Reviewers should not destructively assume the role of a researcher

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A B S T R A C T

It cannot be nullified that the peer review process is characterized by reviewers who tend to destructively assume the role of researchers. In so doing, this behavior undermines the intellectual ability of researchers, especially novice researchers, who dedicate their time attempting to contribute to scholarly epistemology. Effectively, this concerning behavior of assuming the role of a researcher denotes that the reviewers downplay the reality that researchers certainly know something; no matter how little or greater it is. Thus, it is not fair-minded for reviewers to regard themselves as if they are gods of knowledge. With this in mind, this particular paper aims to explore and open a dialogue concerning the challenge of reviewers who destructively assume the role of an author or researcher, thereupon sabotaging the peer review process by imposing their personal scholarly interests. This is against the reality that such conduct deter potential epistemologies that could make a constructive social impact within and outside the arena of scholarship. In parallel, such behavior from the reviewers may lead to the rejection of scholarly contributions that can generate change and transformation in the academic community. By the same token, the rejection of papers, in large part, by the recommendations of destructive reviewers who assume researchers’ roles may demoralize novel researchers who have a strong determination to construct and assemble original, and innovative insights into the body of knowledge. In view of this fact, reviewers ought to appreciate the importance of recognizing the voices and narratives of the authors without imposing their personal interests that could sabotage the quality and publication of valuable and well-deserving scholarly papers. On account of this, I conclude this scholarly dialogue by presenting some of the recommendations that may be considered to mitigate the problematized phenomenon.

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Introduction

The peer review process is one of the critical components of scholarly discourses or research as it assists in ensuring that published research is of a high-quality standard and generates social impact, among many other components. Having said that, a peer review process does not denote that a published paper or research could be free of errors, hence other published papers have been retracted over the years (Barrière et al., 2023). Fundamentally, the process of retracting or even correcting an already published paper signals intellectual maturity as it indicates the author’s acknowledgment of unfactual, outdated, or invalid claims. Similarly, the process of retracting or correcting an already published paper could potentially signal the very same purpose of ensuring quality outcomes. Considering this, a peer review process, even one that is regarded as rigorous and stringent does not suggest that a paper or research will be error-free. This does not exclude theses and dissertations which are often critiqued at proposal stages, wherein an excellent proposal does not suggest that a thesis or dissertation will be an excellent one. Certainly, one can agree that there are complexities within the peer review process.

In the same vein, decisions about whether or not to publish a paper are based, in large part, on the evaluations of the reviewers (Dobele, 2015). Whereas this is the case or not, it must be underlined herein that the reviewers’ evaluation should not lead to a situation where an individual’s research or idea is owned by the reviewers so much that the author’s voice is silenced, if not entirely castigated, so to speak. After all, the aim of reviewing an individual’s research is not to assume their position. This is based on the grounds that imposition and censorship end with colonialism and apartheid where individuals’ voices are recurrently muted. With this in mind, I

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content that when the researcher’s voice is muted by the reviewers, this may be regarded as imposition and censorship. Even then, imposing one’s personal interests during the peer review process on the researcher’s discourse could be deemed as prejudice against humanity as it silences their voices and disowns potential journals of an opportunity to publish worthy and constructive scholarship. Having said that, it cannot be ethical in a democratic state (or at least states that are in pursuit of democracy) to impose censorship on the researcher’s work. This is on account that research plays a central role in supporting and strengthening democracy as it provides the information, data, and evidence needed to make informed choices on a wide range of issues, from public policy and legislation to election decisions (Brown et al., 2009).

By the same token, reviewers’ comments may also provide valuable feedback to researchers in a bid to improve the quality of their paper (or any type of research (Bloom, 1999). As a result of this, I put forward that reviewers who provide valuable and contributive comments should be deemed constructive. This should not be misconstrued to suggest that such reviewers agree or subscribe to all the author’s ideas, claims, or statements, but should be construed to suggest a pursuit of quality scholarly work which is epitomized by a multi-collaborative effort between the authors and reviewers. Whether the reviewers are constructive or “destructive”, must be underlined that these factors, among many others, may contribute to an improvement in the quality of papers published and the way in which that particular journal may be perceived. Over and above this, a strong peer review system has come to be regarded as a marker of a quality journal (Snell and Spencer, 2005). Nevertheless, the nature and quality of the process of peer review vary widely from one journal to the next; and from one discipline to the other. For example, other journals may require multiple rounds of peer review processes, while others may not do so.

