

Guest editorial: “Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped”: peer review, knowledge production and the politics of “catching up” in global academia – toward a tender reviewer perspective

On the third round of review of an article that had already been proofread by multiple native speakers, one of us was told that the English “is not yet of a good enough standard for publication” and that this was something that could be “easily fixed” with the help of a willing colleague. The word “easily” is doing a great deal of work here. Proofreading, in our experience, is never deemed satisfactory. This is what [Mizielinska and Kulpa \(2016\)](#) describe as a “simple yet powerful reprimand of style”: writing in “ideal English” is required not as a means of reaching across difference but as proof of belonging, a mechanism for placing scholars outside the Anglo-American core in a state of permanent linguistic inadequacy.

Reviewer 2 has become one of the more durable figures in the folklore of academic life: the anonymous critic whose comments are vague, dismissive or simply beside the point. The term has circulated long enough to generate a Facebook group – “Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped” – with over 50,000 members, and to attract constructive scholarly examination in the social sciences literature ([Watling et al., 2021](#)). But the description behind the meme is worth stating plainly. Reviewer 2 is the peer reviewer who is rude, patronising and unwilling to treat authors as peers. The “Reviewer 2 attitude” reproduces masculinist power relations by casting reviewers as omniscient and objective, while manuscript authors are positioned as always already insufficiently read, insufficiently literate, insufficiently intelligent. As [Silbiger and Stubler \(2019\)](#) have shown, unprofessional reviewer conduct is widespread across disciplines, and its consequences fall hardest on scholars who are already underrepresented: women of colour, non-binary academics, researchers from the Global South and those writing from outside the Anglo-American mainstream. These are not equal-opportunity injuries.

This special issue grew out of a roundtable session organised at a conference on feminist and queer geographies. The session, titled “Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped”: The Power Relations in Knowledge Production and Reviewing Process from the Non-Anglo-American Perspectives”, was organised by the two of us together with Michal Pitonák and Lukasz Szulc, and brought together Dorottya Rédei, Alice Salimbeni, Maria Rodo de Zarate, Miguel Ángel López Sáez and Lukasz Szulc as speakers. What connected us, across different national and disciplinary locations, was a shared experience: peer review as a site where hierarchies of language, geography and epistemological authority are reproduced and enforced under the cover of anonymous scholarly evaluation.

We are both based in Poland and work in feminist and queer studies, fields in which the relationship between Anglo-American theory and non-Anglo-American experience has been a persistent methodological and political problem. Seminal work in feminist and queer geographies has long exposed how knowledge production reinforces gendered, racial and colonial hierarchies ([Rose, 1993](#); [Mountz et al., 2015](#)). We began this project because we had accumulated a particular kind of archive: actual reviewer comments that demonstrated, with a specificity no abstract argument could match, how peer review encodes these hierarchies. These dynamics, first reflected upon in the context of editing a queer studies collection ([Mizielinska and Kulpa, 2016](#)), organise our thinking here along three axes: English as not merely a lingua franca but a technology of gatekeeping; the structural positioning of non-Western scholars as knowledge consumers and informants rather than knowledge producers



and theorists; and the non-recognition of what we call Other geo-temporalities, the assumption that non-Anglo-American contexts are simply behind, catching up with a West that alone generates the conceptually new.

Three axes, three kinds of comment

The proofreading comment above illustrates the first axis. On the second, another review complained that the authors did not seem to be aware of the “latest international research findings” – where “international” means Anglo-American. Locality and local experience are constantly called into question: treated as over-generalisation without sufficient “international” evidence or simply as things that do not count. The result is a citation economy in which access to expensive Anglo-American journals and books becomes a prerequisite for publication, and in which the elimination of local scholarship is naturalised as quality control.

The following example might illustrate the third axis. A reviewer of an article about queer ageing in Poland acknowledged that the watershed moment for homosexuality did not occur in Poland in 1969 as it did in the USA, but in 1989, and thus that older gay men and women came of age in a very different environment. But concluded, nonetheless, that “in and of itself, this does not provide anything new”. The reviewer acknowledges a genuine historical difference and then dismisses it as insufficient for knowledge production. Poland’s 1989 is interesting only as a variation on America’s 1969, only insofar as it confirms what has already been theorised elsewhere. Non-Western contexts are perceived as catching up with a more progressed West, which means we only provide examples of something already described, something that is “nothing new”. The possibility that the specific formation of queer life under late socialism might generate its own conceptual frameworks or its own theoretical contributions is not entertained. We are positioned as informants, not theorists.

This is the logic this special issue sets out to examine: not as individual reviewer pathology but as structural feature, rooted in the political economies of publishing and the global geographies of higher education ([Browne and Nash, 2010](#); [Misgav and Johnston, 2014](#)), and traceable to the historical formation of peer review as an Anglo-American institution ([Moxham and Fyfe, 2018](#)). We read the contributions gathered here, following feminist, queer and decolonial geographies ([Rose, 1993](#); [Mountz et al., 2015](#)), as interventions that make these naturalised dynamics visible.

The contributions

The articles in this issue approach the three axes from different disciplinary positions and geographic locations, and they do not always arrive at the same conclusions. What they share is a refusal to treat the existing system as natural or inevitable, and a commitment to naming what it costs.

