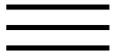


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“Why not give us the full story?”: functions of referees’ comments in peer reviews of scientific research papers

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Abstract

Peer reviews of research articles submitted to journals are an occluded genre, that is, they are not publicly available documents which are part of the research record. When submitting their first scientific papers to international journals for publication, NNSE (non-native speaker of English) novice researchers face the challenging task of framing effective replies to referees’ criticisms, a complex process requiring considerable socio-cultural sensitivity and pragma-linguistic competence. In order to lessen the impact of linguistic and cultural barriers to early publication, it is likely that an awareness of relevant features of peer reviews would be helpful. However, as gatekeeping discourse, peer reviews remain largely under-researched principally due to their hidden status and issues of confidentiality. This study presents the description and analysis of referees’ comments contained in a corpus of 40 peer reviews of short scientific

papers known as Letters. In the task of revising their manuscripts for publication, novice researchers need to interpret appropriately the motivation behind referees' comments, for example, whether they are more directed towards revision of the technical subject matter (*ideational*), the effectiveness of the writer's interaction with the reader in the text (*interpersonal*), or an aspect of the text itself, for example, its format or length (*textual*). The results of this study highlight the strongly interpersonal orientation of referees' concerns, with two-thirds of all comments in the corpus focusing on interactional deficiencies of NNSE researchers' manuscripts.



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