resources for anyone trying to get manuscripts published

While other guides focus on how to write scientific papers, *What Editors Want* advises on preparing them for publication. Its authors, Philippa Benson and Susan Silver, identify their target readers as writers, senior researchers, and teachers of science writing (native and non-native English speakers). While it is natural for them to want their book to reach a broad audience, it is individuals taking their first steps into the world of science writing who will benefit most from it. For them, this book is almost obligatory reading.

What Editors Want comprises 12 chapters, the first of which sets out the reason for its existence, correctly highlighting the 'lack of formal training' in preparing manuscripts for publication. The second chapter, *Changing perspective from author to editor*, invites the reader to get inside the journal editor's mind, while Chapter 3 provides guidance on judging whether one's research is ready for publication and if so in what format.

Chapter 4, titled *Authorship issues*, is where things really start to get interesting. The authors provide handy tips, such as agreeing on authorship and author order early to avoid conflict. They also discuss language assistance for non-native speakers and its implications for authorship, as well as challenges non-native speakers face, including cultural issues/differences. They further introduce controversial topics such as guest authorship. Surprisingly, they neglect to mention the ICMJE guidelines on this matter, despite mentioning ICMJE in Chapter 2. Instead, their advice seems to reflect the reality of how authorship is often assigned in practice (i.e. incorrectly).

Choosing the right journal, the book's fifth chapter, invites the reader to write with an audience in mind rather than just writing and deciding later who the audience is for what you have written. Sound advice. This chapter also runs through some of the factors to consider when selecting the journal to send your article to, including turnaround time, the journal's audience and scope, publication costs, and the novelty and importance of one's data. Open access is covered in some detail, with its strict definition and implications for copyright being helpfully explained. Pre-submission inquiries are more briefly highlighted as a means of determining whether a journal is a good fit for your paper.

Chapter 6 is called *Understanding impact factors* and explains what the impact factor can and, importantly, cannot tell us (e.g. the quality of a particular paper or researcher). It also covers some of the drawbacks of impact factors, as well as abuses by editors and alternatives such as the *h* index and Eigenfactor.

How to write a cover letter (Chapter 7) goes through some of the information to include in the cover letter, such as answers to the questions *Why this journal?* and *Why now?* It all seems obvious now, but how I wish I'd had this book when I wrote this rather perfunctory cover letter template as a PhD student:

We offer for your consideration our original research article entitled 'XXXX'. We hope that you will deem it to be of an appropriate scope and standard for publication in YYYY. We look forward to receiving your feedback.

According to Benson and Silver, a good cover letter could include the following: the scientific background to one's study; a summary of the content of the paper being submitted; explicit details of what is new in the paper; and an explanation as to why this new information is important. Mine contains none of this information.

The next chapter is called *Preparing for manuscript submission*, or 'What Editors wish you knew' and covers the bread and butter of manuscript preparation. Great for the novice, but less useful for

the more experienced writer. And it offers some strange advice on text editing services: that 'Knowing the country where your Editors are working will give you a better idea of their language level'. Our own Editor-in-Chief is an American living in Paris; I am a Brit living in Sweden. Would it reassure you as to our ability if we were to go back 'home'? There are plenty of sub-standard writers and editors operating in our countries of origin, and plenty of good ones working in countries where English is not the official language.

Chapter 9, *Who does what in peer review*, covers what is a neglected topic, presenting the different types of peer review and outlining some of the benefits of being a peer reviewer. The authors briefly highlight some of the potential biases and prejudices of editors and peer reviewers, a fascinating topic that warrants a more detailed analysis.

Next up is *Dealing with decision letters*, which among other things offers helpful tips on tricky issues such as disagreeing with peer reviewers' comments and tackling contradictory comments from reviewers, as well as advice on dealing with the media and information on embargo dates.

Ethical issues in publishing is the focus (and name) of Chapter 11, as well as being one of my pet topics. Plagiarism, self-plagiarism, salami slicing, image manipulation, gift authorship, conflicts of interest, unethical behaviour by editors, ethical policies of journals – all are discussed. *How many words constitute plagiarism?* is a question that is pondered but not answered (can it ever be answered?). Problems of plagiarism for non-native speakers are also addressed. Whether plagiarism is more common among non-native speakers is unclear, but it is very easy to spot an elegantly written plagiarised sentence in a paragraph of error-laden text.

The book's final chapter, *Trends in scientific publishing*, is a less than illuminating look into the future. According to the authors' crystal ball, costs and peer review will change in uncertain

ways, and new metrics may be developed. In contrast to the rest of the book, the information in this chapter is all rather vague. In a sidebar, the CEO of an app development company discusses with more clarity the potential of apps in scientific publishing in a contribution that reads like an advertisement.

Each of the other chapters includes one or more equivalent contributions from interested parties (including journal editors and publishers). While they give useful insights, they are also the source of some unnecessary repetition.

