

## Mapping Out the Peer Review Genre as Reflected in Multilingual Journal Requirements

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*This article is dedicated to our PhD supervisor, Professor Mihai M. Zdrenghea*

### **Abstract**

*Set against the background of research into peer reviewing as an essential component in the research publishing process, this study goes beyond the realm of Anglophone publishing and brings in the multilingual dimension. A corpus of review forms and other relevant documents and information sources derived from five multilingual journals has been compiled and analysed in order to explore how journal requirements and editor guidelines and expectations contribute to mapping out peer reviewing as a genre. This analysis has revealed both commonality of approach in key areas, reflecting international standardization tendencies, and slight differences, especially at the level of detail, reflecting dynamism in the evolution of this "occluded genre". The final part includes examples of multilingualism in action in this scholarly domain and discusses some of the implications for reviewers.*

**Keywords:** *peer review, genre analysis, multilingualism, academic writing, reviewers as gatekeepers*

### **1. Introduction**

**F**or some time now, we have been witnessing two opposing trends in what language use is concerned: on the one hand, language policies and programmes promoting language learning and linguistic diversity (e.g. the "new framework strategy for multilingualism", Commission of the European Communities, 2005; the Council of Europe

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programmes for language teachers and the projects unfolded at and through the European Centre for Modern Languages) and, on the other, the actual communication practices of European academia, often preferring one *lingua franca*, English. Apparently the two directions can co-exist, even if at different levels within academia and with different degrees of expansion and intensity. There are, for instance, both journals encouraging knowledge dissemination via the medium of several languages, and universities with educational policies fostering publication in national languages (Li, 2014; Salager-Meyer, 2014), even if in the field of international research publishing, English undoubtedly prevails as the preferred *lingua franca* (Plo Alastrué & Pérez-Llantada, 2015).

The present paper tries to do justice to both tendencies, i.e. the growing importance of English as *primus inter pares* in academic publishing, and efforts made by multilingual academic communities (especially those in linguistic, cultural, educational domains) for consolidating the status of other *lingua francas*, alongside English, in international scholarly exchanges. The study was generated by an awareness of how difficult it still is for academics carrying out their research at the semiperiphery (Bennett, 2014) to get their manuscripts accepted for publication in prestigious journals, and an interest in contributing to a better understanding of journal requirements for authors and of peer reviewing practices.

This study looks at events of textualisation of new knowledge in view of knowledge dissemination in English (or another *lingua franca*, such as French or German), more precisely at the screening that occurs before a message intended to be seen by a wider readership, reaches destination. This specific “participatory mechanism of intercommunication among the members” (Swales, 1990: 471) of the “discourse community” has to do with mediation between one category of members of the discourse community, the authors, and all the categories of potential readers of the respective article. In the original manuscript, the author gives an own version of what he or she believes to be the best representation of what they intended to share. As a first reader, the reviewer may contribute to improving the manuscript in his or her own view, so a secondary subjectivity is added to the first. Is the reviewed version what the author intended in the first place? Maybe yes, or maybe getting published counts more for the author than having his or her own way. The reviewer in his/her turn may only anticipate that the changes s/he proposes and the recommendation

regarding acceptance for or barring from publication will be beneficial for the next categories of readers.

To look into these aspects in more detail, the present paper discusses publication requirements on the example of five multilingual academic journals and explores how journal guidelines for reviewers contribute to mapping out peer reviewing, as one of the “occluded genres” (Swales, 1996). The comparative analysis will allow us to explore to what extent there is common ground among the different sets of evaluation criteria and what areas are more likely to attract the reviewer's attention. After setting the scene and mapping out peer review as a genre, using Berkenkotter and Huckin's description of genre features (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 2016), we delineate the methodological approach adopted in this study, followed by findings and discussion.

