European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck diseases 132 (2015) 191–195

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Original article

Characteristics and analysis of scientific articles submitted to the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases*

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Scientific report
Medical writing
Otorhinolaryngology

ABSTRACT

Objectives: To evaluate characteristics, suggested modifications and reasons for rejection in scientific articles submitted for publication in the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases*.
Materials and methods: A prospective study analyzed the flaws noted by reviewers in 52 scientific articles submitted to the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases* between August 31, 2014 and February 28, 2015.
Results: Fifteen flaws concerning content and 7 concerning form were identified. In more than 25% of submissions, major flaws were noted: purely descriptive paper; lack of contribution to existing state of knowledge; failure to define a clear study objective and/or analyze the impact of major variables; poorly structured Materials and methods section, lacking description of study population, objective and/or variables; lack of or inappropriate statistical analysis; Introduction verbose and/or misrepresenting the literature; excessively heterogeneous and/or poorly described study population; imprecise discussion, straying from the point, overstating the significance of results and/or introducing new results not mentioned in the Results section; description of the study population placed in the Results section instead of under Materials and methods; serious mistakes of syntax, spelling and/or tense; and failure to follow the Instructions to Authors. After review, 21.1% of articles were published, 65.3% rejected and 13.4% non-resubmitted within 3 months of review. On univariate analysis, the only variable increasing the percentage of articles accepted was the topic not being devoted to head and neck surgery ($P = 0.03$).
Conclusion: These results document the excessive flaw rate still to be found in manuscripts and demonstrate the continuing need for authors to master and implement the rules of scientific medical writing.

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1. Introduction

The *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases* resulted from the merger in 2010 between the *Annales d'otolaryngologie et de chirurgie cervico-faciale*, *Journal français d'ORL*, *Cahiers d'ORL* and *Revue* [former Bulletins] *de la société française d'ORL*, descendents of *Les maladies de l'oreille et du larynx*, which had been founded in 1875 (Fig. 1); since 2015, it has been the official organ of the French SFORL (Society of Otorhinolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery) and the International French-Language SIFORL (Society of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases). It is a learned journal, adhering to the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (http://www.icm-je.org/) and providing authors with an opportunity to submit articles in English or in French via either of two dedicated Internet sites (http://ees.elsevier.com/aforl/ and http://ees.elsevier.com/anorl/default.asp) with a free translation service (French-to-English or English-to-French) for articles accepted by the review committee. It is now covered by the Journal Citation Report, thereby acquitting an impact factor [1].

In the present prospective study based on the articles submitted to the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases* during the period August 31, 2014 to February 28, 2015, the editorial board analyzed the epidemiology of the submitted studies, detailed the flaws noted during the review process and the acceptance status of the articles, and assessed the impact of various variables on acceptance. The resulting data were analyzed in the light of the literature, so as to provide authors with a framework that should facilitate rapid publication of their studies in the journal.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.anorl.2015.07.003
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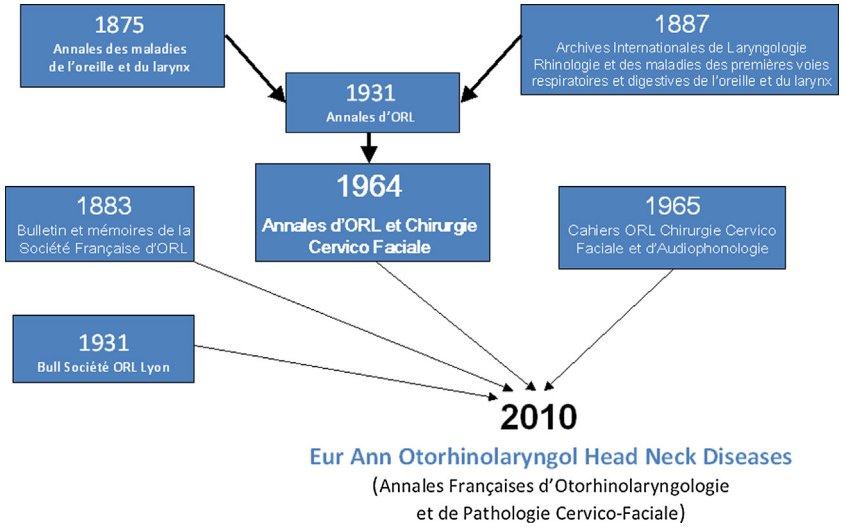

Fig. 1. Origins of the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases*.

