

EASE-Forum Digest: September to December 2010

You can join the forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Be sure to send messages in plain text format; the forum software does not recognize HTML-formatted messages. More information can be found on the EASE web site (www.ease.org.uk). When you first subscribe, you will be able to receive messages, but you won't be able to post messages until your address has been added manually to the file. This prevents spam being sent by outsiders, so please be patient.

During the last quarter, discussions on the forum have ranged from my hobbyhorse of using plain language in science, and transliteration (revisited), to practical points arising when articles are put online as and when they are accepted.

Why can't scientists do things?

I have an aversion to pomposity and I encounter a lot of it in my work. This is why I was irritated when a journal's copy editor had changed the word *done* in a proof of an article I had edited to either *performed* or *conducted*. The journal is published by Wiley-Blackwell. There seemed to be no logic as to what the journal's copy editor considered was performed and what was conducted. The only rational was that on no account was the word *done* to appear anywhere in the article, even when it was the more correct word. Goodman and Edwards in their book *Medical Writing: A Prescription for Clarity* state: "if you mean no more than *do*, then that is a less misleading word to use' (Gowers). *To carry out* is a better verb to apply to ordinary action than *to perform*."

I related the incident on the Forum, where the subsequent discussion largely centred on the use of appropriate words. Marjorie Monnickendam quoted further comments made by Sir Ernest Gowers (quoted in chapter 5 of the 1973 *The Complete Plain Words*), who gave three reasons for why many writers prefer complexity to simplicity:

- A feeling that all common words lack dignity
- An author's tendency to retain in maturity the adolescent's love of the long word
- The perceived danger of being precise.

Françoise Salager-Meyer said that although she had been taught that in general you *make* a thing, *do* an action, and *perform* a required task or a work of music, a linguistic analysis might reveal that current fashion (= sounds better, "more scientific/academic") favours *perform* over *do*.

According to Angela Turner, the *CBE Manual* says that *perform* can often be replaced by *do* or more active verbs and gives the example "He performed an appendectomy", which could be changed to "He did an appendectomy"

or "He removed the appendix". Paul Neate also made the good point that better style is to use a more direct active construct: one can do a study of such and such or one can study it, or one can do an analysis of such and such or one can analyse it.

Although it is interesting to explore good style, what I actually asked members of the Forum was whether they thought changing words in the way I had described was impinging on the author's voice. The general consensus, strongly expressed by HPS Kalra and Karen Shashok, was that if changes do not clarify an ambiguity the author's choice of words should be respected. Margaret Corbett believed that text should not be changed unless a definitive source could be quoted for why such changes were necessary. Likewise Angela Turner saw no excuse for a copy editor changing good English to what is perceived as "correct scientific English", but she did not consider an author's style to be sacrosanct. There are cases where grammar and syntax are all right, but editing can make the style more readable and concise – cases where, for example, authors repeat words and phrases that have they pick up from other scientific papers and use them ad nauseam, especially in the passive voice. Such words might include *perform*, *exhibit*, and *utilise*, which could be replaced by shorter alternatives or other more specific verbs.

So why did the Wiley-Blackwell copyeditor make the changes in the proof I received? Margaret Corbett, who uses the Wiley-Blackwell style sheet, noted that it made no statements about the use of *do* or *done*. Lorna O'Brien suggested that the *AMA Manual* (Section 11.2.2, *Expendable words and circumlocution*) might be the source of this copy editor's zeal, as it urges avoidance of roundabout and wordy expressions, stating that *carry out* should be avoided and *perform* or *conduct* preferred. Although there was no mention of *do* she surmised that the copy editor had picked up the idea that things are performed or conducted in preference to any other verb.

There was a happy ending to the story (for me at least). When, emboldened by the opinions expressed on the Forum, I took the matter up with Wiley-Blackwell, they agreed that there is absolutely no need to change words such as *done* and assured me that their copy-editors and in-house freelance co-ordinators would be informed not to change too much of the text in future.

