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Peer Reviewers' Comments on Research Articles Submitted by Iranian Researchers

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Abstract

Peer review plays a determining role in the eventual fate of submissions to international English-medium journals. In this study, a corpus of reviewers' reports on 32 manuscripts in 3 different fields was solicited from a number of Iranian graduate students and a content analysis was performed to find the common organizational patterns and also the most frequent types of problems noted by the reviewers. The results revealed that review reports followed a certain format in terms of structural organization and negative/positive balance of the comments. Also, the results demonstrated that the most frequent type of problems noted by reviewers were content-related defects. However, because scientific information is conveyed through the language and content failure often overlaps language issues, language-use comments should be considered as important.

Keywords: peer review process, reviewers' reports, comment, content comment, language-use comment

1. Introduction

Today academics face unrelenting pressure to publish their research outputs frequently in international journals (Belcher, 2007; Gosden, 2001, 2003). Iranian scholars are no exceptions to this "publish or perish" pressure (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012, p. 1). There are a number of forces that urge Iranian researchers and academicians to rapidly and continuously publish academic works in reputable international English-medium journals. In the first place, researchers' publication record is an indicator of their scholarly competence and effectiveness, and for Iranians residing in an "off-network"

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location (Swales, 1996, p. 43) frequent publication in high-status journals is one of few methods at their disposal to demonstrate their academic talent and achieve attention, credit, and visibility in mainstream discipline-specific community. Besides, academic career paths for Iranian experts are shaped by their success in international publication. Publication is an essential prerequisite for the approval of a Ph.D. degree, and without a good number of publications in their resume, junior professors will find themselves out of contention for available tenure-track positions. In fact, publishing in prestigious journals is linked to grants, funding, and tenure decisions; hiring, promotion, continued employment preferences, and monetary benefits. With regard to such influence, it comes as no surprise that Iranian academicians aspire to publish and seek acceptance in English-medium international journals. Nevertheless, despite the considerable number of submissions for publication, many Iranian academic authors seldom or never see the fruit of their publication attempts. This is because, as Belcher (2007) notes, submission to peer-reviewed international journals is, indeed, a high stake game fraught with frustration and disappointment which rarely ends in immediate acceptance. Many submissions get rejected out of hand and those that are not rejected start a tedious odyssey of "reviewer patience and author persistence" (Belcher, 2007, p. 11) which makes the authors lose their interest and stop short of pursuing the quest for publication.

The decision to reject or accept a manuscript is for the most part based on peer review process (Spigt & Arts, 2010). In academic scholarship today, it is widely understood that all prospective publications must be subjected to some sort of critical evaluation, and the so-called peer review process is the taken-for-granted norm for assessing scientific rigor, judging the quality and credibility of scientific work and warranting scrutiny by the members of a disciplinary community (Fletcher & Fletcher, 1997; Godlee, Gale, & Martyn, 1998). Nevertheless, due to its hidden status as an "occluded genre" (Swales, 1996, p. 45) as well as its subjective basis for assessment, it is believed that peer review is to blame for manuscript rejection, which is not always a just and equitable decision, witness 20 Nobel Prize winners whose papers have been rejected by peer-reviewed journals (Campanario & Acedo, 2007).

Over the last few decades, peer review process has attracted much attention, and a growing body of literature has reacted to this opaque and contentious genre. In this respect, a considerable number of researchers have analyzed the discourse of peer review genre and the difficulties academic writers encounter in understanding the tacit norms and social practices as embedded in the reviewers' responses to their work (e.g., Belcher, 2007;

Fortanet, 2008; Gosden, 2003; Kourilova, 1996, 1998; Mungra & Webber, 2010).

The controversial and questionable nature of peer review notwithstanding, it remains the established norm for determining the suitability of scientific work for publication and to state the obvious, today no author can react as Albert Einstein did when, after receiving a critique from a peer-reviewed journal, replied, "I didn't send my paper to be criticized; I sent it to be published!" (Posteguillo, Pique-Angordans, & Edo, 2008, p. 8). This suggests the need for nonnative speaking (NNS) researchers to develop the skills and abilities to be able to navigate through this complex evaluative process. In general, one point of consensus among the studies on peer review genre is that they all place special emphasis on the facilitative role of reviewer's feedback in publication efforts of NNS scholars. An awareness of the features which might affect the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts may help novice NNS writers get a fuller picture of this genre.

