Publishing in predatory language and linguistics journals:

Authors' experiences and motivations

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences and motivations of language and linguistics academics who have published in potential predatory journals (PPJs). A questionnaire was administered to 2793 academics with publications in 63 language and linguistics PPJs, and 213 of them returned their responses. A subsample of the respondents ($n = 21$) also contributed qualitative data through semi-structured interviews or email responses to open-ended questions. Analyses of the survey data found that the authors were mainly from Asia, mostly had a doctorate, chose the PPJs chiefly for fast publication and/or meeting degree or job requirements, were predominantly of the opinion that the PPJs were reputable, and commonly reported positive impacts of publishing in the PPJs on their studies or academic careers. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed five main themes: unawareness, unrelenting publication pressures, low information literacy, social identity threat, and failure to publish in top-tier journals.

Keywords: reasons for publishing, predatory journals, language and linguistics, publication requirements.

Introduction

Predatory journals have grown exponentially and become a major threat to scholarly publishing (Nejadghanbar & Hu, 2022a). Such journals 'prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best

editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices' (Grudniewicz et al., 2019, p. 210). Predatory publishing has turned into a huge challenge because of its negative impact on knowledge production and science communication (Salehi et al., 2020). According to Shen and Björk (2015), the number of active predatory journals has increased from 1,800 to 8,000 between 2010 and 2014, with a corresponding rise of articles from 53,000 to 420,000. Mills and Inouye (2021) note that around 20,000 journals have been labeled as predatory. This drastic increase in predatory journals seriously threatens 'scientific integrity, quality, and credibility' (Oviedo-García, 2021, p. 405). Three main factors need to be highlighted in the spread of predatory publishing: the emergence of open-access publishing, the neoliberal performance-based orientation to research evaluation, and the geo-politics of scholarly publishing.

Open-access publishing has become popular because of the widely-shared goal of making science and knowledge freely available to everyone (Olejniczak & Wilson, 2020). In this publishing model, authors, their universities, or funding agencies pay an article processing charge (APC) so that their publications can be openly accessed without any subscription-imposed barrier. A legitimate open-access journal normally has (an) editor(s) and an editorial board with relevant expertise and relies on high-quality reviews of its manuscripts by qualified reviewers to weed out weak scholarship. Predatory journals and publishers, however, have unscrupulously exploited the open-access model by abandoning the standard editorial procedures of legitimate journals such as editorial quality control and peer review (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019) and publishing any article as long as its author is willing to pay the APC (Beall, 2012). While some researchers (e.g., Beall, 2012) have attributed the rise of predatory publishing to open-access publishing, other scholars (e.g., Krawczyk & Kulczyck, 2021) have also pointed to the faults of subscription-based publishing and institutional publication pressures.

Indeed, the phenomenon of predatory publishing can be more fully understood against the neoliberal performance-based orientations to research evaluation that have influenced knowledge production in higher education. Widely adopted neoliberal appraisal systems promote and normalize the mantras of 'publish-or-perish' and 'publish-or-no-degree' and exert crushing publication pressures on academics in many contexts (Mertkan et al., 2022). In such contexts, scholars are expected to compete with each other to gain reputation and promotions by churning out publications (Tan & Goh, 2014). When quantity of research output is valued more than quality of scholarship, some academics, especially novice researchers, are tempted to publish in predatory journals to pad out their publication record (Bagues et al., 2017).

Neoliberal appraisal systems can be seen in policies such as Iranian universities' requirements that students should publish an article in order to graduate (Ebadi & Zamani, 2018), Ghanaian universities' policy of making publications a requirement for promotion (Atiso et al., 2019), and Turkish universities' willingness to pay their faculty for publications (Demir, 2018a).

Scholarly publishing is a geo-political arena. In most academic fields, prestigious widely-circulated journals are based in the Global North (Von Esch et al., 2020), viz. Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) countries (Andringa & Godfroid, 2020). The field of language teaching is similarly dominated by WEIRD scholarship (Zhang, 2020), despite the commitment of a rare few journals such as *Language Teaching* to publishing research from the peripheral contexts (Zein et al., 2020). Many language teaching scholars (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Friedman, 2021) have called for more emphasis on language teaching experiences in local, peripheral, and less-researched contexts such as Asia, Africa, and South America. Despite the need and call for more research from the Global South, the geo-politics of academic publishing works against featuring research from the Global South in mainstream 'high-quality' journals (Bell, 2017; Canagarajah, 1996; Shen & Björk, 2015). This bias, together with the high publication fees of the Global North journals (Shen & Björk, 2015), the limited resources available to scholars in the Global South (Truth, 2012), and the pressure on them to publish in international English journals (R'boul, 2022), have created a vacuum that predatory journals are quick to occupy (Bell, 2017). This is especially true for the field of English language teaching since it focuses on English-as-a-foreign-language contexts, the very contexts that are being pushed to predatory journals.