## 2. Peer reviewing as a genre

The topic of peer reviewing has been approached by scholars interested in shedding light on an academic concern of growing importance with the enhanced pressure on academics in a ‘publish or perish’ culture. Thus, Mungra and Webber (2010) looked at the process of peer reviewing in medical research in Italy, Fortanet-Gomez (2008) at reviews of articles in the field of business organization and applied linguistics, Gosden at “functions of referees’ comments in peer reviews of scientific research papers”, Harley and Acord (2011) at “Peer review in academic promotion and publishing”, while Shashok (2008, 2001) wrote about scientific technical medical research. Paltridge (2017) explores the multiple facets of peer reviewing in academic settings, analysing the discourse of reviewer reports for one of the leading English language research journals, while looking also into aspects related to peer review learning and reviewer training.

Building on Berkenkotter and Huckin's five features that define a *genre – dynamism, situatedness, form and content, duality of structure and community ownership* (1995: 4) – we shall try to identify how they are operationalised in ‘peer reviewing’.

Taking the first one – *dynamism* – Berkenkotter and Huckin consider that

*Genres are dynamic forms that developed from actors’ responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give its coherence and meaning. Genres change over time in response to their users’ sociocognitive needs.* (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 2016: 4)

With the evolution of communication technology for disseminating knowledge and the diversity of publication requirements (resulting from a multitude of factors), the peer reviewing genre is definitely characterised by dynamism. At the same time, as publishing is a recurrent activity, especially in the case of periodicals, we can identify “recurrent situations” in peer reviewing. Even if readers’ expectations change over time, the need for ensuring the quality of what gets published is a permanent concern, and it is the peer reviewers’ role to contribute their expertise when evaluating the content and form of manuscripts submitted to journals.

In point of “situatedness”, “participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life” that generates the “situated cognition” specific to genre knowledge, is ensured by the recurrence of reviewing tasks. So, the context of occurrence of such genre exemplars could be identified, in Berkenkotter and Huckin’s terms, as that of “situated actions of writers, and the communicative systems in which disciplinary actors participate”.

The complexity of the peer reviewers’ communicative task is given also by their dual role, as “gatekeepers” and as “facilitators” of improvement (Hyland, 2015; Salager-Meyer, 2014). Peer reviews, therefore, address two distinct categories of audience: the editors, who expect a clear, well argued opinion, based on experience and disciplinary knowledge, on the one hand, and the author(s) of the manuscript under review, on the other. The latter also have their expectations, in addition to getting the green light for publication; they hope to get relevant feedback and guidance that they can use for improving their manuscript, even if this feedback is sometimes offered in an indirect manner, through questions and comments that are not always easy to decode (Paltridge, 2015).

This relates to another genre feature mentioned by Berkenkotter and Huckin: *form and content*. According to them “genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular situation at a particular point of time” (1995: 4). To ensure coherence and consistency of approach, journal editors provide reviewers with evaluation guidelines, usually spelling out the criteria for the assessment of manuscript quality, and with instructions regarding the expected content and format of the peer review. Journals usually provide downloadable peer review templates, and some also ask reviewers for additional information, presented as a referee report.

In the current pilot study, we shall explore some of the abovementioned features of peer reviewing, as manifested in exemplars associated with journals (in the fields of humanities and social sciences), published in non-Anglophone academic contexts, where English is one of the publication languages, alongside French, German, Italian, Spanish. We hope that this analysis, even if small-scale, will provide useful insights both to early career authors and to scholars interested in taking on peer reviewing tasks. Familiarisation with screening criteria for manuscript acceptance and a better understanding of the peer review genre is particularly important now, when we are witnessing a ‘massification’ of manuscript submissions, a phenomenon going hand-in-hand with an increased need for professional peer reviewing, calling for more coherent cooperation among the members of the academic community (Hyland, 2015).

