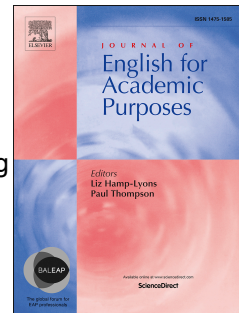


# Accepted Manuscript

"I won't publish in Chinese now": Publishing, translation and the non-English speaking academic

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# **“I won’t publish in Chinese now”: Publishing, translation and the non-English speaking academic**

## **Abstract**

While EAL (English as an additional language) scholars across the world are increasingly under pressure to publish internationally, many are confronted with serious language barriers during the process. A key solution for them is turning to text mediators, and particularly translators. However, the effectiveness of research article manuscript translation remains contested. By presenting the case of a Chinese medical doctor who can hardly write a complete sentence in English but regularly publishes in prestigious international journals, we show the impact and importance of manuscript translation in text mediation practices. We argue that despite its somewhat dubious ethicality and hit-and-miss outcomes, manuscript translation appears to be a viable service for EAL scholars given the right set of circumstances. We believe research on text mediation, including translation, can assist authors and perhaps empower ERPP (English for research and publication purposes) teachers to help students mobilize resources more effectively for English text production in addition to enhancing their individual competence.

**Keywords:** international publishing, EAL scholars, text mediation, translation

## **1 Text mediation, publication and EAL scholars**

Scientists across the globe have found that their careers are increasingly tied to their ability to publish research articles in journals included in the Science Citation Index (SCI) because that “is where individual reputation and institutional funding coincide” (Author, 2016, p.58). In China, this has penetrated into sectors such as non-academic medicine so that publications in high impact factor journals have become an imperative for doctors (Li, 2014a, 2014b), despite recent official efforts to eliminate these pressures (Zhang, 2015).

Writing academic papers for international publication stretch the abilities of both native and non-native English-speaking authors alike, but for EAL researchers, this challenge is often

compounded by a lack of English proficiency. While debates continue about the comparative disadvantages of native and non-native English speakers in the realm of international publishing (e.g. Author, 2015, 2016; Politzer-Ahles, Holliday, Girolamo, Sychalska, & Berkson, 2016), it is important to move beyond deficiencies to consider solutions (Author, 2016; Belcher, 2007). A quest for such solutions lies behind the growth of ERPP (English for Research and Publication Purposes) pedagogies (e.g. Cargill, O'Connor, & Li, 2012; Li, Flowerdew, & Cargill, 2018) and calls for the relaxation of adherence to Anglo-based conventions by journal gatekeepers (Mauranen, Hynnien, & Ranta, 2016).

Another such solution has been the involvement of third parties which we collectively call “RA (research article) mediators” (Author, 2017). These individuals or companies provide either text mediation services which focus on the improvement of manuscripts (e.g. editing, translation, professional writing) or process mediation services which assists authors with the publication process (e.g. journal selection, submission, responding to reviews, etc.) or both. Different names have been used for those offering these third-party interventions. Lillis and Curry (2010), for example, refer to “literacy brokers” to designate all the people, including journal reviewers, who directly influence text production without being listed as authors. However, we use the term “RA mediators” to a) avoid the commercial connotations of Lillis and Curry’s term and b) designate all third-party assistance to explore the dynamics of author-intervenor collaboration.

Overall, text mediation is more common than process mediation and has received more attention in the literature. The former has not only supported EAL scholars in non-Anglophone settings (Kaplan, 2010; Matarese, 2013; Pérez-Llantada, Plo, & Ferguson, 2011) but also those studying in Anglophone contexts (Harwood, Austin, & Macaulay, 2009; Swales, 2004; Turner, 2011). In contrast, process mediation has received less attention, only gaining visibility in China (Hvistendahl, 2015). Occasionally text mediation and process mediation are provided by a single service, with editing/translation and guidance through the steps to publication outsourced to a fee-paying agency. In this paper, we focus on one text mediation service, RA manuscript translation, although other services including process mediation and editing are also involved.

Despite the increasing popularity of text mediation among EAL scholars (Author, 2017; Kaplan, 2010; Li & Flowerdew, 2007), however, many EAL academics underuse such services. This is often due to lack of confidence in the honesty or the skill of such mediators. Li (2014a), for example, shows that many Chinese medical authors do not value editorial services and the first author (2017) found a stark contrast between the potential of text mediation services and 34 Chinese scientists' low confidence in them. EAL scholars' skepticism of text mediation results in its underuse, to the detriment of themselves, their institutions and text mediators (Author, 2017; Li, 2014a). One solution to this problem is to bring the topic of text mediation into the ERPP classroom.