Potential predatory journals (PPJs) in language and linguistics are large in number and they publish, on average, more articles annually than mainstream SSCI-indexed journals do (Nejadghanbar & Hu, 2022a). This shows that predatory publishing in language and linguistics is by no means an insignificant issue. However, predatory publishing has received little attention from the language and linguistics community. Alrawadieh (2020) rightly argues that predatory journals can stall the development of a discipline by polluting its literature, spreading pseudo-science and damaging trust in its progress and future. In view of these grave consequences, this study aims to draw attention to predatory publishing in the discipline of language and linguistics and generate public discussion on a matter of great importance that bears on the future of the discipline. It is hoped that the findings of this study can advance our understandings of the reasons, motivations, and consequences of publishing in PPJs and inform efforts to raise awareness and curb predatory publishing.

Previous research on predatory publishing focused on the locations of PPJs, authors'

reasons for publishing in PPJs, and geographical distributions of publications in PPJs (Demir, 2018a). As the focus of our study is on language and linguistics academics' considerations for publishing in PPJs, we review only studies on authors' experiences and motivations. Most of such studies were not discipline-specific and covered a broad spectrum of disciplines (e.g., Bagues et al., 2017; Kurt, 2018; Mertkan et al., 2022; Salehi et al., 2020; Shaghaei et al., 2018). Only a few studies focused on specific disciplines. Cobey et al. (2019) studied the motivations and experiences of authors who had published in PPJs in biomedicine. Analysis of 82 responses showed that authors learned about PPJs mainly via email invitations (41%) or through online searches (28.2%). A sizeable proportion of them (46.3%) were unaware of the predatory nature of the journals, and a majority (83.3%) reported receiving no peer reviews. Cohen et al. (2019) collected 206 survey responses from 1165 authors of articles published in predatory biomedical journals. While one-third (33%) of them were somewhat familiar with predatory journals, close to one-third (30.1%) knew that their article was published in a predatory journal. Alrawadieh (2020) investigated authors' reasons for publishing in PPJs in tourism and hospitality and found that they turned to PPJs mainly because of publication pressure, lack of awareness, high rejection rates of legitimate journals, and 'deliberate publishing for the sole sake of publishing'.

Overall, the number of empirical studies looking into the reasons why authors publish in PPJs is small, and more research is needed (Mills & Inouye 2021; Mertkan et al., 2021). Moreover, since there are disciplinary differences in predatory publishing and because disciplines have different norms and expectations related to scholarly publishing (Cobey et al., 2019), there is a need for discipline-specific studies of predatory publishing (Elliot et al., 2022). Indeed, the existing literature falls short of providing discipline-specific accounts of why authors publish in PPJs, though findings from such studies can shed light on the problem in disciplinary context and help the disciplinary community tackle it knowingly (Mertkan et al., 2021).

The discipline of language and linguistics has seen some discussions on the rise of predatory journals and strategies for staying away from them (Shehadeh, 2022; Yeo et al., 2021). However, these discussions are mostly opinion pieces and commentaries rather than empirical studies. Two empirical studies examined the editorial differences between PPJs and legitimate journals in language and linguistics. Nejadghanbar and Hu (2022a) compared the editorial features of PPJs and mainstream SSCI-indexed journals, and Nejadghanbar and Hu (2022b) examined the editorial differences between PPJs and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Despite our best efforts, we have not located any studies examining language and linguistics academics' experiences with and motivations for publishing in PPJs. To address

the gap, this mixed-method study collected quantitative (via a survey) and qualitative (via interviews or email responses) data about authors' experiences with and reasons for publishing in PPJs in language and linguistics.

Method

Data Collection

We used the list of 66 active language and linguistics PPJs collected in a previous study to identify authors and extract their email addresses (see Nejadghanbar & Hu [2022a] details on how the PPJs were identified and selected). We dropped three journals from the list because they were indexed by Scopus or ERIC. As the remaining journals differed greatly in the number of articles published every year, we decided to sample the latest 50 articles from each journal and include all the articles in the eight journals that had not published 50 articles. In this way, we identified 2875 authors whose email addresses were provided. Subsequently, we invited these authors to complete a questionnaire adapted from existing ones (Cobey et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2019; Salehi et al., 2020). The email invitations contained a link to the questionnaire in Google Forms. To maximize the authors' engagement, each email invitation was personalized with the author's name, the title of their article, the journal name, and the year of publication. The authors were also assured that their answers would be used anonymously and their consent was obtained. Of the email invitations sent, 82 bounced back. Eventually, 213 authors completed the survey between April and July 2022. The low response rate (7.6%) may be due to these authors' reluctance to be challenged on their journal selection behaviors.