This process might be blinded or open - using detailed checklists (Marsh and Ball, 1991). In contrast to this, it may be observed that certain reviewers’ lack of knowledge of what to attend to in a specific paper as well as vague or unhelpful feedback may sabotage the entire review process and the aim of scholarly dialogues. Based on personal experiences, I was once held in a predicament where, presumptively, the reviewers were deemed seasoned experts in my topic or subject. Predicated on their engagement with the manuscript, it was not clear in which field they were regarded as experts given that their comments and responses did not seem to robustly and constructively engage with the phenomenon that I presented and argued for. In any event, it became clear that the so-called expert reviewers were, in fact, no experts in African or isiXhosa literature and possessed little understanding of the intricacies of isiXhosa literature. Their engagement with the manuscript made it clear that they were experts in other disciplines such as English literature, French, or Afrikaans. Ultimately, their suggestions and recommendations leaned more on their disciplines, thereupon proving to be inapplicable to the dialogue that I was bringing to the fore. As one would expect, non-expert reviewers may present setbacks and sabotage the researchers.

Therefore, it stands to reason that among these challenges that pertain to the peer review process is the presumption that reviewers are all experts in a particular topic or subject, when in fact this is not always the case. In consequence, it may well be contended and accepted that not all reviewers are indeed experts in an author’s subject of interest or topic. On account of this, it may be challenging and contested for such reviewers to impose their problematic and personal scholarly interests on a subject that they are not entirely experts in. Oftentimes, such reviewers may be detected based on their purposeless responses and engagement with the paper or research manuscript. In the discipline of isiXhosa literature or African literature, for example, such reviewers may suggest the application of one theory over the other when in fact, the currently applied theory befits the discussions. At certain times, they may suggest a change in the topic so as to rest well within their personal interests or scholarly positions. Certainly, this is all an injustice if it silences the author’s ideals as opposed to advancing and refining the original idea of an author.

For this reason, non-expert reviewers cannot have the depth of knowledge required to fully comprehend and evaluate the intricacies of the topic. This is despite the reality that they may be regarded as seasoned reviewers, which one may possibly know that they could be seasoned researchers in their own disciplines. This challenge of non-expert reviewers could lead to misinterpretations, missed errors, or inaccurate assessments of the paper (Arns, 2014). In the same vein, reviewers who are not well-versed in the subject matter may provide obscure or superficial feedback, leading to the rejection of a paper that may possibly make a constructive social impact and change. In a similar fashion, the rejection of a well-deserving and worthy paper may obstruct the publication of a paper that would perhaps resolve certain societal challenges such as corruption and money laundering, health pandemics, economic crises, language extinction, climate change, and many others. This can be aggravating for authors who are pursuing constructive critique to improve their work and evoke other scholars into the discourse. In addition to this, reviewers who are not experts may rely more on their personal prejudices or preconceptions when assessing a paper, as they may not have the specialized knowledge to make objective and significant judgments. Given this view, anyone who has ever submitted a paper to a peer-reviewed journal may know that the reviewers could, occasionally, be unpleasant (Peterson, 2020). While rejection always stings, the belief that a reviewer has either completely missed the point of the paper, been overtly hostile in his or her review, or simply held the author to an impossible standard is vexing (Peterson, 2020: 1648).

In essence, one may contend that the peer review process, while essential for maintaining the quality and integrity of scholarly discourses, could indeed be a source of annoyance for both authors and reviewers. Scientific editors may not be an exception to this process. Authors, for example, may find that reviewers’ feedback is inconsistent or contradictory (Dobele, 2015). Different reviewers may have varying opinions on the same paper, making it challenging for authors to know how to address conflicting suggestions. The subjective nature of peer review could also be frustrating. For instance, one reviewer who evaluated my paper potentially
suggested a change in the source of data – the songs that I had appointed as a primary source of argument as observed in the comment below:

> In terms of the analysis, what the author provides is quite superficial. The selection of the two songs - which is insufficiently explained - is to my mind a mistake as they are both quite lyrically straightforward. This means that the analysis has little room for in-depth reading of meaning. I wonder if songs such as ‘ABC’ or ‘XYZ’ wouldn't be better songs for lyrical analysis.