2. Material and methods

During the period August 31, 2014 to February 28, 2015, 162 articles were submitted to the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases*: scientific articles, literature reviews (updates, guidelines), case reports, technical notes, "What is your diagnosis?" papers, editorials and letters in respectively 32.1% (52/162), 5.5% (9/162), 38.2% (62/162), 9.2% (15/162), 8.6% (14/162), 4.3% (7/162) and 1.8% (3/162) of cases.

The 52 scientific articles analyzed in the present prospective study were submitted electronically via the journal's French-language (http://ees.elsevier.com/aforl/) or English-language website (http://ees.elsevier.com/anorl/default.asp) in respectively 69.2% (36/52) and 30.8% (16/52) of cases. Tables 1 and 2 and Fig. 1 report the origins (country, plus city for French teams), medical specialty and academic or other status of the first author, study topics, design (prospective or not), inclusion of statistical analysis, and associated medical specialties and research structures.

Table 1
Origin and subject of the 52 scientific articles submitted to the *European Annals of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Diseases*.

	n (%)
First author country of origin	
France	24 (46)
Morocco	12 (23)
United Kingdom, Tunisia	3 (5.7)
Iran, Portugal	2 (3.8)
Spain, India, Lebanon, Mexico, Romania, Senegal, Turkey	1 (1.9)
First author in university team	43 (82.6)
First author's specialty	
Otorhinolaryngology	45 (86.5)
Oncology	2 (3.8)
Anatomopathology, plastic surgery, endocrinology, ethics, internal medicine	1 (1.9)
Topic of article	
Otology	7 (13.4)
Rhinology	12 (23)
Laryngology	10 (19.2)
Head and neck surgery	21 (40.3)
Maxillofacial and plastic surgery	2 (3.8)
Oncology	22 (42.3)
Pediatrics	2 (3.8)
Prospective study	7 (13.4)
Statistical analysis	17 (32.7)

n: number.

Table 2
Characteristics of associated teams.

	n (%)
Associated medical and paramedical specialties	
None	34 (65.3)
Radiology, radiation therapy	4 (7.6)
Anatomopathology	3 (5.7)
Maxillofacial surgery	2 (3.8)
Dermatology, gastroenterology, physiotherapy, nutrition, oncology, ophthalmology, otorhinolaryngology, pharmacy	1 (1.9)
Associated structures	
None	46 (88.4)
Biostatistics unit, Inserm	3 (5.7)
REFCOR	1 (1.9)

REFCOR: *Réseau d'expertise français sur les cancers ORL rares* (French Rare ORL Cancer Expert Network); Inserm: *Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale* (National Health and Medical Research Institute) ; *n*: number.

This study detailed the flaws noted during review, the acceptance rate and decision time, and assessed the impact of the variables shown in Tables 1 and 2 on acceptance (after exclusion of articles not resubmitted within 3 months of review). The data were entered in a PC and analyzed on StatView software (SAS Inc., USA) using Fisher *t* and Mann-Whitney U tests. The significance threshold was set at 0.05.

3. Results

3.1. Flaws noted during the review process

Fifteen types of flaw regarding the content and 7 regarding the form of submitted articles were noted during the review process (Table 3). Flaws noted in more than 25% of cases (Table 3) were: purely descriptive paper; lack of contribution to existing state of knowledge; failure to define a clear study objective and/or analyze the impact of major variables; poorly structured Materials and methods section, lacking description of study population, objective and/or variables; lack of or inappropriate statistical analysis; Introduction verbose and/or misrepresenting the literature; excessively heterogeneous and/or poorly described study population; imprecise Discussion section, straying from the point, overstating the significance of results and/or introducing new results not mentioned in the Results section; description of the study population placed in the Results section instead of under Materials and methods; serious mistakes of syntax, spelling and/or tense; and failure

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