At the end of the questionnaire, there was a request for volunteers to answer a number of open-ended questions by email or participate in a semi-structured interview. The open-ended questions were adapted from previous studies (Cohen et al., 2019; Kurt, 2018) and were intended to explore in greater detail authors' motivations for and experiences with publishing in PPJs. Six respondents accepted the invitation and attended an online one-on-one interview, and 15 answered the open-ended questions by email. The interviews were conducted via Zoom or WhatsApp and lasted, on average, 21 minutes. They were recorded, transcribed, and combined with the email responses to constitute the qualitative data for this study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative analyses of the questionnaire responses involved computing descriptive statistics for the different response options. A thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007) was conducted on the interview transcriptions and email responses. Adopting an inductive approach to data analysis, the first and the third author separately read the full dataset several times to

develop an initial impression. Next, further readings and moving back and forth among the data led to the assigning of codes to the text segments. Subsequent passes through the data enabled them to remove redundancies and pinpoint initial themes. Finally, these initial themes were refined and clustered to generate the final themes. At the end of this prolonged process, the two coders met to check the accuracy and reliability of their analysis. The inter-coder reliability (Cohen's $\kappa=0.90$) was excellent. All disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Results

Survey Results

Geographically, the survey respondents were mainly from Asia (40.84%) and Africa (33.33%). Only minor proportions of them were from Europe (15.51%), Australia/Oceania (5.16%) and the Americas (5.16%) (see the Appendix for the geographical distribution of participating authors by country). In terms of academic credentials, close to two-thirds (61.03%) of them were PhD holders. Notably, 21.60% and 13.62% of the survey respondents were PhD students and MA graduates, respectively. Only 3.76% were MA or BA students. As for their academic ranks, one-fifth of the respondents were full professors (8.50%) or associate professors (11.73%), the majority of them were assistant professors (25.35%) or lecturers (33.33%), and a small proportion identified themselves as students (12.2%).

Table 1 lists the various reasons why the survey respondents had chosen to publish in the PPJs. Surprisingly, good peer review, good feedback and impact factor were among the top 10 most common reasons. Previous research found that many predatory journals in other disciplines do not provide peer reviews (Cobey et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2019) and that the impact factors provided by such journals were fake (Nejadghanbar & Hu, 2022a). It seems that many of the respondents were unaware of the predatory nature of the PPJs.

Table 1. Reasons for Publishing in PPJs

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Fast publication	103	48.36
Open access	102	47.89
Good peer review	69	32.39
The reputation of the journal	67	31.46
Ease of submission (e.g., via email)	54	25.35
Good feedback	52	24.41
Low cost	50	23.47
Indexing	48	22.54
Prompt responses	43	20.19
Impact factor	42	19.72
Clarity of requirements	35	16.43
Publication guidelines	32	15.02
See my teachers/professors publishing there	31	14.55

Easy peer review	28	13.15
Free cost of publication	26	12.21
Seeing my colleagues publishing there	23	10.80
High standards	22	10.33
Country (location) of the journal	18	8.45
Prominent editorial board	17	7.98
Getting more citations	17	7.98
Invitation to publish from a	14	6.57
Seeing my classmates publishing there	13	6.10
Relevance to the research	12	5.63
Board membership	12	5.63
Considering their invitation	12	5.63
Invitation from a colleague	10	4.69
Believing in diversification	9	4.23
Supporting a new journal	9	4.23
Lack of awareness	5	2.35
Invitation for a special issue	3	1.41

The survey respondents came into contact with the PPJs in various ways. The majority (51.17%) first encountered the PPJs through online searches. Many respondents were led to these journals by email invitations (21.60%) and teachers' recommendations (21.13%). Sizeable proportions learned about the PPJs because they saw their colleagues (17.84%), teachers from other universities (11.74%), and their own teachers or classmates (13.15%) publishing there. On a related note, the vast majority (95.31%) of the respondents viewed journal titles as an important consideration (very important = 48.35%, important = 31.93% and somewhat important = 15.02 %).

Unexpectedly, most (85.92%) of the respondents believed that the journals they published in had an excellent (15.96%), very good (29.58%) or good (40.38%) reputation. Only 5.63% of them were not sure about the journals' reputation or thought that they had a very bad reputation or no reputation. Over half of the respondents (55.40%) published in the PPJs to meet PhD completion or job-related requirements. Three-quarters of them (75.12%) claimed that their publication had a positive impact on their studies or careers. Only 7.04% reported a negative impact.

Results from the Interviews/Email Responses

The qualitative analysis conducted on the interview data and email responses identified five themes: (1) unawareness (*n*=15 participants), (2) unrelenting publishing pressures (*n*=13), (3) low information literacy (*n*=11), (4) social identity threat (*n*=9), and (5) failure to publish in top-tier journals (*n*=6).

