PROOFREADING AS LINGUISTIC SUPPORT FOR ENHANCING SCOPUS-REGISTERED PUBLICATIONS

KATALIN VARGA KISS

Abstract
The paper aims to provide an insight into how non-native academics' scientific progress may be supported by their institution's linguistic guidance before submitting a research article to a Scopus-registered journal. It describes the stages of an internal proofreading process employed at Széchenyi István University, Hungary and highlights some common mistakes related to style, grammar and vocabulary use usually resulting either from mother tongue interference or the lack of general and/or disciplinary literacy. Finally, it makes proposals for how to improve academic writing skills.

Keywords: international ranking, academic literacy, editing and proofreading, mother tongue interference, internal proofreading process.

Introduction
        University rankings have gained popularity over the past decade providing information about the performance and quality of higher education institutions enhancing their international visibility and prestige. Although rankings may be regarded as a source of debate regarding the requirements institutions must meet, they are likely to contribute to a growing number of international students and funds. The rapid growth and acceptance of university rankings are proof of their utility as an assessment tool (De Filippo, et al. 2012).
        One of the most highly reputed rankings is the Times Higher Education (THE) World Rankings. Since 2004 the THE has been providing reliable information on the performance of Higher Education Institutions for university stakeholders including current and potential students, teaching and research staff, administrative staff, governing body, donors, alumni etc. (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings).
        Šereš et al. (2019, p. 9058) point out that stakeholder interests are directly correlated with stakeholder expectations. Based on empirical analysis by Kettunen (2014) stakeholder relationships can be improved by integrating education with research and development, as well as establishing multidisciplinary faculties which may contact industries.
        The Rankings places emphasis on the research mission focusing on research-intensive universities in terms of their teaching, research, citations, knowledge transfer and international outlook. The eligibility criteria for participation in the ranking include publishing activities with a threshold number of 1000 papers over a five-year period. In addition, it is also required to teach undergraduates and work across a range of subjects. (https://www.timeshighereducation.com)
        The major challenge to fulfil these expectations is to provide a sufficient number of quality publications. Scopus-registered publications seem to be a solution to this problem. As Elsevier's abstract and citation database launched in 2004, Scopus is aimed at empowering institutions to bolster performance, rank, and reputation. (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus)
        The credibility of a scientific journal is shown by its quartile reflecting the demand for the journal by the scientific community. Each subject category of journals is divided into four quartiles: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4. Q1 contains the top 25% of journals in the list; Q2 is occupied by journals in the 25 to 50% group; Q3 contains journals in the 50 to 75% group; and Q4 is occupied by journals in the 75 to 100% group (https://phdtalks.org/2022/01/q1-q2-q3-q4-journals.html).
        Internationalisation at Hungarian higher education institutions has gained considerable attention over the past decade. The process embraces not only a significant rise in the number of international students but also the participation of non-native academics in increased publishing

activities. As the university's international ranking (THE) is greatly affected by Scopus-registered papers, researchers are highly encouraged to publish their research findings in prestigious journals.

The paper is structured as follows: First, it describes the stages of the proofreading service launched by Széchenyi István University, highlighting the difference between editing and proofreading, then it investigates the causes of erroneous language use. The next part demonstrates some authentic editing and proofreading examples. Finally, the paper provides some practical recommendations for improvement.

Proofreading as linguistic support

In order to increase the number of Scopus-registered publications, Széchenyi István University provides proofreading assistance to researchers in order to submit an error-free paper to the selected publisher. The proofreading service initiated by the University's Vice-President for Global Strategy in collaboration with the Centre of Foreign Languages consists of the following stages:

1. Submitting a finished paper to the university library for checking the journal
2. On approval forwarding the paper by the library to the Centre of Foreign Languages
3. On acceptance (based on the quality of language use) assignment of proof-readers to the paper, a non-native and a native speaker of English
4. Reviewing the paper by the non-native speaker – timely process
5. Contacting the authors to discuss and accept corrections – there might be two rounds
6. On accepting improvements and corrections forwarding the paper to the native speaker
7. After some minor corrections sending back the final version to the authors
8. Submission for publication

