

# English Medium Publications: Opening or Closing Doors to Authors with Non-English Language Backgrounds

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## Abstract

This critical exploratory study aims to examine the role academic brokers play in opening (or not) the gates to non-first-language-English (NFLE) scholars to contribute to the global research conversation. For the study, a qualitative research approach was used to collect data; ten emergent and established researchers were interviewed, all of whom originated from non-Anglophone countries. Four academic brokers were also interviewed to further examine the topic from their viewpoints. The findings revealed that revisions recommended by journal editors and reviewers could perhaps diminish the richness of texts and ultimately affect the voices NFLE authors try to project in their papers. Findings also showed that academic brokers are cognizant of the problems NFLE authors face when writing for publication, especially those pertaining to the quality of their writing and to the ways they respond to reviewers' suggestions and handle the review process.

**Keywords:** English as a medium of publication, non-first-language-English researchers, academic brokers, global visibility

## 1. Introduction

The prevalence of the English language in modern academic research has resulted in increased pressure on academics worldwide to publish in English. Nonetheless, this increased pressure for international visibility and academic promotion has put scholars from non-English speaking countries at a disadvantage given that the conventions in academic writing are highly standardized and safeguarded by academic brokers, who insist on holding on to the standardization and uniformity in commercial publishing (Galloway & Rose, 2021).

Studies presented by different scholars (e.g., Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993; Fazel, 2018) collectively attest that negotiating mainstream journal gatekeeping/brokering presents more challenges for those residing in the non-Anglophone world. Thus, despite being facilitators in providing needed feedback to authors, academic brokers are often perceived as obstacles on the path to publication (McKay, 2006).

While there is ample evidence of journal editors and reviewers' tolerance of international variations of English in NFLE authors' submissions (Flowerdew, 2001), as well as positive NFLE authors' attitudes toward the involvement of the brokers i.e., editors and reviewers, it is worthy to note that brokers' interventions are not primarily at the level of the language. In fact, they significantly contribute to the shaping of textual knowledge (Lillis & Curry, 2006). Thus, I find it necessary to examine the role academic brokers play in opening (or not) the gates to NFLE scholars to a fair participation in the global research conversation.

This study fills gaps in previous research. It is based on critical applied linguistics and aims at problematizing the assumption that English as a Medium of Publication (EMP) has provided equal opportunities to all scholars, whether in the Inner, Outer, or Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1996) Societies. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do non-native academic authors perceive academic brokers' feedback on their research?
- 2) What are the perceptions of journal editors and reviewers regarding manuscripts submitted for publication by NFLE authors?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research study employs a critical perspective to deal with the controversial issue of English dominance in publication. Because of this dominance, the culture and identity of NFLE researchers have been compromised. Similarly, the original voice of NFLE writers has been ignored because they must use “another’s voice and another’s code” (Johns, 1997: 64) when framing “their papers by the perspectives of the Anglo-European center theorists” (Lillis and Curry, 2006: 28). Nonetheless, it is important to note that gaining a critical consciousness does not necessarily lead to an egalitarian society. It is possible the study results in only a little change in the participants’ lives; nonetheless, it is hoped that giving NFLE scholars empowerment will help them regain their legitimate status as participants in the academic discourse.

### 2.2 *English as a Medium of Publication (EMP)*

Publishing is essential for global visibility; it is the arena where researchers and their findings become known. Given that English dominates the production, reproduction, and circulation of knowledge (López-Navarro et al., 2015), it is of utmost importance that academics seeking international recognition publish in ‘English or perish’ (Viereck, 1996: 20).

However, studies presented by different scholars (e.g., Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Lillis & Curry, 2006), collectively attest that writing in English is extremely challenging to non-Anglophone researchers, whose first language is not in the same language family as English. Flowerdew (1999), for example, argues that his sample of Hong Kong academics faced difficulty: “in structuring arguments and establishing academic voice” (p. 247).

The difficulties NFLE researchers face when trying to publish in a language other than their own have led many researchers to recommend that NFLE authors go through some training, as they often tend to present good research outcomes, but their writing lacks scope and is of a poor quality (Scientific Electronic Library OnLine, 2014). In his study of French biologists, Gentil (2005) highlights another important point, which may add to NFLE writers’ misfortune. In his study, he concurs that even journals, which provide publishing opportunities to NFLE authors, are negatively affected by the dominance of English. As one of Gentil’s informants put it, “the whole world bows to the rules of the Anglosaxon [publication] system” (p. 14).

Hence, despite acknowledging the numerous benefits of being multilingual as to having better cognitive, social, personal, academic, and professional traits, English monolingualism continues to be the prevalent pattern in academia. Additionally, high-impact journals have very clear-cut standards as to how academic discourse should be presented and there is a team of referees to ensure contributors keep within the accepted style parameters (Tressoldi et al., 2013).

### 2.3 *Academic Brokers’ Role*

Peer reviewing is an essential procedure in the publication of research, whereby experts in a particular field read manuscripts and comment on the content, rigor, and use of the language to ensure the selection of fine research for publication. Nonetheless, numerous allegations have been made about biases encountered in peer review (Lee, Sugimoto & Zhang, 2013).

