



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

THE EDITOR'S DEPARTMENT

The editorial process once again: Behind the scenes in the *Language* office

Taking a behind-the-scenes look at certain operations is admittedly a risky proposition; an oft-quoted saying warns against looking too closely into how sausages, or laws, are made, since the process can be ugly.¹ I trust that the same is not true, however, for the process of putting together an issue of *Language*, and especially the final stages. Having now been in on the assembly of numerous issues over four-plus years, I feel it is time to lay bare some of what we do and to discuss some aspects of the editorial side of the last parts of the production process.

Previously in this space I have touched on matters that pertain to editing and production and in particular how, in the course of the editorial process, *Language*'s copyeditors and I often change an author's words and style in the direction of the journal's historically avowed goals of economy and succinctness of expression, as well as other desiderata such as consistency.² My comments then focused largely on the philosophy of editing, so to speak, with just a few concrete examples concerning *Language*'s style and our editorial practices. There is thus more to be said.

Striving to achieve these stylistic goals drives much of what we do as the articles in an issue move into production and the issue itself takes shape. A good part of this reworking is done in the copyediting stage, with a further step—that of proofreading—ensuring, among other things, that the copyedits are incorporated properly into the text.

In the copyediting phase, a 'raw' paper is turned into a *Language* article by careful attention to readability and consistency, balanced against parsimony. We of course aim for accuracy in all respects and preserving the author's intent, but we focus as well on the needs of our readers (on which, see below). Then, after the copyediting, the resulting article is handed over to compositors, who turn it into the familiar-looking *Language* pages. These pages are checked over by authors in the proofreading stage, but also by members of the *Language* 'team': an independent proofreader and my two editorial assistants.

During copyediting we make sure that examples, tables, and figures are properly introduced so readers know what they are looking at. We pay attention to very small details that in the grand scheme of things may not matter a lot but nonetheless are serious business for us: the use of symbols, for instance, should be accurate throughout; when necessary, we work with the compositors to get phonetic (and logical, etc.) symbols right, even if that means having them create a symbol that is not in their repertoire. Accuracy in the presentation of data is clearly crucial, in that claims based on faulty data can hardly stand, but usage must also be consistent throughout the article. If there is an inconsistency in the marking of a sound, for instance, a reader may legitimately wonder if some difference is intended from one occurrence to the next.³ Such is the

¹ Otto von Bismarck, the nineteenth-century German chancellor, is apparently the source of the quote, which maybe runs as follows: 'People who enjoy eating sausage and obeying the law should not watch either being made'. The reason for my equivocation is that there are at least a couple of different versions of the quote circulating. But the intent is clear and content wins out over form here.

² See 'Editing, prescriptivism, and free speech' (79.1.1–4, 2003) and 'A styled farewell and a new era: The purpose, history, and future of the *Language* style sheet' (81.3.564–67, 2005).

³ We assume here that readers approach a text with the same sort of semiotic (or cognitive or even linguistic) principle in mind that seems to govern much of what goes on in language and especially language change (e.g. regarding analogy and grammatical change more generally), essentially a 'one meaning, one

case too with terminology: does an author mean something different by, say, *grammaticalization* in one part of an article and *grammaticization* in another? Some authors do, but some don't, so we level out the differences where appropriate (checking with authors as needed) to remove any doubts. And consistency also comes into play with the implementation of points of style, where other potentially conflicting considerations can matter.

For instance, the *Language* style sheet, like many style manuals, calls for a comma after the next-to-last element in a multiple coordination, thus *Attic-Ionic, Doric, and Aeolic were three Ancient Greek dialects*, not *Attic-Ionic, Doric and Aeolic*.⁴ It is a small point admittedly, but on occasion that comma can add to clarity, even though oftentimes it makes no difference (as in this example). When that comma does not matter, it is, in a small way, extraneous so that its appearance violates the goals of parsimony and economy; nonetheless we include it in all cases, since consistency is the higher-ranking constraint, so to speak.

And there are some style points on which *Language* might appear to some readers to be inconsistent, but in which we ARE carefully consistent according to our style tenets. One in particular deserves comment: we maintain a distinction between reference to an author and reference to a work. Thus, *Jones 2005 claims . . .* is a reference to the work itself where the claim is made and is paraphrasable as 'Jones's 2005 study claims . . .', whereas *Jones (2005) claims . . .* is a reference to the author himself, with the date indicating where that claim was made, and is paraphrasable as 'Jones, in his 2005 study, claims . . .'. Very few journals make this distinction and very few authors observe it—I know I never did before being editor made me aware of its utility—so that it often comes back 'corrected' on authors' proofs to parenthesized or unparenthesized dates throughout, 'corrections' we promptly undo or ignore!⁵ Nonetheless, we consider it important and hope, in a small way, to lead by example and promote the observance of this decidedly minor but nonetheless useful point of style in other venues.⁶

All of the copyediting changes are checked carefully in the proofreading phase, as are some further aspects of an article that can be checked only at this point. We check for and correct any errors introduced in the typesetting process, including misspelled names and typos of all sorts.⁷ But we also, for the benefit of the reader, ensure that examples, tables, and figures are placed near relevant text, something that is not always done in the composition process owing to the vagaries of how paragraphs and sections

form' principle (see Anttila 1972:passim, but especially p. 181). Thus the use of a different symbol or term would be expected to indicate something different.

