This article presents a case study of a nonnative-English-speaking scholar from Hong Kong and his experience in publishing a scholarly article in an international refereed journal on his return from doctoral study in the United States. The investigation is presented as a contribution to the important study of what it means to be a non-anglophone researcher seeking international publication in English but living and researching in a non-anglophone country. The article applies elements of social constructivist theory—most importantly the notions of discourse community (e.g., Swales, 1990) and learning as peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991)—to interpret the difficulties the writer experiences. It also considers the role that TESOL may play in addressing these difficulties.

With the ever-increasing trend towards international scholarly publication in English, an important question that has not been much addressed in the literature is the particular challenges to achieving publication that are presented to scholars whose L1 is not English. These nonnative-English-speaking scholars, it can be argued—other things being equal—are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their native-English-speaking peers when it comes to writing up the results of their research for publication. There is a considerable literature on the role of TESOL in the preparation of students for graduate-level academic writing (see, e.g., Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz, & Nunan, 1988, for a review), and manuals are available to assist in the writing of research papers (e.g., Swales & Feak, 1994; Weissberg & Bucker, 1990). However, little, if any, attention has been paid to the potential role of TESOL in helping nonnative-speaking scholars after they have finished their academic study and are seeking to develop their academic careers. A few studies have touched on the problems experienced by such people, for example, Gosden’s (1995, 1996) research into the publishing practices of young
Japanese academics. In addition, within the field of TESOL, a number of recently published first-person accounts of the apprenticeship into scholarly writing offer advice to others drawn from the personal experience of their narrators (Connor, 1999; Li, 1999). Although these accounts offer some recommendations for TESOL, the field needs to learn more about the particular difficulties of nonnative-speaking scholars before a comprehensive agenda for helping them can be developed. There is a need, therefore, for more case studies of individual writers from different disciplines, countries, and sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds before TESOL can identify appropriate ways to help these people with their language problems.

Research in academic literacy has increasingly come to emphasise the importance of discourse communities in shaping the generic competence of young scholars (Bartholomae, 1985; Bizzell, 1982a, 1982b; Dias, 1994). Authors such as Swales (1990), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), Belcher (1994), Casanave (1995), and Dudley-Evans (1991) have investigated how novice scholars are inducted into their disciplinary discourse communities through various forms of apprenticeship. The notion of discourse community is relevant in the study of academic literacy because it stresses the participatory, negotiable nature of learning and the fact that learning is not always based on overt teaching. Most of the empirical case studies of academic literacy development based on the notion of discourse community have been concerned with native speakers (NSs), although Swales (1990) and Casanave (1995) are notable for their focus on nonnative speakers (NNSs).

Swales (1990) presented three cases of nonnative-speaking scholars developing their scholarly writing skills at the University of Michigan in the United States. Of the three, one planned to return to an academic career in her home country, Egypt. Swales’s account of this scholar ended with her impending return. As Swales stated, however, “if [the subject’s] story is going to contribute to what we know about being a non-anglophone researcher in the Third World the case study needs to continue” (p. 208). Unfortunately, to my knowledge, nobody has taken up the story of Swales’s subject following her return to Egypt. Building on the pioneering work of Swales, however, this article presents a case study of another nonnative-speaking scholar and his experience of writing and publishing an article after his return home from doctoral study in the United States.

Because this research is basically ethnographic in nature, it does not begin with a preestablished set of research questions; rather, the key issues are developed out of the data. As the ethnographic account will make clear, these key issues include the importance of knowing the rules of the publishing “game,” the mediated nature of the publication process, the importance of adapting content to fit the expectations of
the journal, the problem of distinguishing the dividing line between content and form, and the problems of geographical isolation. The article argues that the concepts of discourse community and legitimate peripheral participation are important in understanding these issues involved in the process of NNSs’ scholarly apprenticeship.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Discourse Communities

A discourse community is a group of people who share a set of social conventions that is directed towards some purpose (Swales, 1990). Casanave (1995) traces the concept to Kuhn (1970), who characterises it as consisting of the practitioners of a scientific speciality who share language, beliefs, and practices. Members are able to function as scientists, according to Kuhn, because they share “similar educations and professional initiations,” because they have “absorbed the same technical literature and drawn many of the same lessons from it,” because they share goals and professional judgments, and because their communication is “full” (cited in Casanave, 1995, p. 87). Swales lists six criteria for defining a discourse community: (a) common goals, (b) participatory mechanisms, (c) information exchange, (d) community-specific genres, (e) a highly specialized terminology, and (f) a high general level of expertise. To acquire membership in a discourse community, an individual has to learn the conventions that underpin Swales’s six criteria. This is normally done by some form of formal or informal apprenticeship—Kuhn’s professional initiations. Thus Bizzell (1982a, 1982b) and Bartholomae (1985) argue that students entering academic disciplines must learn the genres and conventions that are commonly employed by members of the disciplinary discourse community. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) point out, students must also learn what Bazerman (1980, 1985) calls the conversations of the discipline, the issues and problems that are current at any one time. Such issues and problems are developed through study and collaboration on research projects with experienced practitioners. In recent work, drawing on Bazerman (1988), among others, Prior (1998) has warned of some of the dangers of existing views of discourse communities, suggesting that the latter are not as homogeneous and closed as previously implied but are dynamic, open, subject to change, and made up of many subgroups, both large and small.