### **3. Methodological approach and corpus analysed in the current study**

Previous studies of peer reviews divided their analyses either in broader categories such as content and language use, like Mungra and Webber (2010: 47-48), which they subdivided according to the comments made by the reviewers they surveyed (“data driven terms”), or “patterns to be analysed: criticism, recommendations and requests through questions” (Fortanet Gómez, 2008: 30), “two quality dimensions: specialized content and writing” (Shashok, 2008: 4), hedge defining, justifying their opportunity of use, and describing the way they were discussed by reviewers (Burrough-Boenisch, 2005: 26). Muresan and Nicolae (2015) look into the publishers’ concern with “the quality of manuscripts received for evaluation”, analysing the responses to a questionnaire addressed to editors of “international research journals in the field of social sciences” (Muresan & Nicolae, 2015: 298).

The present study opens up the scope of the analysis to include several languages for international publishing and for communication among editors, reviewers and authors. It looks at journal requirements, as expressed in peer review forms, guidelines to reviewers and other information sources, as made available to reviewers by the journal editors.

We have, therefore, compiled and analysed a multilingual corpus, consisting of peer review forms and reviewer guidelines, as communicated on the web sites of five multilingual journals (in the field of Humanities

and Social Sciences) or as sent to the reviewers by the journal editors, sometimes accompanied by additional information, as detailed below; in addition, the corpus includes author guidelines, editorial policy documents (where considered relevant), as well as Calls for papers (when sent to the reviewers, in the case of thematic issues). Three of the journals could be considered as examples of combining the international dimension with local endeavours for continuous quality enhancement (see also Lillis and Curry, 2010; Hyland, 2015); one of the journals is primarily associated with the European dimension, and one is published by an international organisation, as detailed below. Table 1 illustrates the multilingual dimension of the journals represented in the corpus, as well as their geographical spread, in terms of institutions editing and/or publishing them. All these journals are indexed in international data bases and have multinational editorial boards.

Table 1: **Geographic spread and multilingual dimension of the journals included in the study**

Journal Code used in thesis study	Journal Title	Country / Institution editing and/or publishing the journal	Publication language(s) for articles	Language options on the journal web site
Journal A	<i>Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies</i>	Spain Universidad de Zaragoza, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras	EN (till 2013 abstracts and keywords in both EN & ES)	EN & ES
Journal B	<i>Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia</i>	Romania Universitatea "Babeş-Bolyai", Cluj-Napoca	DE, EN, FR	(mainly) EN, with some forms also in RO
Journal C	<i>Synergy Journal of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication</i>	Romania Academia de Studii Economice, Bucuresti	DE, EN, ES, FR, IT	EN (the Peer-review form in both EN and FR)

Journal Code used in this study	Journal Title	Country / Institution editing and/or publishing the journal	Publication language(s) for articles	Language options on the journal web site
Journal D	<i>Synergies Europe</i>	France GERFLINT	(mainly) FR (but not exclusively)	FR (since 2014); previously also EN
Journal E	<i>The International Review of Education - Journal of Lifelong Learning (IRE) / Revue internationale de l'éducation - Annales de l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie (IRE) / La Revista Internacional de Educación – Journal of Lifelong Learning (IRE)</i>	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning / Springer (Publisher)	EN, FR	EN, FR, ES

As we can see, the multilingual dimension is operationalised in different forms in the five case studies, reflecting new trends in editorial policies, changes of priorities at either international or national level. In the case of Journal A, for instance, the information on the web site is provided in both English and Spanish, but the language of publication of the articles is only English. Till 2013, however, the abstracts and keywords were published in both English and Spanish, thus promoting bilingualism and doing justice to the L1 of the academic environment publishing this journal dedicated to English and American studies. In the case of Journals B and C, published by two of the leading universities in Romania, the publication languages include also other languages apart from English, but the information on their web sites is primarily in English, with a minimum of information in Romanian (in case of Journal B) or in French (in case of Journal C).

