ENGL 7000: Technical and Professional Editing

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Meta-analysis: *Auburn Speaks* Edited Manuscript

Keywords - Application: editing

This was the major project of the editing class, where each student edited articles from the magazine *Auburn Speaks*. These articles belonged to scientific as well as a computer-related technical disciplines. The instructor provided us the style guide for *Auburn Speaks*, which we used for formatting considerations. The editing involved sentence correction for grammar, clarity, and readability: checking consistency of numbers, fonts, typefaces, abbreviations, positioning of figures and tables etc. Wherever I was confident about making extensive changes, I made comments to the author explaining the necessity of the change and ensured that my comments were polite. I verified all the references using Google Scholar to check their credibility and ensured all the information was correct and up-to-date.

When editors who edit for grammar and mechanics don't understand the technical material they are editing, they generally assume that the author is right and do not question the issues. Unfortunately, authors are not always right; many published documents contain errors of oversight on the author's part. (Grove, 1994, p. 172). My engineering background proved very helpful to me during the editing process because it gave me confidence that I was understanding the meaning and terminology. As a result, I could understand the context and was able to suggest changes to improve the technical matter as well. Nevertheless, when I did encounter content that was confusing and to avoid changing the original meaning, I suggested revision via comments instead of making the changes directly myself.

Authors often dislike when extensive changes are made without explaining them the reason as they fear change of intended meaning. Mackiewicz and Riley have listed sentences that can be used to provide editorial comments and rank them from most to least recommended, on the basis of linguistic theories of politeness and directness in their article "The technical editor as diplomat: Linguistic strategies for balancing clarity and politeness." Eaton et al reported on an online survey of authors' preferences in editing using the above list, and it was observed that non-native speakers of American English personally preferred that editorial comments be as direct as possible because the indirect comments took longer to translate and were more difficult to interpret—they could not tell whether a politely worded comment was a command veiled in polite language or a suggestion they could ignore (Eaton et al, 2000, p. 111). Eaton et al also mentioned that writers recommend crafting editing comments as questions rather than commands. However, these questions need to be phrased intelligibly. I have personally experienced that when I frame my comments as questions to authors, they simply answer as

"yes" or "no;" they should be made to understand that a question is being asked so that a particular sentence can be rephrased for clarity. An example of my comment in this editing sample is: "I'm unsure whether this relates to the glossary or the entries. Is this referring to the entries? If yes, then it needs to be revised as 'provide.'" Here, I first asked a question and then provided a solution to the authors. This then ensured that the authors understood that there is a problem that needs to be corrected.

References

Grove, L. K. (1994). When the basics aren't enough: finding a comprehensive editor. *IEEE transactions on professional communication*, 37(3), 171-174.

Eaton, A., Brewer, P. E., Portewig, T. C., & Davidson, C. R. (2008). Examining Editing in the Workplace from the Author's Point of View. *Technical Communication*, 55(2), 111-139.