By means of fine-grained, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), researchers such as Myers (1985), Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Akerman (1988), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993, 1995), and Prior (1998) have demonstrated how this process of gaining entry into the community and
maintaining membership occurs. At the same time they have considered what factors are beneficial or otherwise in acquiring and maintaining the appropriate generic conventions.

As one example of such research, Myers (1985) conducted a study that showed how scientific texts are the products of a discourse community of researchers and not just of individuals. By comparing successive versions of proposals written by two biologists for research funding, Myers showed how, in writing and rewriting, these scientists both responded to and developed a disciplinary consensus.

As another example, in their study of a graduate student’s writing development and his acquisition of discipline-specific text conventions, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) demonstrated how these conventions were linked to the learning of the research methodology employed by the disciplinary community. To achieve success in his writing, the student gradually abandoned the articulate but informal style he brought with him when he entered the programme, in favour of the more formal register that was required by the disciplinary community. Access to and acceptance by the disciplinary community are thus dependent upon the learning of the beliefs, values, and conventions that characterise that community.

In a further study, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995, chapters 3, 4) turn their attention to an experienced scholar, demonstrating how an established expert also needed to observe the conventions of the chosen discourse community if she wanted to maintain her position by having her work published. The biologist involved in this study submitted an article to a journal whose introduction was considered by the reviewers to be lacking in the conventional literature review. It was only when the writer positioned her study in her introduction within the context of related scientific activity in the field that the paper was accepted for publication. Berkenkotter and Huckin thus show how experienced scholars who have already published widely may also need to continue to reflect the beliefs, values, and conventions of the target discourse community in order to maintain their position.

In a recent book, Prior (1998), based on ethnographic case studies, has further emphasised the “mediated” (p. 22) nature of academic writing, that is, how literary products do not emanate from a single author but are jointly constructed by various parties in addition to the actual writer, as he or she reads, discusses, revises collaboratively, and so on.
Legitimate Peripheral Participation

As the above examples show, the sort of knowledge that is required in order to be accepted by the discourse community in scholarly writing is not usually acquired in the formal setting of a classroom. Such learning is what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as legitimate peripheral participation—legitimate, because anyone is potentially a member of what Lave and Wenger call the community of practice, or discourse community; peripheral, because participants are not central but are on the margins of the activity in question; and participation, because learners are acquiring the knowledge through their involvement with it. Knowledge is thus a process, not a product. It is only valid when activated within the discourse community. As Lave and Wenger put it, knowledge is acquired through “centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community” (p. 100).

As the example of Berkenkotter and Huckin’s (1995) experienced biologist demonstrates, such learning is also ongoing; even experienced scholars need to continually negotiate their position as members of the disciplinary community as that position is ratified by acceptance of their writing for publication. Bazerman’s (1980, 1985) conversations of the discipline are ongoing; to maintain membership of the discourse community, therefore, scholars need to engage in continual legitimate peripheral participation. Learning is not a onetime process but continues throughout the life of a scholar.

One way of conceptualising graduate education is as the facilitation of legitimate peripheral participation for young scholars. Arguably, graduate students learn as much through the various opportunities for peripheral participation they are exposed to—working as members of research teams, interacting with their academic supervisors (who may act as mentors), submitting papers for publication, and communicating with journal editors and reviewers—as they do in the more formal, taught part of their courses, if not more than they do there. When doctoral graduates, having finished their studies, leave their prestigious research universities to take up positions in other, perhaps more isolated and less privileged institutions, the opportunities for peripheral participation are reduced. Writing about students within the United States, Geertz has labeled this phenomenon the exile from paradise syndrome (cited in Swales, 1990, p. 207). Emphasising the even greater plight of graduates who leave the United States, Swales maintains that the term exile in Geertz’s formulation would be even more appropriate for NNSs returning to their home countries than for the U.S. graduates Geertz had in mind. The intellectual dislocation that accompanies such a return for NNSs is extreme.
Although legitimate peripheral participation and the related notion of discourse community are important, this does not mean that there is no place at all for formal training. As Lave (1998, p. 250) notes, instruction is not to be avoided. Rather, classroom time can be seen as an opportunity for facilitating and reflecting upon legitimate peripheral participation as opposed to an opportunity for the transmission of knowledge. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

THE STUDY

Purpose and Context

The purpose of the study reported here was to examine the process a recently returned nonnative-English-speaking doctoral graduate went through in attempting to publish an academic paper in an international refereed journal in English. The study was carried out within the broader framework of a research project conducted over several years that sought to develop an understanding of the perceptions, problems, and strategies of Hong Kong Cantonese L1 academics in writing for publication in international refereed journals in English. The project was carried out by means of a quantitative survey of Cantonese L1 academics (Flowerdew, 1999d), interviews with Cantonese L1 academics (Flowerdew, 1999b), interviews with journal editors (Flowerdew, 1999a), a study of editorial correspondence conducted between journal editors and referees and Cantonese L1 contributors (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 1999), and studies of the written work of Cantonese L1 academics (Flowerdew, 1999c).

