

THE QUALITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN JAPANESE JOURNALS

— OPINIONS OF AUTHORS, JOURNAL EDITORS, JOURNAL
MANAGERS, AND PUBLISHERS

A SURVEY REPORT BY

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INTRODUCTION

The English language has become an indispensable tool to communicate research. The face of research communication has changed tremendously during the last hundred years. While researchers in the 18th and 19th centuries were content with publishing their works in journals printed in languages such as German or Latin, the early 20th century saw a revolution.

Due to the colonialization of the New World and major countries across the globe by the British Empire, the English language gained popularity and precedence over other languages, especially as a mode of formal research communication.

Despite English becoming the preferred mode of research communication and publication, it still poses a difficulty for nonnative researchers. Great effort has been made by scientific publishers in nonnative countries to bring out research journals and magazines in English.

The purpose of doing so, though not explicitly revealed, was to help both the publishers and authors of manuscripts gain sufficient recognition among a major part of the research community, all of who communicate research in English.

During a summit organized by the SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) society on December 12, 2005, in Japan, a presentation was made by Mr. Abhishek Goel, Director of Business Development, Editage, about the quality of English journals published in Japan.

The presentation revealed that improving the language and its presentation improves the visibility of the manuscript. In addition, stress was laid on the role of editing in improving the English language.

It was proposed that Japanese publishers of English journals could certify professional editors whose services may be availed by researchers in Japan. The proposal was taken a step further by suggesting rigorous proofreading exercises that would ensure a smooth publication.

While the presentation expressed a viewpoint that would be endorsed by many researchers and publishing houses in Japan, there was an urgent need to convince the academic publishing community at large about the difficulties faced by nonnative researchers and devise strategies to eliminate these pain points.

To that end, a survey was conducted among the Japanese research and publishing community to gather opinions about the quality of English language in Japanese journals.

This report presents the information gathered from the survey of over 100 respondents across Japan and provides insightful conclusions that would assure Japanese researchers of better citation indices and publishing houses of greater visibility.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SURVEY

The survey was divided into two parts—one consisting of 10 questions and the other of 9.

Part 1 of the survey was aimed at authors, journal editors, journal managers, and publishers of English journals published in Japan.

Part 2 of the survey was aimed at journal editors, journal managers, and publishers of English journals in Japan.

The survey was conducted using the following modes: (1) distribution of newsletters carrying a link to the survey to clients of Editage and (2) display on the survey section of the Editage website—www.editage.jp.

Both populations of researchers were queried on issues related to the quality of English and publishing in Japanese journals.

The results of the survey revealed that the role of editing is extremely important for manuscripts and journals to gain worldwide visibility. In the following pages, a case by case analysis of the questions is provided to help you understand the conclusion better.

ISSUES COVERED BY THE SURVEY

Part 1 of the survey was addressed to authors, journal editors, and publishers. The participants were asked questions that can be broadly classified into the following:

1. Quality of the English language in manuscripts published in Japanese journals
2. Influence of manuscripts and their language on the ranking of the journal
3. Difficulties faced by Japanese researchers in research communication
4. Importance of editing in manuscript preparation
5. Stages and responsibility of manuscript editing

Part 2 of the survey was addressed to journal editors, journal managers, and publishers of English journals in Japan. The participants were asked questions that can be broadly classified as follows:

1. Availability of journal editorial policy and views on grammar
2. Editing procedures for publication
3. Reasons for lack of editing before publication
4. Opinion of editors on manuscript submission to research journals in Japan

CASE ANALYSIS OF PART 1 OF THE SURVEY

1. QUALITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MANUSCRIPTS PUBLISHED IN JAPANESE JOURNALS

Result: Over 40% of Japanese researchers think that the quality of English in Japanese journals is average in comparison with international English journals.

Figure 1. A comparative rating between the quality of English in Japanese journals and that in international journals.



Of the 108 respondents, more than 40% were of the opinion that the quality of English in Japanese journals was average compared to that in international journals.