There is no denying that previous research has added new dimensions in understanding the problems and difficulties of peer review genre; however, most of the studies have been conducted on medical articles, and there is a paucity of an extensive multidisciplinary analysis of referees' reviews in the literature. Moreover, there exists a body of research focusing on scientific submissions from different countries, for example, the submitted work of French scientists (Sionis, 1995), Slovak manuscripts (Kourilova, 1996), Croatian medical manuscripts (Misak, Marusic, & Marusic, 2005), Indian medical articles (Gupta, Kaur, Sharma, Shah, & Choudhury, 2006), and Italian medical research articles (Mungra & Webber, 2010). But, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have yet been conducted on peer review of research articles written in English and submitted to international journals by Iranian researchers. Regarding this gap in the literature, the present study set out to investigate the reviewers' comments on a corpus of research articles submitted by Iranian researchers in three different fields of Engineering, Medicine, and Social Sciences. The central aim of the study was twofold. In the first place, it took focus on the organization of reviewers' comments. An important aspect of the complexity of peer review process is the lack of standardized approaches to the format and organizational structure of comments (Fletcher & Fletcher, 1997; Gosden, 2003). Different disciplines, journals and publishers follow different systems for review process; however, there are common features shared by the majority of reviews. Being familiar with these commonalities is vital for NNS authors in order to understand reviewers' intentions and address their suggested changes. This provides compelling reason to be

concerned about peer review genre conventions, the way reviewers shape their massage for this genre, the rhetorical strategies they deploy to communicate judgment, and the positive/negative valence of their critique. The second endeavor of the study focused on the content of the comments. Academic writing even in one's native language can be a formidable undertaking (Bartholomae, 1985). It involves both research writing expertise and high language capability. Obtaining a global view of the frequencies of commentary types found in the reviews provides a picture of salient types of problems they exhibit; and hence, may contribute to development of NNS novice authors' academic writing skills.

Taken together, the study was an attempt to seek answers to the following queries:

- What specific patterns do the structure and format of reviewers' reports on articles submitted by Iranian researchers in different fields follow?
- What are the most frequent types of problems noted by the reviewers?

2. Method

2.1 Corpus

A corpus of reviewers' evaluative reports was compiled specifically for this study. The corpus was solicited from Iranian graduate students who had submitted manuscripts (mostly based on their M.A. theses or Ph.D. dissertations) to international journals for publication. The corpus consisted of 82 reviewers' reports on 32 submitted manuscripts related to three broad disciplines, namely, Engineering, Medicine, and Social Sciences. From each discipline, 12 manuscripts were selected. These manuscripts were randomly selected from a larger corpus of submissions to different international journals from which only the ones with the editorial decision of conditional acceptance or major/ minor reconsideration were selected. Manuscripts with rejection decision were excluded from the corpus because the reviewers' reports on these manuscripts were short with explanations such as not fitting the mission of the journal or not adding significantly to the current knowledge in the area.

Table 1 presents the information about the submitted manuscripts and the corpus of the study. The manuscripts were "research articles" according to Swales (1990, p. 134) and were submitted to 21 different journals. All the reviewers' reports were the results of the first round of revision. The reason for such selection was Belcher's (2007) insight that the first round reviews hold more criticism of both content and style. The study did not pursue whether or not the manuscripts eventually achieved publication. A major point of difference in the selected corpus was the number of reviewers.

Averagely, the manuscripts had been reviewed by two reviewers; however, there were variations that are delineated in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of the submitted manuscripts and the reviewers' reports corpus

Field	Subfield	Number of manuscripts	Number of reviewers
Engineering	Electrical, Mechanical, Computer, Biomedical, Chemical, Agricultural	9	2
		3	3
Medicine	Dermatology, Pediatrics, Pharmacology, Internal Medicine, Orthopedics, Pathology	7	2
		5	3
Social Sciences	Sociology, Psychology, Cultural Studies, International Relations, History, Education	10	2
		2	3

2.2 Data Analysis

A content analysis was conducted on the collected corpus to identify similar basic patterns in the data. In any analytic procedure the unit of analysis plays a crucial role and affects the "discriminant capability" of the analysis (Gorsky, Caspi, Blau, Vine, & Billet, 2012, p. 5); therefore, we first defined our unit of analysis as the message intended by reviewers' statements. For example, considering a statement such as:

> I think the special aspect of the paper is the excellent curriculum they have developed and implemented for the particular educational setting at hand; however, this is an unusual work in the sense that nobody, to my knowledge, has done anything like this successfully.

was analyzed as conveying two messages: a remark highlighting the strength of the study and feedback on the weakness of the study in general.