Method

The method used in this investigation was, broadly speaking, ethnographic, with a single case study format. In order to examine the issue from a number of different perspectives and achieve an element of triangulation, I used several sources of data for the study. The central focal point of the analysis and point of orientation of the other sources were the various drafts and the final version of a paper published in the XYZ Journal (a pseudonym). The author of this paper was a young Hong Kong scholar, referred to here as Oliver (a pseudonym), who had recently returned from doctoral study in the United States. His field of study was mass communication. Other data sources were my in-depth interviews and e-mail communication with Oliver; correspondence be-
between Oliver and the journal editor, reviewers, and the in-house editor who worked on the paper; field notes and a report written by an NS in Hong Kong who provided editorial assistance to Oliver; participant verification (Ball, 1988) of the final report by Oliver; my discussions throughout the case study with the research assistant/local editor (hereafter LE); and a written account produced by the LE.

The case study was conducted in Hong Kong over several months during 1998. As part of the full-scale project described above, the LE helped with data collection and analysis. He made himself available to provide editorial assistance to Hong Kong Cantonese L1 academics in return for their agreement to serve as possible subjects for a case study. Oliver was one of those people who agreed to participate in this exchange. In return for editorial assistance, Oliver provided various drafts and final versions of academic papers he had written and was interviewed on a number of occasions by both the LE and myself. He also provided copies of correspondence he had conducted with editors in connection with papers he had submitted for possible publication. A preliminary analysis of the articles and correspondence provided by Oliver suggested that a manageable case study could be conducted by focusing on just one article, which was an empirical public opinion survey study relating to Hong Kong’s political transition from British to Chinese sovereignty.

**Participant**

**Educational background.** As indicated in interviews, Oliver had considerable exposure to English throughout his life. His first contact with the language was at kindergarten, when he was 3–4 years old. Following kindergarten, he went to an English-medium elementary school. After that he moved to an English-medium secondary school that was staffed primarily by Irish Jesuit priests. His undergraduate education was at a Hong Kong university that has a bilingual policy of teaching in Chinese or English. On graduation, he worked for a time. Later, for his MA and PhD, he moved to a major research university in the United States, where he had very little contact with non-English speakers either inside the university or outside, where he had friends in the local community, living for 2 years with an American family. Oliver said that he considered both Chinese and English as his mother tongue.

It was clear from Oliver’s account of his experiences in the United States that he had benefited greatly from the opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation provided in his PhD programme. In his courses he would work in small groups of five to six students, and every paper they produced was looked at thoroughly by a faculty member. Oliver
described his advisor as a particularly important “mentor,” who helped him “not just academically but personally” (I, author, December 15, 1998). He worked with his advisor as both a teaching and research assistant. “I have to work at least 10 hours for my boss,” Oliver told me in an interview, “and basically most of the stuff was his research—maybe I collect the data and make the first draft of the article for him and this is not course work.” While working with Oliver, the advisor would correct his writing and tell him what his problems were. When asked in the same interview if he still kept in touch with his advisor and other mentors, Oliver answered, “definitely,” adding that he was still collaborating with his advisor on papers and that he regularly sent articles to both his former advisor and a faculty member in political science. Prior to participating in this study, Oliver had published a number of international refereed articles, some as a single author and some coauthored with his advisor.

**Attitude towards writing for publication in English.** In line with the majority of Hong Kong scholars (Flowerdew, 1999d) and indeed scholars worldwide, it was very important for Oliver to publish in English. Academic tenure and promotion in Hong Kong are dependent upon publication in international refereed journals. Oliver did write in Chinese, but only if he was commissioned to do so. Publication in international journals (in English) is more important for career progression than publication in Chinese language journals, which are usually not refereed:

> I don’t like to write in Chinese but not because I hate Chinese but simply the Chinese journals are not recognized—the English article will count more than the Chinese one. (I, author, December 15, 1998)

In addition, because his research training had been in English, Oliver found it easier to write in that language: “I am used to writing in English journals, so it is more difficult to switch to Chinese” (I, author, December 15, 1998).

When asked how he had learned to write for publication in English, Oliver stated that he had learned “style and organization” (I, author, December 15, 1998) through research methods and graduate courses in the United States. The following statement regarding the difficulty some NNSs have in academic writing shows Oliver’s awareness of the importance of writing in the appropriate academic register:

> I do want to say that some people after many years do not know how to write. They think with a very different perspective. I think it may be cultural. It

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1 Coding conventions are as follows: E = e-mail message; FN = field notes; I = interview; R = report written by LE.
simply doesn’t fit the mentality of the Western reviewers, and every time I review their articles I have to change quite a bit, a large portion of the paper to bring more sense, to make it acceptable to the Western journals. (I, author, December 15, 1998)

Oliver believed that it was difficult for Hong Kong scholars like him to publish in international journals:

I think Hong Kong scholars to be published in international journals is really hard. I think first of all it’s the language problem. I think the journal editors’ first impression of your manuscript they discover that it is not written by a native speaker—no matter how brilliant your idea, they will have the tendency to reject. (I, author, December 15, 1998)

In particular, Oliver took exception to journal reviewers who specifically identified him as an NNS:

What makes me feel bad is I get letters from the reviewer, and in the first two sentences it will say this is definitely not written by a native speaker— they shouldn’t point this out as part of the main criteria for rejecting the article. (I, author, December 15, 1998)

In addition to the language problem, however, Oliver experienced difficulties related to his isolation from the mainstream—Geertz’s (1973) *exile from paradise* syndrome, Bazerman’s (1980, 1985) *conversations of the discipline*, and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) *legitimate peripheral participation*:

There is the language problem, but there is more than that. Hong Kong scholars submitting to the States are suffering from a lack of common dialogue from the mainstream. What I mean, when I was in the US, although I am a NNS, I don’t feel the problem. I speak every day with them certain topics, but when I leave the States I lose that ability to link the hot topic, voice the politically correct voice. I should use this kind of subtle cross-cultural academic dialogue. It’s also influencing the NNSs the non-American European scholars etc. who have to submit to these journals. . . . the less dialogue, the less good work you can produce in the mainstream journals. It is a circular spiral process . . . yes, being connected to the leading edge, and the further you get away the more you’re not sure what’s going on anymore . . . . (I, author, December 15, 1998)

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2 Oliver showed me one review that did actually have such a statement in the first two sentences. The review began as follows: “Obviously, this manuscript has not been written by a native speaker. There are many problems with language usage that would need to be corrected were this to be published.” Oliver also showed me several other reviews that had similar statements, although not right at the beginning. The reviewer did then go on to say that extra efforts need to be made so that international contributions can be published. Nevertheless, initially the first two sentences must have been demoralising.
Although Oliver separates the isolation problem from the language problem in this statement, with his introductory “There is the language problem, but there is more than that,” as his ensuing description of the difficulties of isolation reveals, this too is deeply linguistic. His multiple references to “dialogue,” “topic,” and “voice” in describing the problem of isolation make this very clear.

The importance of communication is again highlighted in the following response to a question about whether Oliver suffered difficulties in maintaining contact with the mainstream:

Well, definitely, when I was there [the United States] I could fly to the cities quite easily and maybe talk to them [other researchers], maybe even on a single paper, and I could go to local conferences, and at these conferences we discussed our papers, and I mean thoroughly. Now we can still communicate on e-mail, but it’s not as deep as direct conversation. (I, LE, March 31, 1998)

**Oliver’s Attempt to Publish His Article**

**Context**

At the time the study was conducted, Oliver had been working for a short time as an assistant professor at a Hong Kong university. This period was a particularly hectic one for Oliver. He was preparing for his PhD dissertation defence, which would take place in several months back in the United States, and his academic appointment would be up for renewal shortly. In order to have a good chance of renewal, Oliver needed to demonstrate that he had been successful in research and teaching. His research performance would be evaluated on the basis of how successful he had been in obtaining grant funding and in publishing in international refereed journals. His teaching would be evaluated on the basis of a teaching portfolio he would have to prepare, which would incorporate descriptions of the courses he had taught and the results of student and peer evaluation. At the same time as he was trying to publish the article that is the focus of this study, Oliver was undergoing a similar process with various other articles, most, although not all, of which were based on material in his recently completed PhD dissertation. This publication activity was in addition to starting up new research projects and developing and teaching new courses.
Article Submission and Revision

The process Oliver went through in writing and publishing his article is mapped out in the following chronology. The data for this analysis were collected jointly by the LE and myself.

November 1, 1996: Original draft completed. The original draft was worked on during the summer of 1996, although notes and data collection actually stretched back over a period of almost 4 years.

May 1997: Conference paper delivered at international conference in North America. Oliver indicated that he received little useful feedback on the paper at this conference (I, LE, March 31, 1998).

June–September 1997: Paper submitted to various journals. The journal selected for the initial submission of the paper was the premier first-tier journal in Oliver’s primary academic area. Oliver received a rejection notice and believed that even with revisions the paper would not be published in this journal. He was anxious to establish an academic publishing record during 1997–1998 in order to prepare for reappointment. The second submission was to what Oliver described as a “third-tier” journal (I, LE, March 31, 1998). Here the response was that the paper, with revisions, would be considered. However, the publishing opportunities for the period 1997–1998 were already filled, and the editor said that he did not want to make Oliver wait (I, LE, March 31, 1998). He accordingly recommended that Oliver submit his paper to XYZ Journal, which was in fact more prestigious, being considered as first tier by both Oliver and a number of academics in the discipline who were consulted. This journal, however, was devoted primarily not to Oliver’s main field of interest but to a related area, being more concerned with area studies than with mass communication. Nevertheless, Oliver took the advice of the editor and submitted his paper to XYZ Journal.

September 4, 1997: XYZ Journal gives a positive response. This time Oliver considered the journal’s response to be positive. First, the single referee’s report that accompanied the editor’s letter, although pointing out defects in the paper (including “second language mistakes that interfere with clarity and obscure meaning”; FN, LE, April 18, 1998) was encouraging. The reviewer described Oliver’s paper as “valuable” and stated that “both the data and the argument [of the paper] contribute significantly to a deepened understanding of [X].” On the basis of these positive comments, the reviewer urged the editor to publish Oliver’s article, stating that even though XYZ Journal had already recently devoted a
special edition to the topic of Oliver’s article, “I encourage you to publish this thought provoking article later in the year.”