While Wennerås and Wold (1997) identify ad hominem gender bias as a weakness in the peer review process, Meadows (1998) argues that affiliation bias, the preference given to prestigious authors, as the main problem. Additionally, studies have found that even in double-blind peer review issues regarding the anonymity of reviewers’ identities have arisen (e.g., Englander & Lopez-Bonilla, 2011).

Perhaps, the most alarming defect of peer reviewing is the discourse used in referees’ reports. In this regard, Kumashiro (2005: 258) states that to succeed in publishing, authors need to develop a ‘tough skin’ that shields them against taking such criticism personally. According to Hewings, there are striking differences in the nature of comments received by Anglophone and non-Anglophone authors, with the latter receiving more criticism regarding the “organization and structure of their submissions together with more general negative feedback on the language used and recommendations for change to meet the expected English standards of the journal” (Hewings, 2006, in Plo Alastrué & Pérez-Llantada, 2015: 212).

Ammon (2000b: 110) further states that reviewers have the tendency to quickly label “deviant” anything that departs from the “norm.” A similar perspective emerges from Mackinley and Rose (2018), who argue that the language used in different research journal guidelines promotes adherence to native (American and British) standards. Thus, to make a text written by an NFLE author acceptable for publication, extensive reformulation of the original manuscript is sometimes needed. Canagarajah (1996: 436) argues that “because these mostly

bilingual/bicultural scholars are influenced by their indigenous communicative conventions, their writing will display peculiarities that are usually treated by Western scholars as ample evidence of their discursive/academic incompetence.” In the same line, Lillis and Curry (2004: 678) report on a Hungarian psychologist who made the following remarks: “if the style or the form of the paper is not native-like, reviewers think that this is a stupid man, this is not acceptable material.”

The difficulty of trying to publish in a journal with a high impact factor is further illustrated by Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), who claimed they had to submit their paper to six different academic journals before it got accepted. Upon examining the ways in which reviewers ask for changes, Paltridge (2015) found them misleading. Tsang and Frey (2007: 129) further state, “not all referee comments help to strengthen a manuscript.” In fact, a too conscious referee may even become a ghostwriter (Bedeian, 1996), thereby affecting the nature and the whole structure of the research.

Another difficult dilemma NFLE scholars encounter when they write for publication is related to the redrafting process. Given that most young NFLE authors receive no formal training in scientific writing and the publication process (Benson & Silver, 2013), most seek the help of FLE speakers and professional translators to help them redraft their work and prepare it for publication. Nonetheless, using trained translators is extremely costly, and finding ones who are knowledgeable in the researchers’ discipline is not an easy task (Flowerdew, 1999). Additionally, translation between languages involves interpretation, which becomes even more complicated when cultural contexts differ. Wittgenstein (1953) argues that it is important to understand the context in order to understand the meaning of a given word in a given language for there are “fundamental epistemological and ontological differences contained within and by languages” (Smith, 2000: 53). Translators need to acquire the necessary skills to negotiate the ideological and ethical issues involved in the transfer of knowledge in the current context of globalization. The social and ideological backgrounds of the writer need to be considered to successfully convey a message from the source text to its target equivalent. Bennett (2007a) posits that, when the work of foreign academics is translated into English for publication in international journals, ‘epistemicide’ (p. 159), the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge, occurs due to the possible consequences on scholar discourse.

#### *2.4 Voice, Self and Identity*

Language is a marker of identity. According to Elbow (1994: 29), writing is not an impersonal voiceless discourse; on the contrary, it always implies the real presence of a person or a voice, hence, writers need to own what they write; they need to feel as if ‘the underlying plasma’ of their prose solely belongs to them.

It has been argued that the voice expressed in texts is not simply a representation of one’s self. Fox (1994) maintains that the way we put our ideas on a page is extremely affected by many factors including our first language, identity, culture, and the social world we live in (Fox, in Javdan, 2014). Due to the fact that researchers come from different countries, it is not bizarre to see differences in their academic writing styles. Given that written texts are shaped by factors that not only differ cross-culturally but also within a single culture, one can imagine the difficulties scholars face when writing in a language other than their own.

Non-first-language-English authors write differently than first-language-English authors (Matsuda, 2001). While the former take an impersonal stance, the latter overweigh the individualistic aspect in their writing. Both Asian and European languages were found to have different patterns of argument and a much less linear structure than English (Eslami, Shaker, & Rakhshandehroo, 2018). These differences and lack of individualism may, as a result, halt NFLE writers’ attempts from presenting a strong voice and diminish their presence as authors.