Japanese journals in comparison with international journals were rated as bad or below average by 34% of Japanese researchers.

Only a meager 12% of researchers were of the opinion that the journals were in par with international journals.

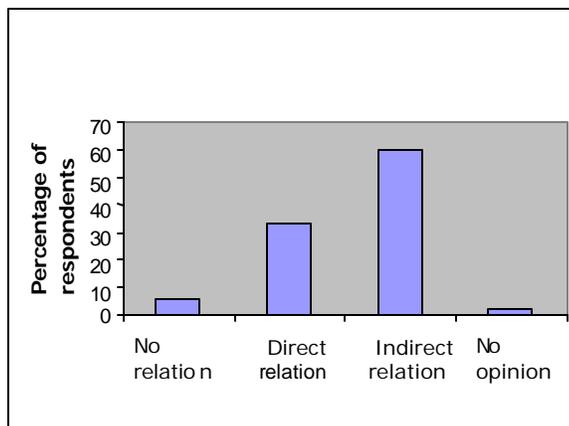
However, all respondents were unanimous in their opinion that the quality of English in Japanese journals has tremendous scope for improvement.

The results when considered together bring out an important fact that needs immediate attention. The quality of English in Japanese journals does not match international standards of scientific communicative English. There is an urgent need to ensure that the prose is structured and written in a grammatically correct and appealing manner.

2. INFLUENCE OF MANUSCRIPTS AND THEIR LANGUAGE ON THE RANKING OF THE JOURNAL

Result: Over 60% of Japanese researchers who took this survey agree that language has a role in influencing the ranking of a journal and improving language can increase the impact factor of a journal.

Figure 2a. The influence of language on the impact factor and ranking of a journal.

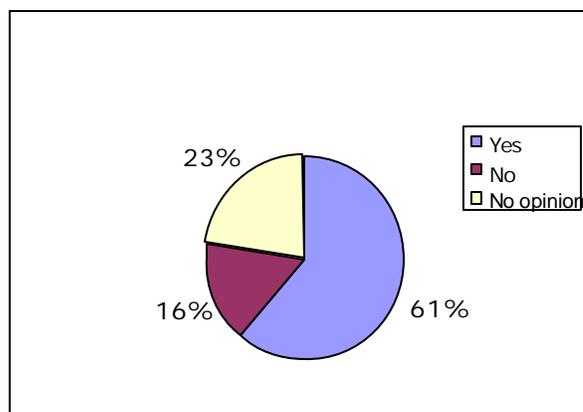


The second important aspect of the survey dealt with understanding the viewpoint of Japanese researchers on the role of language in determining and improving the ranking and impact factor of a journal.

More than 60% of the 108 respondents opined that language indeed plays an indirect role in the ranking of a journal. 33% of the respondents were of the opinion that language has a direct role in the ranking of a journal.

Taken together, 93% of the 108 respondents were unanimous in their conclusion that the role of language in influencing the ranking of a journal cannot be discounted.

Figure 2b. Opinion on the role of language in increasing the impact factor of a journal.



As if to support this opinion, 61% of the respondents were quick to suggest that improving language can increase the impact factor of a journal (Figure 2b).

These results yet again reinstate that language has an important role in determining the reach and future of a journal.

Good research is never better unless it is expressed in a grammatically coherent and readable manner. However, it imposes a great responsibility on journal editors. They need to ensure that manuscripts published in their journals do not falter in terms of language and presentation. A journal that consistently publishes manuscripts with erratic language carries great risk of being misunderstood by its readers.

