

An Editor shall not “censor” submitted papers

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This issue of ACQUAL contains a paper which is certainly “unconventional”: it is critical about a ‘Convention’.

Or, better, it is critical about the effects of a Convention. It critically examines the value of the ‘Convention du Mètre’ (the Intergovernmental Treaty on the Metre, 1875) with respect to chemical measurement.

It was providing the occasion for the Editors to examine a little closer the rules which must guide them when organizing the reviewing, and eventually the acceptance, of submitted papers. An examination which is long overdue.

First, it is necessary to consider the difference between a “convention” and “politically correct language”.

A convention is a document in which a description is laid down of mutually agreed tools such as concepts, terms, symbols, units, used in constructing hypotheses, developing theories, reporting observations or expressing opinions for debate. Conventions are made on the *tools* to do something and, to a certain extent, “*how*” they should be used.

Censoring can never be applied on conventions: they do exist and are available for use after mutual—preferably international—agreement and should be applied.

The term censoring applies to the content of a document, such as consequences of concepts, ideas which are spread, messages which are given, conclusions which are drawn. It applies to what we have in mind and are communicating, which opinion we have on something, what conclusion we draw after a logical reasoning.

They answer the question about “*what?*” we are communicating.

The use—or even enforcement—of “politically correct language” i.e. a language which is designated by some power or authority to be the official one, is on the rise on the political scenes of many of the world’s countries (and not only there). And from an official opinion to the only opinion allowed, is a small step.

At first sight, that is amazing for a scientist. Not only because any form of attempting to impose “politically correct” language imposes limitations to the liberty of thinking in the human society, but because it builds up a barrier to “creative thinking”. If applied in scientific research and reporting, it is catastrophic because it is a form of barrier to “creative thinking” and therefore contrary to continuous improvement of scientific knowledge. It would, in fact, reduce our thinking to reproducing “official” versions thus reducing a creative scientific task to reproducing opinions [1], literally. That would reduce thinking to just *copying opinions without putting them to critical examination for their content*. It goes against the continuing search for the “hidden structure behind the things we observe”, an extremely useful guideline which I applied in my measurement laboratory for decades.

Mere reproducibility of opinions means just repeating opinions, no other view permitted. It implies uniformity in thinking, sometimes no less than standardization of thinking, an eminently slippery slope towards non-creative thinking.

This should not be confused, however, with using commonly understood concepts and commonly agreed terms for these concepts as the real building blocks of the language we use in communicating new ideas, new theories, or simply... comparing measurement results. In the twenty-first century, such building blocks must be intercontinentally—not just internationally—understood in the same way. We must agree a priori on the meaning of these

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building blocks which we have in mind (literally!). The associated terms of these concepts, i.e. the names of the building blocks, must point to the same concepts in the mind of everybody world wide. Only then can these terms be correctly translated into the world's building blocks and languages for similar use everywhere.

At the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century, such building blocks are now available in VIM [2] and GUM [3].

'Reproducibility' of opinions may be useful if the aim is to know how well we are reproducing that opinion. But, "reproducibility is never proof of accuracy" [1]. At best, reproducibility is related to how reproducible our thinking is when we treat a given problem in the same way, all possibly making the same (thinking) errors all the time without realizing that. At worst, it means copying the way of thinking of others without further examination of it and repeating the same error(s) of thinking, either knowingly, or not being aware of them. Achieving reproducibility is easy because it does not require energy. It makes us feel comfortable because it does not require creativity. It is safe because one feels being in company of people who think similarly. It yields a quick answer because it does not require much thinking time.

But, in this context, 'accuracy' is the fruit of training the mind in rational thinking i.e. of critically examining whether logical conclusions can be drawn, and—if these are presented—whether the basic conditions or "premises", necessary for logical reasoning, were correct. Let us not forget that, as a matter of principle, no correct conclusion can be built on wrong premises. Or, put in another way, from wrong premises no correct conclusion can ever follow.

When papers are submitted to the editorial office of a scientific journal, especially when it is devoted to "quality, comparability and reliability", these rules are of prime importance. Any scientific reasoning, based on logical arguments being put together in a logical construct and supported by sound experimental evidence, is acceptable for publication, irrespective of whether or not the conclusions presented are conform with general thinking in (the

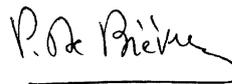
scientific) society. They are also acceptable irrespective of whether such conclusions do comply with accepted "politically correct language" on the subject concerned.

In this sense, Editors must never "censor" the content of a submitted paper on the basis of whether such content leads to undesired or disagreeable conclusions.

Editors can—and should—prevent the use of curse language and copying things published elsewhere. They should certainly eliminate personal attacks. They may decide that a paper is outside the scope of a journal. They can, of course, strongly suggest and sometimes even impose the use of widely accepted intercontinental conventions in matters of terminology, measurement units, and measurement uncertainty.

Editors are secretaries, transmitters, intermediaries, between authors and reviewers. At the end they are even deciders.

But readers from ACQUAL must know that Editors—as well as the referees whom they invite—must not, and cannot, "censor" the content of submitted papers.



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