In terms of the factors affecting the writer's identity, Norton (1997; 2013) maintains that what happens to one’s identity when one uses an additional language is full of contradictions. Writing in English means that NFLE authors are forced to negotiate and redefine their cultural identity in order to successfully communicate in international and intercultural settings. Good command of English, according to Nasri (2011), requires conformity with the norms of the lingua franca community. In other words, writers must speak with authority, and to do so they must use “another’s voice and another’s code, weakening their affiliations to their home culture and discourses to adopt the values and language of their disciplinary ones” (Hyland & Sancho Guinda, 2012: 146).

Atkins and Styles (2015) echoed the notion of individual identity and stated that in order to write in English effectively, learners have to present an individualized authoritative voice or identity and Javdan (2014) adds that writing in English is a process of creating a new identity, which Ivanič (1988) terms as the discursive identity. Ivanič further believes that such a process may result in NFLE writers’ perception of their own experiences as valueless and their literacy practices as failed attempts to approximate these dominant forms.

In alignment with Ivanic's (1988) view, Zughoul (2003) adds that uniformity and commonality to written English standards threaten the sense of ownership to one's language and culture and result in identity fragmentation. With this regard, Norton (1997; 2013) argues that language and identity are dynamic and depend upon time and place; hence, writers need to adjust their written discourse to the standard expected by reviewers in research writing. Additionally, since suggested amendments in peer review "often take the position of nativecentrism towards the use of English" hence, NFLE scholars find themselves forced to "frame their papers by the perspectives of the Anglo-European center theorists" (Lillis & Curry, 2006: 28). On the other hand, Kaplan (1987) maintains that projecting voice in written discourse is not just the problem of NFLE writers. Rather, First-language-English (FLE) writers also have difficulties in this regard (Kaplan, in Brown, 2015).

Contrary to common belief, English does not always provide equal opportunities and open doors to better chances; rather it is "a language of global disparity and discommunication" (Pennycook, 2003: 6). Linguistic norms of Standard English continue to colonize the minds of NFLE scholars leading to feelings of linguistic insecurity (Jenkins, 2007). Additionally, "the skewing of international research agendas toward those most likely to pass the gatekeeping" (ibid: 52) is highly problematic as it not only hinders NFLE writers' quest for publication but also negatively impacts the global research community as substantial research findings, insights, methodologies and theoretical advances are being lost resulting in what Kothari calls "the homogenizing monoculture" (Kothari, 1994, in Pennycook, 1994: 58).

To address inequality, the publishing business that indoctrinates the EMP practice needs to be questioned, and the voices of the disadvantaged, dominated, or dispossessed need to be heard. We should, according to Mauranen, "encourage the maintenance of variety and diversity in academic rhetorical practices for excessive standardization may counteract innovation and creative thought by forcing them into standard forms" (1993, in Swales, 1997: 380). Having the ability to speak and write more than one language with adequate proficiency needs to be viewed as a resource rather than a constraint for not only does it reflect the richness of the individuals, but also a source of cultural capital (Barwell, 2015) that needs to be acknowledged, appreciated, and legitimized.

### **3. Research Design**

#### *3.1 The Critical Paradigm*

The current study is informed by the critical paradigm, which aims to transform the social world and give agency to the oppressed and exploited voices (Cohen et al., 2007). The critical paradigm seems most suited for this study because the aim is not only to interpret the social factors that cause oppressive and powerful groups to dominate certain suppressed and repressed sections of society but also strives to challenge the conventional social structures and bring about transformative or emancipatory change.

#### *3.2 Critical Agenda*

The research is grounded in critical theory, as it aims to challenge policies, produce social change and emancipate the powerless (Crotty, 2003). Turning a skeptical eye and constantly questioning assumptions and notions that have become 'naturalized' in society is a core component of critical research (Pennycook, 2001: 7). Dean (1994: 4) describes such practice as "the restive problematization of the givens." The dominance of the English language in scholarly publishing (EMP) needs to be viewed with a critical lens, as it violates the equality of opportunities between those who have English as their mother tongue and those who speak/write it as an additional language. I support the argument that it is important to raise awareness to the effects EMP is having on academic research produced outside the Inner Anglophone Circle in the purpose of changing the status quo and adopting feasible solutions that will hopefully effect some form of change in that area.

#### *3.3 Methodology*

This exploratory critical methodology aims to question the spread of the Anglo-American culture and its underlying values and challenge the Anglo/American norms for the purpose of promoting linguistic democracy and changing the status quo. This can be achieved when participants become aware of their own intellectual, organizational, and societal realities and feel empowered so that they can, through constructive discussions, discover the reality and recreate knowledge that may lead to a sustainable and successful change of the system for the better.

#### *3.4 Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures*

##### *3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews*

Qualitative methods and, in particular, qualitative interviewing, have been chosen for this study for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a framework for collecting rich and detailed information about how individuals experience,

understand, and explain events in their lives; thus, it was the perfect tool to uncover the processes and meanings of the participants in this study. Secondly, Hussain, Elyas and Naseef (2013) believe that critical research is more inclined toward qualitative research designs despite its flexibility to adopt any methodology, which could result in improving the world’s unbalanced social system. Hence, the potential depth of investigation and the subsequent richness of data qualitative methods deliver were among the reasons for this choice.