Following the reviewer’s advice, the editor held out the possibility of publication of a suitably revised resubmission:

On the basis of an encouraging referee report, I write to tell you that we will be happy to review a revised version of the manuscript and give you a rapid response. Though we reserve final judgment until we receive the final version, we are prepared to encourage you to address the issues set forth here in the review. (L, journal editor, September 4, 1997)

As what appeared to be a further inducement, the editor also stated, “Moreover, as we have gone through a transition of leadership here at XYZ Journal, this is one of the few manuscripts where we have encouraged revision.” In spite of this apparent encouragement to submit a revised version, in her closing paragraph the editor rather enigmatically suggested that Oliver might nevertheless want to consider other journals:

You will note that the referee suggested some other journals for publication. I think there is great merit in considering them and suggest you think carefully about submitting this manuscript to them. We shall understand here.

September 12, 1997: Oliver informs XYZ Journal of his intention to submit a revised version.

October 1997: Manuscript edited and resubmitted. Oliver engaged the services of an L1 writer (the LE) to edit the manuscript. The LE understood that Oliver expected him to be able to edit the manuscript independently, and the LE felt that the edit would be somewhat superficial and, further, that in order for the paper to be published, the editing needed to go beyond “surface” features of grammar and lexis to tackle the overall organization and “flow” of the paper (FN, LE, April 3, 1998). Oliver and the LE discussed some of these issues after the manuscript had initially been edited, but the LE noted that Oliver was only able or willing to give him about half the time he actually needed. For his part, Oliver was expecting the LE to do two things: see if there was anything that someone not in the field might not understand and make some grammatical or stylistic changes.

November 4, 1997: XYZ Journal responds to the resubmission. In her letter of response, the journal editor indicated that the paper had been reviewed by the same reviewer as the original submission. The message was to proceed. However, the editor reported that the reviewer indicated that
“an immense editing job had to be done” and that acceptance was conditional upon Oliver’s ability “to undertake the editing or arrange for the editing to be done by someone else following the examples presented to you.” Five pages of actual editing were included by way of example. The editor further indicated that the journal was “making an effort to reduce the time spent in editing manuscripts.” In addition, she hardened her approach by ending the letter with a reiteration of the suggestion in her previous letter that Oliver consider submission to publications that were in her opinion more directly related to Oliver’s field and that “may have the capacity to undertake the extensive editing we have shown you.”

November 12, 1997: Oliver informs XYZ Journal of his intention to make a further resubmission.

January 1, 1998: Reedited manuscript submitted. Having completed the reediting, the LE was dissatisfied with this process as he again felt that Oliver did not have enough time to direct the edit and that the cumulative effect of the various edits may have obscured the original text to some extent. He felt that a final, coordinated edit would have smoothed the flow of the manuscript.

March 5, 1998: Letter of acceptance received and publishing agreement signed.

April 8, 1998: E-mail correspondence begins. For the first time, the journal editor contacted Oliver directly by e-mail, clearly in preparation for the further editing that was to come. Over the following month, in effect, the in-house editor needed to become familiar with the content of the paper and did so by asking a huge number of questions (45) regarding details in the paper. In addition, in spite of the earlier warning from the editor that the journal could not do the “immense editing job” that the article required, portions of the paper were rewritten by the journal’s in-house editor and submitted for Oliver’s consideration and clarification.

May 5, 1998: Copy editing completed. The in-house editor e-mailed Oliver to say that he would be returning the manuscript (by fax) for further editing. He also stated that this would delay publication of the paper and that “We are sorry for the abrupt change of schedule but we all want the article to be as good as it can be.” The in-house editor did an aggressive job, cutting the paper from 43 pages to 29. Entire paragraphs were removed, and virtually every sentence was rewritten.
May 1998: Editing completed by Oliver and manuscript resubmitted. Oliver was flexible enough to accept most of the changes made by the in-house editor. However, he had to negotiate several areas that to him represented factual errors, inaccuracies, or outright falsehoods.


The Role of the LE

The LE had considerable research experience, having worked for many years in the research office of a North American government agency. As an editor, the LE felt he was constricted by his own lack of disciplinary knowledge, on the one hand, and by the limited role assigned to him by Oliver, on the other. In his account of the editing experience, the LE wrote, “Essentially the directions were simply to ‘edit what you can’” (R, LE, December 2, 1998). To do justice to the paper, however, the LE felt he needed lengthy discussion with Oliver to find out exactly what he was trying to say:

Very quickly into the edit it became apparent that there would be some difficulty in dealing with those requirements that went beyond the English portion of the edit. The structure and thematic consistency needed attention but seemed to be outside the edit mandate.

Oliver, however, did not envisage such consultation as part of the editing process. He expected the LE to be able to work independently and revise the paper appropriately on his own. Consequently, the LE reported, “As the editor I had to determine what was ethical and reasonable under the circumstances” (R, LE, December 2, 1998). The LE accordingly limited his editing largely to what might be termed surface features of grammar, lexis, and paragraph coherence.