The case of Journal D is a more interesting one, as it was a multilingual journal till January 2014, publishing articles mainly in French, but also in English, German, Spanish, and providing information in both French and English on the journal web site. Starting with 2014, although the title has remained the same, promising to address "European synergies", there was a change in editorial policy, reflecting the publishers' commitment to promoting French as *lingua franca* in international scientific communication:

*"L'un des principes fondateurs du GERFLINT étant la défense de la recherche scientifique francophone dans l'ensemble des sciences humaines, sa vocation est de promouvoir l'usage du français dans la communication scientifique internationale."*<sup>4</sup>

The case of Journal E, founded in 1931 and considered the longest-running journal on international education, featured initially "articles on international comparative education in German, English and French". In 1955 it was adopted by UNESCO and is now one of its two academic journals. Its evolution reflects a change in priorities both contentwise and in linguistic terms. It still publishes articles based on comparative research of education systems, but gives precedence to lifelong learning, "adult education, non-formal education and literacy, or [...] formal education viewed through the lens of lifelong learning".<sup>5</sup> The publication languages are English and French, but the information on the journal web site can be accessed in English, French or Spanish. An interesting feature of multilingualism, not noticed in the case of other journals, is that the editorial board accepts for consideration manuscripts in other languages than English or French, provided they are accompanied by an abstract in one of these two languages. The "Author Guidelines" specify some further requirements, in case of acceptance of the manuscript. To do justice to the multilingual dimension in our study, we shall include them here in all the three (almost identical) language versions (EN, FR, ES) present on the journal web site<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://gerflint.fr/politique-editoriale-generale>

<sup>5</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/journal-international-review-of-education>

<sup>6</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/journal-international-review-of-education/instruction-for-authors>

*"Contributions are published in English or French. The Editorial Office is prepared to consider submissions in other languages on condition that a short summary in one of the above two languages is attached. If such a work is accepted, the author must arrange for its competent translation into either English or French."*

*"Les contributions sont publiées en anglais ou en français. Le bureau éditorial pourra examiner des articles rédigés dans d'autres langues, à condition qu'ils soient accompagnés d'un bref résumé dans l'une de ces deux langues. Si l'article soumis est accepté, l'auteur devra en fournir, à ses frais, une traduction appropriée, en anglais ou en français."*

*"Las contribuciones se publican en inglés o francés. La Oficina de Redacción está dispuesta a considerar presentaciones en otros idiomas a condición de que se adjunte un breve resumen en uno de los dos idiomas anteriores. Si la obra es aceptada, el autor deberá tramitar su traducción competente en inglés o francés."*

For the purpose of this study, we have included documents and other sources of information in different languages, as accessed on the journal web sites or as made available to us (as peer reviewers) by the journal editors. The document types and languages present in the multilingual corpus used for this study are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: **Types of documents and languages represented in the Corpus**

Journal Code	Types of documents / sources of information included in the Corpus	Languages represented in the Corpus	Total words per journal in the Corpus
Journal A	Peer review form, Guidelines for reviewers, journal description on the web site, Author guidelines	EN and ES	1064
Journal B	Peer review form, Guidelines for reviewers, journal description on the web site, Author guidelines	EN and RO	1047

Journal Code	Types of documents / sources of information included in the Corpus	Languages represented in the Corpus	Total words per journal in the Corpus
Journal C	Peer review form, Guidelines for peer review, journal description on the web site, Author guidelines and article template, Acceptance of Responsibility form	EN and FR	2337
Journal D	Peer review forms (2010-2012), Call for papers (CfP) for thematic issues (2010-2012); Journal description, Author guide, Editorial Policy (since 2014)	FR and EN (for the peer review forms and CfP in 2010-2012) FR (2014, 2016)	6697
Journal E	Peer review form, Call for papers, Author guidelines for thematic issue, journal description on the web site	EN	815
<b>Total words in the Corpus</b>			<b>11960</b>

The study of the texts in the corpus had a twofold aim: (i) to see to what extent journal publication requirements reflect a commonality of evaluation criteria and (ii) to explore how the forms and guidelines provided by the journal editors contribute to mapping out the peer reviewing of manuscripts, both contentwise and in terms of linguistic realisation.

