SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS TO PEER REVIEW SYSTEM IN ARABIC

Prof. Dr. Luisa María ARVIDE CAMBRA
lmarvide@ual.es
Department of Philology, University of Almería
04120- Almería, Spain

ABSTRACT

Peer reviewing is the common way used for validating writings and requests of financing in order to measure and to test their property, possibility and strictness, etcetera; and, in spite of its failures, faults and mistakes, it seems the best way to get quality assurance for scientific publishing. Nevertheless, there are many people who are in disagreement with this methodology and criticize it from different points of view. This paper refers to some critical reflections about peer reviewing system and includes three conclusions. It has been possible thanks to the finance of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MICINN).

Keyword: Peer review system

PRELIMINARY NOTES

As we know, into academic world peer review also known as refereeing is the process of subjecting scholarly works, research or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field, usually two or three persons. Peer reviewers are knowledgeable scientists who are not directly involved with the research being evaluated, but who are familiar with the field [1]. Peer reviewing is the common way used in every scientific field, including of course Arabic Studies field, for validating writings and requests of financing in order to measure and to test their property, possibility and strictness, etcetera; and, in spite of its failures, faults and mistakes, it seems the best way to get quality assurance for scientific publishing, although some important scientific works were not reviewed [2]. The first recorded editorial prepublication peer review process was at The Royal Society in 1665 by the founding editor of Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Henry Oldenburg. In the 20th century peer-review became common for science funding allocations. This process appears to have developed independently from the editorial peer review. Peer review has been a modern scientific method only since the middle of the 20th century, except in the field of medicine. Before then its application was optional according to each scientific field [3]. Anonymous peer review, also called blind review, is a system of prepublication peer review of scientific articles or papers for journals or academic conferences by reviewers who are known to the journal editor or conference organizer but whose names are not given to the article's author. The reviewers or referees do not know the author's identity, as any identifying information is stripped from the document before review. This system is intended to reduce or eliminate bias, although this has been challenged and today there are many people who advocate for an open peer review where reviewers’ names are given to the article’s author. In other hand, there is the non-blind review, where the reviewers’ names are proposed by the article’s author himself, and in my opinion is the best way because they usually belong to the same field of knowledge than the article’s author and, so, they are experts in the same subject, as in other types of peer review is possible that it is not so, over all in Arabic, a very specialized field of knowledge [4].
To preserve the integrity of the peer review process, submitting authors may not be informed of who reviews their papers; sometimes, they might not even know the identity of the associate editor who is responsible for the paper. In many cases, alternatively called masked or double-masked review (or, like I have said, blind or double-blind review), the identity of the authors is concealed from the reviewers, lest the knowledge of authorship bias their review; in such cases, however, the associate editor responsible for the paper does know who the author is. Sometimes the scenario where the reviewers do know who the authors are is called single-blinded to distinguish it from the double-blinded process. In double-blind review, the authors are required to remove any reference that may point to them as the authors of the paper [5]. Traditionally, the reviewers would remain anonymous to the authors, but this standard is slowly changing. In some academic fields, most journals now offer the reviewer the option of remaining anonymous or not, or a referee may opt to sign a review, thereby relinquishing anonymity. Published papers sometimes contain, in the acknowledgments section, thanks to anonymous or named referees who helped improve the paper. During the peer review process, the role of the referees is advisory, and the editor is typically under no formal obligation to accept the opinions of the referees. Furthermore, in scientific publication, the referees do not act as a group, do not communicate with each other, and typically are not aware of each other identities or evaluations. There is usually no requirement that the referees achieve consensus. Reviewers’ power is considerable, but anyway, the decision whether or not to publish a scientific article or what should be modified before publication, lies with the editor to which the work has been submitted.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

In spite of the peer review system seems to be the best way of refereeing for evaluating the scientific works, there are many people who are in disagreement with this methodology and criticize it from different points of view [6]. This paper refers to this subject and indicates some critical reflections about the process with some of which I am not in agreement of all [7]:

1) The slowness of the process: certainly, in some journals, it passes a long time since the article is received until it is accepted or refused for publishing. In fact, one of the most common complaints about the peer review system is that it is slow and that it typically takes several months or even sometimes several years in some fields for a submitted work to appear in print.

2) All publishers might have the same discernments without bearing in mind their academic interests and their field of knowledge in such a way that the authors were not damaged.

3) There are who say that the identity of the authors might be always unknown by the reviewers in order to avoid possible reprisals. And so, and in order to keep the integrity of peer review system, this methodology is used by some journals.

4) The reviewers usually are very critical with the conclusions which are contradictory to their scientific interests, ideas or points of view, as well as very indulgent with those who are in agreement about them.

5) There are who think that, under no circumstances, the identity of the reviewer must keep in anonymity because, so, the authors stay helpless with regard to a possible unfairness and iniquity as a result of hypothetical academic and scientific interests.

6) There are who speak about the inefficiency of this process, as some notable works never were reviewed, like for example the article from Watson and Crick’s on the structure of DNA which was published in 1951 in *Nature* without reviewing [8].

7) There are who believe that this process is not independent at all and speak about a complex system of scientific interests.

8) There are who think that this process is not clear at all and speak about a complex system of academic reprisals and bias [9].

9) Within Internet era, there are who question if the social networking can replace the traditional
process of peer review carried out by scientific journals to decide whether a job should be posted and if the researchers are prepared for criticism and exposure of their research online.

CONCLUSIONS

1) Although the peer review system has got defaults and failures as well as it can be improved without any doubt, and despite the critics received from many authors and researchers, the process in its different modalities is at the moment the best way, or the least bad, for validating the scientific quality of every work and the approval from the editors.

2) Under all circumstances, the referees or reviewers might belong to the same field of knowledge than the work to be evaluated belongs to, but it not always happens. Moreover, they would not know author’s name in order to prevent possible reprisal and bias as well as conflicts of interests. This mark is more obvious in certain small scientific fields, like for example Arabic Studies.

3) The suitability or no suitability of keeping referees’ anonymity depends on several circumstances; and, in my opinion, it is more advisable in some specific small fields of knowledge, like for example Arabic Studies, than it is in other biggest ones. Bearing in mind that, the more appropriate system seems to be the mixed system, I mean the peer review based on anonymous referees and on reviewers proposed by work’s author to be evaluated, reducing or avoiding thus possible conflicts between reviewers and authors whose work has been refused.

REFERENCES