For the LE, the role of the reviewer was much more critical to the paper than his own editing:

It was the considerable expertise of the . . . reviewer which was responsible for the positive response initially given to the paper. His/her ability to look beyond the language and beyond the structural and thematic problems was crucial to the life of the paper and this may not have been the case given a reviewer with less ability/vision. (R, LE, December 2, 1998)

Paradoxically, the LE felt that his own contribution might have been greater had the paper initially been rejected. Oliver would then have had “no choice but to provide the impetus for a more carefully directed rewrite” (R, LE, December 2, 1998). As it was, after editing the LE and
Oliver set aside some time for discussion, but even this was problematic, as office space was shared, students interrupted constantly, and one meeting even had to be held in the staff restaurant. The LE estimated that a good exchange of views would have required several hours but that he and Oliver spent only about half of the necessary time on this task. The LE further stated,

One of the things that was clear about this paper was that it would have benefited from a further edit after the author had made the necessary changes and before it was resubmitted. The reasons for this are that the number of edits that were done acted to obscure the text to some extent. In other words the flow of the paper could not be adjusted until the edits were completed and the reader was able to “see” a clean copy. Much, but not all, of the second edit could have been avoided if this process had been followed. (R, LE, December 2, 1998)

During the second edit, in fact, the LE felt that there was more opportunity to work on the overall clarity of the paper—that is, “to effect thematic changes and improve upon the continuity of the paper.” In this respect the second edit done by the LE was more satisfactory.

The LE’s overall evaluation of the editorial process from the point of view of Oliver was as follows:

In the end, I have to believe that for the author the entire process must have been extremely stressful. Finding a suitable L1 editor, dealing with the subsequent edits and contending with the vagaries regarding content, as well as having to address the editorial demands of the journal editor and the reviewers all represent L2 challenges which seem far beyond those experienced by L1 scholars. (R, LE, December 2, 1998)

The Role of the Journal Editor, the Reviewer, and the In-House Editor

Journal editor. The journal editor’s role in the publication process for Oliver’s paper is somewhat ambiguous. In her first letter, as stated in the chronology above, she invited a resubmission but encouraged Oliver to submit his manuscript to another journal. One possible interpretation of this is that although she herself was not that enthusiastic about the paper, on the basis of the reviewer’s recommendation she felt obliged to at least offer resubmission.

In her second letter, on the recommendation of the same reviewer, she again signaled that Oliver could proceed. But she also again expressed her reservations—in emphasising the immense editing job that was required, in suggesting that Oliver obtain assistance in editing his manuscript, in stating that the journal was trying to cut down on time spent editing, and in reiterating her suggestion that Oliver consider
submitting his paper elsewhere (to a journal with better facilities for editing his manuscript).

**Reviewer.** As noted by the LE, the reviewer’s role was crucial: He or she was able to envision the final paper based upon the initial submission, which was by no means clear either to the LE or to me.

**In-house editor.** The role of the journal’s in-house editor went far beyond what would normally be expected of a copy editor. He changed not only surface stylistic features but also—in making drastic cuts—the whole organization of the manuscript. Oliver described the job the in-house editor did as “a huge edit” and as “the most difficult” of all the editing processes he had gone through (FN, LE, June 15, 1998). He described the changes as primarily two types: linguistic-stylistic and organizational-structural. He attributed the organizational-structural changes to disciplinary factors. The journal was primarily focused on area studies, whereas Oliver saw himself more closely affiliated to mass communication. The extensive cuts, then, were mainly in the methodology section. Oliver felt this section to be important in his discipline, which values rigorous quantitative analysis and methodology more highly than the disciplinary orientation of the journal, which is more interested in political analysis. As he put it, “[XYZ Journal] is not an [X] journal and they do not require a lot of empirical stuff” (E, author, September 11, 1998).

Oliver stated that he felt that the in-house editor played a major role in shaping the focus of the paper, in “put[ting] his own agenda on the paper” (R, LE, December 2, 1998), as he described it. The disciplinary orientation of the in-house editor led Oliver to emphasize certain aspects that he himself considered minor relative to other sections of the paper. “My article is something about [X] and this has not been the major focus of the journal,” Oliver stated. “He [the in-house editor] is trying to make the argument that [X is significant]—[Y] may not be as interesting as covering as [X].”

This function of the reviewer and in-house editor in reorienting the main focus of the paper is similar to the situation described by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) in their case study of the biologist, whose reviewers insisted that she make the article “newsworthy” by situating it within the previous related research. In Oliver’s case it is also a question of news value, but this was created not by putting the paper in the context of other work but by emphasizing the methodology and subject matter that is appropriate for readers of XYZ Journal. Because the journal had a less empirical leaning, indeed, the methodology, the literature review, and the empirical data were less important than analysis and interpretation, which were of most interest.
When Oliver was asked about the experience of working with the in-house editor, the important legitimate peripheral participation afforded by this activity came out strongly. “I learned a lot in terms of style,” Oliver stated. “The editor was tough, and I think that when I write another article—the current article I am writing—I will be more focussed and more concentrated on the style rather than a lot of the content and stuff like that” (I, author, December 15, 1998). As with Berkenkotter and Huckin’s (1995) biologist, the editorial experience enabled Oliver to appreciate the importance of the rhetorical dimension of the scholar’s work, which may well be as important as the actual content—at least if one wants the results of one’s research published.

