

European Science Editing: May 2015 picks

In the ironically titled 'The increasing pseudodignification of medical prose', retired consultant Neville W. Goodman bemoans the failure of medical writers (by which he means people who write scientific papers) to use simple words.¹ Goodman explores trends in word usage from 1930 to 2010 using PubMed as a source of data on scientific writing and Google's Ngram Viewer (English Fiction corpus) for general writing. He finds that for many pairs of words comprising an approved (simple) and disapproved alternative (e.g. *given* and *administered*) the approved word is more likely to be chosen by writers of fiction than by writers of scientific papers. He presents evidence that this is an old problem, but one that is getting worse. He highlights the rise of the disfavoured word *novel* (prefer *new*), which appeared in no less than 8.5% of abstracts in 2014. All this in spite of concerted efforts to encourage the adoption of plain English (as explored in the March 2015 issue of *Medical Writing*). Goodman is downbeat about the outlook for scientific English but offers no solutions to the problems afflicting it.

On the same subject, regular contributor Denys Wheatley looks at recent trends in English (or Englishes – British and American).² He rues the fact that *measure* has been superseded by the less precise *evaluate*, and that nowadays it is more common for an enzyme to *play a role* than to *function*. He complains about the amount of *exhibiting* and *performing* and *revealing*. 'The rule now seems to be never to use a short word if a long one can be found', he writes with palpable exasperation. But

he also takes aim at seemingly innocuous words such as *outcome* and *clearly*. Acknowledging his own pessimism, Wheatley calls on native English speakers to set a good example and journal editors to halt the decline.

Other articles in the May 2015 issue of *European Science Editing* look at the importance of journals having legal protection for their editorial freedom,³ and how the ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) initiative is streamlining research administration and may give insights into researcher productivity.⁴ Finally, in the regular *This site I like* section,⁵ Silvia Maina presents Coursera, which provides massive open online courses (MOOCs) on a range of topics, some relevant to medical writers (the next issue of *Medical Writing* will feature an example in *The Webscout*).

References

1. Goodman NW. The increasing pseudodignification of medical prose. *Eur Sci Editing*. 2015;41(2):31–5.
2. Wheatley D. Out with the old, in with the new – words and phrases in fashion. *Eur Sci Editing*. 2015;41(2):43–4.
3. Marušić M. The importance of legal regulation for scientific journals. *Eur Sci Editing*. 2015;41(2):36–8.
4. Allen L. Connecting researchers and research – investing in infrastructure to bring efficiencies to research. ORCID as an enabler of better research analytics. *Eur Sci Editing*. 2015;41(2):38–9.
5. Maina S. Coursera: when learning never ends. *Eur Sci Editing*. 2015;41(2):49.

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