The study used Skype software to conduct Web video telephony interviews. This technique allows people to video-chat over the Internet using a webcam. Web video telephony interviews is appropriate because it enables multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken, and heard (Cohen et al., 2007), which provide a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answers provided by the interviewees.

### 3.4.2 Sampling

The selection of the participants for the one-to-one interviews was purposive with a maximum variation (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton, & Ormston, 2014). This type of sampling was suitable, as it provided researchers from different nationalities, and different social backgrounds, who served different communities and shared similar challenges with regard to EMP.

Recruitment through ResearchGate social network, which consists of over 15 million members, was very handy and quick. It enabled me to reach out to the large community of national and international scholars in a short time. A globalized academic networking setting, such as ResearchGate, is deemed useful and proper for this study as it overcomes the constraints of fixed physical locations and provides the opportunity to interact with as many researchers as possible to effectively present viewpoints from researchers who work in different contexts and come from different countries and backgrounds.

In total, 202 members of ResearchGate social network, who listed ‘publishing’ as a topic of interest in their profiles, were invited to participate in the study. Although initially, over 25 researchers expressed an interest in being interviewed, I was not able to make arrangements with all the researchers that I had purposively selected since some of them got busy.

While this sampling approach can be seen as purposeful, I ultimately also took advantage of snowballing sampling (Wellington, 2000), where word of mouth led to additional interviewees. Hence, those who were interviewed were asked to recommend other researchers and reviewers who might add value to this study.

All 14 interviewees (10 NFLE researchers and 4 academic brokers) were invited to choose a date and time most convenient for them and the actual interviews lasted between 25 to 35 minutes each.

## 4. Findings

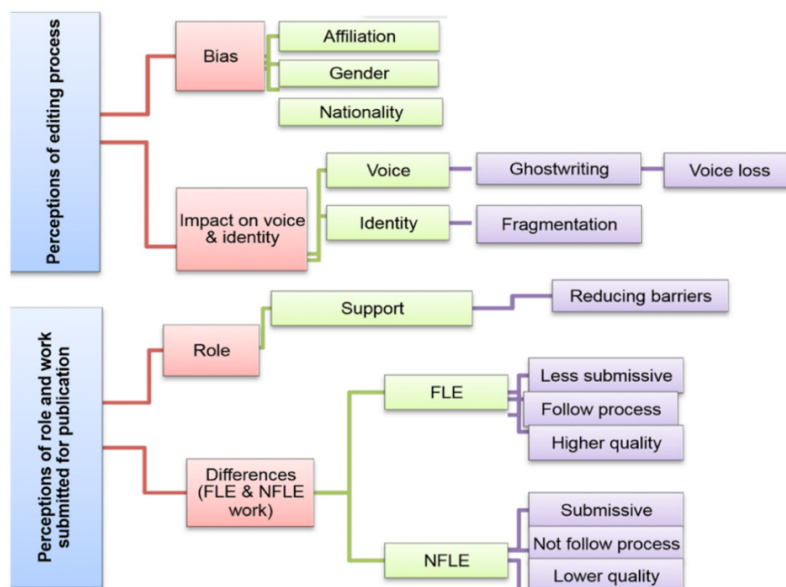


Figure 1. A comprehensive view of how the categories were developed into themes and subthemes in the findings

#### 4.1 Participants' Perceptions of the Peer Review Process

Data gathered from semi-structured interviews with NFLE researchers show a distinct perception of inequity in the peer review process: "On the papers, when you read, you have this impression that we were equal but once the review process starts, you actually realize that we are far from equal." Blanca, an NFLE journal reviewer stated. Hence, in this section, I plan to investigate participants' views on the current peer review process and more precisely explore the extent to which reviewers influence the publication practices of NFLE scholars who choose to publish in mainstream journals.

##### 4.1.1 Bias Against NFLE Writers – "Reviewer Was Very Sure We Were Nonnative, So It Was a Very Condescending Tone of Review"

Many interviewees spoke of biases encountered in the peer review process. *Muneer* for one argued that papers submitted by authors from less developed countries have a significantly lesser chance of acceptance than similar papers submitted by authors with high prestigious affiliations: "Editors don't think that they [NNE writers] can produce good papers." This statement confirms the argument stated by Yousefi-Nooraie, Shakiba, & Mortaz-Hejri (2006), that a considerable manuscript selection bias perhaps exists against low-income countries due to a mistrust of the data. Nonetheless, when prompted to elaborate, *Muneer* stated, "a researcher with a foreign professor has high chance for acceptance while the same researcher after return home to his country has higher chance for desk rejection unless adding foreign professor." *Muneer's* statement asserts the findings of Meadows (1998) and Gonzalez-Brambila, Reyes-Gonzalez, Veloso and Perez-Angón (2016) who argued that articles by researchers in developing countries have a greater impact when they are co-authored by researchers from industrialized countries.