But there is always another challenge around the corner. What, I asked the author, did the word *cognate* in the following sentence convey that *similar* or *related* would not convey: "B cells require cognate interaction with CD4+ helper T cells to develop high affinity antibodies against protein antigens". The (tongue-in-cheek) answer was that *cognate* is the term used in the scientific immunological literature. Its use shows that you belong to the inner circle of people who know what they are talking about. If the inner circle wants to avoid becoming marginalized it should read <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/usingPL/sciences/whiteman.cfm>.

Format of foreign language articles cited in English reference lists

The Forum revisited the topic of how Russian names and article titles should be written in reference lists in articles written in English for the third time this year (see *ESE* 2010;36(2):48-49 and *ESE* 2010;36(3):77-78 for summaries of the previous discussions). The ISO and UNESCO systems had been recommended for transliteration of authors' names and article titles to the Latin alphabet. In the new discussion Elisabeth Heseltine confirmed that ISO 9 is the internationally accepted method for transliteration and that Wikipedia has a useful article on transliteration. Sylwia Ufnalska, however, warned that another system of transliteration, which was developed by the American Library Association and Library of Congress (ALA-LC), is used by North American libraries and the British Library.

Views differed slightly on the answer to Alina Chitova's question as to how Russian articles should be listed, probably reflecting different methods used between disciplines and journals. Elisabeth Heseltine thought the alphabetical order of the works cited should follow the order of the Roman letters. Each work listed should begin with the authors' names and the original title in transliterated letters followed by a translation in brackets, which should be square brackets, according to Sylwia Ufnalska. Françoise Salager-Meyer thought that it would be better to write the author's names and title in the original Russian version rather than in a transliterated version, with the translation given either immediately below the original Russian text or in a footnote.

Alina works at St Petersburg State University, where she teaches Russian post-graduate students how to write scientific research articles in English, and she also asked for suggestions about which on-line publications might be interested in articles on Russian-English language applied linguistics/translation theory. Françoise provided a list of potential journals but thought that *Babel*, the international journal of translation published by Benjamins, was the most obvious candidate.

Numbering pages in articles online and using an e-ISSN

Journal pages are numbered consecutively in a paper journal when it goes to print, which presents no difficulties as all the material is published at the same time. But how are pages numbered when articles are published online when they have been accepted for publication, and shortened versions of the articles are subsequently published in the print version? This was the question raised by Arjan Polderman, whose journal *Pharmaceutisch Weekblad* was about to switch to an online-first system. Pippa Smart suggested that Arjan adopt the system used by the PLOS and BMJ group journals: although the pages in individual online pdfs are numbered, articles are allocated an article identity (DOI) and cited with reference to the volume number and the article identity. Pages in the print version are then, as before, given consecutive numbers when the issue is compiled.

Arjan had also asked when a separate e-ISSN is useful. Pippa explained that the use of a p-ISSN for the print version and e-ISSN for the electronic version when both versions were identical was useful for library subscriptions. When, however, the electronic version and print version were different products, as would be the case with Arjan's journal with different lengths of the articles being published in the two mediums, an e-ISSN is essential to clearly differentiate the two publications within any library or licensing agency system.

Elise Langdon-Neuner (compiler)

langdoe@baxter.com

Discussion initiators

Elise Langdon-Neuner: langdoe@baxter.com

Alina Chitova: eataw@jiscmail.ac.uk

Arjan Polderman: a.k.s.polderman@pw.nl

Silvia Maina – EASE web editor



Silvia graduated in Pharmaceutical Chemistry at University of Torino and, as a direct consequence of her studies, found a job in Istituto Biologico Chemioterapico, an Italian pharmaceutical company. She soon found out that she got bored with research but was fascinated by everything related to books, journals, and scientific publishing. Therefore, in 2002, she joined C.G. Edizioni Medico Scientifiche, where she worked as medical writer,

proofreader, and editor. In 2006 she moved to SEEd medical publishers, where she currently works as a commissioning editor. In 2009 she decided to join EASE, to share her passion for editing and publishing with many other people and be updated on what happens in the editorial world outside Italy. Her life as an editor is now full of books and journals – the ones read for inspiration and education, the ones edited, and the ones imagined with authors, clinicians, and SEEd's colleagues.

Silvia lives in Torino with her husband and her two black cats – who have found that proofs are a wonderful place to sleep.