⁴ This is consistent with, for example, the *Chicago manual of style* (1993:§5.57), but not all writers agree. James Kilpatrick, in the September 28, 2005 column in his syndicated 'The writer's art' series, advocated the use of such 'serial' commas only when called for by the need for clarity (based on his subjective evaluation).

⁵ At least such authors are observing the consistency constraint (as to their understanding of our citation practice)!

⁶ The relevant distinction is between *Jones (2005) takes his place among scholars who . . .* and *Jones 2005 represents the first work to . . .*, where *Jones 2005* or *Jones (2005)* in both would lose the nuance that the differential use of parentheses allows for.

⁷ Actually, though, one can never be sure with names. I once was called upon to offer some guidance to a student whose last name was given as *Joeph* in the file handed over to me; I was, of course, sure that this was a typo in the file, even though it was consistent over the several occurrences of the name contained therein. But when I met the student and asked about the spelling just out of curiosity, it turned out to be accurate, as far as this particular 'Joseph' family was concerned: the student's response to me was 'Yeah, well how else would that name (i.e. [dʒoʊsef]) be spelled?!'

fit onto pages. And we fuss over the layout of tables, the sizing of columns, the shading of figures, and other details that emerge only after the compositors have done their work.

I mention succinctness above and it is perhaps worth defending (even at the risk of adding extra words myself here in violation of economy) why editors are so keen on conciseness. Unnecessary words can clutter up the presentation of an idea, so it is in the author's best interest to say only as much as is needed to get a point across. Thus, copyeditors are often rightly brutal in cutting an author's excess verbiage. But from my viewpoint as journal editor, there is another bonus to brevity: saving a word here and another there can add up to saved lines and ultimately to saved pages; having shorter articles (even by a page) means that more material can be included in a given issue of the journal. A couple of pages saved will generally mean that a few extra book notices or one extra book review can be included, and that in itself is a substantive, and substantial, benefit. But it can also contribute to some flexibility in assembling an issue: each issue has a target length of 225 numbered (content) pages, according to the LSA's current regularly budgeted amount of funding for producing the journal,⁸ but various unnumbered pages (forematter and advertising in particular) must be included and there is an overriding constraint that says that the final number of pages, numbered and unnumbered, must be divisible by four in order to satisfy the exigencies of the printing and binding process.⁹ There is always thus a curious calculus involved in getting an issue together: squeeze in as much content as possible but end up with around 225 pages and have the result with the unnumbered pages added in be a multiple of four. Saving a few pages here and there to allow for a bit of playing around with extra book notices has often made the difference between an issue that is in compliance with all highly ranked constraints and one that could be in violation.¹⁰

Obviously, our goal is to have every issue end up perfect in terms of both typography and layout,¹¹ and while we have yet (I suspect) to produce a perfect issue in all respects, I believe we come closer and closer all the time.¹² We aim for the highest level of

⁸ Given that some 6,000 copies of each issue of *Language* are printed to cover all personal and institutional LSA members, the cost per page comes to approximately \$130.

⁹ And a bit more too: another constraint is operative here as well, dictated by US Postal Service regulations, namely that there can be no blank end pages for items to be sent via a special bulk rate.

¹⁰ I do worry what the switchover to electronic publication of book notices in *eLanguage* sometime within the next eighteen months or so will mean for our page-count calculus. Presumably we will have to fiddle around with the 'Letters to *Language*' section or the number of advertising pages or, heaven forbid, with the length of the Editor's Department!

¹¹ This is quite apart from the criteria for a perfect journal that Geoffrey Pullum has written about and which I have discussed in another column (see 'On change in *Language* and change in language' (80.3.381–83, 2004) for the Pullum references and criteria and a sense of how *Language* measures up).

¹² Note that I am NOT hereby soliciting 'gotcha'-type letters with lists of typos we have missed, but it is worth stating for the record that *Language* publishes corrections for anything substantive that needs correcting. We place the correction either in the 'Letters to *Language*' section, as with Mira Ariel's letter in *Language* 81.1 (2005) correcting a point of interpretation in her article 'Most' from *Language* 80.4 (2004), or as a separate item, as with the correction in *Language* 81.3 (2005) to the article 'The paradox of sign language morphology' by Mark Aronoff, Irit Meir, and Wendy Sandler in *Language* 81.2 (2005). Both achieve the desired effect, but interestingly, in a feature that only an electronic presentation could accomplish, the separately published corrections are linked with the article they correct in the web-accessible versions of *Language* (through Project Muse for current and recent volumes and JSTOR for others), even though the correction comes typically one or two issues later (see the Aronoff et al. piece and my own column in *Language* 80.3 (see n. 11 above) for a couple of examples); this handy bit of electronic linkage does not happen with corrective letters, however.

perfection in the areas that we can control, and we hope for the best in all other respects; I am pleased to say that we come pretty close most of the time.¹³

Brian D. Joseph
Columbus, Ohio
July 11, 2006

REFERENCES

ANTTILA, RAIMO. 1972. *An introduction to historical and comparative linguistics*. New York: Macmillan.
The Chicago manual of style. 14th edn. 1993. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹³ The June 2006 issue (*Language* 82.2) had some symbols that were incredibly difficult and nasty to deal with, but they were exactly produced after much care and concern on the part of the proofing team. Although one can perhaps never be sure, that issue left our office in a state that we thought was error-free as far as typos and such are concerned. Unfortunately, after this piece was completed and typeset, a needed correction to the June issue came to our attention (see p. 481 herein); moreover, the cover was cut about one thirty-second of an inch too short on the right margin. Thus, alas, perfection eluded us again.