#### **4. Journal requirements as operationalised through review forms and guidelines to reviewers. Findings and discussion.**

The comparative analysis of the peer review forms has revealed that all of them have several features in common: they incorporate several levels of synthesis; they have a structuring and layout that facilitates the reviewer's completing them; and, more importantly, the evaluation criteria - indicating what is valued according to each journal's publication policy - reflect similar preoccupations in terms of manuscript quality. In what follows, we shall elaborate on each of the abovementioned features.

#### 4.1 *The levels of synthesis and the structuring of the evaluation forms*

The highest level is encapsulated in the 'verdict statement' (referred to as 'decision', 'recommendation', 'overall conclusion'). Four out of the five journals provide pre-formulated options, for the reviewer to select and tick one. These range from "acceptance without revision" (*acceptable / accepted in the initial form / acceptance without revision / acceptable for publication as is*) to "rejection" (*to be rejected / rejected / rejection*).

In-between the two extremes, there are the following options, reflecting different degrees of compliance with journal requirements:

- *accepted with minor modifications / acceptance with minor changes / acceptable for publication with the minor corrections which I describe in the attached pages*
- *accepted with substantial modifications / acceptance with major changes / acceptable for publication with the major corrections which I describe in the attached pages.*

As we can see, most of these pre-formulated decisions are elliptical; it is in only one of the four journals that they are expressed as full sentences.

One of the peer review templates (Journal A) comprises a more general formulation (*acceptable with corrections*, i.e. without the nuanced differentiation between *minor* and *major* corrections or changes) but this is followed by a "Comments" section, inviting the referee to "provide commentary on the paper to substantiate the recommendations" [...], specifying that "they are especially welcome in the case of negative or partially negative reports."

In addition, one of the journals (Journal D) gives reviewers two options also for the rejection:

- (i) total rejection: "*It is my opinion that the proposed article is not acceptable for publication in [the journal] and I recommend that it be rejected for the reasons which I set out in my comments (see attached pages)*"
- (ii) partial rejection ("*It is my opinion that the proposed article is not acceptable for publication in its current state*"), accompanied by the request "*for a complete revision*" and resubmission ("*once the corrections have been made*").

Only one of the five peer review forms does not provide options for the "verdict statement" and instead expects the reviewers to formulate their

"overall conclusion" in their own words. It does, however, provide the reviewer with "questions to consider while reviewing":

*"(a) Should the article be published in this special issue or in the journal at another time, or not? (b) If yes, should it be amended, and which changes should be made?"*

(Journal E)

The next level of synthesis is to be found in the enumeration of publication criteria, formulated as (sub)areas or aspects to be evaluated. On all the peer review templates analysed, they are grouped in tabular form, either as a list of 'aspects', each with equal weighting, or as sub-areas under various headings (e.g. *content, style* etc.), as detailed in the next section.

To facilitate the reviewer's job, three of the journals provide these tables with a header row comprising several options, on a scale from *inadequate / unsatisfactory* to *good* or even *excellent*, with alternatives in-between (*acceptable / satisfactory*). These alternatives, representing degrees of compliance with the journal requirements in various areas, could be seen as replicating the selection of options available for the verdict statement.

One of the journals has included an additional option: 'not applicable/unable to judge', introduced presumably, after the occurrence of such situations. This could be seen as a mark of the dynamism of the genre, confirming Berkenkotter and Huckin's statement that "Genres change over time in response to their users' sociocognitive needs". (1995:4). Two of the journals ask the reviewers to formulate their decisions regarding the manuscript's compliance with each of the publication criteria in their own words, as detailed below.

And finally, at the third level of synthesis, we find brief, overall comments, meant to justify the 'verdict' given at the previous two levels. The peer review templates analysed provide a blank space (either as a separate column in the above-mentioned table or as a space at the end of the form), where reviewers are asked to provide essential information in support of their decisions.

