EDITORIAL
Dealing with language

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Science is not bound to a single language. However, English remains the most commonly used language in scientific literature, and the ability to write, speak and probably think in English will definitely enhance the scientific advancement of a community. Around the world, intensive measures have been taken by governments and research organizations to improve the standard of English[1].

In Malaysia, most researchers can speak and often think in English. However, presenting their thoughts or ideas in writing remains difficult. This is a common phenomenon in scientific communities where English is not the first language. Scientific writing includes correspondence (letters, emails), proposals (grant applications), instructions (procedures, protocols), presentations (reports, theses, dissertations) and publications (journal articles). In terms of manuscripts prepared for publication in a journal, there are two major problems associated with poor language. Firstly, the reviewer may not be able to fully appreciate the actual scientific content of the paper, a problem that is especially important in the introduction and the discussion sections of a manuscript. Secondly, the author(s) may have difficulty responding to comments or critiques put forward by the reviewers or editors. Such rebuttals usually require in depth explanation for specific queries (detailed description of a new procedure or innovative solution for a difficult problem), and a language editor may not be able to provide effective assistance. That is one of the many reasons that experts like Professor Tsuda Yukio from Japan are urging for the use of languages other than English to achieve linguistic equality in scientific publication[2].

There are several ways to improve the language quality of a scientific paper before submitting for publication. Some journals have an in-house language editor or copy editor who will improve the presentation (language, style and format) of the material. However, due to cost constraints, most of these services are provided only for manuscripts that have been favourably reviewed and selected for publication. Therefore, authors must be able to deliver essential information through the initial version of a submitted manuscript to convince the reviewer or editor that their work has adequate scientific merit and deserves to be published. Listed below are some methods commonly used to improve the language of the manuscript before submission:

(1) Revise the document after a "cooling off" period
(2) Ask a friend to check for errors
(3) Engage the services of local language specialists in the institution or community
(4) Engage language editing services online

There are currently many freelance language editors advertising their services through the internet. Fees to be charged are based on number of pages, number of words and urgency of the undertaking. Use of free online sites such as "Google Translate" for scientific writing has many limitations and is unlikely to be of benefit to scientific or medical writers in the near future [3]. However, the authors must still ensure the accuracy of text especially in the discussion section.

Globally, more and more scientific research is being reported in languages other than English. Although scientific literature in French and Japanese has not been able to influence the supremacy of English over the last few decades, the emergence of new research centers in other parts of the world has made continuing English dominance less certain[4]. For the moment, proficiency in English is still beneficial and writing in English is helpful in order for authors to have their manuscripts accepted for publication.

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