



Ten years of *Salud Colectiva*: a look into the rules of the game in the scientific editorial field

Diez años de *Salud Colectiva*: una aproximación a las reglas de juego del campo editorial científico

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THE BEGINNINGS

The consolidation of an identity, an active and well-established meeting point built around a community, was unthinkable in late 2003 when Eduardo Menéndez, at the café La Esquina de Garufa in the heart of Buenos Aires, brought up the need to create a scientific journal in Spanish for the promotion of critical thinking about health that could carry on the important work performed by *Cuadernos Médico Sociales* in Rosario from 1978 to 2002. It took us a full year to build the bases which allowed for the publication, in April 2005, of the first issue of the journal, with an editorial team representative of the Latin American region, and with the support of the Collective Health Civil Association - Health Studies Center [*Asociación Civil Salud Colectiva - Centro de Estudios para la Salud*]. In 2007, the Universidad Nacional de Lanús (UNLa) took over full responsibility for the project, a decisive step in overcoming financial obstacles and ensuring the continuity and subsequent growth of the journal.

We knew from the beginning that we were not alone in the playing field; in order to hold a place in an editorial arena dominated by a highly industrialized sector, we had to learn the rules of the game, decide what path to follow and what policies to adopt, and identify those fissures that would allow us entry without surrendering our goals and principles. It was not an easy journey then, nor is it easy now. The actors and the interests of the scientific publishing field are very diverse, yet the economic power of the industrialized sector often appears to be overlooked. As an example of this power: Thomson Reuters, one of the world's leading sources and distributors of scientific as well as financial information (a), according to its annual report, had in 2012 an income of 12.9 billion dollars, with a growth rate of 3% with respect to the previous year (1). Another of the most important companies in the sector, Reed Elsevier, which encompasses a series of associated brands, such as Elsevier, Scopus, ScienceDirect, LexisNexis-Risk Solutions, and BankersAccuity, among others (3), reported in 2012 a total income of 7.523 billion euros, with a growth rate of 9% with respect to the previous year (4). Science is part of a profitable business for the shareholders of those companies. However, in order to dispute the legitimacy

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of a symbolic capital such as “scientific quality,” the publishing industry must hide any relation to economic interests because, in the market of symbolic goods, accumulating economic capital does not award the benefits of legitimacy (5). Therefore, profits must be seen as the result of scientific merits, as achievements of science, and not as a result of the economic interests at stake. In order to achieve this, a certain type of enunciation, of discourse construction, is needed.

A LOOK FROM THE OUTSIDE: THE CONTEXT OF EDITORIAL PRACTICE

When the first issues of the journal were published, one of the primary objectives of the journal was to be included in indexing services. In that journey to enter the international arena, we confronted the hegemony of certain concepts which are reproduced uncritically, which lack unbiased data to support them and which, furthermore, lead to the undervaluing of Latin American editorial work. This discursive twist limits the diversity of editorial proposals, goals and practices to two monolithic blocks of journals, described according to opposed pairs of adjectives which ensconce value judgements, for example: international journals vs. regional or national journals; mega journals vs. small journals; high-impact journals vs. low-impact journals; just to name a few of the most widely known. One of the characteristics of dichotomous grouping is that it does not acknowledge elements common to each pair and creates two opposite concepts (6); thus, any aspect attributed to one group is automatically excluded from the other. In this way, industrialized journals take ownership of concepts such as editorial quality, scientific quality, high impact, and internationalization, which owing to the discursive construction itself, can longer be the ascribed to non-industrialized journals. This type of construction generates certain effects that we will next enumerate and analyze.