The second definition we had to agree upon was our working definition of comment. The term comment conveys a widespread and nonspecified meaning which made it necessary to establish a specified definition for the term, as it was the basic element under investigation in our study. Following Mungra and Webber (2010), we recognized comment as any point raised by the reviewer with the purpose of evoking a text alteration. Thus, none of the

two messages in the above example were identified as comments because they did not invite a specific change in the text. In other cases such as:

> Some of the words are repeated a lot throughout the paper. Having a variety is important.

the statement was acknowledged as a comment because it invited an alteration in the text.

Regarding the coding and counting of the comment types, from among the numerous methodological possibilities and options (e.g., the approaches proposed by Belcher, 2007; Fortanet, 2008; Gosden, 2003; Mungra & Webber, 2010), we chose Mungra and Webber's (2010) categorization because of the compelling reasons that it takes language-related problems into account and also classifies the comments in two broad categories: content comments and language-use comments; each category consisting of detailed subcategories. Such data-driven and itemized categorization seemed to provide a more precise and reliable basis for our comment analysis. Table 2 portrays the main features of Mungra and Webber's (2010) comment categoris.

Table 2. Mungra and Webber's (2010) categories of reviewers' comments

Category of Comments	Description
Content Comments	• Sampling errors • Scientific reasoning errors • Incorrect scientific interpretation • Procedural infelicities and lack of rigor • Statistical irregularities • Lack of association between claim and prior research • Lack of association between claim and data • Explain why data are unusual • Incomplete literature • Terminology or definitions
Language-use Comments	A. Lexis and syntax comments • Lack of clarity • Not well written/use of English • Verbosity • Repetitions •Typos, improper citation or suggestions for text editor • Incoherence B. Discourse and rhetorical comments • Improve information flow • Up-tone or give more salience to novelty feature • Down tone or hedge

As explained earlier in this section, the unit of analysis was the intended message of the reviewers; that is, each invitation for a change in the text was placed as a data unit in the comment categories. The following example may illustrate the procedure of data arrangement and organization more distinctly.

Example1:

> The paper needs to be edited for typos and spelling mistakes (1). On page…., line… and also page…, line… there are run-on sentences that should be corrected (2)…. On wavelet network segmentation using fuzzy C-means algorithms there is a major reference authored by X that should be added (3).

Coding of comments identified in Example1:

> (1) → Category: language-use comment; Subcategory: typos
> (2) → Category: language-use comment; Subcategory: not well written/use of English
> (3) → Category: content comment; Subcategory: incomplete literature

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Organizational features of reviewers' reports

In answer to the first research question that addressed whether the reviews from different disciplines follow a specific organization, the analysis confirmed the existence of a common format in the review reports of all the three disciplines. All of the reviewers' reports were enclosed in a decision letter from the journal's Editor-in-Chief or another authority from the editorial board demonstrating its initial revision status (i.e., reject, major revision, minor revision, or accept). All of the reviewers' reports under the study (100%, from all the three disciplines) were of major/minor revision type. The reviews were organized in two different ways. Some of the reviews first highlighted the major concerns, and then moved to minor and changeable concerns. Some other reviews progressed section by section through the manuscript presenting major and minor concerns in chronological order. Some of the reports provided a numbered point-by-point list of the comments, whereas others favored a more integrated approach. The organizational features in the format and structure of reviewers' reports for the three disciplines appear in Table 3.

Table 3. Organizational format of reviewers' reports in terms of frequency percentage for the three disciplines

Field	Section-by-section		From major to minor	
	Numbered	Integrated	Numbered	Integrated
Engineering	12 %	59 %	8 %	21 %
Medicine	18 %	45 %	5 %	32 %
Social Sciences	14 %	17 %	10 %	59 %

As can be seen in Table 3, the section-by-section format was more favored in review reports of Engineering and Medical manuscripts, but for Social Sciences reviews the format of moving from major to minor concern was more frequent. As demonstrated in Table 3, regardless of the approach used for organizing the review, most of the review reports did not follow a numbered point-by-point style. The use of standardized forms and checklists is an idea that has been mentioned by professional science organizations in order to improve the review format (Gosden, 2003). Especially, numbered format of reviews is highly recommended because an unnumbered style places a greater burden on NNS authors in following a referee's points. Despite such organizational advice, the results indicate that the majority of referees who had reviewed the manuscripts of this study had not followed such numbered style and adopted an integrated way of organizing their comments and suggestions. On the whole, these results imply that several formats exist for peer-review feedback reports. In writing research articles, researchers need to be aware of such organizational formats in reviewers' reports on their manuscripts because peer review is at the heart of academic writing and publications; thus, the different formats of peer review presentation are among the profession's practices that novice professionals need to learn.