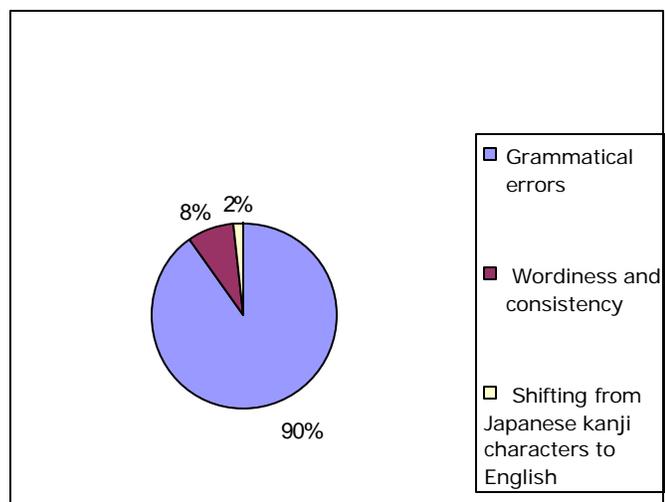
This in turn would lead to lower citation rates and a fall in subscriber numbers. Both these factors would thus contribute toward affecting the ranking of the journal.

In essence, language indeed plays an important role, either directly or indirectly, in the ranking of a journal.

3. DIFFICULTIES FACED BY JAPANESE RESEARCHERS IN RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Result: 90% of Japanese researchers claim that grammatical errors are a major obstacle in writing manuscripts in English.

Figure 3. The most common problems faced by Japanese researchers in preparing manuscripts in English.



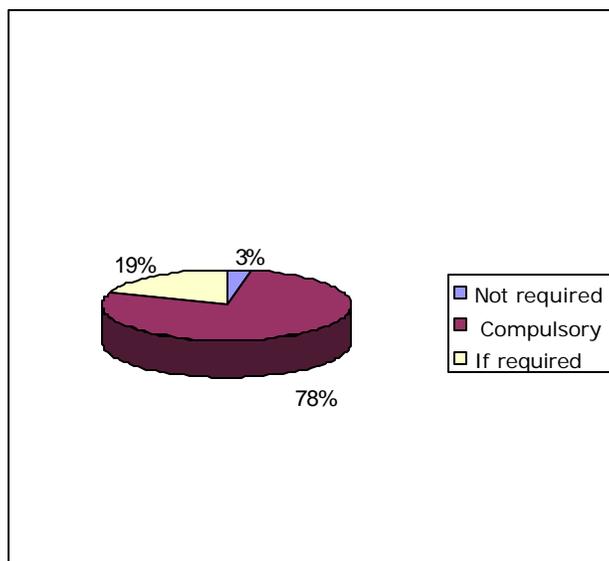
Of all the difficulties faced by Japanese researchers while communicating research in English, grammatical errors were the most prominent. Avoiding grammatical errors, and framing meaningful sentences in English, was a major pain point for 90% of the survey takers.

Apart from difficulties in understanding rules of English grammar, a small population of researchers faced obstacles in overcoming wordiness. In addition to these, 2% of the Japanese research community faced diffidence in expressing their thoughts in English and lack of speed while converting the Chinese "Kanji" alphabets into their corresponding English alphabetical counterparts.

4a. IMPORTANCE OF EDITING IN MANUSCRIPT PREPERATION

Result: 78% of Japanese researchers consider editing to be a compulsory component of manuscript preparation.

Figure 4a. Opinions on the role of editing in manuscript preparation.



In response to the importance of editing in manuscript preparation, over 78% of the 108 survey respondents considered editing to be an integral component of manuscript preparation (Figure 3a).

However, 19% of the respondents felt that editing must be carried out only if necessary. Only a small number of respondents corresponding to 3% felt that editing a manuscript is of no relevance.

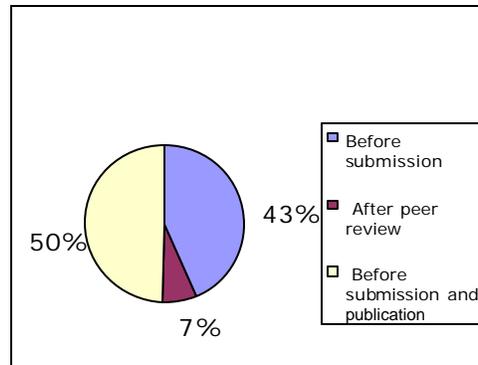
An analysis of this response demonstrates that a larger segment of the research community in Japan is aware of the importance of editing. The community realizes that editing is important to improve the quality of the manuscript. This opinion proves that Japanese researchers are genuinely interested in improving the quality of their manuscripts, and as a consequence, their visibility in the international research scene.