This denotes that the reviewer’s suggestion was based on a misunderstanding of the data chosen. In fact, the change in the data may necessitate a change in the research techniques, theoretical perspectives, and other crucial components of a paper. In this case, the author herein may somehow lose the essence of his original idea. As a result of this attempt to assume the role of a researcher by introducing a completely different set of data, the reviewer’s suggestion is based on a misunderstanding of the paper’s objectives and methodologies. This challenge leads to misalignment and unnecessary revisions. Similarly, reviewers’ personal prejudices and preferences can influence their evaluations, potentially leading to prejudiced rejections or acceptances (Harvey et al., 2022). Authors may receive feedback that lacks specificity or constructive guidance for improvement. This means that vague or obstructive comments could potentially leave authors uncertain about how to revise their work effectively. Another important component is the reality that papers often go through multiple rounds of revision and resubmission, extending the publication process. With this view in mind, I argue that this is not entirely problematic especially when the reviewers’ suggestions are constructive and specific. This could only be problematic when reviewers are unhelpful to the process.

Bearing this contextual background in mind, this particular paper pursues to explore and discuss the issue of reviewers who assume the role of an author by providing destructive suggestions that are characterized by prejudiced personal interests. The aim is to underline that the peer review process should not lead to the presumption that authors know nothing. As a result of this flawed and defective presumption, such reviewers dismally fail to make constructive suggestions that may improve the quality of the paper for further consideration. Oftentimes, such reviewers present an unintelligent recommendation that an author’s work should be rejected, as opposed to the possibility of improving the quality of such submission without necessarily assuming the role of an author or researcher. One must further understand that the rejection of a journal paper is not unusual or a tragedy, but what I contest herein is the idea of reviewers who are “destructive” and “personal” – and in so doing, they assume the role of an author. Fundamentally, there is a continued idea (at least from my experiences) that even “personal” reviewers are not personal. This idea is flawed. Reviewers can be personal, and that cannot be normalized as it promotes a culture of abuse and bullying, particularly for novice researchers who, in all fairness, need constructive responses from the so-called expert and seasoned reviewers. Suffice it to say, that it is uncultured for reviewers to be personal, assume the role of an author, and be destructive. This is because the peer review process ought to be collegial given that reviewers are “colleagues” in academic contexts and sister-academic institutions. With this contextual background in mind and the introductory remarks, the next section discusses the aim of the review process.

**The Aim of the Peer Review Process**

The aim of the peer review process is multifaceted and serves several critical purposes in the world of scholarly research. One of the primary aims of peer review is to guarantee the quality and plausibility of published research. Peer reviewers, who are experts in the relevant field, assess the methodology, data analysis, and overall soundness of a paper (Horrobin, 1990). This rigorous evaluation helps identify and amend errors, inconsistencies, or weaknesses in the paper, contributing to the publication of accurate and incorruptible information. For example, the reviewer might assist in improving the identified inconsistencies in a paper in a bid to heighten its quality as could be observed in one of the reviewers of one of my papers below:

> The conclusion should focus on the subject of the article rather than giving general statements about pragmatics and semantics which are already overstated throughout the article.

In other words, the aim of the peer review process is to evaluate the quality and validity of scholarly research before it is published, ensuring that only reliable and credible information is disseminated. In the process of peer reviewing, two or more expert reviewers scrutinize the paper for errors, incongruities, and weaknesses, as could be observed in the excerpt above and confirmed by Jana (2019). This suggests that, among other issues, they look for flaws in experimental design, data collection, statistical analysis, and interpretation of results (Patel, 2014). Identifying and addressing these issues is central to maintaining the integrity of the research. This is an on account that peer review aims to validate the validity and rigor of research findings. Reviewers evaluate whether the research’s design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques are appropriate and robust. This process helps weed out scholarly dialogues that may lack scientific rigor or ethical standards. With this in mind, I must stress that reviewers are not gods of knowledge. This means that they ought to deviate from the idea and mindset that all their comments or engagements to the paper contribute to scholarly rigor. This is based on the premise that, sometimes, even when one differs from the reviewers’ suggestions, they tend to come out strongly, illogical and oppose the researcher’s point of view. In this instance, they may make flawed assumptions that they are gods of knowledge.