What Authors Want is an absolute goldmine of information regarding relevant resources. The 12 chapters are complemented by five appendices, which provide, among other things, links to online resources for improving science writing; a list of textbooks on writing, editing, and publishing; a list of databases offering free access to scientific articles or abstracts; a handy presubmission checklist; and links to websites offering free/cheap photographic images.

A drawback of the book is that in attempting to cover everything, the authors leave themselves too little room to address some topics thoroughly enough. For example, they provide a reasonable amount of general information on copyright and permissions, but not enough detail for it to be of practical use. But, hey, what is there to stop the reader doing a bit of follow-up research?

As an introduction to the world of scientific publishing, this book really cannot be faulted (how I could have done with it when I was writing my first scientific papers). While it is less essential for those of us who require no such introduction, it nevertheless contains more than enough useful info to merit its bargain £13 price tag.

Reviewed by Stephen Gilliver

Science Editor, Center for Primary Health Care Research,
Malmö, Sweden
stephen.gilliver@med.lu.se



Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything
by David Bellos;
Penguin Books, 2011.
ASIN: B005GET42K (Kindle Edition).
5.49 GBP. 400 pages.

An amusing essay on the role of translation in culture, society, and human life

To start with, the title of this book is astonishing and needs to be explained. If you stick one of the Babel fish featured in *'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the*

Galaxy – a science fiction comedy series created by Douglas Adams – in your ear, you will be able to instantly understand anything said to you in any language in the world. This Babel fish, which inspires the title of the book, feeds on brain wave energy and absorbs unconscious frequencies, excreting a matrix formed from conscious frequencies and nerve signals from the speech centres in the brain. In fact, ‘translation’ is such a complex process that it is often thought not to be explainable at all. This book by prize-winning translator David Bellos tries to analyse this process in all its facets and presents complex translation issues to both specialist and non-specialist readers.

So, what is translation? One of the earliest descriptions of a ‘translator’ is given as a ‘turner’ in the ancient Sumerian language. Other languages have defined translation as ‘to bear across or bring over’ (English), ‘to put across’ (German), ‘to lead across’ (Russian), or ‘to turn’ (Latin). Translation involves many concepts that do not fit common definitions of translation, and Bellos’s meditation on the various concepts that individual cultures have developed is illuminating.

Bellos asks the reader whether we really need translation. Indeed, in the introduction he takes us through the most important question concerning translation: What do we need it for? Or, posing the question the other way round, how could we do without translation? Instead of using translation we could learn the languages of all different peoples; we could all decide to speak the same tongue; or we could adopt a common language and simply ignore people who do not speak it. Fairly radical options... Nevertheless, the author gives examples of how these ideas have proved valid in practice and why they have not survived over time. India, for example, is a country where there is no tradition of translation. Indeed, until very recently, nothing had been translated between Urdu, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, or Marathi. The communities speaking these languages simply learned the other languages! But, as the author points out, we live in a world of worldwide communication in which as many as 7000 languages are spoken and no one could learn them all. Some may argue that we could also opt to have a language-free intercultural communication... But I guess that would also be too radical an option!

When discussing whether translation may be avoidable, Bellos points out that one result of the spread of English is that most of the English now spoken and written in the world comes from people who do not speak it natively, making native English speakers a minority. According to

the author, many native speakers of a language tend to think that they are able to understand every word ever written in their own language. However, much of the English in scientific publications written by scientists whose native language is not English is almost impenetrable to non-scientist native users. That is to say, non-native speakers can write good scientific English, but many native-speaking non-scientists cannot understand it. Bellos concludes by stating that as an international language used in many forms around the world, English ‘serves an important purpose – and it would barely exist if it did not serve well enough the purposes for which it is used. It is, in a sense, an escape from translation (even if in many of its uses it is already translated from the writer’s native tongue)’.

In part, this book is the author’s means of demolishing some received ideas about translation. I guess we have all assented that a translation is no substitute for the original – what Bellos calls an example of ‘folk wisdom’. However, he points our attention to the fact that this is exactly what a translation is ‘translations *are* substitutes for original texts’. We use them in place of a book, an article, or a text written in a language we cannot read. If it were not for translations, we would have no knowledge of the Bible and many other world masterpieces. He further points out that the ability to understand both a translation and the original text on which it is based is ‘a basic requirement for anyone who wants to claim that one of them is not the same as, equivalent to, or as good as the other’.

He continues with more folk wisdom and provocation when discussing the ‘paradox of foreign-soundingness’. ‘Where’s the bonus in having a French detective novel for bedtime reading unless there is something French about it?’ he asks. How best should the foreignness of the foreign be represented in the receiving language? Each foreign text has a degree of ‘foreign-soundingness’ to someone who perhaps speaks the language perfectly but does not inhabit it. For example, in German, Kafka does not sound ‘German’, he sounds like Kafka. Nevertheless, to a foreigner who has learned the language but does not inhabit it, Kafka sounds German to some extent, precisely because German is not the reader’s mother tongue. Is it the translator’s task to transmit to the reader their own experience of reading the original as a non-native, i.e. the feeling of foreignness? Only when working from a language with which the receiving tongue and culture have an established relationship is this a real option for the translator.