However, the survey pertaining to the importance of editing also revealed that Japanese researchers would prefer to have their manuscripts edited during certain stages of manuscript preparation (Figure 3b).

4b. STAGES OF MANUSCRIPT EDITING

Result: 93% of Japanese researchers prefer editing manuscripts before submission.

Figure 4b. Opinion of Japanese researchers about the stage at which manuscript editing must be conducted.



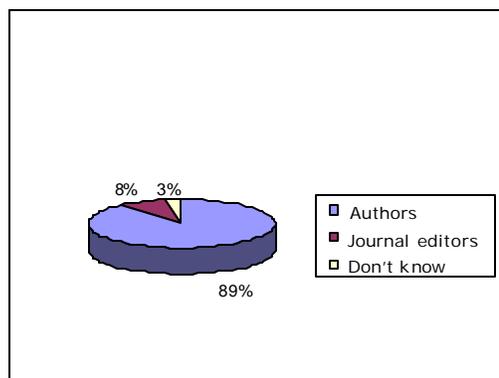
While 43% of the researchers preferred that their manuscripts be edited before submission, 50% of the respondents preferred editing to be completed before submission and publication. However, 7% of the researchers sought to edit manuscripts after peer review.

Taken together, a large majority of Japanese researchers including 93% of the total respondents to this survey prefer to edit their manuscripts before submission.

5. RESPONSIBILITY OF MANUSCRIPT EDITING

Result: 89% of Japanese researchers claim that manuscripts must be edited by authors themselves.

Figure 5. Opinion of Japanese researchers about the responsibilities of authors toward manuscript editing .



In addition, 89% of the researchers claimed that editing of manuscripts must be carried out by the authors themselves. Only 8% of the researchers suggested that editing was the responsibility of journal editors.

However, over 40% of the researchers suggested that they would prefer editors to focus on errors with respect to language and content (data not shown).

INTRODUCTION TO CASE ANALYSIS OF PART 2 OF THE SURVEY

The aim of part 1 of the survey was to understand the quality of English journals published in Japan and the importance of editing, primarily from the viewpoint of authors.

The analysis revealed that Japanese authors are unanimously aware about the status of English journals published in Japan in the international research market.

Apart from being just aware, a large segment of the respondents seem to understand the pitfalls of the journal system and their immediate needs.

However, this being a one-sided view of the larger picture, there still remains a gap among researchers in understanding the editors' perspective on the issue of manuscript editing and publication.

This part of the survey report aims to help researchers across Japan, including authors and editors, to view the journal publishing industry from a global perspective.

Part 2 of the survey was addressed to journal editors, journal managers, and publishers of English journals in Japan; they were asked questions that can be broadly classified as follows:

1. Availability of journal editorial policy and views on grammar
2. Editing procedure for publication
3. Reasons for lack of editing before publication
4. Opinions of editors on manuscript submission

In the following pages, a case analysis of each of these sections is presented. It is hoped that by the end of the case analysis, readers would appreciate the role of editing and language in writing a good manuscript.

CASE ANALYSIS OF PART 2 OF THE SURVEY

1. AVAILABILITY OF JOURNAL EDITORIAL POLICY AND VIEWS ON GRAMMAR

Result: 66% of journals in Japan make their editorial policies available to authors through websites and other mediums.

66% of English journals published in Japan instruct authors to submit manuscripts that are grammatically correct.

Figure 6a. Availability of editorial policies to authors by Japanese journals.