Unawareness

Unawareness was the most common reason for publishing in the PPJs. Unlike previous studies (e.g., Kurt, 2018), we did not tell the participants that they had published in a PPJ in order to elicit more accurate accounts of their experiences and motivations. However, at the end of the open-ended questions/interviews, we asked them if they had any familiarity with predatory journals. Sixteen of the 21 participants replied that they had heard of predatory journals. They described predatory journals as low-quality or fake journals that only seek money, are dishonest and deceptive, and have no peer review or plagiarism check. According to them, these journals do not have editors or reviewers, are not indexed, do email spamming, and promise fast publication. Then, we asked them whether they thought the journals they had published in were predatory ones. To our surprise, 16 out of the 21 participants were not aware that they had published in PPJs, three were doubtful, and only two knew that they had published in such journals. It is worth mentioning that some participants had little knowledge of predatory journals. For example, a PhD student told us that he had gone online right after answering our questions to learn about predatory journals, and thanked us for doing this research because it was 'an eye-opener' for him.

When asked whether they would consider submitting to the journals again, 17 respondents gave a positive answer, three gave a negative one, and one said 'maybe'. Those willing to submit to the journals again mentioned reasons such as using the publication for promotion purposes, gaining recognition for publishing in an international journal, the journal's high impact factor, familiarity with the journal's editorial procedure, easy submission/revision procedures, and availability of APC waivers. R13, a female PhD holder in Nigeria, was pleased that the journal had digital preservation, making it different from 'predatory journals that collect money and pull the article down as soon as possible'. Two of the three respondents who said they would not publish in the journals referred to their predatory nature and the fact that publishing in such journals would not bring them any genuine credit. The other one said that she would like to aim at a journal indexed by the Web of Science next time. R2, a professor in Ukraine, was doubtful whether he wanted to publish in such journals again because 'it is very expensive: they asked for 300 USD'. As evidenced in their responses, the majority of the participants appeared to be unaware of the fact that they had published in PPJs despite their rudimentary familiarity with predatory journals.

The general lack of awareness was evident in other parts of the qualitative data too. Some participants were pleased to publish in an international journal that was believed to increase the visibility of their research. R5, a male PhD graduate in India, explained that 'the research topic was very innovative, and I decided to share it with international readers in an international

journal'. R17, a PhD holder in Algeria, was very happy to see us contacting him about his published article, believing that we approached him because his ideas were being seen by other international researchers:

Thank you for reaching out. I am very happy to see my article is attracting attention. I am pleased to discuss my article with other scholars.

He went on to say that publishing in international journals could lead to more citations and help him get promoted and make international connections.

The participants' unawareness was ruthlessly exploited by PPJs that sent them email invitations for articles. Some of the participants were pleased to receive such emails and felt flattered. R15, a MA graduate in Indonesia, thought that the journal she had published in was very professional in reaching out to her, and was pleased with the timely publication of her article:

This journal has a timely schedule and timely publication as well. They kept their promise and stuck to the schedule they announced in their call.

R16, a well-published professor based in the USA, told us that the journal invited him to join its editorial board. After checking out the journal's website, he accepted the invitation and was pleased to assist the journal and publish his article in it. He explained:

They approached me. I get this constantly…. Sometimes I accept; sometimes I do not. It depends on what they are doing. Although this journal is not quite my area of research, I support it.

R7, a retired male professor and PhD holder in Brazil, praised the quick review process and offered some explanations:

I think that, as it is a less-known open-access journal, the flow of article submissions is lower, which allows for a more agile publication. In more reputable journals, this process takes longer, which is understandable.

By contrast, R6, who was a PhD student in Ghana, was doubtful whether the journal was predatory. He had expected to receive feedback from the reviewers but the feedback never came and his article was accepted 'as it is'. This rang alarm bells in his mind: 'I felt suspicious about the fact that no critical review was done, and I am not sure if this journal is fake or not'.

In four cases, the participants' lack of awareness seemed to have been cemented by contextual factors. For example, R1, a male MA graduate in Indonesia, believed that the journal in question was a good one because

> *This journal is included in SINTA, the abbreviation for Science and Technology Index. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology manage SINTA, an online scientific website which provides a list of authorized periodicals.*

Similarly, R15 and R9 reported checking SINTA before submitting their manuscripts. When asked whether he thought that the journal he had published in was predatory, R17 responded with a big 'No' because the journal was recognized by his university:

> *NO, this journal is not predatory because it is on the whitelist published by my university. It is a class C journal and is indexed.*

Unrelenting Publication Pressures'

Thirteen of the participants explicitly referred to the 'publish-or-perish' / 'publish-or-no-degree' mantras. They were under crushing pressure to publish in order to keep their jobs, obtain promotions, graduate from their degree programs or start their PhD studies. R17, for example, confided: 'Now, I am under pressure, because I am expected to publish in a class A journal [listed by his university] by November, because I want to be promoted so that I can teach seminars'. Similarly, R1 lamented that 'working in an education university creates unique and fundamental pressure'. He explained:

> *We need to establish our Tridharma Activities every semester. Article publication is one of them ... because lecturers need to show their ability to compete (inter)nationally.*

R4, a female PhD holder in Tanzania, had to publish two articles in the same PPJ to meet the graduation requirements. Fast publication by PPJs would make it possible for doctoral students to satisfy such requirements at the very last minute. As R4 explained:

> *The pressure is always there ... I needed this article for my graduation. The submission process was via email, and the cost was somewhat affordable. We only waited for two weeks to get a response from the journal. The journal is also accessible for free download.*

Likewise, R8, a PhD student in Turkey, published in a PPJ to get his PhD degree: 'I hadn't felt such pressure before, but of course, as part of our academic studies such as writing a PhD dissertation, I had to publish my work'.

Those who aspired for a doctorate also felt the pressure to publish even before they were admitted into a doctoral program. R20, a male MA graduate in China, reported that 'I have been meaning to start my PhD program for some time now' and 'I published this paper so that next year I can apply for a PhD program'. R12, an MA student in Iran, was in a similar situation and found herself pressurized to publish to earn the full score (i.e., 20) for her Master's thesis so that she could be admitted into a good PhD program in the future. Her university stipulated

that 0.25 of the full score should be reserved for publishing an article from a candidate's thesis. In R12's own words,

If we do not publish a paper, then there is no way for us to get a score higher than 19.75
[out of 20] ... I felt the pressure in my bones to get published.

Low Information Literacy

In many cases, the participants' lack of awareness about predatory publishing was attributable to their low information literacy. Typically, they would search the Internet for target journals with keywords, but they lacked the knowledge and skills to evaluate the credibility of what they found. For example, R8 reported that 'I discovered this journal by searching the Internet using keywords such as interculturality, intercultural communication, etc., and then I chose this journal'. Similarly, R11, a PhD holder in Indonesia, went online to check a PPJ introduced by her friend and was happy with what she found:

One of my friends gave me information about this journal. Then I googled it. I got valuable
information from the web. I then thought that this journal was appropriate.

When asked what she meant by 'valuable information', she said it was an international journal, located in an English-speaking country and indexed in many databases. Failing to recognize credible and valid indexes led some participants to accept PPJs. R21, an MA graduate in Turkey, submitted his manuscript to a PPJ simply because the journal claimed to be 'indexed in many databases'.

Other participants were misled by false information found on PPJs' websites, for example, fake impact factors and rejection rates. R19, a PhD student in Poland, was not only overjoyed but also surprised by the publication of his article in a journal claiming a high impact factor: 'This journal has an impact factor of 3, and I did not expect to publish in such a good journal'. If he had been knowledgeable about scholarly publishing, he could have easily disproved the PPJ's claimed impact factor by checking the Journal Citation Reports. Similarly, R1 believed that the PPJ he had published in was a reputable journal because 'it has a high rejection rate' mentioned on its homepage. Because of their limited information literacy, participants like R1 and R19 simply trusted the PPJs' claims, were not able to make a critical evaluation of the information encountered, and failed to notice the many warning signs of PPJs (Nejadghanbar & Hu, 2022c).

Social Identity Threat

Some participants refrained from submitting their manuscripts to top-tier legitimate journals to avoid potential social identity threats. Like Kurt (2018), we adopt Branscombe et al.'s (1999) definition of social identity threat as the fear of being seen as inferior by others because of

being associated with a particular group. For example, R12, an Iranian MA student, googled three journals recommended by her classmates and chose one for the following reason:

Considering the high number of Iranian authors publishing in this journal, I decided to choose it ..., and fortunately, I managed to publish it. I did not get any mixed feelings about it.

Seeing other Iranians publishing in the same journal gave R12 a sense of affinity to the journal. Similarly, R10, a PhD holder in Indonesia, submitted her article to a PPJ when she noticed that many of her colleagues from Indonesia had published there.

Participants from developing or peripheral countries were doubtful of submitting their manuscripts to quality journals located in developed countries. For example, R7, a retired professor from Brazil, confided that although he was able to publish in top journals based in developed countries, he still thought that there were prejudices towards authors from peripheral countries. He put it this way:

I have the feeling that the European and American journals have a certain prejudice against publications coming from peripheral countries, as is the case of Brazil. I consider the works that I have published to date relevant (some I even consider revolutionary, pardon my lack of modesty), but I do not always feel comfortable submitting them to the major journals in my area.

