

Chinese scientists writing for publication: English teachers as literacy brokers

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Increasingly, scientists in China have to publish in international journals to make themselves visible internationally and to progress their careers. As EAL scholars, they naturally face barriers to different degrees in publishing English papers. Many have to turn to 'literacy brokers' for text mediation (editing and/or translation). One important resource they turn to has been local English teachers at the university level. This presentation, drawing from interview data supplemented by text history, examines cooperation and difficulties experienced between local English teachers and scientists at three Chinese universities. Findings show that, although lack of disciplinary knowledge and infelicities caused by the authors' inadequate English have greatly prevented these language professionals from deciphering the manuscripts alone, they have mostly succeeded in transforming the problem-laden texts into publishable papers by closely communicating with the authors. Apart from increasing the legibility of the manuscripts, close communication with the authors allows the most experienced English-teacher text mediators to enhance publication chances for the manuscripts by effecting strategic rhetorical and/or content changes. Additionally, manuscript mediation has proved to be an important learning process for some English teachers by familiarizing them with disciplinary knowledge and prompting them to self-teach themselves genre theories. However, lack of institutional funding for language mediation of this kind and uncertainties about awarding appropriate credit for this work have greatly demotivated many English teachers from assisting their scientist colleagues. Consequently, many Chinese scientists have to turn to professional language services, many of which (particularly the domestic ones) are questionable in terms of competence, price and even ethics. The presentation will end with a discussion of implications for future research and practice on how EAL scientists may make better use of local resources when striving for international publication and how peripheral English teachers may professionally develop themselves by providing scientist colleagues research writing support.

Biodata

Na Luo is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Hong Kong. Before she entered her PhD program, she taught English at a university in China for 16 years and worked as an amateur author's editor for scientists striving to publish internationally for nearly a decade. She also spent a year learning academic writing at University of California Santa Barbara. Her dissertation project is about research writing support for scientists in China.