In fact, recent research has started to prepare the ground for this by conceptualizing academic writing by EAL scholars as more of a networked activity than an individual endeavor (Canagarajah, 2018; Lillis & Curry, 2006). Seen in this light, traditional pedagogies which focus only on enhancing students' individual competence, fails to "reflect the real-life text production practices" of EAL authors in their routine practices (Lillis & Curry, 2006, p. 263). To render the EAP writing classroom a site for students to learn not only writing *per se* but also how to strategically mobilize network resources to generate meaning requires urgently needed research to empower EAL writing teachers in new roles.

## 2. Translation as text mediation

Despite a growing interest in text mediation in recent years, there are relatively few studies in this area. Most focus mainly on editing (e.g. Authors, 2016, 2017; Flowerdew & Wang, 2016; Gholami & Zeinolabedini, 2017; Willey & Tanimoto, 2012) with other services receiving far less attention. While international students in Anglophone contexts may seldom need translation, it appears to be common, to varying degrees, among EAL scholars in non-Anglophone settings (e.g. Bennet, 2013; DiGiacomo, 2010, 2013; Kerans, 1999; Montgomery, 2009).

Despite its popularity among EAL scholars with limited English literacy, the effectiveness of translation remains contested. Venuti (2008) argues that translation is stigmatized as a form of writing and disparaged by the academy while Bennet (2013) observes that many factors makes RA manuscript translation particularly formidable. For instance, the feasibility of translation for

international publication is potentially diminished by the huge differences between scientific languages while many translators are not well-versed in the conventions of particular academic disciplines.

EAL scholars, in fact, can be quick to blame their translators for an unsuccessful submission. Thus, the European scholars in Lillis and Curry's study (2010) predominantly believed "it is very difficult to find a translator who is sufficiently familiar with their subfield specialism to produce meaningful texts" (p.95). Such authors assume that their work would otherwise be welcomed by journal editors and it is only the translator's lack of expertise in the author's subfield which prevents acceptance. Lillis and Curry, for example, report a Hungarian academic's complaint that he received a verbatim English translation of his text, while Martinez and Graf (2016) quote a Brazilian scholar's observation that local English teachers produced RA manuscript translations "riddled with errors of vocabulary, grammar, and spelling" (p.6).

Another problem when considering translation in academic publishing is that many EAL scholars insist that translators should be familiar with their field, which may, however, be more desirable than actually necessary. Bennet (2009) suggests that a shared register, or what she calls an "English Academic Discourse" across disciplines, is sufficient to allow translators ignorant of the authors' disciplines to translate manuscripts competently. DiGiacomo (2010), for example, recounting her successful experiences of translating manuscripts in anthropology as an insider and in biomedicine as an outsider, reflects that a translator equipped with the metalanguage of the target genre does not have to share an author's specialism to produce meaningful translation.

There are also ethical considerations overhanging translation. Current conceptions of authorship value creativity and agency, with the named authors taking both credit and responsibility for published papers. Translators are generally absent from article bylines despite the fact that good translators, by making scientific observations real and persuasive to others, do not just change the language in which a text is written, but craft new texts and ways of seeing. However, some leading medical journals such as *BMJ* have replaced "authorship" with a "contributorship" model, requiring that the role of each author is specified in the text (<https://authors.bmj.com/policies/bmj-policy-on->

authorship/). In addition, the *International Committee of Medical Journal Editors* (ICMJE) (2017), widely accepted by biomedical journals, requires authors to meet the following criteria:

- (a) Conception and design of the work that led to the paper, or (b) analysis and interpretation of data; (c) Drafting of the article or (d) critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content; and (e) Final approval of the article.

While translation is not listed explicitly here, we feel it falls firmly under category c. Since the ethics of publication lies in the inherent trust between the editor and authors (Rennie, et al., 1997), the failure to include translators in the submitted manuscript would seem to violate this code of conduct.

Despite all these complications, many EAL academics find RA manuscript translation a valuable resource. Spanish scholars in Pérez-Llantada et al. (2011) secured reliable translation services, for instance, and even Nobel laureates' masterpieces have been effectively translated into English (Meneghini & Packer, 2007). What would be helpful in further understanding about academic text creation and the role of mediation in this process is more research on translation in publishing contexts. In this paper, we aim to tease out its dynamics by reporting how a non-English-writing medical doctor managed to publish regularly in international journals via the support of different translators with varied background and competence in scientific writing.

### 3 The focal participant

Guan<sup>1</sup>, in his late 40s, is a clinical neurologist at Dongtian Hospital, an institution with 3,000 beds affiliated to a regional university in a comparatively remote city in China (hence RU). Like most of his colleagues, Guan is a physician with no research training, little research experience and poor English proficiency. His only higher education was an undergraduate program in internal medicine at RU in the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Publication was not part of the routine work of the hospital, but to improve an indifferent profile in international publication, RU initiated a policy in 2009 offering generous

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<sup>1</sup> All the names in this paper, including those of people, institutions and agencies, are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> In the past, the threshold to becoming a professional such as a medical doctor was very low in China. Thus, Guan could become a neurologist with only a bachelor's degree in internal medicine.

financial inducements for authorship of papers in SCI- journals and also requiring this for promotion. Promotion to professorship, for example, now required 300 “publication points”, achieved through being listed as a first or corresponding author. Points are allocated according to a hierarchy of journals, categorized as 1) SCI-indexed, 2) prestigious journals in Chinese and 3) average indexed journals in Chinese. A paper in an SCI-indexed journal would earn the author as many as  $30 \times (1 + \text{impact factor})$  points while one in a Tier 2 or 3 journal would only accumulate 10 or 8 respectively.