*Agatha* also drew attention to an indirect gender bias: "sometimes I have problems with reviewers because I try to use gender-inclusive language... they wanna get rid of my gender-inclusive language because it's not standard." *Agatha's* statement echoes previous research in the area of gender bias in the publishing industry (Logan, 2016).

Along similar lines, Blanca, one of the journal reviewers, argued that sometimes review results vary according to the country of origin of authors: "reviewers who read your article will immediately see from what you have written that you are not a native speaker and sometimes this will affect their judgment." When prompted to elaborate, Blanca recounted her personal experience as an author:

I had a contest so to speak with a reviewer from Ireland...he or she was extremely rude in his reviews to me...wrote extreme rude things ... I think that the reason for this kind of tone was because the reviewer was very sure we were non-native speakers so it was a very condescending tone of review.

Blanca further recounted that when she writes in English, she usually has "this burden of trying to sound as native as possible." When asked to elaborate, she said: "I know that this is one of the factors which will lay heavily on acceptance or rejection of the paper because it's not about the quality of the text, it's also about the quality of the language." Blanca then added: "By quality of the language, I mean sounding English, sounding native English."

Given that the reviewers I interviewed stated that they can identify authors' nativeness and non-nativeness through the discourse structures: "I could tell that the paper had been written by a NNE and sometimes I could even guess on the first language" (Flora), "I think that this person is a German speaker because he makes grammar mistakes or a person is an Arab because he makes these particular grammar mistakes" (Mona), hence, it can be argued that blind reviewing may not be the most efficient method to use in peer reviewing evaluation (Brown, 2007). In fact, this point was repeatedly argued by Mona, a journal reviewer and editor, who advocated the adoption of an open peer review system whereby both the authors' and reviewers' identities are known to each other, and the reviewers' names and (optionally) their reports are published alongside the paper. Quite clearly, Mona's argument corroborates with Ware's (2008) who claimed that open review is a much fairer process since the identities of both parties (reviewers and authors) are revealed.

Moving onto what seem to me more laden matters, reviewers were also asked during the study about their perceptions of the current publishing system. All four referees expressed their resentment for several issues. The first and foremost criticism on the part of reviewers is the fact that the peer review process is "free of charge." The peer review process has also been criticized for being "time-consuming" and "difficult" especially when an NFLE researcher writes the paper:

Mona: I think it's very difficult to be patient with an article that is not written in good English. I guess that's why editors send them to me...because I'm a nonnative and they expect me to be more patient.

Nonetheless, being an unpaid, laborious and a time consuming process, according to Blanca, does not exempt reviewers from the responsibility that rests upon their shoulders (given the effect reviewers' discourse may have

on authors' academic careers and lives): "I think it's a very responsible thing to do...somebody's academic success, somebody's learning process depends on what you will write in your review." However, it has been argued that not all reviewers would be able to follow Blanca's example, particularly given that, currently, journals are increasingly overloaded with submissions (Paltridge & Starfield, 2016).

#### 4.1.2 Effect on Voice and Identity – "Something Is Lost"

Data obtained during the study revealed different and conflicting beliefs regarding the perceived effect reviewers' comments may have on authors' voices. Many of my interviewees felt that the comments they receive do not affect their voices as authors. *Faisal* exemplifies this stance as he stated, "it's a very unpersonalized procedure...there is nothing personal in terms of either my response or their comments." *Faisal's* perception brings to mind the argument put forward by Kumashiro (2005: 258), which states that to succeed in publishing, authors need to develop a 'tough skin' that shields them against taking such criticism personally. Nonetheless, several researchers (*Agatha, Anna and Ellen*) expressed a different stance. *Agatha*, for one stated that the changes reviewers recommend, "affect the way I write," and *Anna* argued that suggested amendments have "certainly affected the subject matter." *Anna* further spoke of the absence of a particular rhetorical stance on the part of NFLE writers:

When you are writing, you're projecting your own identity or your own voice in whatever it is the message that you want to put forth, right...in order to fit in the model that the academia proposes, you have to sacrifice your own voice, and you have to sacrifice your own identity.

This notion was taken further as *Ellen* endorsed Norton's (1997; 2013) perception of identities constantly changing in her extract:

When I speak in English, I am different than when I speak in German, I change, my humour changes, my outlook changes...even my search changes...something is lost...the use of the Anglo American thinking structure and way of writing affects identity.

*Mona*, an NFLE journal editor and reviewer, further recounted a personal experience as an author where the reviewer changed her wordings to the extent that she felt violated as an author: "he was changing what I was saying into something that was different from what I was saying... he just wanted to change the style...but he ended up changing the meaning." The recount ended in her telling the reviewer: "this is a postcolonial response what you're doing."

Hence, in trying to keep with the Anglo-Saxon worldview, academic brokers may impact not just the linguistic style scholars adopt, but also the content of what is produced. Findings thus far corroborate data in the literature, especially data from Zughoul (2003) who claims that uniformity and commonality to written English standards threaten the sense of ownership to one's language and culture and may result in identity fragmentation.

