

Raising the acceptance rate of article submissions from ESL authors

a white paper

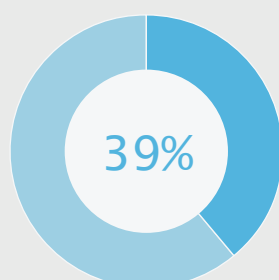
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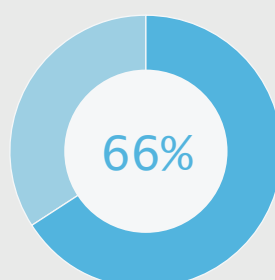
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMPARISON OF ACCEPTANCE RATES FOR SUBMISSIONS TO BIOMED CENTRAL JOURNALS

BioMed Central overall acceptance rate



Acceptance rate of manuscripts edited by Edanz



■ Rejected
■ Accepted

- Since 2011 BioMed Central has partnered with Edanz to support non-native English speaking researchers through language editing, on-campus educational workshops and e-learning. BioMed Central and Edanz analyzed the outcomes of 232 manuscripts on which Edanz had performed language editing and where the designated target journal was a BioMed Central journal.
- Of the submitted manuscripts on which Edanz performed language editing, 66% were accepted for publication (75% of those from Japan, 59% from China and 68% from the rest of the world). This compares favourably with the overall percentage of manuscripts that were accepted by BioMed Central in 2013: 39% (44% of those from Japan, 25% from China and 42% from the rest of the world).
- The use of a trusted and high quality language editing service, ideally as part of a wider strategy of author outreach, seems to improve the likelihood of manuscript acceptance and is a positive way to help non-native English speaking authors publish their research.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and clinicians, particularly non-native English speakers, face a variety of challenges when trying to publish manuscripts: selecting the appropriate journal, adhering to journal guidelines, interpreting journal editor decisions and reviewers' comments, writing in English, as well as keeping up with the literature [1]. Researcher demography is also changing. More and more research from Asia and other non-native English speaking countries is being published in English language journals, approaching parity with the United States and the European Union [2]. Scopus publication data from 2012 showed that nearly 70% of publications were from non-native English speaking countries, with East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan) contributing to more than 20% of the total [3]—these percentages are up from 54% and 13%, respectively, in 1996. Within a few years, there will likely be more submissions from researchers in China than from those in the United States. Submission data from BioMed Central corroborates this increase (Figure 1).

The changing researcher demographics described above have exacerbated certain issues, too: author disambiguation; differences in culture and communication styles; language barriers; and the pressure placed upon peer reviewers. Publishers worldwide are addressing this demographic shift in a variety of ways. Some initiatives to address these include cross publisher collaboration on ORCID, the researcher digital identifier, and local language web portals such as BioMed Central's 'Gateways' for China and Japan [4, 5]. Some publishers provide industry-standard multi-language

MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSIONS TO BIOMED CENTRAL JOURNALS

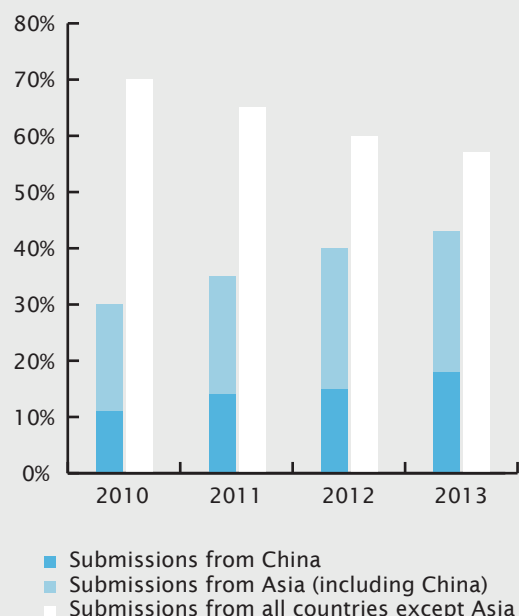


Figure 1: Manuscript submissions to BioMed Central journals 2010–13

resources for authors, such as BMJ's patient consent forms [6]. Other publishers provide multi-language educational resources, such as Springer's Author Academy [7]. Springer, together with Edanz, also organises and delivers local author workshops that aim to help authors improve their scientific writing skills and provide guidance on how to contribute as a peer reviewer.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Language barriers are a specific challenge for the entire scientific publishing process, from authors through to funding bodies, journal editors and publishers. For example, native English speakers spend around 95 hours preparing a manuscript—as a comparison, survey results from China suggest that over 40% of authors spend

more than 200 hours [1, 8]. For funders, previous studies have suggested that the proficiency in the English language among a country's scientists may influence its scientific output [9–13]. For journal editors and reviewers, manuscripts from non-native English speaking authors often suffer from some or all of the following problems: poor word or phrase choice; poor grammar; non-adherence to journal guidelines; poor structure. The resulting manuscripts have low readability—busy journal editors and reviewers may end up rejecting potentially good science because the manuscript is poorly prepared.