Examples of editing. The extensive nature of the editing carried out on Oliver’s paper makes it difficult to exemplify clearly. The following examples are indicative of some of the transformations of certain paragraphs (some key words have been changed to preserve anonymity). Three stages are provided for each of the examples: the original submitted version, the LE’s revision, and the final published version. I emphasize, however, that the examples illustrate editing only at the level of paragraph coherence (admittedly, a significant area where many changes were made). They do not show deletions and reorganisation, which were also important editorial changes made by the in-house editor, or the cumulative effect that extensive sections of such rewriting had on comprehensibility.

Example 1

Author: The question is whether the media would continuously be a companion of pro–status quo camp during the late political transition or after the Communist Party has taken over. What will be the treatment of the media upon the various interest groups when they entered the establishment after winning the district board elections?

LE: The macro question under review is whether the media continues to support the pro–status quo camp and the public after the Communist Party take-over of Hong Kong.

In-house editor: This article seeks to anticipate whether the media will continue to lean toward the pro–status quo camp and the public under Chinese rule.

Example 2

Author: With people’s aspiration of democracy and hence district boards’ popularity in the subsequent elections, mass media were shown to have made a complete volte-face from outraging to following public opinion, to shape the various groups, especially status quo groups, as legitimate political entities for district board electioneering in the 1990s.
LE: With the peoples’ aspiration of democracy and the ensuing parties’ popularity in the elections, the mass media made a complete about-face from opposing the general public opinion (in the 80s) to following and endorsing it (in the 90s) with regard to their view of district boards as legitimate political entities.

In-house editor: Such democratic aspirations and the resulting popularity of the parties brought a complete about-face in the mass media in the 1990s, and they now endorsed various groups as legitimate political entities.

Example 3

Author: In the campaigns, Beijing was contradicting itself by espousing the reforms be a “triple violator” but mobilizing pro-China figures to participate.

LE: In the campaigns waged, Beijing was contradicting itself by on the one hand espousing that the political reforms were a ‘triple violation’ and on the other hand by mobilizing pro-China figures to participate.

In-house editor: In the campaign, though, Beijing acted inconsistently, saying that Governor Patten’s political reforms were void while simultaneously mobilizing pro-China figures to participate in the subsequent school elections.

The Editing of Content

One other important aspect of the editorial process is the need for the author to adapt the content to suit the priorities of the journal. In response to a specific request for examples of this type of editing via e-mail, Oliver mentioned a number of aspects of content that he had felt obliged to change. First, he felt that the journal wanted the conflictual aspect of Hong Kong–China relations to be emphasised; he had accordingly developed this theme more. Second, he stated that, in the interpretation of events, the journal “tended to attribute everything to China’s interference” (E, author, September 11, 1998). He felt obliged to accommodate this tendency. Third, he considered that the main concern of the journal was “freedom in Hong Kong under the rein [sic] of China.” In response to this last issue, he added a lengthy section describing Hong Kong’s gradual democratic development before the handover, in order to satisfy what he described as the journal’s desire “to make the point that Hong Kong’s political development is interrupted by China’s presence.” These changes were in line with the analytical orientation of the journal, as opposed to the more empirical emphasis that Oliver had originally put on the paper. They also suggest, however, that the journal, or at least the in-house editor, had a particular political ideology to convey.
DISCUSSION

This ethnographic investigation of the publication of a scholarly article by an NNS is ultimately a success story, insofar as Oliver achieved publication of his article. However, the process was fraught with difficulties, and at various stages Oliver’s efforts might have been thwarted. Some of these difficulties were overcome through Oliver’s prior knowledge of the publishing “game.” He was knowledgeable enough about the initial rejection from the first journal not to give up but to try a second and then a third one. His disregard of the two separate suggestions by the editor of *XYZ Journal* to submit elsewhere was a wise move in the end. His willingness to cooperate with the in-house editor and accept radical cutting and rewriting also worked in his favour. Other possible impediments to success, however, were overcome by luck as much as judgement. Oliver was lucky in that, in the change of editorship of *XYZ Journal*, his was one of the few submissions taken on by the new editor. He was also lucky in that the single reviewer of his submission had the skill to see a publishable article in a manuscript that two nonspecialists (the LE and I) were unable to envision and that had what the reviewer described as “second language mistakes that interfere with clarity and obscure meaning” (reviewer, September 1997). He was furthermore lucky in that the journal staff devoted an immense amount of time and effort to editing his paper when the journal editor had earlier said they were not willing to do this. Finally, he was fortunate in being able to secure the services of the LE.

To what extent Oliver’s difficulties were specific to his situation as an NNS is hard to say. It is of course true that native-English-speaking writers are likely to experience most, if not all, of Oliver’s problems. It is equally true, however, that it is impossible to draw the line between content and form in writing. As the reviewer of Oliver’s article noted, L2 mistakes do have the potential to interfere with clarity and obscure meaning (although some errors, such as subject-verb concord, are more transparent than others). In terms of the time put in working on a manuscript, as an NNS Oliver most likely had to put in more time than would an NS. Certainly, as far as the LE was concerned, Oliver’s struggle represented “L2 challenges which seem far beyond those experienced by L1 scholars” (R, LE, December 2, 1998). On the other hand, one wonders if the editors of *XYZ Journal* would have been willing to put in so much time on a poorly presented manuscript if it had been written by an NS. Perhaps as an NNS Oliver was accorded a special privilege.