While the structuring of the information is fairly standardised at the first two levels, at the third level, we can notice a greater variety of possible solutions, depending on what other components are included in peer reviewing. For example, if the peer reviewer is asked to write a referee report with additional details, the peer review template does not necessarily comprise a space for comments regarding compliance with each of the criteria. Similarly, if the reviewer is expected to provide

comments/annotations directly on the manuscript, to be passed on to the author(s), the peer review form does not necessarily include a section for overall comments and recommendations to be sent to the author(s).

Where the sections for overall comments exist, they are accompanied by clear indications, drawing the reviewer's attention to the two target audiences: the journal editor(s) and the manuscript author(s). For example, the preamble to the section meant for editors, asks the reviewers to provide overall comments and relevant details to justify the verdict and reassures them that these comments will be kept confidential and will not be shared with the authors. The introduction to the section with suggestions for the author(s) encourages the reviewers to include useful details and recommendations for manuscript improvement; at the same time, it underlines the importance of constructive formulations, e.g. "These comments will be passed on to the author so we ask you to be as constructive as possible" (Journal A).

#### *4.2 Evaluation criteria*

While the focus of the previous section was on the format and structuring of the peer review forms, in this section we will try to gain more insights into the criteria for evaluating manuscripts, highlighted by each of the five journals under scrutiny. For practical purposes, to facilitate comparisons, they could be grouped into four sections:

- 1) General assessment levels;
- 2) Appropriateness to the field, journal or issue, originality and relevance;
- 3) Methodology, organization and argumentation;
- 4) Completeness, references, language and style.

In terms of *general assessment levels*, there is a close similarity among the publications, while differences can be accounted for either by the specificity of the readership or the purpose of the journal/issue.

Four out of the five journals define the general levels of assessment in a more or less similar way, as already exemplified in the previous section. Only one replaces these with references to what is an acceptable length and "guidelines for case studies":

*Length of articles (for case studies): 4000 - 5500 words. Guidelines for case studies: "case studies from formal and non-formal education follow" (Journal E).*

So, the pre-requisite of acceptance for this journal is for the article to deal with a specific content in a specific way:

*[...] authors critically analyse the integration of the multilingual ethos and culture into the development and conceptualisation of the education programme with regard to literacy and oracy, teacher training and the development of a literate environment, and the extent to which these programmes open up to a lifelong learning process. Furthermore, the role, the status, the function and the timing of the languages of instruction will be analysed, as well as the way language acquisition and learning are conceived as part of the conceptual framework. (Journal E - Review template)*

A second level of generality in assessment could be considered that related to "appropriateness to the field, journal or issue, originality and relevance". The *appropriateness* criterion is present in all the five journals, either as such - e.g. "appropriateness of the subject to the scope of the journal" (Journal A) - or expressed in different terms, e.g. "Should this article be published in this special issue or in the journal at another time, or not?"(Journal E).

The same can be said about *originality*, which is present in all five journals, either as such or combined with other terms, as an expression of related aspects, such as "contribution", "contribute", "innovative", e.g.

*"The scientific contribution of the paper is original" (Journal B)*

*"Is it innovative and original for its field of research? (Journal C)*

The *originality* criterion may be combined in the same sentence with that of *appropriateness* to the field/area of study, as in the following examples:

*"Contribution to knowledge in the area of study, contribution of research in applied linguistics or language pedagogy" [...] (Journal D)*

*"Does this article contribute to knowledge in the field?" (Journal E)*

*Relevance* is also mentioned in all the five journals, in relation to different aspects, e.g.

*"Relevance to present-day research in the area"(Journal A),*

*"Contribution to the field of research: Is it relevant for the area of study?" (Journal C)*

*"The introduction presents the relevance of the article for the given field" [...] (Journal B),* a formulation that could be seen as serving a dual purpose: on the one hand, it specifies requirements regarding aspects to be covered

by the article introduction, and on the other, it implies that the article is expected to be relevant to the field.