Dichotomous effect 1: The description of each part of the dichotomy as a homogeneous whole possessing the same qualities

The discursive construction homogenizes and makes equal every journal that possesses an element of this dichotomy. Thus, every journal published, for example, by Elsevier, begins to share the qualities of their star journal, *The Lancet*, which has an impact factor of 39.060 (7). Nonetheless, when examining the Elsevier catalog, it can be seen that more than a third of the Social Science journals, for example, are not indexed in the database of Thomson Reuters, which means they lack an impact factor (b) and, among the indexed journals, some of them have an impact factor under 1, while others barely reach an impact factor of 0.173 (8), a number widely surpassed by many of the non-industrialized journals. However, a wide spectrum of social actors still considers this block of industrialized journals as “high impact international journals,” ignoring the dissimilar characteristics of the journals which make up the industrial publishing house catalogs. It is important to clarify that it is not our intent to use the impact factor as an indicator of scientific quality; we are simply trying to offer reflections regarding certain assumptions.

Additionally, a particularity of the scientific publishing field is that many of its members who have decision-making power and linguistic capital (9) do not conceive of it as a field of study. Hence, the slogan-like effect of such dichotomies is an easy resource for strengthening their reproduction without the need to contextualize or understand the peculiarities and complexities that surround the publishing field as a field of knowledge – a field that, like any other, should be addressed through concepts supported theoretically or empirically, so as to outline an interpretative theory about a delimited aspect of the reality of scientific editing.

Dichotomous effect 2: The production of an overlap between scientific quality and operational capacity

The operational capacity of publishing houses such as Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and others, is undeniable. However, this capacity does not speak to the scientific quality of what they publish, but rather to their commercial capacity to achieve one of their main goals: profitability. Similarly, no one would ever doubt the capacity of a chain such as McDonald's to storm markets: the business runs 33,000 restaurants worldwide and has more than 17 million employees (10). Nonetheless, one thing is to have the operational capacity to produce on a large scale, to affect the market, and to create a brand and a highly profitable business model; and another very different thing is the quality of those products sold and distributed around the world.

Due to a class action started by more than 1,000 Australians who had suffered myocardial infarctions in 2003 after taking rofecoxib (Vioxx) for many years, it was discovered that, between 2000 and 2005, Elsevier published and distributed the *Australian Journal of Bone and Joint Medicine*, which was presented as a peer-reviewed journal when it was actually a "marketing publication" sponsored by Merck. The pharmaceutical company did not deny this fact; indeed, it also reported to the British Medical Journal that "according to published reports, Elsevier published a series of similar journals" (11).

The rising number of retractions, that is to say, of articles that, after being published, are taken out of circulation by the journals themselves (12), has various facets to consider. One is the pressure exerted by the industries to take off the market articles that show results that compromise them (13). Another is the approval and publication of fraudulent articles, expressly created with fictional data and ghost writers or authors who lend their names (14,15); or of articles created virtually, for example, through SCIgen (16), an automatic program which generates fake scientific articles. Recently, the IT specialist Cyril Labbé detected more than 120 fake scientific articles written automatically by the aforementioned program, which were accepted and published by Springer and the Institute of Electronic Engineers (IEEE) (17). Faced with that situation, Springer stated: "[...] we are looking into our procedures to find the weakness that could allow something like this to happen, and we will adapt our processes to ensure it does not happen again [...] Since we publish over 2,200 journals and 8,400 books annually, this will take some time" (18). That is to say that during the time it takes to modify all these processes, such articles will likely continue to be published, which clearly puts into evidence that one of the main goals of the publishing house is to maintain the publication volume regardless of the quality of the contents.

Another recent event which involves Springer is the detection of plagiarism in the journal *Scientometrics* by Jeffrey Beall, librarian of the University of Colorado. The editor-in-chief of the journal justifies the publication's use of what he calls a "collage technique" and, as a solution, invites Beall to become a peer reviewer for the journal: "As a referee, you would have the opportunity to make your remarks in an early stage, thereby you could help us to improve the quality of our journal" (19). The differences in the responsibility of the journals and their editors and the responsibility of the external reviewers should be clearly distinguished. The control of plagiarism and fraud in their different versions, and the control of ghost authorship, among other aspects, should be carried out by the journals before starting the revision process – especially in journals that are part of the industrialized sector and therefore have the staff, infrastructure, and funds to acquire plagiarism detection programs. This task should not fall on the shoulders of external reviewers, who have the responsibility not only to accept or reject articles, but also to provide a critical reading of the text with a perspective both external and knowledgeable regarding the subject, enriching the texts and helping them to gain depth and clarity.