Another organizational feature in peer review genre is the way reviewers socialize authors and communicate their messages. Familiarity with such conventions would be empowering for those who wish to join the field. In this regard, the analysis of the reviewer's reports in the study revealed that the reviews enjoyed specific patterns. All of the reviews in the corpus (100%) started with opening paragraphs. An opening paragraph describes the reviewer's overall opinion of the manuscript (Tesser & Martin, 2006). It may include the manuscript title and a brief synopsis of the article which ensures whether the reviewer captured the essence of the manuscript (Spigt & Arts, 2010; Tesser & Martin, 2006); or, it may accentuate the manuscript's strengths or weaknesses (Diener, 2006; Lovejoy, Revenson, & France, 2011). An example of opening paragraph selected from the corpus of the study is as follows:

Example 2:

The authors present interesting data about weight change following first year of new diagnosis of diabetes based on retrospective review of electronic medical records of patients seen at XXX. The authors report that majority of diabetes patients lost some weight after diagnosis, but gained weight after a couple of months. Predictor factors for weight loss are also evaluated (1). The manuscript is well written, has important clinical message, and should be of great interest to the readers (2). However, the results are not well presented and I'm concerned about the amount of generalizations and speculations contained within this report (3).

(1): short summary of the content of the study and what it sets out to do
(2): highlighting the strength of the article
(3): bringing the weakness of the study to light

Table 4 summarizes the results of the analysis of opening paragraphs and statements highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of manuscripts.

Table 4. Opening paragraphs and reviewers' statements highlighting strength/weakness of the manuscripts

Field	Number of reviews	Number of Opening Paragraphs	Statements highlighting strengths	Statements highlighting weaknesses
Engineering	27	27	30	34
Medicine	29	29	35	37
Social Sciences	26	26	30	35

The results of the analysis as presented in Table 4 reveal that all the reviews in the corpus opened up with an enthusiastic good news opener; and then, on the heels of the good news, the bad news criticizing the weakness of the research article were disclosed. The good news patterns in the corpus were in the form of global praise with such statements as: an interesting topic. The bad news statements of the corpus were in most cases signaled by the adversative conjunction 'however' or 'but'. As shown in Table 4, the frequency of bad news highlighting the shortcomings and weaknesses of the research articles was more than the frequency of good news openers for reviews in the three fields. Another observation is that no reviews in the corpus failed to mention, at least, one redeeming feature. In other words, the criticism came only after a statement of praise. It could be concluded that the good news first, bad news later frame is a common strategy which most

reviewers use in shaping their feedback on submitted manuscripts. However, this conventional way of presenting the comments might be baffling and confusing for novice authors because of the conflicting signal of praise/criticism pair in opening paragraphs. An evidence for this probable confusion and misunderstanding of the purposes behind reviewers' comments was the experience of one the researchers whose manuscript was in the corpus of the study. He stated that when he received the reviewers' report he was confused as to the interpretation of the conflicting feedback. While the reviewers appreciated his 'interesting' and 'well-organized' article, in the following lines, they described it as 'unjustified' and 'hardly be understood'! This implies that NNS authors need to be familiar with the praise/criticism pair as a standard convention of the peer review genre. Such knowledge might help them to understand the rhetorical purposes behind the discourse of the review genre because it is quite important in deciphering the inferences between the lines of reviewers' comments.

3.2 Categories and frequency of comment types in reviewers' reports

A deeper content analysis of the reports enabled us to discern the salient types of problems noted by reviewers; and hence, to answer our second research question. As mentioned earlier, the identified comments from the three fields under investigation were categorized and analyzed based on Mungra and Webber's (2010) model which divides comments into two categories: content comments and language-use comments. The analysis of the data provided us with a total of 318 comments in Engineering, 332 comments in Medicine, and 196 comments in Social Sciences reviewers' reports. The comments encompassed both content and language-use comments. Table 5 depicts the frequency of the comments for the three disciplines under investigation separately and also reports the count of the occurrences of comment categories within each discipline.