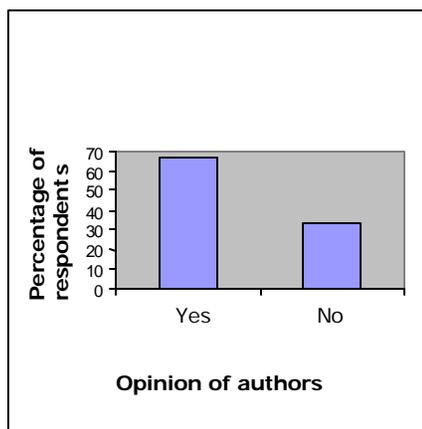
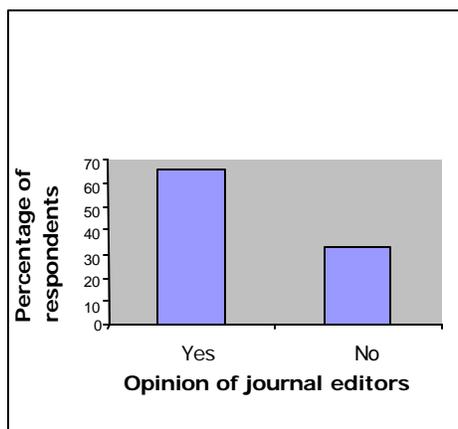


Figure 6b. Editors' instructions on submitting grammatically correct articles.



According to the survey, 66% of the journal editors in Japan make their editorial policies available to authors. However, 33% of the editors did not reveal their editorial policies to authors.

This indicates that a majority of the journal editors in Japan encourage authors to submit well-written manuscripts.

In support of this view, 66% of English journal editors from Japan claimed that their journals require authors to submit manuscripts that are grammatically correct.

Taken together, both these responses suggest that journal editors in Japan are aware that language plays a role in determining the quality of a manuscript.

2. EDITING PROCEDURES FOR PUBLICATION

Result: More than 60% of editors who responded to the survey recommend language editing by professional editing services.

60% of editors who responded to the survey edit manuscripts only.

Figure 7a. Division of labor in editing manuscripts.

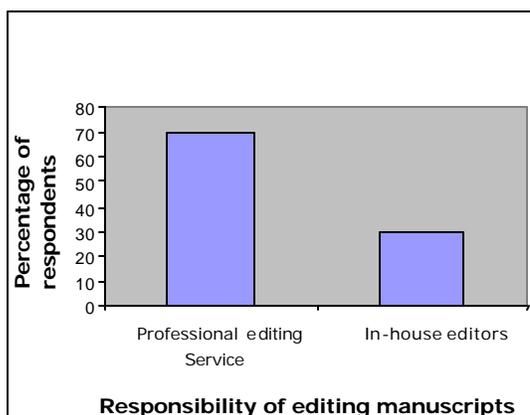
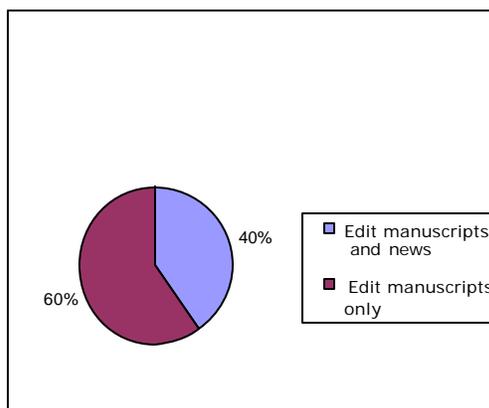


Figure 7b. The editing procedures of English journals published in Japan.



With respect to responsibility of editing manuscripts, more than 60% of the survey respondents revealed that language in manuscripts is edited by professional editing houses. Only 35% of Japanese journals claimed to perform in-house editing of manuscripts.