It may also be expressed through more details, e.g. *“Overall quality of the content: thoroughness; discussion in context of other research, depth of treatment, etc.”*, the implication being that all the qualities mentioned above contribute to the relevance of an article.

The third group of criteria, and the largest one, deals with content from the perspective of the research itself (the author's awareness of previous research in the field, soundness of methodological approaches, reliability of data sources, etc.), e.g.

*“Awareness of the theoretical aspects and implications of the topic”*  
(Journal A);

*“The source of the databases is reliable (official databases, representative sample, etc.)”* (Journal B)

*“Method: Appropriateness of the methodological approach for the type of study”* (Journal D)

This set of criteria also includes requirements related to logical thinking and rigorous argumentation, as well as to the clear structuring of the manuscript and the logical organisation of ideas, e.g.

*“Rigour in reasoning and analysis”* (Journal A)

*“Is the argumentation logical?”* (Journal E)

*“Quality and cogency of ideas presented, logical argumentation. Conclusions: relevant, related to the objective and the body of the article.”*  
(Journal D)

*“Content and overall organisation: Is there a clear, logical presentation of ideas? Is there a clear structuring of the article into sections and subsections? Are they organised in a logical manner and with clear links between text parts?”* (Journal C)

Worth pointing out here is the fact that some of the journals (e.g. Journals B and C) have the peer review form uploaded on their web site, thus making the evaluation criteria transparently accessible to both reviewers and (prospective) authors. The level of detail included in the formulation of requirements (in the review forms of Journals C and D, for instance) could also be seen as almost prescriptive in terms of editor expectations and journal requirements. These might reflect the editors' perception of their and the reviewers' dual role as 'gatekeepers' and as 'facilitators', with a view to assisting and guiding authors in different stages of manuscript production (Bocanegra-Valle, 2014).

In addition to the information encapsulated in the review forms, some of the journals provide more details on the journal web site regarding the editors' view on manuscript quality and selection criteria. In case of Journal A, this information is transparently accessible to both reviewers and authors, in the "About the Journal" section. The authors are even encouraged to familiarise themselves with these criteria before submitting a manuscript to the journal.

***"Selection of contributions***

*The criteria for selecting unsolicited contributions will be basically: their global interest and originality, their theoretical and methodological rigour, the development of a well-defined thesis, the quality of their style and the general observance of the norms required of work of an academic nature. The papers submitted should evince serious academic work contributing new knowledge or innovative critical perspectives on the subject in question. Articles that are of a merely popularising nature will not be accepted."* (Journal A - English section of the web site)

***"Selección de los artículos***

*La selección de las contribuciones se hará principalmente sobre la base de su interés global y originalidad, su rigor teórico y metodológico, el desarrollo de una tesis bien definida, la calidad de su estilo y su adecuación a las normas del trabajo académico. Los artículos habrán de ser el resultado de un trabajo de investigación serio que aporte nuevos datos o perspectivas críticas innovadoras sobre un tema. No se publicarán artículos meramente divulgativos."* (Journal A - Spanish section of the web site)

This excerpt (included above in both language versions, English and Spanish), clearly illustrates the journal editors' preoccupation for promoting high quality standards, a trend more and more visible in various academic settings (Bocanegra-Valle, 2014; Hyland, 2015; Muresan & Nicolae, 2015).

Finally, the last group is eclectic to a certain extent as it includes both specific journal requirements regarding "completeness and references" and more general aspects regarding "language and style", empowering the reviewer to decide on the quality of the manuscript's linguistic and stylistic realisation. Adequacy of title to the contents, present in three of the journals, can be considered both a linguistic aspect and one closely related to the content or the manuscript's main focus. One of the journals (Journal E) has much fewer items in this category, a fact which

might be attributed to the different perspective in a field other than language studies.

