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Book Review

Nigel Harwood

Proofreading and Editing in Student and Research Publication Contexts: International Perspectives

—Reviewed by

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The question of what constitutes ethical writing intervention has only grown more complex throughout history due to the increase in informal writing interventions, unequal access to editing and proofreading resources across socioeconomic classes, and confusing, vague, or absent institutional editing and proofreading policies. All these concerns draw back to and have been compounded by the lack of a consistent definition for proofreading across individual and organizational levels. In *Proofreading and Editing in Student and Research Publication Contexts: International Perspectives*, Nigel Harwood offers a collection of pioneering essays seeking to define proofreading on the way to addressing its many ethical dilemmas. These dilemmas include whether writers should assign authorship to editors in an academic and/or research context and whether professors should grade student assignments differently based on editor intervention. Because these problems can be solved only through collective agreement on what constitutes appropriate editing intervention, the book maintains a broad definition of proofreading to address student, professor, publisher, and even proofreader perspectives. Harwood therefore affords a holistic portrait of how

various stakeholders necessarily approach ethical proofreading in different ways and suggests routes for merging these conflicting definitions.

In Part I, the book first attempts to define ethical proofreading from a student-centered perspective. While many studies have been conducted to understand professional proofreading practices, Nina Conrad examines the proofreading that students receive from personal connections through a mixed methods study and analyzes how this “less visible” (p. 15) intervention poses implications for inequitable writing development, resource availability, and grading decisions. She concludes that international students have a “relatively lower tendency” (p. 27) to pursue informal proofreading, which suggests that they have less access to these resources or perceive other avenues, such as writing centres, as more helpful. If a student benefits in their grades and in their writing development more from informal interventions, then it’s possible that international students are at a disadvantage for building productive and lasting writing habits. In Chapter 3, the book shifts to explore the historical construction of university writing centres as a perceived authority over student texts. Yet, this chapter also resists this authority and demonstrates how most multilingual students are indeed intrinsically motivated to improve their writing. Rather than reinforce the perception of the writing centre as a “laundry” where students can “simply drop off error-filled text and return later to collect an improved draft” (p. 33), this chapter argues that tutors should adapt and respond to multilingual students’ demonstrated interest in mastering English communication as a non-native speaker. The remaining chapters of Part I build on these initial takeaways to further explore how proofreading’s historical precedents have complicated its practice within university settings. These chapters impart similar recommendations by recontextualizing student goals as they seek out proofreading services.

In Part II, the book adopts a policy-centered approach to critique vague and gatekeeping proofreading guidelines. These chapters argue that teaching effective proofreading can empower students to become better writers themselves without as great a need for outside intervention. For example, Mary Davis outlines how many university academic integrity policies are intended to regulate “the interaction between a student and a third-party proofreader” (p. 122) through “warnings that increase anxiety” (p. 124). She further illustrates how this flawed methodology not only harms emotional wellbeing but also endangers a student’s ability to “comprehend a policy” (p. 124), demonstrating how policy can further blind rather than enlighten about ethical proofreading practices. As pointed out in Chapter 8, the rise of cheating services worsens this problem by making students feel safer about circumventing vague and unclear rules.

In Part III, the book switches to a publisher’s perspective, which begins critical conversations about how proofreading may contribute to linguistic imperialism by prioritizing correctness over context. Chapter 9 raises important questions about how policy and publishing priorities are set without practical merit. Through a single-case mixed methods study, Songsha Ren and Guangwei Hu demonstrate how one student researcher’s experience with proofreaders contradicts many of the assumptions about proofreader authorship and multilingual writer development when supported by proofreaders. This student perceived his proofreaders’ interventions as foundational to his successful publication. His supervisor influenced him to view proofreader interventions as “a legitimate form of research collaboration” (p. 173). He also believed he wouldn’t have been able to adhere to advanced English publication standards without proofreader assistance. This study suggests that the question is not whether proofreaders deserve authorship but why publications prioritize identity politics over quality research endeavors and writing development. However, this priority is not without its basis. As discussed throughout the book, the popular belief is that students only want edits without having to spend time or effort learning how to write. In this case study, though,

proofreading included “co-construction of meaning” and suggested the student had made an intelligent move to ensure a lack of native English proficiency would not “affect [his manuscript’s] chance of publication” (p. 173). This case study demonstrates how multilingual writers must navigate invisible barriers in publication contexts, and imperialistic writing has been imposed on these writers due to false public perceptions. Chapter 10 builds on this argument by recommending that we properly move away from the idea of “English as a Lingua Franca” (pp. 193–194) in publishing. By prioritizing the preservation of “individual voice or intended tone” (p. 179) rather than “native” (p. 193) English through policy decisions, publishers can help writers publish their work without these barriers and help editors support “clear writing” (p. 179) above all else.

Finally, in Part IV, Pejman Habibie and Saskia Van Viegen engage in an autoethnographic study to represent the researcher’s perspective in more detail. Conducted through a collaborative interview process, the authors cement much of what has come before—namely, the idea that editing is a “humanist practice” concerned with promoting “mutual trust, respect, and empowerment” (p. 218) between editor and writer. Notably, Pejman connects this conclusion to Vygotsky’s psychological theory surrounding the “zone of proximal development (ZPD) wherein collaboration fosters for both the opportunity to reach a level of knowledge and understanding together, beyond our current competence” (p. 205). The book concludes on a powerful note to affirm every essay that came before by combining theoretical and practical knowledge surrounding proofreading’s benefits when conducted appropriately (or according to the needs of both the writer and editor).

The greatest strength in *Proofreading and Editing in Student and Research Publication Contexts* is demonstrating how these recommendations resonate with all academic audiences and reverse common,

flawed perceptions of proofreading. For example, one could easily learn that proofreading's vague and inconsistent definitions need to be addressed, and the book leaves this definition open-ended. However, the book provides pathways toward this answer through introductory studies aiming to explore problems that have yet to be researched. Through mixed methods studies, surveys, interviews, and documentary analyses, this book is a productive foray into highly uncharted territory and serves as a valuable contribution to studies on multilingual literacy, publishing, and academic writing and editing. The book invites other scholars to further redefine proofreading within institutional policies and the public domain as a productive pedagogical practice between collaborative rather than competitive stakeholders.