Considering Oliver’s endeavour in terms of discourse community and legitimate peripheral participation sheds a considerable amount of light on the experience. As an NNS writer, Oliver was at two steps removed...
from a desirable situation with regard to these two phenomena. By living and working on the periphery, in Hong Kong, he was geographically removed from the discourse community and peripheral participation to which he is seeking access. But he was also linguistically removed insofar as he lacked the nativelike language proficiency that full membership of his target discourse community and peripheral participation demanded.

In Oliver’s case, the geographical isolation was mitigated by the use of technology (e-mail), but, perhaps significantly, electronic communication began only when the journal was already committed to publishing Oliver’s paper. The technology, it seems, is at the service of the gatekeeper, when the in-house editor requires rapid work on the paper, but not at the service of the supplicants, who are eager to receive news of progress on their submission. In any case, as already mentioned, for Oliver e-mail communication was “not as deep” as face-to-face conversation. In terms of literacy theory, in highlighting the important roles played by the LE and the in-house editor, the study has reiterated the mediated nature of academic writing, as previously highlighted by, for example, Prior (1998).

CONCLUSION

What might be done to alleviate the difficulties of nonnative-English-speaking scholars such as Oliver seeking to publish in international journals in English? In many ways Oliver is in a privileged position compared with other NNSs, having had great exposure to English at school and having done his graduate studies in the United States, with all of the opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation that that implies. Nonnative-speaking scholars who have had less exposure to English and less opportunity for peripheral participation than Oliver are presumably in a more difficult position when it comes to the international publication of their research.

One obvious point that needs addressing is the tendency of editors and reviewers to use the label NNS in their reviews and correspondence. The terms NS and NNS mark two ends of a continuum that mask a whole range of language competencies. English is the native scholarly language of many scholars internationally even though it is not strictly speaking their mother tongue; it is the language they have been educated in and the language in which they conduct a great part of their scholarly activity. Thus Oliver described himself as an NS of both Chinese and English, even though his English is perceived by others, including reviewers, as nonstandard. Nonstandard language needs to be pointed out to all contributors, but this can be done without distinguishing between NSs and NNSs. NNSs, of course, also have a responsibility to prepare their
manuscripts to the best of their ability and to use any editorial assistance they may be able to find locally. Given the importance of disciplinary knowledge in editing (as indicated by the problems of the LE in this study), native-English-speaking writers might be better to work with a specialist in the discipline in addition to a nonspecialist NS.

A number of further recommendations come to mind with regard to the notions of discourse community and legitimate peripheral participation, which are so crucial in achieving success in writing for academic publication. Legitimate peripheral participation is likely to come about through the encouragement of attendance at international conferences and exchanges of scholars between the centre and the periphery. Similarly, international collaboration in research is likely to be beneficial.

If one were to identify a misapprehension on Oliver’s part, it might be that, like the biologist in Berkenkotter and Huckin’s (1995) study, he did not initially put a high value on the rhetorical dimension of his work; he was more interested in the ideas than in the format for their expression. Oliver’s understanding of the importance of the discursive dimension of his work, as this case study has demonstrated and Oliver has acknowledged, came with the experience of submitting and editing journal papers. To this extent Oliver’s experience, as reported in this case study, was beneficial not just in terms of getting the paper published but also in the opportunity for the peripheral participation and learning it afforded. (Oliver’s experience in collaborating on this research project was also beneficial; he commented that he felt that what this article says was “essentially true” and that “the influence of research collaboration [as highlighted in the paper] is particularly important” (E, author, June 5, 1998). Like other academics, with each submission Oliver will know a little bit more about how to manage the process; however, editors, reviewers, and the academic community at large still have a duty to facilitate and optimise such learning.

In case the conclusions about the usefulness of informal legitimate peripheral participation to be drawn from this article might be construed as negative for the teaching of academic writing, I would like to stress that this is certainly not the case. As stated earlier, the notions of discourse community and legitimate peripheral participation do not preclude any role for formal instruction (Lave, 1998). In considering the sort of training that might be offered to people in Oliver’s position, however, instead of being designed as a formal, teacher-fronted package, such instruction might better be envisioned as an opportunity for bringing together apprentice professionals to share their experiences and reflect together on their ongoing legitimate peripheral participation. In such a programme, young scholars would meet periodically to interact with their peers, receive a certain amount of formal instruction in academic writing, and be mentored by both subject and language
specialists.3 This training might be supported by individual mentoring sessions organized in some sort of writing “clinic” staffed by both language and subject specialists. Perhaps Oliver’s experience might have been easier if his university had been able to offer him access to a centre where such opportunities were available.4

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REFERENCES


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3 This idea is expressed in more general terms by Lave (1998, p. 250).
4 Hong Kong Polytechnic University has recently set up such a centre (Sengupta, Forey, & Hamp-Lyons, 1999). See also an account of a similar programme run at the University of Hong Kong for graduate student dissertation writing (Allison et al., 1998).