It has been argued in the literature that reviewers who become actively engaged in the process can easily end up overstepping their role (Bedeian, 1996). *Omar's* statement exemplifies this notion: "Others [reviewers] were so good to the extent where my colleagues and I had said once that we should just write and send it to the reviewers, and they will complete the job for us and edit the paper." This brings to mind Tsang and Frey's (2007) argument that a too conscious referee may even become a ghostwriter, who eventually takes over the author's voice. Thus, this practice has been seen as helpful yet intrusive.

Interestingly, the second group of my interviewees exhibited a range of awareness and sensitivity to this issue. *Mona* stated that the reviewer should avoid taking over the author's voice: "I very rarely edit an actual sentence. Sometimes if an article is poorly entirely written, I suggest that they show it to a native speaker, but I won't do it myself." Similarly, *Flora* admitted:

I usually do not ask for changes that would affect the way they express themselves. I don't ask them to employ a different kind of discourse, a different kind of writing... how somebody phrases something...this is not something that I would try to influence.

*Blanca* also believed that whenever she intervenes as a reviewer, she is maybe "changing the author outlook in terms of his or her contextual background," and *Roy* argued that the changes he recommends "do change the author's voice but not in a bad way." The purpose, according to *Roy*, is to "help the person to blend into the community they are engaging with...bring the writing into line with similar writing within that field."

#### 4.2 Academic Brokers' Perceptions of Role and Work Submitted for Publication

The aim of this section is to present and discuss the dominant themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of reviewers and editors' perceptions of their role and work submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

#### 4.2.1 Journal Editors and Reviewers' Role in the Publishing Process – “Help Researchers Learn and Become Better”

Editors stated that their role is to make decisions, monitor the review process, and balance out inconsistent evaluations.

Mona: I am involved about making decisions about the directions of the journal.

Blanca: I scan all the articles and then decide who the reviewers are based on the relevance of the topic of the article...then compare the assessment of these reviews and see how they differ...and sometimes mediate to balance out highly different reviews.

Reviewers, on the other hand, argued that providing support, giving constructive feedback, reducing barriers, checking journal conformity, and ensuring that manuscripts follow the norms of the genre are the main tenets of effective peer reviewing:

Roy: I edit language and review for academic technique...look at the conformance the journal styles... make sure the journal article fits with the requirements for their target journal.

Mona: We generally want to be supportive of authors...help the authors improve their papers.

It is evident that both editors (Mona & Flora) and reviewers (Blanca & Roy) interviewed in my study are knowledgeable in their fields and tend to provide expert advice to authors. Even if a manuscript is rejected, the reviewers' comments have been considered valuable by Omar, Vanni, Masumi, and Ellen: by incorporating reviewers' suggestions in the revised manuscripts, authors stated that their chances of acceptance by target journals have increased.

Overall, the statements mentioned by my interviewees corroborate with Flowerdew (2001) and Pérez-Llantada, (2012) arguments: referees, together with journal editors, have the power to either open or close the gates to scientific discourse. While editors initiate and monitor the review process, a pool of competent and reliable referees provide authors with valuable suggestions to improve their manuscripts and make knowledgeable, reasonable, and fair decisions on accepting or rejecting manuscripts, for the benefit of the journal quality. Nonetheless, this is only partially evident in my study as some participants believed otherwise. The results presented here suggest that NFLE authors, such as Rudolph, Omar, Chen, Muneer, and Masumi, require training to properly guide their papers through the editorial process. It would also be beneficial to make this training available in various languages.

#### 4.2.2 Journal Editors and Reviewers' Perceptions of Work Submitted for Publication

Given that authors' native or non-nativeness can be identified through the discourse structures they use in their writing (as we have seen in the previous section), hence, journal editors and reviewers were asked to report their perceptions of work submitted by NFLE writers for publication.

##### 4.2.2.1 Differences between FLE and NFLE Work – “Non-Natives Tend to Be Fairly Submissive”

One dominant theme surfaced from the analysis of reviewers' and editors' responses: differences exist between FLE and NFLE work submitted for publication. The differences my study participants reported involve: the quality of output and the way each group addresses reviewers' comments and handles the review process.

What is abundantly clear from interviews with journal editors and reviewers is that NFLE work, if identifiable, is perceived to be of a lower quality than work presented by their counterparts. Below are some excerpts:

Roy: I would say that they [non native speakers] are generally poorer.

Mona: the quality of the research isn't always good. They ended up publishing it but the quality is definitely less than some others.

Roy attributed the problem to a “difficulty in understanding the huge amount of journal requirements...and transferring to new journals after rejection,” which, Roy added, “can get very very confusing.” Mona revealed a third reason: “there are many native speakers who submit.” In other words, due to the increase in the number of articles written by authors from the Anglophone nations, the quality of some FLE writers' submissions stands out in comparison to their peers.

The majority of reviewers also reported that both NFLE and FLE writers' submissions are comparable with regard to matching the journal scope, nonetheless, in terms of handling the submission and peer-review processes, some stated that NFLE writers “do not follow the whole process” because they often times “miss what the reviewer is actually asking for.”