This minimizing of revision controls and processes puts into evidence that what is prioritized is the increased reduction of the production cycle. According to Bourdieu, "enterprises with a *short production cycle* [...] minimize risks by an advance adjustment to predictable demand and benefiting from commercial networks and procedures for marketing (advertising, public relations, etc.) designed to ensure the accelerated return of profits by a rapid circulation of products which are fated to rapid obsolescence" (5 p. 215) [italics in original].

Thus, the scientific publishing industry should be analyzed using the logic of production of the publishing field and not that of the scientific field, given that its primary objectives would not appear to be publishing quality contents or improving the quality of life of the population, but rather increasing production, sales and annual profits.

Dichotomous effect 3: The association of scientific quality with content distribution

Applying descriptions such as “mainstream science” to the content of the articles distributed through commercial databases automatically exclude from predominant scientific thought the articles included in databases with other access and distribution models (such as SciELO). It also precludes any State budget allocations anywhere near the sums demanded by commercial databases.

The large scientific publishing houses publish blocks of journals that, as we have attempted to analyze in the previous two points, usually bear very dissimilar characteristics and qualities. Nonetheless, during the last decade, the increase in the sum of money Latin American countries allocate to the purchase of these databases of scientific bibliography have increased significantly: Argentina went from paying 2.1 million dollars in 2003 to 19.5 million dollars in 2013 (20), an increase of more than 900%; Brazil went from paying 21.4 million dollars in 1996 to pay 61.2 million dollars in 2010 (21), almost 300% more. However, these same increments are not seen in the funding that these States provide to the SciELO collections of each country and to the journals distributed as part of these collections. The overlapping of scientific quality, operational capacity and the form of content distribution helps to impose the needs of the industry and justify the increase in public expenditure:

It is known that the subscription fee to international journals is constantly increasing and that the percentage of adjustment applied by publishers has been, in recent years, around 6% per year [...] Publishing houses justify this increment through increased spending on the peer review of articles, the sophistication and necessary upgrading of the electronic equipment to store contents and the growing number of articles in each issue. (21) [Own translation]

The journals in the region have increased the number of articles published and even the number of issues published annually, which necessarily implies more human and economic resources. Nonetheless, the dichotomous effect not only serves to exclude these journals from the “main current of science,” but also to invisibilize their needs.

The recent incorporation of SciELO Citation Index into Thomson Reuter’s Web of Science platform may possibly generate a change regarding the way of describing the science distributed via SciELO collections and, in the particular case of Argentina, a new valorization of the collection and the journals included in it by the Argentine state through the designation of greater resources and the incorporation of the collection in the country’s productivity assessment systems. Such a need has been expressed by Argentine publishers (22) and by the SciELO program coordinator himself, Abel Packer: “[SciELO Citation Index] makes an important contribution to the development of the journals, and should be considered a standard to be used in the evaluation processes of agencies that support research and scholarly communication” (23).

Dichotomous effect 4: Enunciations produced with no clear source

Publishing more and in less time, contradictorily, has become a synonym of “excellence” to organizations assessing the productivity of research institutes. In the case of Brazil, for instance, in the area of health sciences, for a research institution to get the highest score, its researchers must publish six articles in journals categorized as Qualis International A or B, that is to say, journals with an impact factor of 4 or

higher (24). It should be highlighted that until 2009 the impact factor required for a journal to be Qualis International A was 1; the number was raised when some Brazilian journals had reached this value. These journals consequently descended to lower categories, provoking the reaction of editors (25-32). According to Oswald Ducrot's polyphonic theory of enunciation (33), we could ask ourselves: Who is the person directly responsible for the expression "publish or perish"? Who is the real author of such an enunciation, making it so that assessment organizations transform it into an agenda? Who benefits from imposing the need to publish more articles in less time in industrialized journals?