R9, a master's student in Indonesia, reported that the editor of a good journal based in the UK had rejected his article citing his poor English as the reason. He resented the outright rejection, which dented his confidence. When he submitted the article to a PPJ, he had a very different experience:

Then, I decided to submit to this journal, which is not in an English-speaking country .... The feedback I got from the two reviewers was manageable, clear, and easy to apply. Their comments and corrections didn't make me feel like my study was worthless.

As a result, he regained his confidence and would not submit manuscripts to journals based in English-speaking countries again.

Some participants, who were MA or doctoral students, believed that their current academic status would subject them to social identity threats when they submitted articles to quality journals. They assumed that good journals would look at their educational credentials before deciding what to do with their manuscripts. For example, R12 claimed that MA students did not stand any chance to publish in top journals even if their articles were really good:

As soon as the editor sees your degree, she rejects the manuscript. I did not send my article to such journals in order to stay away from rejection.

Likewise, R19 thought that students should not aim at publishing in top journals and should have big names as their co-authors when they did submit their manuscripts to such journals. As he explained,

> *None of my PhD classmates has been able to publish in top journals alone. They do not accept articles that have a single author who has not yet finished his PhD studies.*

(Fear of) Failure to Publish in Top-tier Legitimate Journals

Earlier failures to publish in well-established journals pushed some participants to PPJs. R8 recounted his experience of publishing an article as follows:

> *As a matter of fact, I first sent my article to a journal with a high impact factor. I got a really late reply from them and the peer review results showed that I had to nearly redo and rewrite everything. Therefore, I decided to look for another journal and it was the one where I published my article.*

R3, a PhD graduate in India, lost her confidence because of a rejection by a top journal and decided not to submit to such journals again:

> *I submitted my article to a top journal. After a month, I received an email that said my article was not appropriate for their journal …. I should probably not go for top journals.*

Some participants did not receive rejections from top journals but still refrained from submitting to such journals because they believed that their manuscript would be rejected anyway. R20, an MA graduate in China, did not try to publish with top journals because he did not know 'the tricks of the trade' yet, and more importantly, rejections by such journals would make him feel resentful and stupid. To avoid these feelings, he submitted to a PPJ:

> *I needed to get published and the most possible venue for me was to go with easy options which could help me get my paper published.*

R14, a Nigerian PhD student, anticipated an eventual rejection of his manuscript submitted to a prestigious journal and, consequently, decided to withdraw it to avoid frustration:

> *I submitted my article to Journal X. After four months of waiting the status was still 'awaiting referee selection'. They kept me waiting so long because they were not impressed by my work maybe. I was sure they will reject my article at the end which is frustrating. So, I decided to withdraw my article and send it here.*

Discussion

This study investigated language and linguistics authors' motivations for and experiences of publishing in PPJs. Geographically, the majority of the participating authors were from Asia or Africa, in line with previous studies (Salehi et al., 2020; Shen & Björk, 2015). However, a sizeable proportion of them were from Europe, most noticeably the UK, which indicates that

even authors from developed countries are prone to publishing in predatory journals (Alrawadieh, 2020). While Cobey et al. (2019) found that 21% of authors publishing in biomedicine PPJs were from the USA, our study showed a much lower percentage (1.4%) of USA authors publishing in language and linguistics PPJs. This difference could be attributed to the need for scientific findings (i.e., biomedicine) to be published more quickly, suggesting disciplinary differences in journal selection behaviors.

Demographically, it has been suggested that 'novice researchers, unwary higher degree students, and over-eager new academics may be easily duped by the predators' (Darbyshire 2018, p. 1727). Demir (2018b) asserted that most of the researchers publishing in PPJs did not have a PhD degree. However, our study showed that around two-thirds of the language and linguistics authors were PhD holders and that one-fifth of them were full professors or associate professors. These results suggest that language and linguistics authors publishing in PPJs are not necessarily young or novice researchers but are from all levels of academic experience.

The authors in our study chose 'fast publication' as the main reason for publishing in PPJs. This finding was consistent with those of previous studies that one of the main reasons for publishing in PPJs is their promise of fast publication (Mathew et al., 2021) to meet academics' 'need to publish more and to do so fast' (Mertkan et al., 2021, p. 470). The fast turnaround time is made possible for predatory journals often by the lack of a review process (Beall, 2016). Fast publication, easy peer review, low fees (Ebadi & Zamani, 2018) and the promise of open access (Shaghaei et al., 2018), which were all found in our study, can be huge incentives for authors to submit their manuscripts to predatory journals. Predatory journals are well aware of these 'selling points', highlighting them to their prospective victims (Moher & Srivastava, 2015).

