MY LIFE AS A RESEARCHER AND EDITOR

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Introduction
I currently work as an Associate Professor at Tokyo Medical University, a private university located in Shinjuku, Tokyo, one of the busiest cities in Japan.

Although I was born in Tokyo, all my education has been aboard as I have lived overseas since the age of 5. After graduating from university in the US, I began my career at Tokyo Medical University as an assistant and eventually became involved with teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP) and medical editing. I teach EMP to undergraduate students, as well as publication ethics to graduate students. I also serve as Director of the Center for International Exchange, where I prepare students for their overseas clinical clerkship.

Outside the university, I serve as a Board member for the Japan Society for Medical English Education (JASME), an English consultant for the Asian Pacific Society for Respirology, and a member of the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences COI Committee.

I am currently an English language editor for the Journal for the Japan Pediatric Society, the Japan Society for Pneumothorax and Cystic Lung Diseases, and the Tokyo Medical University Journal. I was also the English language editor for the Journal of the Japan Society of Gastroenterological Surgery for over 10 years.

I really love teaching and helping students improve their English and medical English skills. I also find it rewarding to be able to assist researchers with their publications and presentations. My personal interests include poetry, singing Karaoke and watching movies.

My editorial career (mentors, path, and main achievements)
First, my background is probably quite different from that of a ‘typical’ researcher. After graduating from university, I returned to Japan to reunite with my family and at that time had no idea that I would be looking at a career in the medical field. As embarrassing as it may sound, I had never heard of medical English or medical editing until I met my mentor Professor J. Patrick Barron, who was one of the pioneers in teaching medical English in Japan since the early 80’s. He was also a medical editor for numerous journals and societies in Japan. When he started to train me in medical editing, he continuously told me that we, as medical editors, were there to support researchers whose native language is not English, so that their papers can be published for the ultimate goal of helping patients for their benefit. He believed that educating students in medical English and medical writing was essential to increasing publications, in addition to the power and value of developing good relationships and networks with people both domestic and international. I carry his message with me every day and try to pass it on to my students. He constantly talked...
about the importance of making a difference in the world, no matter how big or small, so that it would help someone, somewhere. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2019 at the age of 71, but not a day goes by when I don’t think about how lucky I am to have met him, and grateful for everything he taught me. Without him, I would not have pursued my career in teaching or editing.

I have also been blessed with colleagues, administrative staff, and friends, in and outside of Japan, who have supported me so much throughout the years. I am so grateful to Dr. Armen Yuri Gasparyan, whom I have never met in person (but hope to!) but who has supported and encouraged me to grow as a researcher. I think he is probably the only person who has continued to push me to publish papers on issues in publication ethics, or take part in webinars, even during times when I lacked motivation to do so. I believe this is a perfect example of how the relationships and networks you form, even from a distance, can turn into something so valuable and life-changing.

My career as an English instructor (teaching English to undergraduates and postgraduates, priorities, and main achievements)

Having been raised abroad, I can truly understand how the Japanese language differs from the English language and some of the difficulties faced by students, as I myself learned how to speak and write Japanese as a second language in high school. I also understand how culture can affect the way one learns a language. In Japan, students are not accustomed to expressing one’s opinions openly or having discussions on certain issues in school, so it is no surprise that it becomes even more difficult to do in a foreign language as they become older. I try to incorporate this understanding of cultural differences in my EMP teaching and encourage students to make the initial step of speaking out rather than waiting for someone to ask them to speak. Nevertheless, students still find it hard to do so, but the difference becomes apparent when students return from a 1-month overseas clerkship with the courage to initiate conversations in English. It is amazing to see how even a 1-month clerkship can significantly impact the behaviour and mindset of students.

I also see how culture influences the way authors write. For instance, it is quite common for Japanese authors to have long and vague Introduction and Discussion sections that make it confusing for readers to figure out what the main message is. I think that being raised in a culture that places much emphasis on harmonizing with others, keeping opinions to oneself, and being subtle and polite, the concept of making clear and precise statements when writing, does not come naturally.

How English has become the lingua franca and the role of English in scholarly communications amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic made educators, including myself, realize how important and essential it is for researchers to be able to communicate in English effectively. At my university, many doctors found themselves attending more online meetings and conferences, with increased opportunities to speak in English. Also, researchers who had experience writing in English were able to publish papers related to the pandemic on a timely basis. I think this demonstrates how international cooperation becomes indispensable especially during difficult times whether it be through oral or written communication.

How Japan may benefit from quality English articles and journals

I believe there is a lot of significant research in healthcare that still goes unnoticed simply because they are not published in English in a timely manner. I hope that with the increase in editing services, and education in medical writing, that Japanese researchers can contribute even more on a global level.

My message to medical editors and English teachers in Central Asia

We had the honor of welcoming some medical students from Kazakhstan back in 2014 and 2015. We had a great time sightseeing and shopping in Tokyo, and of course introducing our facilities as well as sharing how we edit papers and help researchers with publishing at our institution. I think there is a lot we can learn from each other’s experiences as non-native speakers of English, and I look forward to future collaborations that will enable us to establish more networks and friendships.
Figure 1. With students who participated in the overseas clinical clerkship and colleagues at Tokyo Medical University
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