Dichotomous effect 5: Hiding the differences in objectives between industrialized and non-industrialized journals

This dichotomy implies that the scientific journals included in what we are calling the non-industrialized group wish to be journals like *Nature* and *The Lancet*, among others. Thus, according to this dichotomy their publishing houses would have the same goals as Macmillan or Elsevier, annulling the possibility that publishing houses in fact may seek dissimilar goals, even within these larger generalized groups.

Many Latin America journals, *Salud Colectiva* included, have different goals and propose a different productive model; these journals are not interested in becoming a fast food restaurant, producing on a large scale, or acting as spokespeople for the interests of the pharmaceutical industry, transgenics, or biotechnology. Instead, they prioritize quality over quantity; social impact over bibliometric impact; open and free circulation of knowledge over closed publication models; contextualized science over scientificism, as Oscar Varsavsky once called it (34). This productive model is not a "business model" but a model based on a "political" stance taken within the publishing field. According to Chantal Mouffe (35), the game of social relations implies making decisions, choosing from alternatives in conflict with one another. Denying the existence of controversy places politics in neutral ground where the dominant hegemony is not questioned, annulling the ability to perceive politically the issues that our societies face.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: CONTEXTUALIZED EDITORIAL PRACTICE

How does the context we have so far described affect everyday editorial work? The day to day is filled with tasks, and, generally speaking, management is prioritized as an essential component for organizing these tasks, with the function of creating strategies to maximize time as well as human and economic resources. Nevertheless, if the rules of the game are not discussed, so as to determine the types of policy to adopt, there is a risk of performing busywork that never turns into action.

From this perspective, discussing what we mean by impact is an essential step to avoid pursuing erroneous objectives. From the first years of *Salud Colectiva*, we have prioritized the free circulation of the publications and so immediately sought to enter open access databases, understanding their use as an indicator of the impact of open access contents. We also decided to enter into the commercial databases that provide bibliometrical indicators, not because we value the notion of impact measured as the number of citations, but rather because we understand that appearing in such databases, apart from being a requirement imposed on authors by the productivity assessment systems, permits a greater distribution of their work. Once the distribution within the academic community was guaranteed, we observed that certain research studies that offered discussions of certain social issues as well as contributions to the creation of public policies were not entering into dialogue with the society as a whole, but rather were limited to the channels of distribution of scientific information. Due to this fact, we needed to produce new interlocutors via the media and, above all, the written press. Thinking in terms of "social impact" allowed us in 2013 to begin building new distribution channels which have already started to bear their fruits (36-39).

In the same way, putting into discussion the mandates reiterating that “English is the language of science” led us to reject the possibility of publishing texts exclusively in that language and to reaffirm our choice to create an editorial space for critical thought in Spanish while developing ways to bring this production to other regions. So the bilingual Spanish-English edition came to be, itself leading to other new challenges. In the generalized discourse regarding the need to incorporate English, it is not suggested as a second language, but rather as a replacement for the original one. In contrast, bilingual editions preserve the original language, translating the contents and publishing them in two languages. This type of publications, which are not typical in Anglo-Saxon countries or in the commercial publishing industry, face a great normative vacuum and certain technical barriers that hinder the incorporation of the second version into databases such as Medline, Scopus or Web of Science. They are however accepted on platforms such as SciELO that were created with the goal of making visible the production of Latin American countries and that therefore respond to the editorial practices of the region.

