



Why English is so important in sciences ?

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A universal language ?

Text understanding

English as the universal language of science: opportunities and challenges

1. [David G. Drubin](#) and [Douglas R. Kellogg*](#)

English is now used almost exclusively as the language of science. The adoption of a *de facto* universal language of science has had an extraordinary effect on scientific communication : by learning a single language, scientists around the world gain access to the vast scientific literature and can communicate with other scientists anywhere in the world. However, the use of English as the universal scientific language creates distinct challenges for those who are not native speakers of English. In this editorial, we discuss how researchers, manuscript reviewers, and journal editors can help minimize these challenges, thereby leveling the playing field and fostering international scientific communication.



THE AMERICAN
SOCIETY FOR
CELL BIOLOGY

The science of life, the life of science

[...] For scientists whose first language is not English, writing manuscripts, preparing oral presentations, and communicating directly with other scientists in English is much more challenging than it is for native speakers of English. Communicating subtle nuances, which can be done easily in one's native tongue, becomes difficult or impossible. [...] But, we believe that the communications advantage realised by native speakers of English obligates them to help alleviate the extra challenges faced by their fellow scientists from non-English-speaking countries. Native speakers of English should offer understanding, patience, and assistance when reviewing or editing manuscripts of nonnative speakers of English. At the same time, non-native speakers of English must endeavour to produce manuscripts that are clearly written. We offer the following guidelines for writing and evaluating manuscripts in the context of the international community of scientists:

1. Non native speakers of English can write effective manuscripts, despite errors of grammar, syntax, and usage, if the manuscripts are clear, simple, logical, and concise. (We note that native speakers of English sometimes write manuscripts exhibiting good grammar, yet filled with muddled and confusing logic.)
2. When possible, reviewers and editors of manuscripts should look beyond errors in grammar, syntax, and usage, and evaluate the science.
3. It is inappropriate to reject or harshly criticise manuscripts from nonnative speakers of English based on errors of grammar, syntax, or usage alone. If there are language errors, reviewers and editors should provide constructive criticism, pointing out examples of passages that are unclear and suggesting improvements.
4. Non native speakers of English must be aware that reviewers, editors, and journal staff do not have the time or resources to extensively edit manuscripts for language and that reviewers and editors must be able to understand what is being reported. Thus, it is essential that non-native speakers of English recognise that their ability to participate in the international scientific enterprise is directly related to their ability to produce manuscripts in English that are clear, simple, logical, and concise.

The fact that English is the *de facto* global language of science is not likely to change anytime soon. Optimising communication among members of the international community of scientists, and thus advancing scientific progress, depends on elimination of obstacles faced by nonnative speakers of the English language. This ideal can best be achieved when all members of the scientific community work together.

<http://www.molbiolcell.org/content/23/8/1399.full>

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Vocabulary :

de facto = de fait (locution latine)

native : [language] ► maternel = mother tongue ≠ non-native

reviewers : ► critique

To foster : “encourage” : [+ friendship, development] ► favoriser, ► encourager

“entertain” : [+ idea, thought] ► entretenir, ► nourrir

to alleviate : ► adoucir, soulager

harshly : ► sévèrement

fellow : ► compagnon

To endeavour : ► s’efforcer, s’évertuer



Jay Walker: The world's English mania

Jay Walker explains why two billion people around the world are trying to learn English. He shares photos and spine-tingling audio of Chinese students rehearsing English -- "the world's second language" -- by the thousands.

Let's talk about manias. Let's start with Beatle mania: hysterical teenagers, crying, screaming, pandemonium. Sports mania: deafening crowds, all for one idea -- get the ball in the net. Okay, religious mania: there's rapture, there's weeping, there's visions. Manias can be good. Manias can be alarming. Or manias can be deadly.

The world has a new mania. A mania for learning English. Listen as Chinese students practice their English by screaming it.

Teacher: ... change my life!

Students: I will change my life.

T: I don't want to let my parents down.

S: I don't want to let my parents down.

T: I don't ever want to let my country down.

S: I don't ever want to let my country down.

T: Most importantly ... S: Most importantly ...

T: I don't want to let myself down.

S: I don't want to let myself down.

Jay Walker: How many people are trying to learn English worldwide? Two billion of them.

Students: A t-shirt. A dress.

JW: In Latin America, in India, in Southeast Asia, and most of all in China. If you are a Chinese student you start learning English in the third grade, by law. That's why this year China will become the world's largest English-speaking country. (Laughter) Why English? In a single word: Opportunity. Opportunity for a better life, a job, to be able to pay for school, or put better food on the table. Imagine a student taking a giant test for three full days. Her score on this one test literally determines her future. She studies 12 hours a day for three years to prepare. 25 percent of her grade is based on English. It's called the Gaokao, and 80 million high school Chinese students have already taken this grueling test. The intensity to learn English is almost unimaginable, unless you witness it.

Teacher: Perfect! Students: Perfect!

T: Perfect! S: Perfect!

T: I want to speak perfect English.

S: I want to speak perfect English.

T: I want to speak -- S: I want to speak --

T: perfect English. S: perfect English.

T: I want to change my life!

S: I want to change my life!

JW: So is English mania good or bad? Is English a tsunami, washing away other languages? Not likely. English is the world's second language. Your native language is your life. But with English you can become part of a wider conversation: a global conversation about global problems, like climate change or poverty, or hunger or disease. The world has other universal languages. Mathematics is the language of science. Music is the language of emotions. And now English is becoming the language of problem-solving. Not because America is pushing it, but because the world is pulling it. So English mania is a turning point. Like the harnessing of electricity in our cities or the fall of the Berlin Wall, English represents hope for a better future -- a future where the world has a common language to solve its common problems.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

Vocabulary :

Spine-tingling : ▶ à vous glacer le sang

To rehearse: ▶ répéter

pandemonium : ▶ Tohu bohu, Chahut

rapture : ▶ enchantement

weeping : ▶ larmes, pleurs

grueling : ▶ éreintant

disease : ▶ maladie

wide : ▶ large, de grande envergure

harnessing : ▶ exploitation