There are a handful of professional language editing service providers that operate worldwide. Some publishers have recognised language editing as a potential revenue stream by providing services under their name—such as Elsevier and Nature Publishing Group [14, 15]. While there are many legitimate and professional service providers, some poor practices have been reported within the language editing and author services industry. For example, unscrupulous businesses offering publication support in China were exposed in a news article published in *Science*: some were selling authorships, others were brokering deals on data or ghostwriting manuscripts [16]. Authors might also struggle to make an informed choice, when a Google search for language editing services can yield numerous service providers.

Testimonials from non-native English speaking researchers and clinicians indicate that they appreciate journals (and journal editors) recommending a reliable and high quality service—this in turn saves their time and potentially

increases the quality of their manuscripts.

For journal editors, receiving higher quality manuscripts not only saves their time during initial assessment, but also helps them in their relationship with busy peer reviewers: well-written manuscripts that conform to journal guidelines allow peer reviewers to concentrate on the science. Furthermore, there are savings in time and resources spent on manuscripts that might otherwise be rejected.

BIOMED CENTRAL-EDANZ PARTNERSHIP

To support non-native English speaking authors in getting legitimate and professional language editing help, in 2011 BioMed Central and Springer both chose a “partner” relationship with Edanz after a vetting process. In addition to recommending Edanz to authors seeking language editing, Edanz and BioMed Central/Springer have co-delivered over 160 author workshops. There is no financial relationship between Edanz and BioMed Central/Springer, although authors do receive a 10% discount on Edanz's services.

Many BioMed Central journals recommend Edanz to authors pre-submission from within the journal instructions [17]. The overall goals of this partnership are to: 1) improve the quality of submissions to BioMed Central journals by recommending a vetted and approved language editing service provider; and 2) train and educate authors on how to write and prepare manuscripts for submission to international journals.

OBJECTIVES OF ANALYSIS

We aimed to measure the impact of the Edanz-BioMed Central partnership using the manuscript acceptance rate. What was the acceptance rate of manuscripts by authors who used the Edanz language editing service prior to submission? How did it differ from the overall acceptance rate of manuscripts submitted to BioMed Central?

METHODOLOGY

Data were from all 232 manuscript language editing orders undertaken by Edanz between 1/1/2013 and 30/3/2013, with a target journal defined as a BioMed Central journal. Data were from each of Edanz's three business units, defined as Japan, China and the rest of the world.

Data supplied were: Edanz order date; Edanz customer given name, family name; target journal; the edited title of the manuscript. All data were password protected, and none were shared outside of BioMed Central and Edanz.

To find out whether the Edanz-edited manuscripts were submitted to and accepted by a BioMed Central journal, cross-matching analysis and manual checking were performed. All analyses were carried out by BioMed Central. Using database queries, manuscript records on the BioMed Central system were extracted into a spreadsheet alongside the Edanz data. Matching patterns were used to match the Edanz data to the BioMed Central manuscript records. In the first stage, Excel formulas performed full matching on

the manuscript title and the author's given name and family name.

However, there were some limitations in the full matching method. Occasionally, author names were spelled slightly differently, or their given names and family names inverted (most frequently among Chinese authors). Another limitation was the difficulty in finding exact matches on manuscript titles owing to minor differences in spelling, word order or punctuation. These challenges meant that the Excel formulas were not adequate in identifying all actual matches. In a second stage of analysis, further manuscript matches were identified manually by the strong similarity in their titles and author names.

The matching analysis revealed the proportion of Edanz-edited manuscripts that were submitted to and accepted by BioMed Central journals. The acceptance rate of Edanz-edited manuscripts was then compared with the acceptance rate of all manuscripts submitted to BioMed Central during the whole of 2013.

“I discovered Edanz through the BioMed Central recommendation ... They are fast, thorough and give me so many useful tips. The best thing about Edanz is that they not only edit my language, they also edit and recommend changes in the content ... Even my statistician was impressed with the knowledge the person editing my manuscript had about statistics. I have no doubt in my mind that Edanz has helped me increase my chances of being accepted for publication.”

