Tool-based copyediting – A boon or a bane?

Business context

A *copyeditor* acts as a bridge connecting three segments of any published material: the author, the publisher and the reader. To this end, the copyeditor acts as the author's second pair of eyes, pointing out and correcting technical errors and inconsistencies; errors in spellings, grammatical usage and syntax and inconsistencies in content. As noted in Wikipedia, "The 'five Cs' summarize the copy editor's job: Make the copy clear, correct, concise, complete, and consistent. Copy editors should make it say what it means, and mean what it says." Many a time, a copyeditor has to understand and mediate between the conflicting needs of each of the three segments. In today's publishing scenario, copyeditors need to possess the following skill sets: He or she needs to be quick (and handle large volumes) and efficient at the same time being sensitive to the expectations of all the three segments of the publishing community. Copyeditors must have a strong foundation in the English language and must possess a keen eye for detail.

Copyediting is the one area in the pre-press value chain that cannot be fully automated and requires a highly skilled workforce. It has a significant impact on pre-press service timelines and budgets. With a number of competitors vying for space in the publishing service arena, tool-based copyediting has become the order of the day. Tools refer to two categories of software: (1) Custom-made software that help perform repetitive pre-editing functions such as reference and citation formatting, clean-up and structuring of the documents and (2) copyediting aids such as tools that help check consistency of word usage throughout a book or tools that help check serial comma usage and so on. However, the question is whether tools really help a copyeditor and – with the focus of the publishing industry shifting towards more and more volume of printed output in limited time – whether there is an over-reliance on tools in editing.

Tools and tool-based copyediting help improve the quality of the edited output and hasten the process.

Category 1: Tools for technical editing

Although automating repetitive technical edits relieves the copyeditor of having to focus on style points and instead focus only on the language and content, the tool output cannot be taken as print-ready material. The tool completes 70%–80% of the task in this case but a copyeditor with a complete knowledge of the style aspects needs to review and sign-off the tool output. It is to be noted that the copyeditor needs only to "review" the tool output and not "do" the styling and therefore, there is almost a 50% saving in time (*from our experience*) and hence cost, provided the tool has been tested extensively and output is error-free. However, the bigger advantage is that tool-based style editing significantly improves quality of the output. Besides, the software can be configured to work with different styles and comes in handy when the same publisher uses three or four different styles for various categories of journals (say, AMA for medical journals, APA for social science and CMS for humanities).

www.**spiralupsolutions**.com

#1067 Officers Colony, Anna Nagar West Extn.
Chennai 600 101, INDIA
Mail: info@spiralupsolutions.com

Category 2: Tools that aid copyediting

A number of copyediting-helper software are being developed by software departments of pre-press firms such as ones that report the word usage consistency throughout the book (hyphenated against spaced-out/closed-up words, en-dashed words etc.), a report of US/UK spellings used, an abbreviations versus expansions report and so on. All these tools help improve the efficiency of the copyediting process and improve the quality of the copyediting.

However, tools cannot be considered substitutes for copyeditors *per se*. For instance, a tool can highlight occurrences of hyphenated versus spaced-out words in a document. But it is the copyeditor who has to check every instance and take a call whether any editing or querying is required in the first place. Copyediting involves a much deeper understanding of the written content and only a skilled copyeditor with a good understanding of the nuances of the language will be able to do full justice to a manuscript. Therefore, tools can be considered as aids but can never be considered replacements for the keen pair of eyes of a copyeditor.

Conclusion

Tools and tool-based editing cannot be shunned because they provide a huge benefit when it comes to time and cost saving – which is the most important goal of almost every corporate today – and quality improvement, but tools must be used judiciously by editors and editorial service providers. In so far as tools are used only as aids in copyediting, tool-based copyediting is definitely a boon to the publishing industry.

About Us

SpiralUp is a leading provider of specialist technical editing services and language solutions. At SpiralUp, we copyedit books, journals, web content and documents in different levels of detail and according to the publishers'/clients' house style ensuring consistency of style, language, structure and logic of content. We establish priorities and balance a desire for perfection within our clients' timeline and budgetary requirements. We offer the following editorial services:

Pre-edit Service
Copyedit Service
Copyedit Service with XML Output

We have the capacity to provide both end-to-end solutions in the pre-press value chain as well as perform services as independent components.