As a result, Guan’s desire to be promoted to full professor meant he had little choice but to develop his research skills. Without the necessary English skills, he targeted Chinese journals, setting his research area strategically to meta-analysis and systematic reviews to avoid the need for funding and writing case reports when he and/or his colleagues came across interesting cases. He had, however, to read the medical literature in English to keep up with the field and explore research topics. Although his low English proficiency meant that he read slowly with continual reference to an electronic dictionary, Guan persisted. This kind of perseverance enabled him to publish over 40 first-authored Chinese articles in the five years to 2010, with several in top category 2 journals.

Clearly, as a scientist, Guan had coauthors, but they seemed to contribute little more than retrieving references, providing data for case reports and supporting his clinical work. The only exception was a young PhD-holding coauthor who would translate Guan’s Chinese abstracts into English, but he found a job elsewhere in 2009. While Guan was aware that including some of his colleagues as coauthors might not be strictly ethical, he preferred to maintain good relations with them by doing so.

Because he had succeeded in publishing in the top national journals in Chinese (Level 2), which are highly anglicized in their presentation and referencing, and because the points gained were much higher in SCI English language journals, Guan believed he had the potential to publish in these international journals. He also recognized that he would need ongoing assistance of skilled translators to do so, as he was still relying on his electronic dictionary to read English RAs and could write only short, low stakes email messages such as:

Thank you very much



Hi, I am Guan! please you look at the attachment.

I confirm this instructions for the “Article 3.doc”.

He began to hire RA mediators in 2010, and began to publish in English, successfully gaining between 1 and 3 acceptances each year, mostly in SCI-indexed journals. He therefore stopped publishing in Chinese two years later:

I won't publish in Chinese now. I stopped that after 2012... (interview, original in Chinese)

When he was interviewed for this study in 2014, Guan had published ten articles in international journals (Table 1), being responsible for conducting the research, drafting the manuscripts in Chinese, securing mediation services and managing the submission process.

Table 1: international publications which Guan lead-authored

	publication year	article type	SCI-index	Impact factor
RA1	2010	original RA	yes	0.173
RA2	2010	original RA	yes	0.173
RA3	2011	original RA	yes	3.618
RA4	2012	original RA	yes	3.032
RA5	2012	original RA	no	NA
RA6	2012	scientific letter	yes	2.748
RA7	2013	original RA	yes	1.216
RA8	2013	original RA	yes	1.216
RA9	2014	original RA	yes	2.558
RA10	2014	original RA	Yes	3.234

In the following sections, we describe this transformation in Guan's publishing practices.

#### 4 Data collection and analysis

The data for this study comprises:

- 1) Over 700 emails and their attachments (in either English or Chinese) retrieved from Guan's two email accounts, to which he generously provided full access. These represent the correspondence

between Guan and his mediators, journal editors, coauthors and colleagues from February 2009 to September 2013 as well as 128 manuscripts in different stages of completion.

- 2) 45 posts (all in Chinese) from December 2013 to September 2014 from Guan's QQ zone, a virtual space for sharing information via the QQ platform, a synchronous messaging service.
- 3) Two face-to-face interviews with Guan in Chinese May 7, 2014 and August 25, 2015. The first, lasting about 90 minutes, centered on his publishing experiences with mediators and the second, of about one hour, focused on clarifications and issues in the analysis. Both interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.
- 4) Guan's entire QQ communication record with the first author.
- 5) Interviews with two text mediators, Ling and Nancy, in Chinese via QQ on September 6 and October 24, 2014. Both mediators responded to inquiries during the data analysis.

Due to the overwhelming volume of data, this was analyzed by the bilingual first author rather than translated. Emails, postings on Guan's QQ zone, interview transcripts and the QQ communication record were entered into MAXQDA 11, a qualitative data analysis program, for coding (see <https://www.maxqda.com>). The coding process involved a two-cycle procedure of open coding and axial coding following Saldaña (2013). In the open coding cycle, data were read line by line and coded based on emerging themes or codes (e.g. "mediator accessibility", "communication barrier", and "author satisfaction"). A constant comparative method was adopted to allow new codes to emerge and old codes to be merged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The second cycle, axial coding, grouped the open codes into themes (e.g. "mediator expertise", "quality control", and "author involvement"). The data, codes and themes were repeatedly refined over several months, consulting the manuscripts and published articles wherever necessary.