Salehi et al. (2020) found that more than 50% of their participants considered the journals they had published in as having a good reputation. A much higher proportion (86%) of the authors in our study believed that the journals they published in were reputable. Similar to Salehi et al. (2020), we believe that one explanation of this finding lies in the journals' use of imposing descriptors such as 'international' in their titles. As the qualitative findings made clear, unawareness and limited information literacy could be other factors contributing to the authors' positive perceptions of the journals. Still another influence on their perceptions would be the institutional recognition accorded to the journals in the contexts where they worked. In our previous research (Nejadghanbar & Hu, 2022a, 2022b), we examined features of the journals that the participants in the present study published in. We found that the journals engaged in clearly predatory practices such as making fake indexation claims and posing fake impact factors. Thus, we were greatly surprised to learn from our participants that some of

these journals were on institutional whitelists and government-managed indexes. We suspect that the compilers of such lists and indexes were uninformed gatekeepers. Of course, even without such lists, some of the authors would still have chosen to publish in the journals because of the geo-politics of academic publishing, unequal global distribution of resources, and various contextual factors (Bell, 2017; Mertkan et al., 2021).

Cobey et al. (2019) found that biomedicine authors who had published in predatory journals discovered their target journals through email invitations (41%) or via online searches (28%). These were also the main ways the authors in our study learned about the PPJs, but the proportions were reversed: 51.17% through online searches and 21.60% by email invitations. As evidenced in the qualitative findings, the authors in our study appeared to have low levels of information literacy and, consequently, could not distinguish between legitimate and predatory journals when doing online searches. In line with previous studies (Demir, 2018a; Shaghaei et al., 2018) which found that authors were often fooled by allegedly high impact factors, the authors in our study were misled to believe that the PPJs were indexed in credible databases and had high impact factors. As reported by Nejadghanbar and Hu (2022a), none of these PPJs have valid impact factors or are indexed by credible databases. The authors' unawareness about the PPJs and their low information literacy could be attributed to a general lack of graduate training in scholarly publishing and distinguishing legitimate journals from fraudulent ones (Mathew et al., 2021).

Both the quantitative and qualitative results of our study highlighted how important contextual factors could be in shaping authors' decisions when choosing their target journals. The authors in our study turned to the PPJs based on their institutions' journal whitelists or government-managed indexes, because of recommendations by their close contacts, or after seeing their classmates, colleagues or teachers publishing in the PPJs. As Frandsen (2019) pointed out, many researchers are encouraged to publish in predatory journals by seeing their colleagues receiving promotions as a result of publishing in those journals. Moreover, students' trust in their teachers prevents them from carefully evaluating their target journals when seeing their teachers have published there or, even worse, when their teachers recommend those journals to them.

PPJs usually use words such as 'International', 'European', 'American', 'Canadian', and 'Australian' in their titles to pretend to be based in Western or English-speaking countries (Erfanmanesh & Pourhossein, 2017) and to appear more international. Cobey et al. (2019) found that authors in biomedicine generally considered journals based in the USA as high quality and reputable. Likewise, the language and linguistics PPJs succeeded in alluring

submissions partly because a vast majority of authors in our study considered the name of a journal very important or important in influencing their submission decisions.

While some scholars have characterized the peer review provided by predatory journals as 'corrupted … or minimal' (Frandsen, 2017, p. 1513), many authors in our study appeared to be happy about the peer review process of the PPJs. These authors were pleased with the peer reviews received mainly because they were easy to understand and apply. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of the authors failed to recognize the predatory nature of the journals, and only 2.35% of them indicated that they had published in the journals knowingly. Based on our data, language and linguistics academics seem to be less familiar with predatory journals than their counterparts in other disciplines. Cohen et al. (2016), for example, found that 30.1% of their biomedical authors believed they had published in a predatory journal. In our study, only three survey respondents and two participants in the qualitative phase thought they had published in a predatory journal. Clearly, much education about predatory publishing is needed in our discipline.

Although 16 out of the 21 participants in the qualitative phase of our study reported that they had heard about predatory journals and had some familiarity with such journals, they still published in the PPJs and did not view them as predatory. These apparent discrepancies indicate that having heard of predatory journals and knowing some of their features do not necessarily mean that authors can identify them in practice (Grgic & Guskic, 2019). Our findings contrast those of Atiso et al. (2019) that Ghanaian scientists in the disciplines of animal, food, forestry and water research were aware of the differences between predatory and legitimate journals but published in them because of fast and easy publication. The authors in our study appeared to be genuinely unaware of having published in predatory journals despite their claimed basic familiarity with such journals, hence the burning need for more education about PPJs in our discipline.

Consistent with previous observations (Yeo et al., 2021), our study found that more than half of the language and linguistics authors published in PPJs to meet graduation or career promotion requirements. The qualitative findings also revealed that the participants were under great pressures to publish. The authors experienced such pressures because 'publishing is increasingly institutionalized as a graduation [or promotion] requirement throughout the world' (Lei, 2021, p. 69). This is not a problem specific to English-as-an-additional-language students or early career academics from developing countries; academics from developed countries, including native-English-speaking ones, also experience this pressure to publish (Lei & Hu,

2019). It is high time to combat the neoliberal, performance-based approach to research evaluation because of its detrimental effects on academics (Jemielniak & Greenwood, 2015).