This underlines that reviewers while playing a central role in evaluating journal papers, should not be perceived as infallible or possessing ultimate authority over the scholarly quality of a paper. As a matter of fact, reviewers, like all individuals, bring their own perspectives, prejudices, and expertise to the review process (Ceci and Peters, 1982). This means that what one reviewer regards as a critical flaw, another may regard as a minor issue. This subjectivity underscores that reviewers’ comments are not absolute
judgments but rather opinions and assessments. On the grounds of this, I argue that authors or researchers are experts in their own research areas and have in-depth knowledge of their specific research questions and methodologies, among others. Therefore, it cannot be fair for reviewers to presume that they are more knowledgeable than the authors or researchers. While reviewers provide valuable external assessments, they may not possess the same level of expertise as the author in the specific subject matter or topic. That is the reason I remain optimistic that authors have the autonomy to make choices about their scholarly discourses or research, including data sources, methodologies, and interpretations. For this reason, reviewers should embrace this autonomy while providing constructive feedback aimed at strengthening the research or author’s work.

Another central goal of the peer review process is to assess the contribution of the research to the existing body of knowledge in a particular discipline, or in respect of a specific topic. This is because the pursuit of knowledge and the continuous expansion of the existing body of knowledge drive progress and innovation in various fields. New discoveries, insights, and theories help humanity better understand the world and the universe, enabling them to (re)solve complex problems and improve their quality of life. During the process of peer review, the evaluators evaluate whether the research offers original insights, advances understanding, or provides a valuable addition to the literature (Spier, 2002). This is an important component as it ensures that published work contributes meaningfully to the academic discourse. In so doing, it is significant that reviewers do not benchmark the author’s paper with what may appear similar to the existing body of knowledge. Instead, they should appreciate the novelty of the author by delving into the contents of the paper. This denotes that reviewers should focus on evaluating the novelty, contribution, and validity of the researcher’s work rather than simply comparing it to existing knowledge. This is based on the premise that recognizing the unique perspectives and contributions of each manuscript guarantees a fair and comprehensive evaluation, buttressing the advancement of knowledge within the academic community.

The peer review process also serves as a checkpoint for ethical considerations (Walker, 2007). In this process, reviewers check for plagiarism, data fabrication, or ethical transgressions in research (Patel, 2014). This helps maintain the ethical standards of academic publishing and promotes research credence. Peer review provides authors with valuable feedback and constructive responses (Fox et al., 2016). Authors could use this constructive response, as opposed to a destructive response, to refine and filter their work, clarify their arguments, and improve the overall quality of their papers. In addition to this, the iterative nature of peer review recurrently leads to more robust and well-developed research. Resultantly, the peer review process aims to determine whether a paper is suitable for publication in a scholarly journal or even a conference. Accordingly, reviewers’ recommendations guide editors in making informed decisions about whether to accept, revise, or reject a paper, thereupon shaping the content that reaches the academic community. In fact, the feedback loop between authors, reviewers, and editors buttresses continuous improvement, encouraging a dynamic and iterative approach to advancing scientific knowledge. While the peer review process remains significant, it must be underlined herein that it has its challenges such as reviewers who pursue to impose their personal scholarly interests on other researcher’s scholarly discourses. This is discussed in the next section.

**Reviewers who assume an author’s role**

Reviewers who seek to adopt the role of an author during the peer review process can certainly create significant challenges and ethical concerns. I regard this behavior as inappropriate and detrimental to the integrity of the peer review system. For example, reviewers are expected to provide impartial and unbiased assessments of the paper or research (Newton, 2010). In view of this fact, when a reviewer attempts to assume the researcher’s role, it creates a conflict of interest, as they may have their own scholarly agenda or interests that could influence their evaluation. One would recall that the peer review process places reliance on nonpartisan and objective evaluations. For this reason, reviewers ought to focus solely on the quality, cogency, and significance of the scholarly discourses presented in the paper. When a reviewer becomes too personally invested or deviates from the author’s perspective(s), objectivity could be compromised or imperiled (Bloom, 1999). This means that an overly personal investment in a particular perspective or ideology may lead reviewers to dismiss alternative viewpoints or methodologies presented in the paper. This may potentially obstruct the open-mindedness necessary for a thorough peer review.