Table 5. Distribution of comments for the three disciplines based on Mungra and Webber's (2010) model

Field	Total number of Reviewers' comments	Content comments		Language-use comments	
		N	%	*N*	%
Engineering	318	190	59.7%	128	40.3%
Medicine	332	200	60.5%	132	39.5%
Social Sciences	113	83	57.5%	196	42.5%

What is evident from the results presented in Table 5 is that for all the three fields, the overall count of content comments exceeded that of language-use comments. As the philosophy behind peer review is to critique the content of scientific research article, such results are by no means unexpected. However, the frequency of language-use comments was also significant, ranging from 39.5 % to 42.5 %, indicating their high frequency. Furthermore, the detailed analysis of the subcategories reveals that some subcategories of language-use comments were as frequent as some subcategories of content comments. This analysis is another evidence of significance of language-related comments. Table 6 summarizes the detailed analysis of subcategories.

Table 6. Detailed analysis of comments subcategories based on Mungra and Webber's (2010) model

Type of comment	Engineering (*N*= 318)	Medicine (*N*= 332)	Social Sciences (*N*= 196)
Content comments			
• Incomplete literature/problems with references	10.2 %	9.7 %	13.4 %
• Procedural infelicities and lack of rigor	12.8 %	11.0 %	10.8 %
• Statistical irregularities	7.6 %	9.2 %	6.2 %
• Scientific reasoning errors of own data	9.7 %	5.4 %	6.3 %
• Incorrect scientific interpretation of other authors	5.1 %	7.7 %	0.0 %
• Terminology or definitions	6.2 %	7.9 %	2.7 %
• Lack of association between claim and data	2.1 %	2.9 %	0.0 %
• Lack of association between claim and prior research	2.4 %	4.1 %	0.0 %
• Explain why data are unusual	3.3 %	0.8 %	0.0 %
• Sampling errors	0.3 %	1.8 %	0.0 %
Language-use comments			
A. Lexis and syntax			
• Suggestions for text edition/ Typos	7.5 %	7.1 %	11.2 %
• Not well written/use of English	10.2 %	8.3 %	10.5 %
• Lack of clarity	7.0 %	7.5 %	11.3 %
• Incoherence	3.2 %	4.1 %	8.2%
• Verbosity	3.1 %	4.4 %	5.8 %
• Repetition	3.2 %	2.5 %	4.9 %

Type of comment	Engineering (*N*= 318)	Medicine (*N*= 332)	Social Sciences (*N*= 196)
B. Discourse and rhetorical comments			
• Improve flow of information	4.3 %	4.0 %	6.4 %
• Up tone or give more salience to novelty feature	1.1 %	1.2 %	0.0 %
• Down tone claim or hedge	0.7 %	0.4 %	2.3 %

3.2.1 Content comments

Table 6 shows that the most frequent subcategory of content comments for the fields of Engineering and Medicine was procedural infelicities and lack of rigor and in the second place, incomplete literature. This order was the contrary for Social Sciences with incomplete literature being the most frequent and procedural infelicities and lack of rigor the next. For other subcategories of content comments, the results of the analysis display various distributions. For example, for Engineering field, the most frequent features, other than the two abovementioned items, are scientific reasoning errors of own data, statistical irregularities, terminology or definitions, and so on. For reviews of the Medicine field, statistical irregularities are the third most frequent subcategory followed by scientific reasoning, terminology and definitions, and so forth. Yet, these two orders of frequencies could be considered as almost similar once the completely distinct frequency order of content comments subcategories in Social Sciences reviews are taken into account. In the latter, aside from the two above-discussed subcategories, statistical irregularities and scientific reasoning errors of own data occurred with about the same frequency; errors of terminology and definitions were the next frequent subcategory of content comments, and the rest of subcategories were not observed in the corpus of the study. These findings may inform authors about the importance of various aspects of methodological and scientific sphere in preparing manuscripts. Since the leading reviewers' objections were on the concerns about procedural infelicities and lack of scientific rigor, it is evident that the ability to describe procedures in felicitous manners and express concepts clearly is of prime importance. Also, it is suggestive that problems with literature and references, statistical irregularities, and interpretation of research findings are among the important areas that should be considered by authors. Overall, issues pertaining to the scientific content of the manuscript are the first consideration that authors should attend to from the outset of manuscript preparation.

3.2.2 Language-use comments

Concerning the language-use comments, Table 6 indicates that this category follows a more varying pattern of distribution in the reviewers' reports of the three disciplines. The subcategory of lexis and syntax comments consisted of not well written/use of English (including such issues as grammatically incorrect sentences, incorrect choice of lexis, and etc.), lack of clarity (suggestions to change the syntactic composition of the sentences to improve clarity), suggestions for edition of the text/ typos (invitation to re-editing or reformulating the text in terms of spelling corrections or ordering according to specific guidelines of the journal or academic writing formats such as APA-style), verbosity (over-use of words where something could be said with fewer words), repetition (repeating of a concept, datum, or sentence), and finally incoherence (lack of connection and consistency in the text). The subcategory of discourse and rhetorical comments included suggestions to improve the way the message of the text was conveyed through rhetorical devices and metadiscourse organizers.