The submitted papers are usually the products of some multidisciplinary research where two or three authors investigate a problem. Given the profile of the university, the articles are both related to the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) (Craig, 2019) and Social Sciences, Humanities, the Arts for People and Economy (SHAPE) (Black, 2020) disciplines. Regarding the STEM disciplines, some authentic examples of multidisciplinary research include research articles related to Structural and Geotechnical Engineering, Telecommunications and Computer Science, or Mechanical Engineering, IT, and Material Science. In terms of SHAPE disciplines papers covered Business and Economics topics. Proofreading seems to be an unavoidable process for the increasing acceptance rates. According to Elsevier, the rejection rate of submitted papers to their journals is between 30% and 50% even before the peer-review stage mainly due to poor language (https://scientific-publishing.webshop.elsevier.com/manuscript-review/proofreading-or-editing/).

In order to be submission-ready, a paper should be thoroughly examined for language-related errors. However, it is not enough to correct spelling mistakes or grammatical errors and punctuations, it is also necessary to have an in-depth study of the text for cohesion and coherence to improve the readability of the article by ensuring a logical connection between sentences and paragraphs. Although the terms 'proofreading' and 'editing' are often used interchangeably, they are not the same. Proofreading is often preceded by editing.

McCombes (2019) distinguishes several stages of editing including content, line and copyediting, of which we apply line editing (changing words, sentences) and copyediting (polishing individual sentences to ensure stylistic consistency) before the final proofread by a native speaker checking for remaining errors, e.g. punctuation, misspelling or stylistic inconsistencies. In the course of the copyediting process, the authors' active involvement is required to improve ambiguous sentences. Content editing and formatting, i.e. following the rules of a specific style guide should be performed by the authors.

The importance of editing is also underpinned by the fact that "the writer fails to notice the errors because he tends to overlook and sees what he intends to write, but not what is written on the manuscript". It is also true that "no writer can be completely objective about his/ her own work" (www.manuscriptedit.com). As a result, we may come to the conclusion that editing and proofreading are indispensable activities for paper to be accepted by a publisher.

Error analysis

Writing any genre including research articles must focus on the lexical and grammatical elements characteristic of the register of the academic discipline in question (Schleppengrell, 2004). Therefore, non-native academics with a relatively high level of proficiency in English for ordinary interaction should develop their language skills to master an appropriate level of academic literacy. Regarding high-level publishing activities, the majority of non-native speakers seem to face the following challenges: on the one hand, they lack the sufficient level of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), on the other hand, they have limited experience with genre-related register. As a result, second-language errors at morphological and syntactic levels, as well as in terms of register choices are relatively common phenomena. For choosing the right register, Schleppengrell (2004) suggests the systematic application of 'grammatical metaphor', a term by Halliday (1994) to express the same meaning with different wording, thereby increasing the technicality and the clear structuring of the text.

With regard to Hungarian speakers of English, we must also underline the importance of linguistic interference, i.e. the transfer of the mother tongue to the target language. It is a proven fact that the greater the difference between the mother tongue and the target language, the greater the negative interference used by the speakers. In addition, mother tongue interference may also be due to the learner's inadequate knowledge of the target language (Bhela,1999), which may be exacerbated by being unfamiliar with the register of a specific genre.

The negative transfer of the mother tongue may hinder the performance of the target tasks (Yang, 2019) resulting in inter-lingual errors. Erroneous language is due to morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, pragmatic errors. Their systematic, analytical study through error analysis may be regarded as a pedagogical tool for improvement.

According to research, L2 writers usually transfer L1 writing strategies when planning, organising, reviewing and editing their thoughts. The higher L2 learners are in their L2 proficiency, the more successfully they may transfer such strategies to the L2. This, then, suggests that L2 writing teachers should work with their students to improve their grammatical and lexical knowledge (Khaled et al., 2013).