Smith (2006) makes it clear that the peer review process premises to provide a fair and evenhanded evaluation of research. In spite of this, when a reviewer has a personal stake or agenda related to the topic, it could potentially lead to unfair judgments that may not befittingly mirror the paper’s merits or shortcomings. Bearing this in mind, I argue that to mitigate these problems and concerns, it is perceptive for reviewers to maintain a clear distinction between their role as evaluators and the authors’ role as content creators or engineers of scholarly philosophy. Reviewers should evaluate the paper objectively based on established criteria and their expertise in the discipline. This is in addition to the reality that some journals have principles that reviewers should follow when evaluating the paper. In fact, when a reviewer believes they have a conflict of interest or cannot provide an unprejudiced evaluation, it is their responsibility to disclose this information to the journal and recuse themselves from the review process for that particular paper or research (Lee et al., 2013). Reviewers may impose their personal agendas and assume the role of researchers for various reasons. For instance, they may have inherent cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias which is a tendency to favor information that confirms existing belief systems, or anchoring bias which relies heavily on initial impressions and can influence their assessments (Newman and Luft, 1974). This is in addition to the reality that reviewers may unconsciously prioritize content that aligns with their values, experiences, or preferences.
By means of a scenario, when the reviewer believes that their personal interests are established on Western standards of evaluating African or isiXhosa literature, it stands to reason that they recuse themselves in the peer review process, especially when they suspect that they may be unfair in their judgment. In actuality, it does not stand to reason that reviewers who have the potential to impose their personal narratives and voices are regarded as impartial. Of course, it remains a bone of contention on how to establish impartiality from the reviewers. As a result of this, it could be purported that such reviewers can be detected through consistent ideologies in their domain of knowledge. These consistent ideologies can be observed through the notion that “it cannot be correct unless it has my voice in it” – inevitably muting the voices and creativity of other scholars, particularly novice scholars. By the same token, consistent ideologies among reviewers in a specific arena may lead to a bias that favors certain perspectives, potentially stifling the multiplicity of voices and creativity within academic discourse. This tendency could inadvertently subjugate the contributions of novice scholars or those with alternative viewpoints, underscoring the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity in the peer review system.

In addition to the above assertion, reviewers transitioning into authors can introduce a potential conflict of interest in the peer review process. This is based on the reality that when these reviewers are tasked with evaluating papers that may compete with their own work or align with their research agenda, there is a risk that bias may sabotage the fairness of their assessments. Predominantly, these kinds of reviewers are suffering from what I regard as superiority or inferiority complexities. One manifestation of this bias occurs when these reviewers are more inclined to recommend the rejection of a paper that directly competes with their research. In this scenario, they may perceive the competing work as a threat to their own contributions to the discipline (Hanford, 1994). As a result of this, they may consciously or subconsciously underline blemishes or flaws in the competing paper or downplay its merits, potentially leading to an unjustified recommendation for rejection. In contrast to this, reviewers may display bias by favoring papers that align with their research agenda (Tsang, 2013). By the same token, these reviewers may be more sympathetic to research that supports their own findings or interests, and as a result, they might recommend acceptance even if the paper does not meet the rigorous standards required for publication.

It must be stressed hereunder that such prejudices undermine the core principles of peer review, particularly impartiality and objectivity. As previously highlighted, the peer review process depends on the expertise of reviewers to provide unprejudiced and constructive evaluations. Having said that, when personal interests, such as protecting one’s own research or advancing one’s own narrative and voice, influence the review process, it jeopardizes the fairness and integrity or credence of the evaluation – peer review. Thus, to address this concern, all journals should institute clear principles and ethical standards for reviewers, with more emphasis on the significance of constructive engagement with the paper or manuscript as opposed to destructive engagement. In the process, these guidelines should underscore the importance of neutrality and the disclosure of potential conflicts of interest. Reviewers who perceive conflicts of interest related to their own research or agenda should transparently disclose these conflicts and, if necessary, recuse themselves from reviewing the paper in question.

Beyond this, reviewers play a central role in the peer review process, and their primary objective is to provide constructive and practical feedback to assist authors in enhancing the quality and impact of their scholarly discourses (Cole et al., 1977: 36). This feedback serves to manage the decency of scholarly publishing, guaranteeing that only robust and well-articulated research is disseminated to the public and academic community. Even so, a significant concern emerges when reviewers blur the lines between their role as evaluators and the author’s role as the originator of knowledge. Given this, I argue that the essence of effective peer review lies in constructive response and guidance on the paper or research. Guidance on the paper during the peer review process is crucial as it advances a more productive dialogue between authors and reviewers, contributing to the exchange of knowledge and ideas. In fact, clear guidance helps authors understand the expectations and criteria used for evaluation, ensuring their work aligns with the standards and objectives of the journal or publication. Notably, some reviewers serve contrary to this as they tend to see little or no merits in an individual’s research, without attempting to make strides to assist in improving its quality and shape, as observed in the comment below:

> It is highly unlikely that this [research] ... would capture the collective memory of the past and present African society.

