Publishing in the Era of Online Technologies

Comments from the editor of *Language Assessment Quarterly*
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For almost 350 years, bound serial publications (popularly known as journals) of scholarly work, along with books, served the public good by bringing knowledge from university laboratories and libraries to the literate person. The bridge that made this possible included faculty members and researchers at university departments, learned societies, and university presses (joined later by commercial publishers), working with voluntary peer reviewers and mostly voluntary editors to produce low-cost journals. This model of scholarly communication worked for more than three centuries, and the classics of yesteryears made their appearance in libraries and homes through library subscriptions and interlibrary loans (at least in the affluent parts of the Western world). Libraries in the developing world, though, had much difficulty with this model and depended very much on assistance from European and North American embassies and universities to access journals. Nevertheless, the model certainly helped with building a collective knowledge base and creating a community of researchers and consumers of research from around the world. The arrangement, of course, was aided by the need to publish: Faculty members and researchers at universities in Europe and North America were forced to publish in scholarly journals in order to be promoted, gain tenure, receive grants, and secure academic recognition. This established a perfect scenario for presses and publishers to create scholarly journals and for authors to submit their recent works for editorial and peer review and possible publication without any payment. In universities in which publishing in scholarly journals was not required, faculty members wrote textbooks or took up tutoring or teaching in coaching schools for additional remuneration.

Enter the late 20th century with the age of information and online publishing technologies. The print model is immediately threatened by the digital and print hybrid model (in which subscribers can receive their journals in print or electronically) and the all-digital virtual model (in which subscribers receive their journals only electronically). In addition, we have the world of electronic monitoring and ranking of journals through citation indices (e.g., the impact factor based on the Social Science Citation Index) and a host of other methods (e.g., the *h*-Index, PageRank, Eigenfactor, and the SCImago Journal Rank; the median impact factor, aggregate impact factor, aggregate immediacy index, aggregated cited half-life, and the number of downloads/hits). Matters became yet more complex because of the mergers and acquisitions of commercial publishers that left Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Sage, and Wiley-Blackwell in control of major journals in most fields. These mergers did not result in a decrease of per-page costs of publishing a journal; rather, researchers assert that journal pricing subsequently went up dramatically. As a result, even the most well-heeled private university libraries in the Western world are cutting journal subscriptions (mainly based on journal rankings and costs). At the same time, libraries in the developing world have very limited resources to subscribe to even a fraction of the journals in most fields. For them, knowledge dissemination has to wait until such knowledge gets into textbooks or news aggregators.

A quick review, for example, of six journals in the field of applied linguistics (*Applied Linguistics, Language Learning, Language Testing, The Modern Language Journal, Studies in Second Language Acquisition, TESOL Quarterly*) revealed the high costs of print and electronic versions: Institutional subscription rates range from $173 to $719 for the online versions, about five times the personal or individual rates. When lower institutional rates are available for the Americas, the rates for the rest of the world are about 50% higher. Incidentally, these rates are much higher for journals in psychology, sciences, mathematics, and engineering. With these subscription rates for individuals and institutions (along with “pay-per-article” prices), particularly in the developing world, coupled with the newly available technologies, the key question posed by Solomon (1999) in the title of his article is relevant to this argument: “Is It Time to Take the Paper out of Serial Publication?” Is it also time then to have more open-access policies to resolve a number of problems regarding costs, access, and inclusiveness?

How do we in applied linguistics view this situation? In the field of language assessment, *Language Assessment Quarterly* (*LAQ*) is a relatively new journal (first issue published in March 2004), joining long-standing journals in applied linguistics (such as *The Modern Language Journal,* which is approaching the century mark, and *Language Learning*, which has gone past its 60th year). The editorial team decided to do a few things differently. It premised its decisions on the idea that academic and professional knowledge dissemination needs to be done through many journal features (i.e., through commentaries, discussions, and interviews) in addition to regular features such as articles and reviews. We also started with a large and diverse editorial advisory board to include researchers from beyond the English language assessment world and geographically from beyond Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Western Europe. Further, as universities and research centers are not now the only locations for knowledge production but comprise, among others, government, military, nonprofit, and commercial organizations and small business groups of individual researchers, we included researchers from these sectors in our review and editorial processes.

These decisions were made primarily to open up the dissemination of existing research studies from and to areas of the world that were not previously able to access such knowledge and to encourage and embrace academic and professional discourse from languages other than those most widely discussed (such as English, German, and Japanese). Because our goal at *LAQ* is to be as inclusive as possible in terms of the language of publication (which is now only English), we want to present abstracts and key articles in other languages. This would enable authors who cannot write in English to disseminate their research. For example, we would like test evaluations of tests in Spanish, Mandarin, or Hindi to appear in these languages as well as English (through translation) so that a wider group of developers, test-takers, and users of the test can read the test evaluations in these languages rather than having to depend on the English version. In addition, we had hoped this inclusive approach would open doors to regions of the world that we do not generally hear from because, as a profession, we have much to learn from academics and professionals in Africa, Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South and East Asia.