## **5 Experiences with translators**

Guan's needs for mediation services were strikingly diverse. Not only did he want assurance that his papers had the potential to be accepted by international journals, but also he had to rely on

mediators for both translation and the publication process. Accordingly, he had used various mediation services from 10 mediators by the time he was interviewed (Table 2), with the bulk being translation. In this section, we describe these services, highlighting translation.

Table 2: Overview of Guan's use of writing mediation

mediators	charge	Service provided
ChinaISI	free	general assessment of RA1, RA3, RA4, RA6, RA8
Song	fee-paying	publication brokering of RA1, RA3, RA4, RA5 and RA6
	free	translating revisions of RA3, RA5, RA6 and RA7, and an email to a published author; interpreting review comments
Ling	free	translating RA1, RA3* and RA4*, revisions of RA1, RA3 and RA4, and abstracts for Chinese RAs
Dao	free	editing RA1*
Geng	fee-paying	translating RA2, RA4*, RA6*; publication brokering RA4 and RA6
NAE	fee-paying	translating RA3-RA8 and their cover letters
EuroCom	fee-paying	editing RA6
Nancy	fee-paying	Quality control for RA7 and RA8; translating all papers Guan lead-authored after RA9
	free	writing emails to editors; interpreting reviewer comments; assisting auxiliary scholarly activity
USM	Fee-paying	translating revisions of RA9*
Guan's son	Free	interpreting reviewer comments; translating Guan's reviewer report

\* translation never submitted for various reasons

### 5.1 Early experiences with translation services

Although Guan had been deterred from international publication before 2010 by his low English proficiency, he had become aware of the possibilities of translation by the advertising emails from ChinaISI, a mediation company targeting Chinese medical professionals. His lack of knowledge of the company, and lack of confidence in his own scholarship, prevented him from going beyond asking them to assess the potential of two manuscripts. The decisive change seems to have been triggered by a cold-call email in English from Song, a retired professor who now brokered papers for

Chinese biomedical academics. Like many of its kind, it read:

Your paper published on Journal X 2009 year gave me very much impression... I expect that your paper could be read by international readers, so I strongly suggest that you should write your new paper in English then send it to international journals which is indexed by SCI.

Song's approach was to trawl the top national academic journals in Chinese looking for potential clients like Guan, not mentioning payment until the paper was published.

Although suspicious of this approach, Guan eventually asked for more details and received the reply that the brokerage was free although Guan had to find a translator for the paper (RA1). Guan then decided to go ahead on this basis. Despite the availability of several dozen English teachers on the staff on RU, Guan dismissed them:

You may call it bias. But I thought they could not do the job. (interview, original in Chinese)

He felt that only a language professional well-versed in both medicine and English would be competent for his needs, but such people were not locally available. Unwilling to pay the prohibitively expensive price of professional services of ChinaISI, he turned to Ling, a sales representative of a pharmaceutical company who was seeking to build connections with doctors to promote her sales. Ling held a BA in English and an MA in applied linguistics, but her only medical education was a short pre-service training course organized by her employer. However, Ling was prepared to work for free to build contacts with doctors and Guan was impressed with the fact Ling had passed Band 8 in the test for English majors, the highest English proficiency grade in China. As a result, he asked her to translate RA1.

Having completed the translation, she asked Guan to check it, but Guan lacked the confidence in his English to do so and, now concerned about Ling's limited medical background, eventually contacted a former classmate, Dao, who had worked as a medical researcher in the US for over a decade. Dao agreed to edit the text but Guan was impatient to wait and after two weeks he sent Ling's translation verbatim to Song, who then submitted it to an SCI-indexed journal. After a swift rejection, Song was successful in getting a second journal to accept it two months later without further revision.

While the journal had a very low Impact Factor, this success marked Guan's debut in international publishing. However, while reading the proof, he found that Ling had missed one quarter of an important table in her translation, his own *laissez faire* non-involvement in the translation process having led to a potentially serious problem.

He immediately asked Song to rectify the problem and two weeks later Dao sent Guan the following email in English:

I took some time to make some modifications of your paper. I feel there are still some problems. I could not understand many of sentences in the article. I hope this will be of help.

As RA1 was already submitted, however, Guan simply discarded Dao's edited version. Flushed by the success of RA1 but impatient with Dao's lack of immediate response, Guan once again turned to Ling, asking her to translate RA4 while he searched for someone more medically qualified. Around this time however, a colleague recommended Geng, a professional medical RA translator and process broker. Guan immediately entrusted her to retranslate and broker RA4:

I had already given this paper to a pharmaceutical sales rep for translation... but I finally asked a professional medical translator to do it ... (email, original in Chinese).