Wenche Langfjord Mangerud
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Key finding: Using a quality language editing service appears to increase the likelihood of a manuscript being accepted for publication

We found that of the submitted manuscripts that had been through the Edanz service, **66%** (142 of 216) were accepted for publication. Broken down by region, the figures are 75% (27 of 36) for Japan, 59% (48 of 81) for China and 68% (67 of 99) for the rest of the world excluding Japan and China ([Figure 2](#)). This was compared with the benchmark of BioMed Central journals' acceptance rate in the whole of 2013, which was **39%**: 44% for Japan, 25% for China and 42% for the rest of the world (also [Figure 2](#)). The higher acceptance rate is an encouraging sign that the partnership is succeeding in its original aims.

One limitation of our interpretation is that this cohort of authors who submitted their manuscript to a language editing service may be better funded and better trained than the average researcher, and that this may have had a bearing on the original quality of the article and its likelihood of being accepted for publication.

CONCLUSION

The use of a trusted language editing service, ideally as part of a wider strategy of author outreach, seems to improve the likelihood of manuscript acceptance. These services are a positive way to help non-native English speaking researchers publish their manuscripts and share their results with other researchers around the world.

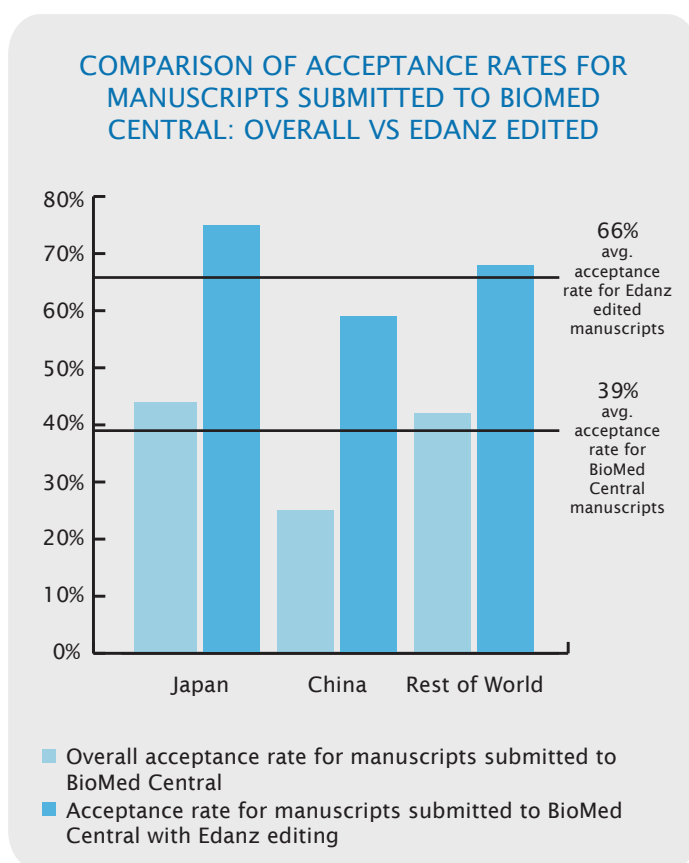


Figure 2: Percentage of manuscripts that were accepted by BioMed Central journals, overall in 2013 vs Edanz-edited subset (216 manuscripts from the period 1/1/2013 to 30/3/2013)

Source: Edanz and BioMed Central data 2013

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Yeen Lau is an Assistant Product Manager at BioMed Central, where she supports the delivery of business needs and technical solutions in STM publishing. Her previous experience includes working on the development and support of digital products at Macmillan Education and Immediate Media. She has a Masters degree in Cultural Studies.



Tom da Costa is a Director at Edanz Group. Tom graduated from the University of Oxford in 2000, joined Edanz Group in 2009, and is based in Japan. His main responsibilities are in management, sales, editorial and publisher partnerships.

ABOUT EDANZ

Edanz Group is a leading provider of scientific and medical language editing services for non-native English speaking researchers and clinicians. Established in Japan in 1995, Edanz has edited over 100,000 manuscripts for submission to international journals. Since 2011, Edanz has been the exclusive worldwide language editing partner for publishers Springer, BioMed Central and the American Institute of Physics.

ABOUT BIOMED CENTRAL

BioMed Central is an STM (Science, Technology and Medicine) publisher of 265 peer-reviewed open access journals. The portfolio of journals spans all areas of biology, biomedicine and medicine and includes broad interest titles, such as *BMC Biology* and *BMC Medicine* alongside specialist journals, such as *Retrovirology* and *BMC Genomics*. BioMed Central is owned by Springer Science+Business Media.

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