With the above piece of textual evidence in mind, reviewers are entrusted with identifying strengths and weaknesses in the paper, pinpointing areas for improvement, and offering suggestions to heighten the research’s rigor and clarity. The aim is not to demoralize the authors or researchers. Over and above this, the aim is to provide a response in a deferential, thoughtful, and helpful manner. On account of this, reviewers should avoid personal attacks or unwarranted negativity and focus on specific, evidence-based feedback that authors or researchers could use to strengthen their work. As previously mentioned, the idea is not to frustrate authors or researchers but to assist them in producing high-quality research or writing. In any event and bearing in mind that certain reviewers tend to assume the role of researchers or authors, there may be adverse outcomes to this. When reviewers attempt to assume the author’s role, they may inadvertently relocate the focus away from this constructive purpose. In fact, when reviewers use the peer review process as a platform to advance their own ideas and injustices, it can potentially detract from the primary goal of helping authors clarify their scholarly standpoints such as in the case of the aforementioned incident or piece of textual evidence. This may lead to a prejudiced assessment that lacks objectivity, as the reviewer’s personal interests and perspectives come to the forefront.

In the same vein, excessive criticism, unrelated tangents, or attempts to impose the reviewer’s viewpoint on the paper could also undermine the collaborative spirit of the peer review process. It is important to recall that the peer review process should facilitate a
respectful and constructive dialogue between authors and reviewers, with the collective goal of improving the research. Scientific editors are no exception to this endeavor. This denotes that reviewers should adhere to their role as evaluators, focusing on offering constructive feedback and engagement to authors to strengthen their scholarly discourses. Furthermore, attempting to take on the author’s role can potentially lead to unintended consequences, including an erasure of objectivity and the potential for the peer review process to deviate from its intended purpose. Bearing this in mind, I argue and propose that a balanced and constructive approach to peer review significantly benefits the scientific community by promoting rigorous research and scholarly advancement. In addition to this, it helps ensure that research is rigorously scrutinized, enabling the publication of premium work while providing valuable responses to researchers for improvement. This process ultimately contributes to the growth of knowledge and the dissemination of reliable information in the scientific community. Central to the reviewers who tend to assume the role of the researchers or authors, is the issue of alarming, rude, and harsh reviewers. This is discussed in the next section.

**Rude and Harsh Reviewers**

Reviewers who are impolite and destructive could pose significant challenges within the peer review process, as their behavior undermines the integrity and effectiveness of scholarly publishing (Marsh and Ball, 1989). Their rude behavior may be problematic given that the peer review process is a significant component of the scholarly publishing process, designed to promote the quality of research by offering authors constructive responses and valuable feedback in a collegial and deferential manner. Typically, being rude and harsh is problematic in most contexts. This is on account that it harms relationships, creates negative work environments, and leads to misunderstandings and conflicts. Considering this challenge, maintaining a respectful and constructive approach to communication is usually more conducive to effective collaboration and positive interactions in both personal and professional settings. Having said that, when reviewers adopt a rude, harsh, and destructive tone, the purposive benefits of this process – peer review - can be severely compromised. This is because such behavior includes the use of harsh language, personal attacks, or dismissive comments, all of which inhibit productive dialogue and hinder a researcher’s ability to make meaningful revisions to the paper. As I have outlined previously, one of the central purposes of peer review is to assist authors or researchers in refining their work, addressing weaknesses, and strengthening their arguments. For this reason, constructive responses and feedback provide authors with insights into how their research could be improved, which is invaluable for academic growth or development. The constructive manner of responding to research allows authors to view their work from different perspectives, leading to a more robust and well-proportioned final product.

Rude or destructive reviewers, on the other hand, undermine the collaborative nature of the peer review process. In particular, harsh language and personal attacks demoralize authors, causing frustration and potentially discouraging them from continuing their research (Eisenhart, 2002). This adversarial experience not only harms the individual author but also impacts the broader scientific community, as valuable research may go unpublished or unimproved. Harsh and dismissive language that does not, in any way, attempt to assist the author can be observed in the comment below:

> You claim that the focus of the paper is on language death yet, you use a cultural practice, ukweluka, which is an isXhosa initiation to illustrate the point. You seem to suggest that there is a direct relationship between the death of culture and the death of language. This is not necessarily the case because culture evolves just as language does. Even the ukweluka initiation you are referring to is evolving for various reasons.