Over the next three months Guan also asked Geng to translate RA2 and RA6. Although still unwilling to check translated drafts, Guan did answer the questions Geng had inserted into the translated text using Track Changes. However, this arrangement ended soon after with the rejection of RA4. Geng blamed this outcome on Guan's reluctance to follow her advice in revising the manuscript based on reviewer comments. After falling out with yet another translator, Guan was left once again without a professional RA mediator. While RA2 was soon accepted by the same SCI journal which had published RA1, Guan now had two unpublished English manuscripts, RA4 and RA6, and an untranslated Chinese manuscript, RA3. Thus, he returned to the free services of Ling, although this was short-lived as she moved to another region soon after.

## 5.2 Working with a corporate translation service

Frustrated with a succession of mediators and with a coauthor to help select target journals, Guan decided to manage the publishing process himself. Although unsuccessful in securing acceptances, he learnt about NAE, a leading international language service for EAL academics. Guan paid this company to retranslate both RA3 (first translated by Ling) and RA4 (first translated by Geng). A few months later, and after repeated rejections of RA6, Guan once again turned to Song and asked him to process broker all three papers simultaneously. With Song's help, RA3 and RA4 were quickly accepted by SCI-indexed journals with good IF scores of over 3.0. While Guan was delighted that the quality of NAE's translations allowed him to publish in prestigious international journals, RA6 (translated by Geng) continued to stick. One reviewer of the journal to which Song first submitted RA6 criticized its language severely:

The all manuscript needs English editing as it is very difficult to understand, the English is not clear and it is hard to follow the authors thinking...

(reviewer report)

Guan had NAE retranslate RA6, but again it was rejected with some reviewers continuing to criticize its language. Confused, Guan asked another international language service, EuroCom, to edit the NAE-translated version, but again without success. Only two years later was RA6, retranslated by Song, accepted as a letter to editor.

Although criticism on the language of Guan's manuscripts translated by NAE occasionally surfaced in reviewer reports, such as the negative judgment against RA6, the careful quality control exercised by the company allowed him to publish in international journals. Nancy, a translator of Guan's manuscripts at NAE, stated in an interview that this was because any translation was typically the work of at least three mediators, as NAE's website testifies:

Our translation service includes translation of your paper by an expert in your area of study, review by a bilingual Academic Translation Advisor, and editing by a subject-matter expert English editor. (accessed on May 24, 2015)

In fact, Guan's manuscripts had received even better treatment as he always chose their premium service:

With standard translation, you have one translator translating your work while with our premium service, you have another more senior translator reviewing the work after the first round of translating... (email)

The track-changes comments always bore the traces of three to four other professionals in addition to the translator, thus not only translating his manuscripts but also improving them. Finally, Guan seemed to have found a translation service he was happy with:

This is translated very well. You took out the unnecessary words in my version. You not only translated my manuscript but also improved it. Thank you very much!  
(margin comment in RA4, original in Chinese)

Despite his new successes and the fact that multiple mediators had worked on his manuscripts, Guan saw NAE's assistance as a one-shot translation service which provided little help in managing the protracted redrafting and editorial negotiation processes required in journal publication. Each short revision required translation and Guan was reluctant to pay the nearly US\$200 NAE would charge for this. After 2012, NAE began to include "a single translation of up to 1500 words in the original language" in its translation package to accommodate this situation, although manuscripts often require more than one round of revision. As a result, Guan returned to his stalwart helpers, begging favours from Ling and Song and, later, Nancy.

Guan was also frustrated by NAE's reluctance to communicate with him in Chinese. Despite asking the recipient "请您以中文回信" (please reply in Chinese), he was told:

I regret I can only respond to you in English at the present but please feel free to contact if you have any additional questions or misunderstanding. (email)

This situation of Guan addressing NAE in Chinese and the latter responding in English lasted for nearly two years. Even bilingual NAE mediators consistently addressed him in English. Another problem was that all his messages to the translator were mediated by the company:

There is no way for you to communicate with the translator directly...when you find a problem, you send an email to the company. Seldom can you receive a timely solution.

(interview, original in Chinese)

These difficulties were only removed when he met a new translator, Nancy.

### 5.3 Finding the ideal translator

Nancy was a Chinese translator with a PhD degree in neurobiology from a Chinese university and she came to Guan's notice when she began to contact him on behalf of NAE. At last he could contact a translator in the company directly to negotiate translation issues in Chinese. Soon after he got to know her, Guan regularly began asking her for free services translating emails and short segments in manuscripts. She always agreed but began charging him when she left NAE to become a freelance translator a year later. From then on, all Guan's articles have been translated by Nancy.

Nancy was an extremely conscientious mediator who, after translating Guan's articles, would check it herself and then employ a NES editor to proofread it to "remove any inconsistencies and nonnative signs". More importantly, she engaged the author at every step of the process and these interactions with Nancy made Guan realize that he had a key role to play in the quality of the final text:

With Nancy's help I began to try and read each text carefully with a dictionary to see whether my meaning is accurately translated. I communicate a lot with her while doing this. Now I spend as much as a whole week checking a translated text.