Taking the above facts into consideration non-native speakers of English usually face the following challenges: (1) insufficient knowledge of English often resulting in the negative transfer of the mother tongue to the target language, as well as (2) limited experience with the genre-related register in the target language as a result of which the stylistic features of the genre in L1 are erroneously transferred to L2.

Editing and proofreading examples

Gaps in L2 syntactic structures usually include word order problems, the misuse of collocations and the incorrect use of participles as authors usually apply translation techniques in the writing process. Stylistic errors are usually related to wordiness, the overuse of long sentences, on many occasions run-on sentences without any logical connections, as well as the lack of cautious language. Among 'the hit parade of errors' in academic writing Taylor et al. mentions sentence fragments, run-on sentences, the overuse of passive voice, faulty parallelism, vague pronouns, wordiness and the misuse of punctuation.

This section provides some examples of linguistic errors and their correction with the help of editing and proofreading. The examples are classified according to the following types of errors.

1) Register-related mistakes due to simple wording:
   – today* => **these days**
   – important* task => **essential task**
   – there are still many* residential properties built =>there is **a large amount of** …
   – The main result* of this study => The main **finding of this study**
   – Because of* the lack of uniform criteria =>**Due to the lack** of uniform criteria
   – Besides* the model … => **in addition** to the model
2) Register-related mistakes due to wordiness:
   – The reason while we have selected side corridors* at* the first step is that their complexity is quite high*, moreover from the point of view of life threatening is extremely significant*. => The reason **for selecting side corridors as the first step** is that their complexity is **considerable enough**, **with an extremely significant danger to life**.

In this case the correction of wordiness requires rewriting the sentence by using Participle, upgrading the word choice, as well as applying nominalisation as a means of grammatical metaphor. The use of grammatical metaphor helps shorten explanations and lessen the number of clauses as more information can be condensed in noun phrases, thereby formalising the tone.

3) Syntactic errors:
   – The data used for testing were the followings* => **We used the following data for testing.**
   – In recent years, the interest in … has grown quite remarkable* for many reasons … => In recent years, **there has been a remarkable interest in** … for many reasons
   – The followings are very important to mention related to the research on the websites* => **With respect to our website research the following remarks should be made.**
   – The questionnaire, which was anonymous and in full respect of the data protection rules in force, was sent to this group of students by means of GoogleForms.* => **This group of students was sent an anonymous questionnaire with full respect of the data protection rules in force by means of GoogleForms.**
4) The misuse of collocations:
   – To avoid this problem and give* uniform assessment systems, several decision supporting methods were carried out*. =>To avoid this problem and to **set up** a uniform **assessment system**, several decision supporting **methods were developed**.
   – … has received more emphasis* => … has received more **attention**
   The verb *receive* combines with the noun *attention*, whereas *emphasis* is used with *put, place*.
   – draw up* the conclusions and √suggestions => draw conclusions and put forward suggestions
   In this case the nouns collocate with different verbs. In addition, the verbs *draw* and *draw up* combine with different nouns such as *draw conclusion* but *draw up a plan, a proposal, a contract*.
   – This fact creates* a research limitation. => This fact has **imposed some limitation** on our findings.
   The noun *limitation* is frequently used with the following verbs: *put, place, impose.*
5) Redundant elements:
   – The aim of this paper is to investigate how terms related to social responsibility appears* at Hungarian universities' websites*. To answer the question a research was made among universities under the autumn of 2019. Twenty-one institutions were involved in the research which formed state universities at the time of the research. => The aim of this paper is to investigate how terms related to social

responsibility **appear** on the websites of Hungarian universities. In autumn 2019 **some research was carried out involving twenty-one universities.**
In order to improve readability, redundant elements are omitted and information is condensed with the help of grammatical metaphor.