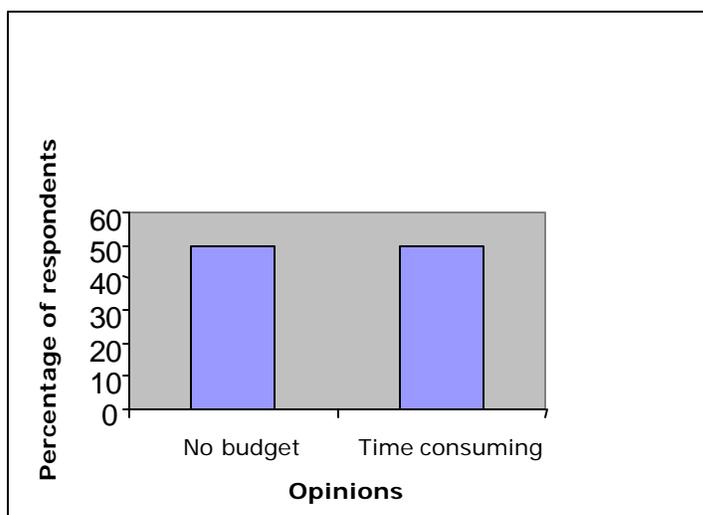
Interestingly, while 40% of journal editors edit both manuscripts and news-related articles, 60% of the editors in Japan only edit research manuscripts. These data suggest that journal editors in Japan give great importance to manuscript editing. Though editors use professional editing services to perform the task, a majority of editors contribute some part of their time in editing language-related errors in manuscripts.

3. REASONS FOR LACK OF EDITING BEFORE PUBLICATION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Results: 50% of editors of English journals in Japan lack budget to perform language editing in manuscripts before publication.

50% of the editorial community in Japan finds editing language in manuscripts to be time consuming and unmanageable.

Figure 8. Journal editors' reasons for not taking up editing of manuscripts.



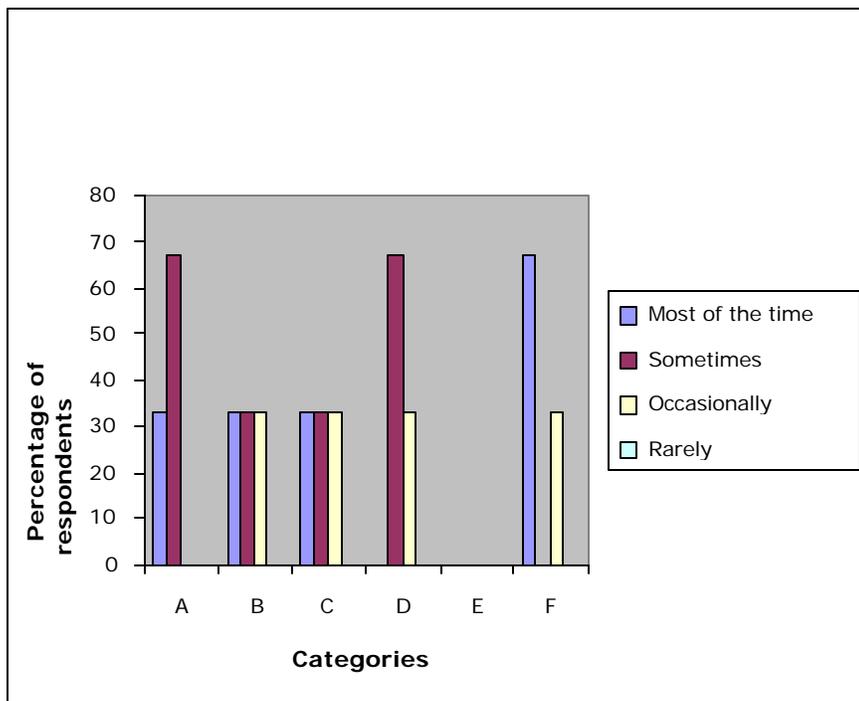
All Japanese journal editors who participated in the survey revealed that they were not in a position to perform editing of the English language for primarily two reasons.

First, 50% of the editors of Japanese journals voiced that they did not have sufficient funds to offer or perform English language editing of manuscripts. Second, 50% of the editors found language editing in manuscripts to be time-consuming.

These results, when taken together, inform Japanese researchers indirectly that submitting well-written manuscripts is essential. In order to do so, editors in a way encourage authors to employ professional editing services to edit manuscripts written in English.