(interview, original in Chinese)

After Nancy went freelance Guan relied on her for the translation of all his work, both large and small. She not only translated full manuscripts, revisions, cover letters, responses to reviewers



and emails to editors, but also translated reviewers' comments from English into Chinese so that Guan understood what they wanted him to change. Guan was now having to pay for his translations but seemed more willing to do so having recognized the value of the service he was getting. Nancy charged a rate based on character counts for the drafts, but often translated the shorter texts for nothing, although Guan began paying her for these too.

He was certainly getting good value from his translator as Nancy not only translated Guan's manuscripts but improved them. She would fix inconsistencies where she could, asking Guan's approval in margin comments, while raising questions where she was unsure of his meaning. In this way Guan was pressed into an interactive construction of the revised English text.

Guan stopped using other translators and asking favours from acquaintances. He seemed to have found his ideal translator, although he was occasionally frustrated at the time she took in returning a translated manuscript. As a successful translator Nancy's services were now in high demand and he waited nearly a month for the translation of RA10. Thus, he confided:

I found her too busy. I just finished another paper but she is too busy. I may have to go back to NAE again. (QQ communication, original in Chinese)

Needless to say, the fear of repeating his communication problems with that company and their lack of ongoing support meant he never took this path. He was, however, tempted away when another language service, USM, approached him, claiming that it provided higher quality translation than NAE at a much lower rate. He was, however, disappointed at the poor translation they made of RA9 and returned to Nancy, never changing translators again.

With Nancy's help then, and patient reading of the literature with a dictionary, Guan had become a successful academic, regularly publishing in SCI journals to share his research with the international community. The financial inducements from the university had largely paid for the services he had purchased and he was promoted to full professor. He had, moreover, gained a taste for research and vowed to continue publishing:

I used to publish just to get promoted and the rewards...But now, I publish because I am interested in the work. (interview, original in Chinese)

## 6 Manuscript translation and the EAL Scholar

While perhaps astonishing to western academics schooled in conceptions of authorial agency and publishing ethics, Guan's success in international publishing, although lacking basic English literacy skills, is not an exception. Several of Guan's colleagues at RU became clients of NAE following Guan's recommendation. Shao, a gynecologist, for example, went on to publish three papers by submitting NAE translations to international journals. The company currently help EAL authors translate manuscripts from four languages into English and Nancy recalled that it managed about one thousand manuscripts for Chinese researchers in the year she worked there fulltime. Nor is NAE alone in providing these services. As financial rewards increase, and academic careers are ever more tied to publication in English, this has become a crowded and competitive market in China (Author, 2017).

But while Guan's case suggests the huge potential of translation for EAL scholars with limited English proficiency, the critical role of translators in text mediation has gone unremarked in the literature. Lillis and Curry (2010), for instance, argue that success in English-medium publishing hinges more upon "the extent to which scholars can mobilize relevant resources via networked activity" than an individual's English competence (p. 61). For them, the most valuable resources are coauthors and the generous help of altruistic Centre scholars rather than third-party translators, whom they explicitly reject as a helpful resource.

However, although co-authoring is now commonplace, many scholars do not have access to more English-proficient coauthors or generous centre scholars. In China, although international collaboration is universally encouraged, less than 15% of the SCI papers lead-authored by Chinese scientists are coauthored with researchers from English-speaking countries (ISTIC, 2017). While there is also the possibility of coauthoring with local more English proficient colleagues, its success by no means comes easily either (Author, 2017). In contrast, soliciting support from text mediators seems altogether much easier. Guan's case suggests that translation is a valuable option for academics with limited English writing proficiency. While four individuals (Ling, Geng, Nancy and Song) and

two companies (NAE and USM) translated manuscripts for Guan, only the translation of USM did not make it into print.

It is, however, worth unpacking the key issues and implications from this success. The following seems most pertinent to us.

### **6.1 Garbage in-Garbage out**

Perhaps the most obvious point to make is that even a great translation will not transform a low-quality text into a publishable paper. Language is only one component of a publishable manuscript and brilliant prose cannot compensate for poor research. International publication means having something to say and demands awareness of the main disciplinary paradigms and methodologies, as writers must address currently hot topics in novel ways which will both interest colleagues and move the disciplinary conversation forward. It involves filling a worthwhile gap, not merely an existing one. It is these ideas, and not merely the words, of a source text which are translated and these ideas must meet the expectations of reviewers and editors.

Guan had already published in top Chinese medical journals and his work was regarded as important enough to be read by a wider audience. This is not the case of many texts sent to translators, however, which are unpublishable despite the best efforts of translators. Thus, Nancy, Guan's most trusted translator, observed that many manuscripts NAE received from Chinese authors were poorly written even though translation teams at NAE made "full use of their imagination" to improve them.