It is perceptive to observe that the reviewer above missed the point that sought to draw an inter- and intra-relationship between language and culture. As a matter of fact, the paper referred to by the reviewer above was published in another journal wherein the reviewers understood and comprehended the symbiotic relationship between language and culture; and how the two components influence each other. That was the point that I attempted to underline, which, clearly, the reviewer missed. This proves the point that was made earlier that certain reviewers may not entirely be experts in a particular subject or discipline, hence the emergence of comments in this manner. In addition to this, dismissive comments without substantive feedback dismally fail to guide authors or researchers towards the necessary improvements. At times, even meaningful revisions become challenging when reviewers unleash rude and harsh behavior. Thus, reviewers ought to provide specific and actionable feedback that helps authors identify and rectify weaknesses in their papers. It is unintelligent for reviewers to make suggestions that they, themselves, cannot action or implement. Effectively, it is illogical for reviewers to request authors to make corrections or adjustments that, in my view, can categorically be regarded as petty and insignificant.

It must further be underlined herein that authors dedicate significant time, energy, and expertise to conducting research and preparing papers for journal publication. This process signifies a culmination of their intellectual pursuits and contributions to their respective fields. In this context, the role of the reviewers is crucial in configuring the academic landscape. Nevertheless, when reviewers adopt a rude or discouraging demeanor, it can have profound and detrimental effects on authors (Bies and Shapiro, 1987). Fundamentally, rude reviewers, characterized by harsh criticism, personal attacks, or dismissive language, deject and dishearten authors who have invested their intellectual capital in their research. Such negative feedback not only damages authors’ self-credence but also erodes their enthusiasm for research and academic pursuits. In the same vein, the emotional toll of rude and harsh reviewers potentially leads authors to question the value of their work and even contemplate abandoning it altogether (Mavrogenis et al., 2020). The consequences of this demoralization are far-reaching. First, they obstruct academic progress by discouraging talented researchers from continuing their work or pursuing innovative ideas. When researchers feel disheartened or undervalued, they may choose to
exit academia or shift their focus to less ambitious projects in the interest of the very same problematic reviewers. This stifling of creativity and enthusiasm diminishes the pool of innovative ideas that could otherwise accelerate academic advancement and overall scholarship. Second (last), rude and harsh reviewers promote a hostile and discouraging atmosphere within academia. Authors may become wary of the peer review process, regarding it as an obstacle rather than a constructive forum for scholarly improvement. Ultimately, this can lead to a reluctance to submit work for peer review, obstructing the dissemination of valuable research findings, theories, and methodologies. In contrast to this, constructive and respectful peer reviews not only help authors improve their work but also foster a supportive academic environment. In respect of this, authors are more likely to engage in productive dialogue with reviewers and continue to pursue challenging research questions when they feel their contributions are valued.

On account of this, it is important to understand that rude and harsh reviewers tend to immerse themselves in the researcher’s work. For this reason, the behavior of reviewers who assume the role of an author continues to be concerning. This is because such behavior within the peer review process, where reviewers assume the author’s role or let personal interests influence their judgments, has far-reaching consequences beyond the immediate impact on research quality. In fact, early-career researchers, who are already navigating the complex terrain of academia, might particularly be vulnerable to the consequences of prejudiced or unfair reviews. This means that unwarranted rejections or harsh criticisms driven by personal scholarly interests deter them from pursuing research careers or cause undue stress and discouragement (Wilcox, 2009). The net effect of such behavior is the creation of a hostile environment within academia. A hostile environment not only undermines the principles of fairness and objectivity but stifles the diversity of thought and perspectives that are crucial for advancing knowledge. In an inclusive scholarly landscape, diversity fosters innovation, creativity, and the exploration of new research directions. When individuals feel subjugated or excluded, the potential for intellectual enrichment may be erased, if not distorted. In any event, to promote a more inclusive and equitable academic community, it is imperative that reviewers adhere to the highest standards of impartiality and objectivity. Journals and academic institutions should also implement guidelines and training to ensure fair and unbiased peer review. This collective effort can certainly help create an environment where all researchers, regardless of their background or career stage, feel honored, valued, and empowered to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