BY WAY OF SYNTHESIS

The purpose of this editorial is to address “contextualized editorial practice”: on the one hand, discussing in political terms the direction in which we wish to head in order to establish a possible path that translates into concrete actions; and on the other hand, analyzing the context of this practice, which forces us to consider the real producers of certain enunciations which, once installed, are uncritically reproduced. According to Ducrot (33 p.16): “our words are largely the simple reproduction of discourses already heard or read.” However, citing statements produced by others, in certain contexts, are not innocuous. Dichotomous constructions, for instance, expel politics and interject themselves between reality and the message, shutting off the possibility of critically perceiving the complexity of the landscape; the quick penetration of their slogan effect manages to dilute and neutralize the accomplishments and advancements of alternative editorial proposals.

In order to reframe this discursive argumentation, plagued with highly subjective adjectives laced with value judgements, we believe it necessary to start differentiating concepts, to achieve the production of our own enunciations and to redirect the focus of study. As once suggested by anthropologist Laura Nader at a gathering of friends in Berkeley: “you need to study us.” She was referring to her famous 1970s work “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up” (40), in which she asks her colleagues to think more about studying the colonizers instead of the colonized (41).

In this journey, we believe it is necessary not only to constantly strengthen and improve our editorial practice and to understand editorial quality as a set of political decisions and actions related to management, editing, communication, distribution, publication ethics, among others, but, above all, to create an *us* (35); that is, a collective identity that allows us to think about the scientific publishing field in political terms, to strengthen the role of non-industrialized scientific journals, and to clearly specify our productive model and the policy that supports it, so as to define ourselves on our own terms and to build our own narrative. However, that *us* cannot include just editors and authors; the institutions devoted to the promotion of scientific activity play an important role in revaluing the scientific editorial practice of a country. In Brazil, for instance, the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) [*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*] and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) [*Coordenação de aperfeiçoamento de pessoal de nível superior*] have joined in order to allocate funds to the Brazilian scientific journals through the state foundations supporting research. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Maria Cecília de Souza Minayo, editor-in-chief of the journal *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, the amount distributed is “a negligible incentive for a group of periodic publications, as generally the federal funding does not cover the expenses of a journal,” and adds: “the country has taken important steps to promote scientific production, nevertheless, in the field of scientific distribution, there is still a knot [...] in the process of scientific work, the most

vulnerable, lacking and poorly developed part is scientific distribution which [...] constitutes itself as a complex, expensive and under-funded process" (42). In Argentina, the journals published in the country do not receive any funds from institutions supporting research, while the sum allocated to the purchase of subscriptions to the journals of the industrialized sector keeps rising.

Despite this adverse scenario, we have moved forward. As processes of construction are only possible when there is a vast cast of actors recreating and enriching the script in each scene, we sincerely thank all the institutions and those that, from different places, have helped us build this meeting point: the Universidad Nacional de Lanús, Maria Cecília de Souza Minayo, Eduardo Menéndez and Mario Testa for their sustained commitment; Núria Homedes and Antonio Ugalde, for believing in us; the members of the editorial council; the authors and peer reviewers; the readers; and all those who shared this with us during these ten years and are who continue supporting us. Because of you, *Salud Colectiva* has been able to continue to establish itself within the Ibero-American publishing field in health, demonstrating that the public university can be and is in a condition to produce contextualized science, committed to the problems of our *Patria Grande*, the great homeland of Latin America.

ENDNOTES

a. Thomson Reuters not only produces the "impact factor," but also creates other products such as the WM/Reuters: a global reference indicator that updates the value of 160 currencies every hour. Recently, the WM/Reuters has been involved in an international currency fraud for which the Deutsche Bank, Citi Bank, HSBC, UBS, JP Morgan and the Royal Bank of Scotland, among others, are under investigation by the financial authorities of

Bern, Brussels, London and Washington, under the suspicion that these banks manipulated the WM/Reuters for their own benefit (2).

b. The information expressed here comes from a study which has not yet been published that recovers the information provided by Elsevier on its webpage about each of the journals included in its catalog. That information is publicly available, and so can be easily corroborated.

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