### **6.2 The nature of translator expertise**

Only when translators are able to work with good source material does their expertise fully come into play, but the nature of this expertise for RA translation remains unexplored. The scholars in Lillis and Curry (2010) rejected translation altogether and intuitively believed its help would be minimal unless translators were familiar with the author's subfield. Our discussion of Guan's experience challenges this view, since most translators Guan turned to managed to produce publishable texts from his work while differing greatly in their backgrounds. Ling, a language professional with a BA in English and MA in applied linguistics, was essentially ignorant of academic

medicine. Song was a retired professor in biotechnology and did not share Guan's discipline. While Geng had a degree in medicine, she had not worked in Guan's subfield yet she was able to successfully translate articles for authors in different medical specialisations.

Only Nancy, with a PhD in neurobiology, shared Guan's subfield, but she pointed out that it was difficult for even a large language service like NAE, employing over 2000 mediators, to match translation team members with the author's exact specialism. The availability of appropriate mediators and the delivery period makes matching authors with translators in their subfields difficult, so that manuscripts were routinely assigned to those in the author's main discipline rather than subfield. While NAE claims the papers will be translated "by an expert in your area of study" and edited "by a subject-matter expert English editor", those experts were often, as in Guan's case, someone in medicine but not in neurology.

Despite the varied background of Guan's translators, however, we have seen that most of them produced translations acceptable to the gatekeepers of international journals. It appears that while a professional manuscript translator requires a good command of written English and a professional familiarity and experience with the register of scientific English, he or she does not need to have profound knowledge in the author's field. Ling, for example, had the least medical background of the translators in this paper, but she had become familiar with academic writing during her MA program in applied linguistics. Additionally, experience, or at least an understanding of the research publication process on the translator's part is also desirable for a successful outcome. In Guan's case, he could not have published internationally without Song's process mediation in addition to all the manuscript translation services he had used. Even after Guan was able to select an appropriate journal and submit a paper himself, he still needed Nancy's process mediation including the translation of correspondence with the editor and interpreting reviewer comments.

### **6.3 Author involvement**

Nancy's principal advantage over NAE as a freelancer was her ability to involve the author and so produce a potentially more effective text. She would not only ask a NES editor to proofread the English draft and invite Guan to comment on the translation, but also discussed points with him

synchronously via QQ and in the margin comments of drafts. Her personal access to Guan and their shared L1 allowed them to build a relationship of trust which benefited the text considerably. NAE, in contrast – and like most mediation services – only permitted their mediators to communicate with clients through the company, presumably to avoid them setting up independently and taking clients away from the company. Guan, however, benefited from Nancy's role in charge of NAE's Chinese manuscript translation section so contacting clients was part of her responsibility.

The significance of author involvement has been emphasized repeatedly in the literature as far as editing is concerned (e.g. Burgess & Lillis, 2013; Flowerdew & Wang, 2016; Shaw & Voss, 2017; Willey & Tanimoto, 2012). We have also stressed its importance and tracked the mechanisms of the process, showing how authors respond to mediators' editorial advice (Authors, 2016, 2017). Guan's case demonstrates that it is a key factor affecting translation outcome as it improves both translation quality and author satisfaction. Yet EAL authors often delegate the entire process to paid mediators, perhaps expecting them to produce a perfect text independently of author involvement. The Hungarian author in Lillis and Curry's (2010) study, for example, expected a well-translated paper from the translator and similar authorial nonchalance is reported elsewhere (e.g. Kerans, 1999). Guan also failed to check translations made for him during his early forays into mediation due to lack of confidence in his own ability to judge their quality, asking Dao to check Ling's translation of RA1 on his behalf and so failing to spot that a key part of a table was missing. He only became aware of the importance of the author's role in this process after working closely with Nancy who insisted he read the final paper carefully.

It is also the *continuous* nature of this involvement which is important. RA manuscripts often require at least one round of revision and always involve some interaction with editors and responses to the criticisms of reviewers. Since EAL authors using translation service tend to have low English proficiency, they are likely to struggle with this discursively and pragmatically complex aspect of the process. Guan's case shows how personal access to a competent and willing translator can help EAL authors overcome these difficulties.

#### **6.4 Authors and professional translators**

Guan's case also reveals another key factor affecting manuscript translation: that translation has to be regarded as a professional service, rather than a request to friends, family and colleagues who know some English. While not always recognized as such, particularly by authors, translating an academic paper is perhaps as challenging as translating a literary work in requiring considerable literacy and interpretive skills to help authors communicate ideas effectively to a community with certain expectations of fluency, novelty and familiarity with disciplinary conventions (Bennet, 2013). However, EAL authors often lack the knowledge about where to find reliable academic translators.

With little knowledge of professional academic translation services, Guan had thought that international publishing was something beyond his reach and thus did not try to submit papers to journals in the west. His entire approach to writing seemed scattergun, inconsistent and driven by hope and a lack of clear direction. Even after Song assured Guan that his research merited publication in SCI-indexed journals, he continued to make free use of Ling, Dao, Song and Nancy on the basis of their knowledge of English. But while he rejected the idea of asking English teachers at RU to translate RA1, he made use of the expensive NAE premium translation option which involved a large team of mediators working on the paper. He also seemed uncertain about the decisions he did make, asking Geng to retranslate RA4, an article which he had previously entrusted to Ling.