[Tarchi et al. \(2025\)](#) (*Should be edited by a native speaker: Anglo-American hegemony and peer review processes*) show how English dominance creates a double bind: linguistic fluency is conflated with intellectual merit, while the diversity of the English language actually used in international scholarship is suppressed in favour of a norm that few outside the Anglo-American world can claim as natural. [Wang \(2025\)](#) (*English native-speakerism in the phenomenon of Reviewer 2: implications for qualitative research*) examines the ideology behind this: (non)native-speakerism as geolinguistic hierarchy rather than merely procedural preference, with particular consequences for qualitative researchers whose methodological commitments sit awkwardly alongside demands for standardised academic prose. [Nigar et al. \(2025\)](#) (*Decentring linguistic hegemony in peer review: relational epistemology, affect and ethical becoming*) propose a different orientation entirely. Drawing on Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and Indigenous relational philosophies, they theorise what they call Onto-Epistemic Mutual Becoming: peer review reconceived as a dialogic, affective and co-constructive practice rather than a filtering mechanism.

Frisancho and Delgado Ramos (2025) (*Reviewing the reviewers: a critical autoethnography of two global South psychologists on bias and inequity in peer review*) document, through autoethnography from Peru, three recurring editorial patterns: identity- and affiliation-based bias, disciplinary mismatch between authors and reviewers and the confusion of stylistic imposition with substantive critique. Sanaullah (2026) (*Peer review and the coloniality of knowledge production: a critique from the Global South*) takes a different methodological route: a corpus of sixty-five actual peer reviews, received across forty-four journals over five years, examined through critical discourse analysis. Five discursive mechanisms emerge – epistemic delegitimisation, foreclosure, superiority, moralisation and gatekeeping – through which reviewers position NNES authors as deficient rather than as peers. The data are the author’s own reviews, which makes the analysis both unusually direct and openly political. Khundrakpam and Sarmah (2026) (*No calm before the storm: insights on editorial discrimination against Global South scholars*) show, from India, that discrimination begins before peer review, at the desk review and pre-screening stage, where institutional affiliation and country of origin already shape outcomes. Iheduru-Anderson (2026) (*Decolonising peer review: disrupting academic gatekeeping and reclaiming knowledge production*) names the underlying logic: peer review as a colonial artefact, an epistemic gatekeeper that institutionalises Western knowledge through linguistic exclusion, methodological policing and citational hierarchy. Latin American bibliodiversity and African Ubuntu-based models are proposed not as reforms from within but as alternatives that begin from different premises about what knowledge is and who produces it.

Copple and Flint (2025) (*“We regret to inform you”: enacting willful feminist negotiations of rejection*) draw on Sara Ahmed’s feminist killjoy politics to reframe rejection as a site of critical knowledge and relational accountability rather than failure. Their work also speaks to the affective dimension of the problem: burnout, the self-doubt, the question of how to survive in academia without becoming only an academic. Nopas (2025) (*Decolonising peer review: addressing systemic bias and inclusivity for LGBTQ+ scholars in Southeast Asia*) brings a dimension undertheorised even within critical publishing studies: the compounding of queer identity, regional positioning and linguistic marginalisation. LGBTQ + -focused research dismissed as “too niche,” reviewers who read heteronormativity as methodological neutrality: these are structural features of a system that was never designed to include these scholars or recognise this knowledge.

Toward a tender reviewer perspective

Procedural reform matters: the establishment of diverse editorial boards, reviewer training and greater transparency in decision-making (Moxham and Fyfe, 2018; Kelly, 2023). But procedure without epistemological transformation has a limit. As long as the implicit standard remains the Anglo-American research article, produced in standardised English, anchored in a citation network weighted toward the Global North, Reviewer 2 will find plenty of targets regardless of how the forms are redesigned.

Drawing on Stasinska’s (2022) concept of the “tender researcher perspective,” we propose its adaptation for the specific context of peer review: a “tender reviewer perspective” grounded in care, epistemic humility and genuine attention to difference. In practice this means treating the review as a conversation with the author rather than a verdict; learning from good reviews done by others; acknowledging limitations in access to expensive journals and books across languages and geographies; not suggesting proof-reading as a revision requirement, since that is the job of the editor; actively suggesting references from outside Western and Global North localities; and remembering that the paper is not about you. Beyond the review itself, it means being supportive before someone submits, offering pre-peer-review within academic networks and sharing one’s expertise across boundaries, including grant proposals and publishing strategies. Strategic publishing in journals beyond the most highly cited and collaborations with scholars from “Other” localities are also part of this practice.

This framework also makes visible a dimension of the problem that rarely gets discussed: the challenges of being a non-native English-speaking reviewer. If you yourself struggle with “polite English,” or tend toward directness in a register that can inadvertently harm or have limited access to the literature a manuscript requires, the standard model of peer review leaves you without resources. The position of the non-native reviewer is as invisible as that of the non-native author, and any serious reform has to address both.

We began this project from our own experience. We offer it as evidence that the problem is wider than any one roundtable could hold, and that those on the other side of the hierarchy have considerably more to say than the system has so far been willing to hear.

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