Social identity threat was found to be an important reason for publishing in the PPJs. In line with earlier work (Kurt, 2018; Shaghaei et al., 2018), our findings showed that many language and linguistics academics experienced fears of rejection when deciding whether to submit their manuscripts to prestigious Global North journals. As a result, they were lured to PPJs to get published and 'retain a sense of self-efficacy in the face of rejection by more highly ranked journals' (Mertkan et al., 2022, p. 603). Some of them also sensed prejudices from the editors and reviewers of mainstream well-established journals. There have been discussions on the alleged prejudicial peer review of traditional publishing models (Teixeira da Silva & Dobránszki, 2015). Mertkan et al. (2021) rightly argued that all the problems cannot and should not be limited to contextual factors such as promotion policies or weak research evaluation procedures; rather, broader 'inequalities' that exist in knowledge production and dissemination should be also considered.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the experiences and motivations of language and linguistics authors who had published in PPJs. The findings of our study offer several implications for education and policymaking. First, our findings highlight the need to educate graduate students and novice academics about predatory journals and publishing ethics. Such education can be provided through workshops or in research courses that alert them to the tell-tale signs of PPJs (see Nejadghanbar & Hu [2022a] for a list of 19 such signs), introduce the participants to tools such as Beall's updated list of predatory journals (https://beallslist.net/) and publishing guidelines by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), develop their information literacy about scholarly publishing, foster their publishing and research ethics, and raise their awareness of the long-term negative effects of publishing in PPJs on themselves, their institutions, and academia. We understand that with the more immediate need to land a job, hold on to a position, or secure a promotion, these appeals to education and ethics alone are unlikely to work wonders. This leads to our next implication concerning government and academic policymakers.

Second, our findings also accentuate the need for institutional and national policymakers to avoid legitimizing PPJs in any way, for example, through their indexes, journal whitelists, and other officially disseminated documents. Such official legitimating of PPJs can cause great damage by encouraging unwary junior academics and students to publish in them. Rather, academic policymakers should clearly identify and blacklist PPJs and discount publications in

such journals for research appraisal. Applicants with such publications should be viewed negatively in hiring and promotion decisions.

Third, our findings raise serious issues with institutional and national policies on research assessment, graduation requirements, and employment matters. For example, there is every reason to rethink the neoliberal practice of making publication a graduation/promotion requirement and look for more qualitative and less performance-based ways of assessing scholarship. While these alternative methods of measuring scholarly achievement often require more effort, the harms of predatory publishing in particular and valuing quantity over quality in general justify the investment of such effort.

Finally, our findings point to global inequalities that exist in scholarly publishing and call for concerted efforts to raise awareness about, generate public discussions on, and find effective ways to address the glaring inequalities. Such inequalities not only push academics to PPJs but also impede the progress of a discipline in the long run. Academic journals based in the Global North can play an active and key role in addressing the global inequalities and geo-politics of scholarly publishing by "building a knowledge base with a multiplicity of voices … being as sensitive to issues of diversity as to concerns about quality" (Mertkan et al., 2017, p. 58). Increasing the geographical diversity of their editorial boards can help because the composition of editorial boards is highly correlated with the diversity of articles (Demeter, 2020). Our field also needs more initiatives such as 'A Country in Focus' of *Language Teaching* to feature the research of scholars from the Global South.

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Appendix: Geographical distribution of authors participating in this study by country

Asia

India 28, Indonesia 10, China 6, Iran 5, Philippines 4, Thailand 4, Malaysia 4, Nepal 4, Saudi Arabia 3, Bangladesh 3, Vietnam 3, Jordan 3, Pakistan 2, Taiwan 2, Iraq 2, Kuwait 1, Oman 1, Sri Lanka 1, Yemen 1, Total 87

Figure 1

Africa

Nigeria 14, Ghana 8, Kenya 8, Algeria 7, Morocco 6, Ethiopia 6, Sudan 4, Congo 4, Egypt 3, Cameroon 3, Libya 2, Benin 2, Tanzania 2, Sierra Leone 1, Côte d'Ivoire 1, Total 71

Figure 2

Europe

UK 8, Poland 4, Greece 4, Turkey 4, Ukraine 3, Russia 3, France 2, Spain 2, Italy 2, Austria 1, Total 33

Figure 3

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Americas

Country	Value
USA	3
Brazil	3
Canada	2
Argentina	2
Cuba	1
Total	11

Figure 4

Australia/Oceania

Country	Value
Australia	6
New Zealand	2
Papua New Guinea	2
Fiji	1
Total	11

Figure 5