Given that NFLE authors previously stated that they address all comments, regardless of their own perceptions, one can deduce that it is possible NFLE authors believe that they are addressing complex peer reviewer comments, when in fact they are not. This notion can be taken further as Roy stated in the following extract:

I find the non-natives tend to be fairly submissive. It's as if we just want our articles accepted regardless and will do anything so you say yes...also quite often, you know, you get them responding formulaically saying that 'thank you for this comment' even if the reviewer has said something completely unreasonable or unjustified.

When asked what would help reduce the challenges NFLE writers face in the publication process, journal editors and reviewers emphasized the need to "provide some support for international authors," "accept other paradigms of science," and "organize intensive training programs and workshops." Several reviewers also pointed to the importance of having free access to scholarly research outputs:

Flora: I strongly encourage these initiatives on open access and open science so that the information really circulates and is accessible to researchers all over the globe.

Blanca: I strongly believe that open access is something that everybody should support. And I am glad to see that things are somehow moving in that direction.

The argument concerning Open Access is in line with previous research that claimed free, unrestricted, equal access to scholarly information to people all over the globe is of paramount importance as it increases visibility, usage and impact (Houghton, Swan, & Brown, 2011).

Findings thus far reveal that both journal editors and reviewers are generally aware of problems with submissions from NFLE authors, especially in terms of writing quality and handling the submission and review processes. This finding ties in with my previous findings regarding the need to better educate NFLE authors on how to navigate and negotiate the process of academic publishing (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993; Fazel, 2018).

## 5. Discussion

Research question one which was designed to examine participants' views of peer reviewing process point to distinct perceptions of bias and inequity in the publishing process. The traditional notion that evaluation scores are affected by affiliation, gender and nationality biases (Gonzalez-Brambila et al., 2016; Logan, 2016) was reiterated by few study participants.

One response to the problems of bias has been to move to open review rather than double-blind review. This might be a legitimate solution and if successful could well have the additional benefit of improving author/reviewer communication (Ware, 2008). Given that authors' nationalities are identifiable (through the different discourse structures they use), I tend to believe that an open review system could help eliminate bias and provide a much fairer treatment to NFLE scholars. Nonetheless, since both systems have their weaknesses and strengths, it is perhaps fair to suggest that more research to develop the advantages and disadvantages of this for NFLE and FLE writers with different backgrounds is needed.

Other pragmatic criticisms of peer reviewing include the time it takes to publish a paper. Nonetheless, the most voiced concern echoed by some of my study participants is the fact that reviewers almost always insist on reshaping the final drafts to fit the Anglophone-oriented way of doing research (Lillis and Curry, 2006). This indeed is alarming especially when the underlying ideology of the original manuscript is very different from the Anglophone one and may consequently lead to what Bennett (2015) so eloquently described as *epistemicidal*. Overly valorizing standardized Anglo/American English is an unfair advantage to FLE academics. It limits integration and strengthens the power of certain dominant forms of English. Borrowing once again from Bennett, a monoculture of standardized norms not only fuels imperialistic ideas, but also affects the right to ownership and construction of self.

Given that the majority of my participants claimed responding to editorial changes without any opposition, it is perhaps fair to say that by doing so, they may unintentionally incorporate different views and consequently relinquish some of their textual ownership (Lee & Norton, 2003). However, despite the seemingly enlightened stance taken by some reviewers and editors who claimed maintaining a professional demeanor, a minority felt it to be a necessary step to successful publication. I agree with Miller and Van de Ven (2015) on the importance of centering all evaluations on author's own framework rather than imposing preferred frameworks or perspectives.

Given that language practices and identities are mutually dependent and interconnected, it is perhaps fair to assume that when NFLE scholars adapt their identities to the Anglo-American norms and practices, not only do they

empower the already dominant group (Bourdieu, 1991) and thus become agents of epistemicide themselves, but also contribute to weakening their affiliations to their own identities.

Preserving one's national language is necessary to prevent the loss of cultural identity. Crystal (2003: 86) uses the term 'language suicide' to explain how people's attitudes and values toward their own language can kill that language. That said, it is worth mentioning in the context under discussion that NFLE scholars are not free to construct their academic identities as writers in the English academic discourse community; on the contrary, they are forced to favor one that is associated with Anglophone countries and cultures.

As is evidenced in this study, many restrictions prevent NFLE scholars from feeling comfortable in this new dominant 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1991). The gap between FLE and NFLE researchers is getting wider (Swales, 2004), the fact which adds to NFLE writers' miseries and positions them and their academic capital in a lesser position than their FLE peers.