In a similar fashion, journal editors play a significant role in maintaining the integrity and quality of published research, and one of their challenging responsibilities may be managing reviewers who exhibit rude and destructive behaviors. While constructive critique is essential in the peer review process, addressing reviewers’ unprofessional conduct can be a complex and sensitive undertaking, continually requiring a delicate balance. Over and above this, scientific editors must uphold the principles of constructive feedback by enforcing a collegial approach and system towards the peer review process. This is not necessarily to suggest that scientific editors must interfere with the duties of the reviewers. This is on account that reviewers, as experts in their respective fields, provide valuable insights and suggestions that authors use to enhance their work. In contrast to this viewpoint, scientific editors aim to advance an environment where peer review is a collaborative process aimed at advancing knowledge. On the other hand, managing reviewers who resort to rudeness or destructive behavior may be challenging. Such conduct harms the scholarly discourse, undermines the morale of authors, and deters potential contributors, as said earlier. In my view, scientific editors should consider several factors when addressing this issue. For example, they could set a professional tone for the entire peer review process. In so doing, they should remind reviewers of the importance of respectful communication and adherence to established guidelines for constructive feedback. They can offer guidance and training to reviewers on providing constructive engagement while maintaining professionalism. This training can help reviewers understand the impact of their comments on authors and the scientific community. Some potential recommendations are presented in the next section.

Conclusion

It could be accepted that there are challenges and setbacks within the peer review process concerning journal papers, as explored in the previous sections. In view of this reality, this particular paper presents the following recommendations for possible consideration:

i. Reviewers ought to approach each paper with an open mind, setting aside personal prejudices and beliefs. This approach may potentially help maintain the integrity and credence of the peer review process and advance the dissemination of knowledge based on merit rather than preconceived ideologies.

ii. Among other issues, it is important that reviewers focus on the paper’s content, methodology, and adherence to research standards rather than personal preferences that may be defective. By so doing, reviewers provide valuable and constructive feedback that contributes to the improvement and credibility of the research, ensuring that scholarly work is evaluated based on its scientific merits rather than subjective biases.

iii. Reviewers should provide feedback that is constructive, unpreserved, and aligned with the paper’s objectives. This approach can help researchers comprehend how to improve their work, thereby promoting a positive and supportive peer review process, and ultimately, contributing to the quality and integrity of academic publications. In the process, instead of vague or generalized comments, reviewers should provide specific feedback on different components of the paper, such as methodology, data analysis, or presentation. By the same token, reviewers should acknowledge the paper’s strengths and accomplishments, which can motivate the authors and provide a juxtaposed assessment.

iv. It is equally important to recognize the importance of diversity in perspectives and research methodologies in the scholarly community and avoid imposing one’s own viewpoint on authors or researchers.
For authors, it is crucial to engage constructively with reviewers’ feedback, even when there is a perceived deviation from their perspective. In fact, professional communication and a willingness to consider and address valid points of concern are key to a productive peer review process. In the same vein, journal editors also play a central role in guaranteeing that reviews remain objective and constructive. On account of this, they should monitor the quality of reviews and address instances where personal bias or deviation from the author’s perspective threatens the objectivity of the peer review process. In closing, the role of reviewers in the peer review process is indispensable, as it serves to guarantee the quality, credibility, and integrity of scholarly publications. In spite of this, the title of this particular paper underscores the critical importance of maintaining professionalism, objectivity, and ethical conduct among reviewers. Destructively assuming the role of an author introduces numerous challenges, including conflicts of interest, loss of objectivity, and biased recommendations, all of which can compromise the fairness and rigor of the review process. It also threatens the trustworthiness of scholarly publishing, which relies on the impartial assessment of research by “knowledgeable” experts.

The core principle of peer review is to provide constructive feedback, guide authors in improving their work, and make informed recommendations to journal editors. When reviewers overstep their role by attempting to take on the author’s role, it not only erodes the rudimentary principles of fairness but also disrupts the multi-collaborative nature of the scholarly community. To maintain the integrity of the peer review system, it is imperative that reviewers adhere to their designated roles, exercise objectivity, and approach papers with professionalism and honor. This approach ensures that the peer review process remains a cornerstone of academic quality control and knowledge dissemination, buttressing a robust and trustworthy scholarly environment for researchers, authors, and readers alike. Unlike this paper, which has an ending, intricacies concerning the peer review process continue to be engulfed with challenges, hence the necessity to continue this dialogue.

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