As is evident from Table 6, for all the three groups, the subcategory of lexis and syntax comments was more frequent than discourse and rhetorical comments. The subcategory of lexis and syntax encompasses features of precision and clarity which are the paramount demands of scientific writing. Scholarly written texts should be precise, and this precision should be reflected in the form of clarity (Swales, 2004). Thus, the sensitivity of reviewers to incorrect structures and forms, lack of clarity, incoherence, and verbosity may be suggestive of such expectation.

In the subcategory of lexis and syntax comments, the most frequent and salient items for Engineering field were 'not well written/use of English, suggestions for edition of the text/ typos, lack of clarity, incoherence and repetition with equal frequency, and verbosity'. This order was a little different for Medicine field with 'not well written/use of English' being the first followed by 'lack of clarity, suggestions for edition of the text/ typos, verbosity, incoherence, and repetition'. Yet again, with a slight difference, for Social Sciences field, 'lack of clarity' ranked first with approximately equal frequency with 'suggestions for editing text/typos'. The order then followed 'not well written/use of English, incoherence, verbosity, and repetition'.

This highlights the significance of these language-related items and implies that authors should pay extra attention to their submissions in terms of lexis and syntax features of the English language, especially they need to make sure that their manuscript is well written and free of grammatical errors, follows the guidelines of the journal and proper citations, and unveils the aim and findings of their research in a clear and comprehensible manner.

In sum, the findings imply that the privileged form of language in writing research articles is clear, concise and grammatically correct English.

Viewing from a broader perspective, a very important issue captures the attention and deserves special consideration. As Mungra and Webber (2010) have noted, the distinction between content and language-use comments does not entail a clear-cut discrimination and in some cases these two categories overlap each other. This is exemplified in the following extract from the corpus:

Example 6:

> What is meant by the mechanism of fracture? What do you mean by timing and location, but not circumstances of the fracture? If this cannot be clearly stated, it should be dropped from the results of the paper.

On initial consideration, this comment may seem to refer to terminology or definition of content-related concepts. But on second thoughts, this comment may identically appear a language-use comment asking for clarity. This speculation was confirmed when we brought up the issue with the author of the manuscript from which the above example was extracted. He admitted that he lacked the appropriate language proficiency needed to elaborate and discuss what he meant in a better and more eloquent manner. This example brings out the conclusion that content comments in many cases do not actually refer to scientific infelicities and errors but indicate the authors' problems with language and their inability to put the intended message across through the best language choices and structures.

4. Conclusion

The current study was informed by the belief that exploring the reviewer's feedback on submitted manuscripts from different fields of Engineering, Medicine, and Social Sciences may provide an overall indication as to main areas of concern for Iranian authors submitting their manuscripts to international journals. With the narrow-angle analysis of the fairly small sample of this study, any generalized conclusions are necessarily tentative but perhaps also provocative with respect to possible implications. First, the findings demonstrated that there are some common and shared patterns in the format and structure of the review reports for the three disciplines of which Iranian authors should be aware. The description of common and frequent patterns and comments in the review reports can help researchers understand the demands and intentions of the reviewers, which in turn helps them to better address the suggested changes. Furthermore, being aware that

reviewers' reports might follow a section-by-section or an integrated format, or being familiar with the positive/negative balance of comments, adds to the knowledge of authors and empowers them to both consume professional knowledge and contribute to it.

Second, regarding the most frequent problems noted by reviewers, content comments were the most frequent and language-use comments ranked second. This has strong implications for researchers who seek publication in international journals as to the importance of scientific rigor and careful presentation of their work in their submitted manuscripts. However, it would not be wise to conclude that language-use comments are less important than content comments because content comments are conveyed through the language structures and many of content infelicities are the result of limited language abilities. In practical terms, it could be concluded that in preparing research articles to publish in peer-reviewed English-medium journals as much effort and consideration should be given to the language, style and organization of the paper as may be given to the scientific rigor of the study.

The results of this study can be useful for novice Iranian researchers who are not yet familiar with the characteristics of the review genre. Additionally, these findings may be of help to ESP/EAP practitioners and material developers to generate insights that help prospective academic authors achieve their publication goals.

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