Much to my disappointment, this kind of scholarly communication has not happened in a visible way in the journal, although it has been successful according to the traditional criteria of readership, subscriptions, submissions, and quality of published articles. Perhaps it is too early to tell, but I fear that our goals and interests in widening our reach are not yet resonating in the profession.

To find a solution to this problem, I have been personally engaged in encouraging participation of academics and professionals from other regions to disseminate their research. At the same time, I have also been wondering whether we need to consider why scholarly communications from other regions are not represented in the journal. There are two possible reasons: the price and the electronic environment. Regarding the price, based on my correspondence with professionals from different parts of the world, this is the main reason that researchers from around the world are not considering publishing in *LAQ* (even when they have research findings to share), as most university and commercial libraries cannot afford a new journal and individual subscriptions are prohibitively expensive—thus excluding access to the journal's current and back issues. Regarding the electronic environment of the journal—namely, article submissions through the ScholarOne Manuscripts system (formerly Manuscript Central), review, revision, preproduction, page proofs, and correspondence—that medium itself leads to disparate submission levels as access to and use of electronic submissions and page proof reviews cost money in Internet rooms. Thus, although the electronic medium is expected to provide more access, in terms of scholarly communication, access has been less than satisfactory. As Willinsky (2006) pointed out, today more and more information is becoming less and less available freely. This is an important point, as readers of a journal often become its authors and promoters. Therefore, all three—wider readership, authorship, and interest in scholarly communication—have suffered.

What, then, are the possible solutions in the modern world of online publishing technologies? Kling and McKim (1999) argued that articles published within a scholarly community should satisfy three criteria: publicity, trustworthiness, and access. *Publicity* announces the existence of articles through subscription, abstracts, advertising, and citations; *trustworthiness* is established by peer review, a quality editorial advisory board, and overall journal quality; and *access* is made possible through individual and institutional subscriptions, libraries and interlibrary loans, search engines, and commercial aggregators (such as indexing, abstracting, and archiving like the National Institutes of Health's PubMed Central, the free digital archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature). If these three criteria can be met, then scholarly communication can be accomplished through e-journals (as in the case of *Language Learning & Technology*) and open-access journals, thus largely removing the cost factor.

E-journals are already known to the field, but the concept of open access may be new. So, what does "open access" mean? The Budapest (2001), Bethesda (2003), and Berlin (2005) declarations of the Open Society Institute defined *open access* as "removing price and permission barriers." More specifically, they identified the following characteristics for open-access journals: They are scholarly, digital, and refereed, but readers can access them free of charge and authors retain copyright. These last two characteristics are important, as they dispense with readers or their institutions having to pay for articles or for journal subscriptions that have been written for no compensation (unlike book authors who are compensated with a fee and/or royalties).

The open-access movement has been active for the last decade (cf., Buckholtz, 2001). As of May 2010, the Directory of Open Access Journals (from Lund University libraries) lists 5,022 journals, of which 182 are in the languages and literatures subject area. In the field of applied linguistics, disappointingly, I noticed only two others beyond the previously cited *LLT*: *Heritage Language Journal* and *Reading in a Foreign Language*.

How can *we* bring about change to this situation? Here are a few suggestions to authors, administrators, publishers, learned societies, foundations, and governments, based on Suber's (2005) recommendations:

- *For authors (faculty and researchers):* to deposit their preprints of accepted articles and postprints of published articles in an open-access, OPI (Open-Access Initiative)-compliant Web site (either with permission from the publisher or by retaining copyright) or to deposit these article versions on the author's personal, institutional, or sponsor's Web site
- *For university librarians and administrators:* to launch an OPI-compliant archive, to encourage and help faculty and researchers to deposit their articles in the university archive, to encourage theses and dissertations to be archived in the institutional archive, and to publish institutional open-access journals
- *For publishers:* to allow authors to retain copyright and to archive both preprints and postprints on their own Web sites; if this is not immediately feasible, to allow open access after some delay or embargo period (say, 3–6 months)
- *For learned societies:* to consider making their journals open access, allowing authors to retain copyright, and encouraging members to endorse and use open-access journals
- *For foundations and governments:* to require research grant seekers to use open-access journals for their sponsored research publications and to provide funds to create open access

In summary, open access to journals means online access without charge to readers or libraries. This means that publishers have to dispense with the financial and legal barriers that are now limiting dissemination of knowledge to paying subscribers and must find other ways of making the business model work. It also means, in the words of Buckholtz (2001), a return of "scientific publishing to scientists." This I believe to be the solution for accelerating research, sharing knowledge, and including readers (and potential authors) worldwide who do not otherwise have access or cannot pay or subscribe.

NOTE

The views expressed here are solely the author's and not of the associate editors of *LAQ* or of its publisher.

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