Then we arrive at a crucial question: What is a mother tongue? Is your language really your own? Considering that your native language is the language of the region you were born in, but not necessarily the region you have inhabited all your life, to speak of a ‘native’ command of a language is just as approximate and, to a degree, misleading as speaking of having a ‘mother tongue’ (i.e. the language spoken by your parents at home).

Bellos gets quite polemic when asking his readers what a monolingual dictionary is for. The implication of the necessity for such a dictionary is that speakers of the language do not know their own language well enough. As if the English – to take an example – were to some degree foreign to their language. Why else would they need a dictionary to explain the words of their own language for them?

The author tackles many questions about translation: What is translation and what can we learn from it? What do we actually know about translation? Do we still need to find out something about it? What do people mean when they offer opinions and precepts about the best way to translate? Are all translations the same kind of thing, or are different operations involved in different kinds of translating? Is translating fundamentally different from writing and speaking, or is it just another aspect of the unsolved mystery of how we come to know what someone else means? As well as addressing these questions, he discusses a number of other interesting topics, including literal translation, formal equivalence, damage caused by translation to other languages, and the impact of

translation, meaning, and automated translation machines.

Finding out what translation has done in the past and does today, finding out what people have said about it and why, finding out whether it is one thing or many – these inquiries take us far and wide. ‘*Is That a Fish in your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything*’ will not give answers to all these unanswerable questions, but it certainly introduces us to the most interesting translation questions of present times. It is an exhilarating meditation on translation as a process, spiced with great and provocative dissertations on common translation concepts. A book to be read by all linguaphiles!

David Bellos is the director of the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication at Princetown University, where he also has a joint appointment in French and Comparative Literature. He was awarded the 1988 French-American Foundation’s Translation Prize and the 1994 Prix Goncourt de la Biographie, and won the 2005 Man Booker International Translator’s Award for his translations of works by the Albanian author Ismail Kadare. In 2011 he published ‘Is that a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything’, which has sold numerous copies worldwide and has been translated into French, Spanish, and German.

Reviewed by Laura C. Collada Ali
 Freelance medical translator and writer
 laura.collada@ontranslation.it;
 http://www.ontranslation.eu



Healthcare Economics Made Easy
 by Daniel Jackson;
 Scion Publishing Ltd, 2012.
 ISBN: 978-1904842941 (paperback).
 15.99 GBP. 119 pages.

An introduction to health economics and health economic evaluation

Healthcare economists use economic tools and ideas to facilitate decision making by healthcare professionals, with the goal of achieving ‘value for money’. Knowledge of the basics of health economics is becoming increasingly important for medical writers, as companies seek to communicate the economic value of their products.

Daniel Jackson is a Senior Research Fellow in Health Economics at the University of Surrey in

the UK. He has worked with the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE; provides national guidance to ensure that high-quality, cost-effective healthcare is available throughout England and Wales) and the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC; provides advice about the clinical- and cost-effectiveness of medicines in Scotland), and has served as the Health Economics member of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation for the UK. In this book he aims to provide healthcare professionals and managers with a working understanding of the methods and techniques routinely used by healthcare economists.

The book is organised into 12 chapters, starting with an introduction to the basic concepts and progressing to a more in depth discussion of the tools used by healthcare economists. The reader is not expected to have any previous experience with

health economics, and the concepts are made easily accessible with the use of 'everyday life' examples throughout. A 'star' system is used to highlight the most important concepts for those in a hurry. An 'ease of understanding' rating has also been applied to the main concepts to guide the reader to allow more time to comprehend the trickier aspects of health economics.

The first two chapters describe basic economic ideas commonly used by health economists. Health outcomes such as health-related quality of life (QoL) and quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) are discussed briefly and are covered in more detail in later chapters. There is an overview of the considerations involved in evaluating the economic costs of a healthcare decision (opportunity cost, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency) and discussion of whose point of view should be taken for the economic analysis (perspective). The three most commonly used methods of economic evaluation are introduced here and described in detail in subsequent chapters. They are cost minimisation analysis (which aims to find the least-cost approach from all the alternatives),

cost-effectiveness analysis (which compares the financial costs against health outcomes that are measured as simple health economics, e.g. years of life saved) and cost utility analysis (a type of cost-effectiveness analysis that uses QALYs). Other chapters cover health utilities (preference of a patient for a particular QoL), evidence-based medicine, the importance of critical appraisal of the clinical results available and systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The final chapter covers health technology assessment using the UK as an example.

As someone without any previous experience of the world of healthcare economics I found the book informative and easy to read. Although the final chapter in particular has a focus on decision making within the UK, the history and scope of the organisations involved (NICE, SMC, and the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group) are of general interest to those outside the UK.

Reviewed by *Melanie Lee*
Dianthus Medical Limited
mlee@dianthus.co.uk