4. OPINION OF EDITORS ON MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION TO RESEARCH JOURNALS IN JAPAN

Figure 9. Opinion of editors on manuscript submissions.



Explanation of categories on X-axis

- A: Authors submit well-edited manuscripts.
- B: Manuscripts are submitted according to journal guidelines.
- C: Peer reviewers comment on many language-related changes in the manuscript.
- D: Manuscripts are rejected due to poor English.
- E: Rejected manuscripts are considered for editing.
- F: Accepted manuscripts are sent back for editing.

A: Authors submit well-edited manuscripts .

Result: 67% of editors who took the survey claim that they do not always receive well-written manuscripts.

67% of the editor community who took the survey claimed that they received well-edited manuscripts around 70% of the time. However, 33% of the editors claimed to receive well-written manuscripts always.

Taken together, this data suggests that while some authors submit well-edited manuscripts, a majority of the authors submit manuscripts without editing the language.

This signifies that authors need to ensure that well-edited articles are submitted.

B: Manuscripts are submitted according to journal guidelines.

Result: 70% of the editors who took this survey claim that authors do not submit articles based on journal guidelines.

According to the data, only 30% of Japanese editors received manuscripts prepared according to guidelines of their journal.

This data is indicative of the fact that authors are not paying attention to the journal guidelines.

C: Peer reviewers comment on language changes in the document.

Result: 70% of the editors who took the survey claim that peer reviewers indicate language changes in the document in 50%–80% of the cases.

70% of the editors who participated in the survey received comments from peer reviewers about changes in language and presentation of the data in 50%–80% of the manuscripts the journal receives.

This, in turn, suggests that while submitting manuscripts, authors also need to ensure that their manuscripts are grammatically correct.

As shown earlier, a large number of editors find performing language editing unmanageable. Taking this into account, the authors are advised to ensure that maximum efforts are made to submit manuscripts written without errors in grammar.

D: Manuscripts are rejected due to poor English.

Result: 70% of the editors who took the survey reject manuscripts due to poor English writing.

According to 70% of the editors who took this survey, manuscripts are edited in 50%–80% of the cases due to poor English writing. This is a clear indication to authors that in order to get published, authors have to ensure grammatically correct usage of the English language in their manuscripts.

E: Rejected manuscripts are considered for editing.

Result: Editors do not reconsider rejected manuscripts for editing.

Editors of English journals across Japan do not reconsider rejected manuscripts for editing. This implies that editors consider various parts of a manuscript that include language, presentation, methodology of the study and its relevance to the scope of the journal.

F: Accepted manuscripts are sent back for editing.

Result: 75% of the researchers send accepted manuscripts for language editing in most cases.

75% of the editors who took the survey claimed that accepted manuscripts are sent back to the authors for language editing.

The reader must make note that only those articles where there is a reasonable amount of scientific matter and tolerable language errors are sent back for language editing.

However, in these cases, as editors have revealed, the accepted manuscripts are sent back because the editors lack sufficient funds to carry out language editing.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the survey was to gain some understanding about the quality of English language in Japanese journals and the importance of editing. Over 100 researchers from Japan, comprising of authors, journal editors, and journal managers participated in the survey.

The responses received provided certain important insights in this regard; these are listed below:

1. The quality of English in journals from Japanese publishing houses is average when compared to that in international journals.
2. Language editing is an important element in manuscript preparation, which can influence the impact of a journal.
3. Researchers in Japan face problems with English writing due to difficulties in understanding the rules of English grammar.
4. To eliminate these difficulties, authors are encouraged to consult and use the services of professional editing houses that have expertise in English communication.
5. Journals do not perform language editing due to lack of funds or unmanageable circumstances.
6. Authors need to ensure that manuscripts submitted in English are grammatically correct and are written according to guidelines framed by the journal.
7. Grammatically incorrect manuscripts face the risk of being rejected by journals.
8. Authors can improve citations of their articles in English if the manuscripts are well written with minimal grammatical errors.

This report is an outcome of the opinions of certain Japanese researchers who took this survey. The reader is advised against drawing broad conclusions on the basis of this report.