Only after many detours, changes of direction and dead ends, did Guan finally encounter the services of NAE and Nancy, which proved more reliable in offering a timely and accurate translations of his texts. It is possible that knowledge of these sources might have prompted him to use them earlier, and so eliminate a great deal of agonizing and time-spent on rejected papers.

## **6.5 Ethics and the professional recognition of translators**

The final and perhaps most contentious issue raised by our study is the status of the translated text and the recognition that should be given to its translator. Academic translators seem to inhabit the grey areas of research publication: essential but unsung champions of the otherwise excluded EAL academics. They provide a critical, but anonymous, service sometimes paid but rarely acknowledged. Publishers and journals seldom mention the need to acknowledge or credit translators in their guidelines or statements of ethical practice. Nor does the research literature seem particularly

concerned with the matter, despite the issues it raises for questions of authorship, contributorship and the transparency of research.

Academic translation, like literary and commercial varieties, however, is more than providing line by line equivalence in another language. In this study, most translators tried to improve Guan's manuscripts by going beyond changing Chinese into English. The manuscripts translated by NAE and Nancy, for example, resulted from the collaborative agency of one translator with at least one other mediator, usually an editor. Thus, Guan explicitly acknowledged that NAE and Nancy not only translated his manuscripts but improved them. The translation is actually a new text, suffused with the translator's knowledge of English and an academic research register, rewritten from the original Chinese for a community of academics, and with a sensitivity of that audience apparent in the new text. One leading translators' association, CEATL, with 10,000 members across 29 European countries, enshrines this view of the translator as author in its statement on legal rights (<https://www.ceatl.eu/translators-rights/legal-status#s2>).

Academic work requires accountability and transparency as researchers are obliged to disclose the sources they have used. It would seem a small step to require authors to disclose that they did not write the English version of the paper. We recognize this situation lies someway in the future, but the relative silence which surrounds translation should be broken and more research in academic writing is one way to do this.

## 7 Conclusion

We recognize that this is a single case study and do not claim that Guan's story is generalizable beyond this case. However, by examining the international publication success of one Chinese academic author we hope to have shown that translation can be a practical text mediation strategy for EAL academics with limited English proficiency. More importantly, we hope to have shown that RA manuscript translation outcomes are shaped by many factors, among them, the quality of the source text, the expertise of the translator and the translator's involvement with the author. While Guan's trajectory to professor is a success story, he took various detours and dead ends before he found reliable translators. This trial and error approach is typical of the routes EAL scholars take

towards text mediation, including translation, despite the burgeoning language services industry which now exists to support them.

To help EAL authors avoid some of these detours, the topic of how best to mobilize text production resources might be usefully addressed in the ERPP classroom. This is, however, a route which requires more research on text mediation services to inform teachers and EAL academics of the options available. We believe that findings from such research, like those reported here, can help transform ERPP pedagogy by better reflecting “the real-life text production practices” of EAL scholars (Lillis & Curry, 2006, p. 263). Teachers might be better placed to serve students by including effective resource mobilization for English text production in addition to enhancing the skills of individual writers. Guan’s case is particularly relevant for ERPP teachers in non-Anglophone contexts like China where many students may have difficulty producing comprehensible English drafts and thus need translation.

Guan’s story also underlines the fact that, despite the obstacles and studies to the contrary (e.g. Durand, 2006; Lillis & Curry, 2010), English as the language of international scholarly publication does not necessarily exclude EAL academics with limited English. It also supports the view that language may be less a barrier to EAL scholars’ striving to publish in international journals than factors such as lack of funding, geographical location and research training (Author, 2015, 2016). Finally, it suggests a central role for text mediators, who can contribute considerably to the text production process (Authors, 2016, 2017; Burgess & Lillis, 2013; Flowerdew & Wang, 2016).

We might also point out that mediators can help EAL researchers to a greater extent than those serving Guan. For example, they have assisted non-Anglophone European academics with only raw data to publish in English via developmental editing (Matarese, 2013, 2016) and professional writing (Morley, 2013). Such services are perhaps less accessible to authors than translation, but they further reinforce the fact that EAL authors may not need to produce well-written English manuscripts themselves to publish internationally.

In focusing on translation, we have also highlighted something of a blind spot in academic publishing. High quality translation involves decision-making and interpretation, presenting ideas in a specific way rather than other ways, and in so doing creates a specific text rather than simply



rendering one. By failing to publicly recognize the work of good translators, the academy overlooks work of considerable scholarship and, at the same time, it fails to reward a major mechanism which supports EAL academics to participate in international disciplinary conversations.

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