In respect to research question two which was designated to explore the perceptions of academic brokers regarding work submitted for publication, data revealed some interesting, although not surprising findings regarding several distinct differences between articles written by NFLE and FLE researchers. On the overall quality, findings suggest that NFLE scholars tend to present work that is 'generally poorer' than their FLE peers. In this, they were in agreement with other scholars who investigated NFLE scholars' problems with writing for publication in English (e.g., Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008). Reasons for this disproportion as editors and reviewers claim are: scholars' limited ability in understanding the huge amount of journal requirements, the high rate of rejection, which often necessitates manuscript transfer and the high contribution from Anglophone countries. Perhaps it should be noted that the last-mentioned reason will no longer be a threat in the near future given the massive contributions from developing countries (Scientific Electronic Library OnLine, 2014). Nonetheless, one cannot deny the need to find feasible solutions to the other highly problematic concerns. A viable solution, in my view, is calling for and insisting upon providing further aid to scholars in interpreting policies and formatted guidelines specific to journals for these are not minor but major aspects that may impact feelings of self-esteem and aptitude attached to academic writing.

Having a more submissive nature than their counterparts is another characteristic NFLE scholars share as suggested by the data. This finding is significant as it exemplifies NFLE writers' feelings of linguistic insecurity (Jenkins, 2007), which places additional strains on linguistic communication between authors and academic brokers. While there are certainly grounds for demanding guidance on how to negotiate with academic brokers (Fazel, 2018), an emphasis on how to give constructive academic criticism would undeniably help NFLE scholars become integrated members of international scientific community and reduce feelings of exclusion.

Findings revealed that some editors and reviewers of established journals have little tolerance for imperfect and non-standard writing (Meneghini & Packer, 2007), hence NFLE speaking referees are asked to deal with papers submitted by non-Anglophone scholars because as one participant (Mona) reported, 'it's as if they expect me to be more patient.' This stance is regrettable in many ways as it implies discriminatory perceptions and does not show any respect for bilingualism or tolerance of other languages. To bridge this gap, more discussions and research about the respective role of academic reviewers is necessary.

Although the majority of respondents in the study were theoretically in favor of equal opportunities for NFLE writers, in reality, this was not the case. What my research revealed is the existence of a system that not only hinders NFLE writers' quest for publication but also negatively impacts the global research community as substantial research findings, insights, methodologies and theoretical advances are being lost resulting in what Kothari calls "the homogenizing monoculture" (Pennycook, 1994: 58). I, therefore, believe the critical stance I have adopted in my study is justified. This is not to say that I do not acknowledge the indisputable importance of English as a language of international communication. In fact, for me, as is the case for many, the globalization of English is a reality (Singh & Doherty, 2004). Nonetheless, as the increased pressure to "publish in English or perish" (Viereck, 1996: 20) continues to disadvantage one group at the expense of another, I, therefore, believe interventions aimed at greater equity in scientific knowledge production are needed to help NFLE scholars meet the overwhelming requirements of the publishing process.

## **6. Pedagogical and Theoretical Contribution**

My study investigated issues related to English dominance in international scholarly publishing from NFLE writers' perspectives whose insights are often overlooked by academic brokers. The value of my study is that it is the first study, I know of, that critically explored the perceptions of a maximally varied group of NFLE researchers and academic brokers who originate from different countries and who are all members of an online social academic networking site (ResearchGate). Through a focus on NFLE writers' views and their accounts of their

experiences with EMP practice, the study gave a voice to and empowered ten L2 scholars through the recognition of the difficulty they encounter when writing for publication.

The value of this research lies in its research design which consisted of adopting a qualitative approach. The use of semi-structured interviews to investigate issues related to EMP practice has proven to be a valuable tool since it allowed participants to express their views and voice their concerns freely and openly. I feel that the contribution of my study is that I made the plight of some L2 academic writers and the complexity of their struggle to get published visible. This study could be replicated by researchers who wish to further investigate EMP practice by recruiting a greater number of NFLE writers through different channels. This would consolidate and make my findings more generalizable.

## 7. Conclusion

With respect to the process of peer review, there was agreement among the participants that academic brokers were more likely to recommend a manuscript for acceptance if it was anchored in the US/UK English dominant framework and methodology. In addition, few participants spoke of biases in the peer review process. Some participants also mentioned that reviewers do not provide them with clear constructive feedback (quite notably, the reviewers and editors believed otherwise), so they do not understand what needs to be done. With respect to the effect of literacy brokers on texts' originality, most participants believed that redrafting their papers does not affect their voices as authors. Only three NFLE writers felt that reviewers' amendments may in fact impact the subject matter and their own linguistic styles.

Findings also indicate that academic brokers appear to be aware of the fact that the rigorous review process could sometimes lead to the loss of the author's voice. While some maintained a professional demeanor and avoided imposing personal preferences, others believed that it is their job to bring researchers' scripts into line with similar writing within that field.

Upon investigating the perceptions of academic brokers on manuscripts submitted for publication, findings revealed that editors and reviewers are aware of problems with submissions from NFLE authors, especially in terms of writing quality and in ways of addressing reviewers' comments and handling the review process. I believe the findings of this study are significant in that they contribute to existing knowledge and research on EMP practice by providing further evidence on critical issues that have arisen as a result of English dominance in international scholarly publishing based on L2 academics, reviewers, and editors' perspectives.

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