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The ethics of editing : respecting authorial voice in South African literature

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Abstract

This is an introductory study into cross-cultural editing in the South African publishing industry, which is significant in a multilingual country like South Africa which has eleven official languages. This research report explores the cross-cultural editing relationship between an editor and three authors with different first-languages in South Africa.

Specifically, the nature of the cross-cultural editing relationship is investigated in this study of first-language English editors, editing first-language African language authors. This research focusses on the specific instance and experience of the cross-cultural editing relationship in South African trade fiction.

The report presents a review of literature of research studies in the field of copyediting and cross-cultural editing in order to contextualise the research carried out and establish why there is an ethical concern in cross-cultural editing. It proposes a definition for cross-cultural editing, specifically looking at language as an aspect of culture. The report consists of a case study of the cross-cultural editing relationship between a first-language English editor and three second-language English authors that s/he worked with. Data is collected via questionnaire response. Additional data is collected via an interview with a South African editing professional.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is used to analyse the data collected to determine the editors' individual experiences of cross-cultural editing in South Africa. The themes identified from the data were communication, consciousness, collaboration and experience that characterise the cross-cultural editing relationship. The report presents findings from the research conducted. The lack of data from authors is significant and highlights the need for research that explores the editor-author relationship from the perspective of authors. The report finds that the editor participants viewed the role of the editor positively and as a valuable resource in the production of a book. However, the research shows that editors find the commercial environment has changed and they no longer feel the need to balance the needs of the publisher, author and reader. Furthermore, the contemporary publishing environment is not conducive to extensive collaborative editing processes. The findings show that the two editor participants have conflicting opinions on the approach to cross-cultural editing, but that both respect the authority of the author. The editor-author relationships analysed here were characterised as collaborative and open to negotiation by both parties involved as per the editors' perceptions. Findings also highlight the importance of editors being aware of the authority and power they hold and exercise with regards to an author's text.

The report offers recommendations for further research into the area of cross-cultural editing and argues that more research into cross-cultural editing needs to be done to understand the unique complexities of South African editor-author relationships and editing processes.