The survey is a first step in understanding and helping researchers across Japan to communicate effectively.

To that end, we shall be bringing out more surveys and products which would help the scientist in you to grow in your scientific career.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I

1. How would you rate the overall language quality of papers published in Japanese journals compared to those published in international journals?
 - Superior
 - At par (same)
 - Average
 - Below average
2. Which journal do you rank as the best in your field of specialization?
3. What is the relationship between well-written (error-free) manuscripts and the popularity or ranking of a journal?
 - No relation
 - Direct relation (very closely connected)
 - Indirect relation (somewhat closely connected)
 - Don't know
4. Can improvement in the language quality of papers improve the impact factor of a journal over a period of time?
Yes
No
5. What measures should be taken to improve the overall language quality and readability of English journals published in Japan?
6. What problems do Japanese authors face when preparing manuscripts in English?
7. Please indicate your opinion on the editing of manuscripts. (You can select multiple options.)
 - Manuscripts don't require editing
 - Editing should be compulsory for all manuscripts
 - Editors don't add much value to a manuscript
8. Manuscripts should be edited
 - before submission to journal
 - after peer review, before publication
 - both before submission and before publication
 - don't know
9. Who should be responsible for the editing of a manuscript?
 - Author(s)
 - Journal Managers (or Editor-in-Chief)
 - Publisher
 - Other (Please specify)

10. When you send a manuscript to be edited, what do you want the editor to enhance?

- Only language
- Primarily language and maybe some obvious content errors
- Both language and content

11. Any other comments

End of Part I.

Authors, thank you for your valuable time and comments.

Journal editors, managers, and publishers, please proceed to Part II.

Optional Information

Name

Organization, Institution, or Gakkai

Department or Journal

Part II

1. Which of the following best describes your journal?

Type	Format	Subject
Specialty	Print	Biomedical Science
General	Electronic	Physics or Engineering
Other (Please specify)	Both	Chemistry Social Sciences Earth Sciences Business Other (Please specify)

2. How old is your journal?

3. Is your journal's editorial policy made available to authors through your website or any other medium?

- Yes
- No
- We do not have an editorial policy because we are still unsure of the terms we want to communicate
- We do not have an editorial policy because we do not know how to create one
- Other (Please specify)

4. Which of the following processes does your journal employ?

- We get all the journal content (manuscripts + news and other articles) edited before publication
 - We only get manuscripts edited
 - We send all material directly for printing (no editing)
 - Other (Please specify)
5. Who edits the manuscripts before publication?
- Professional editing service
 - Freelance editors
 - In-house editors
 - Printer or publisher
 - Don't edit
 - Used to edit in the past but have discontinued now
6. If your journal currently does not undertake the editing of manuscripts before publication, please indicate the reason for this decision.
- High cost
 - It doesn't improve the quality significantly (low value for money)
 - Low turnaround time
 - Don't know how to
 - Lack of budget
 - Cumbersome process to manage internally
 - Other (please specify)
7. Does your journal specify that authors should ensure that their manuscripts are grammatically correct and contain no language errors?
- Yes
 - No
8. What style/format does your journal recommend authors follow?
- We have our own style guidelines mentioned in the *Instructions for Authors*
 - We follow a style guide such as those created by international organizations such as AIP, ACS, AMA, etc.
 - Both
 - No specific style or format

9. Rate the following based on your experience with your journal.

	Mostly (90–100% of the time)	Sometimes (50–90% of the time)	Occasionally (25–50% of the time)	Rarely (<25% of the time)
Authors submit well edited manuscripts				
Authors prepare manuscripts according to the Journal Guidelines				
Peer reviewers have several language-related comments and changes in the submitted manuscripts				
Manuscripts are rejected due to poor written English				
Rejected manuscripts are considered for resubmission after editing				
Accepted manuscripts are often sent back to the authors for editing				

End of Part II

Thank you for your time and valuable comments!

Optional Information

Name
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Department or Journal

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