Two more points of interest - plagiarism and suggestions for revision - are mentioned in one of the five journals:

*"Plagiarism*

*Are there parts of the article or the article as a whole copied from other sources or do you suspect they can be found in other sources? Do you suspect that the article or parts of it have been published previously in other journals/volumes/on line sources, etc.? Suggestions for revision."*

(Journal C)

In fact, the concern for originality is present in all the five journals, either expressed as such, by default as "contribution", or in the requirement for proper referencing and citation.

As we can notice, the level of detail in the peer review templates may differ from one journal to another, which is probably a reflection of local concerns regarding the areas to be insisted on in order to ensure compliance with international publication standards.

### **By way of conclusion**

The focus in the present study has been on publication requirements in the field of humanities, on the example of five multilingual academic journals, with a view to exploring how journal guidelines for reviewers contribute to mapping out peer reviewing as a genre. The comparative analysis has allowed us to identify aspects that are shared by the journals under scrutiny, in terms of requirements, editor expectations from authors and reviewers, operationalised in evaluation criteria. At the same time, we have been able to identify areas where there are certain differences, especially at the level of detail, possibly reflecting different priorities associated with academic publishing in various academic contexts.

To do justice to the multilingualism dimension, we have compiled and analysed a multilingual corpus of documents (review forms, guidelines to reviewers and authors, explanatory texts on editorial policies, and other sources of information), as published on the journal web sites or as made available to us (as reviewers) by the editors of the five journals.

An important observation based on our analysis is that within the framework of a journal, the requirements are the same, irrespective of the language of the manuscript. The linguistic realisation of the review forms

and guidelines presupposes a certain degree of intercomprehension, in the sense that the peer review form and the additional materials made available to the reviewer by the editors may be in English, for instance, and the manuscript to be reviewed may be in another language (e.g. German or Spanish). So the reviewer may have to work with documents in more than one language and then, after reviewing a manuscript in German, Spanish or Italian, for instance, s/he might make comments in the margin of the text in the manuscript's language, and fill in the review form in English, with additional comments, both for the editor and the author(s), in English or French. Implicitly, this reflects the reviewer's plurilingual competences and availability to navigate competently among languages and documents.

Our analysis has also revealed that the main aspects to be considered when reviewing and providing feedback on a manuscript are more or less the same in the case of all the five journals. The main areas reviewers are expected to cover and give feedback on, as well as the main evaluation criteria are more or less the same. The differences may appear at the level of sequencing or grouping these aspects in the review form, or at the level of terminology.

Differences among the journals are to be found at the level of detail both in terms of the amount of detail provided by the editors to the reviewers, and in terms of expected detail from the reviewers. In the case of some journals the reviewers are expected to fill in the review form and to add some overall evaluation comments, whereas some other journals ask them to write a report in addition to filling in the form.

What are the implications for reviewers? It is clear that once asked to review a manuscript and once they have committed themselves to embarking on this process, they need to go beyond the synthetic, often elliptical information provided on the peer review form. They need to familiarise themselves with the journal's profile, aims and scope, as well as with the evaluation criteria, in all their complexity. Reviewers also need to be aware that editors, even if concerned with preserving the genre manifested in the similarity of the requirements, so as to "stabilize experience and give its coherence and meaning" (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 2016), may also modify them to suit a new situation, such as a special issue of the magazine, or other socio-cognitive needs.

With all the genre variables evident in peer-reviewing, reviewers also need to develop their sense of form and content, i.e. of "what content is appropriate to a particular situation at a particular point in time", as well as

of the situatedness of the exercise. This is also true about the variation in the level of details.

If we are to refer to the social role of languages, this study definitely confirms it in the concern shared by the multilingual journals focused on with publishing articles of high standards. With this end in view, it has become clear that they are all striving to provide reviewers and authors alike with support instruments for ensuring the quality of the articles to be published, irrespective of the publication language. All this can be considered evidence of how the values of multilingualism and multiculturalism are still being promoted in contemporary academia.

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3. *Synergy – Journal of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication – Bucharest University of Economic Studies –* <http://www.synergy.ase.ro>

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<http://gerflint.eu/publications/synergies-europe.html>
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