– In this study we made a first attempt to measure this visibility with finding keywords related to social responsibility*. [It is important to note that such kind of research was not made before based on our knowledge, so the method we used is an attempt to analyse the visibility of social responsibility.] => **The study may be regarded as the first attempt** to measure this visibility **by finding keywords** related to social responsibility.
The second sentence is totally superfluous; therefore, it is deleted from the text. In the first sentence the syntactic structure is changed by using Passive combined with cautious language.

Conclusion

The internationalisation process of HEIs also raises the international visibility of universities. In addition to English bachelor and master's programmes for students, research and publication activities also gain attention. University world ranking lists offer reputation and prestige at international level by requiring high-level publication activities on behalf of the academic staff. However, poor language often tends to be the major barrier to fulfil this task.

There are some remedies to overcome this barrier including Academic Writing courses to improve general academic literacy by making non-native academics aware of register-specific language use and organised proofreading services by institutions. Making scholars aware of erroneous language use highlighted by various examples may enable experienced EFL writers to employ strategies like those employed by skilful native English speakers. In this way the negative transfer of the mother tongue may be eliminated as authors will be less likely to apply any L1 to L2 translation in their writing process, while, on the other hand, they will consciously use the proper academic style.

References

BHELA, B. 1999. Native language interference in learning a second language: Exploratory case studies of native language interference with target language usage. In: *International Education Journal, 1(1)*, pp. 22 – 31.

BLACK, J. 2020. *SHAPE – A Focus on the Human World.* Available on: https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2020/11/shape-a-focus-on-the-human-world/

CRAIG, O. 2019. *What is STEM?* Available on: https://www.topuniversities.com/courses/engineering/what-stem

DE FILIPPO, D., SANZ-CASADO, E. et al. 2012. Visibility in international rankings. Strategies for enhancing the competitiveness of Spanish universities. In: *Scientometrics 93, pp. 949 – 966.*

KHALED, K., HOSSEIJ, N. 2013. First language transfer in second language writing: An examination of current research. In: *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research 1(1)*, pp. 117 – 134. Available on: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1127353.pdf

KETTUNEN, J. 2015. Stakeholder relationships in higher education. In: *Tertiary Education and Management, 21/1, pp. 56 – 65.* Available on: https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2014.997277

MCCOMBES, SH. 2019. *Quick Guide to Proofreading | What, Why and How to Proofread.* Available on: https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/what-is-proofreading/

Proofreading   or   Editing? Available   on: https://scientific-publishing.webshop.elsevier.com/manuscript-review/proofreading-or-editing/

Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 journals list 2022: Scopus Quartile ranking. https://phdtalks.org/2022/01/q1-q2-q3-q4-journals.html)

SCHLEPPEGRELL, M. J. (2004): Technical Writing in a Second Language: The role of Grammatical Metaphor. In: *RAVELLI, L., ELLIS, R. A. Analysing Academic Writing: Contextualized Frameworks.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 173 – 190.

ŠEREŠ, L., MARIC, M. et al. 2019. University Stakeholder mapping. In: *GÓMEZ CHOVA, L., LÓPEZ MARTÍNEZ, A et al. ICERI 2019 Proceedings 12th annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation.* IATED Academy. 9054-9062. DOI: 10.21125/iceri.2019.2174

TAYLOR, D., PROCTER, M. Hit Parade Of Errors In Grammar, Punctuation, and Style. https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/revising/hit-parade-of-errors/

TAYLOR, D., PROCTER, M. *Hit Parade of Errors in Grammar, Punctuation, and Style.* https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/revising/hit-parade-of-errors/

YANG, S. 2019. A Review of Negative Language Transfer Regarding the Errors in English Writing in Chinese Colleges. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 10/3, pp. 603 – 609.* DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1003.24

Contact
Dr. Katalin Varga Kiss, PhD.
Széchenyi István University
Centre of Foreign Languages
1 Egyetem tér, 9026 Győr
Hungary
Email: kathykis@sze.hu