UNIT 2 EDITOR-AUTHOR-PUBLISHER RELATIONSHIP

Structure

2.0 AIMS

This unit discusses how the responsibilities of writing, editing and publishing a manuscript are shared, with special emphasis on the editor-author relationship. It also covers the inter-dependence between editor-author-publisher so that you, as a publishing professional, can appreciate the work of all those involved in the publishing process.

At the end of the unit you will be able to distinguish the role of the editor from that of the author and to describe the different responsibilities of the editor, author and publisher.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The editor, the author and the publisher have a commonality of interests – viz. that the book is well produced, well received and everyone is happy. It is, therefore, important that the interrelationships between the three are well understood from the very beginning. This unit will tell you what the roles of each are and about their inter-dependence.

It will be helpful for you to know at the very beginning of your career, or even if you are midway into your career, that the editor and the author do not have, or should not have, a clash of interests. The editor must be clear about the fact that the credit for the creation of the work will go to the author, and be satisfied to remain in the shadows. His recognition will come from the publisher and author, not from the reader.

The publisher's role is critical to the entire publishing process for he is the one who is investing his resources and money in bringing out a book. We shall, therefore, try to show you how his role is pivotal even if the author, in his own way, too is necessary— if there is no document or manuscript to publish, what will the editor or publisher do?

2.2 AUTHOR'S DEPENDENCE ON PUBLISHER AND EDITOR

The author writes a book in three situations:

1) He writes without a publisher of that kind of book in sight.

2) He may tell a publisher of his own credentials for writing a book on the subject. The publisher may either agree to the proposal, modify it to conform to his own need or reject it outright.

3) The author, in the third case, may decide to make the same proposal to another publisher who may be interested in such a book. The second publisher also has the three choices, which the first publisher had. In case of rejection of the proposal, the author may either abandon his project or may approach one publisher after another.

2.3 EDITOR-AUTHOR-PUBLISHER RELATIONSHIP

Often authors "suspect" that print runs are not revealed to them by publishers. The Author's Guild of India believed this to be "the major bone of contention between authors and publishers" (Jolly, p. 47). Why can't the publisher decide the print run and let the author know? Because "the contract is signed before the manuscript is given to the press. We can't decide how many copies are to be printed....To a suspicious type of author, we even tell him the press where the book is being printed so that he can go and check for himself.."(Ghai, quoted in **Authors and Publishers: Love-Hate Syndrome**, by Jolly, G. S.).

For these and several reasons, the phenomenon of the Vanity Publisher arose. Here an author is willing to pay for the publication of his book and may not care for financial gain even. There are certain publishers who are willing to come to some kind of an arrangement with such authors who wish to publish their works to pander to their 'vanity' hence the term **Vanity Publishing**. Good or bad, this phenomenon exists and must be acknowledged but is not within the scope of this unit.

2.3.1 How a 'Literary Agent' Works

In the case of a literary work of the type which Vikram Seth (**A Suitable Boy**) or Arundhati Roy (**The God of Small Things**) wrote, the norm in Europe and America is to approach what is called a 'literary agent'. Alternatively, the author may submit the book to more than one 'literary agent'.

A 'literary agent' is a freelance evaluator of books, chiefly novels or collections of short stories or of poems. He may work alone, but more often there are teams of 'literary agents' who share the work of evaluating books of different types. These teams of 'literary agents' keep in touch with publishers of different types. The more important 'literary agents' also keep in touch with professional translators who have made it their business to make their own evaluation of books to see if any of them meets the needs or standards of publishers in the language chosen for translation. Thus Arundhati Roy's book was translated and published in more than a dozen languages.

2.3.2 Editor's Role

There are various kinds of editors in publishing houses/firms. The bigger publishing houses may employ one or more **'commissioning'** or **'acquisition'** editors, one or more subject-specific editors and one or more copy editors. The smaller companies, which transact much less business, may make do with a **'commissioning'** and/or a copy editor.

In the smaller publishing houses, the publisher may himself read and evaluate a book, or he may give the copy editor the manuscript to do the necessary detailed editing. No standard formula can be prescribed because there are all sizes of publishing houses. Similarly there are experienced publishers who depend upon their own judgment and are reluctant to delegate responsibility. There are others who delegate responsibility, but insist that the big 'yes' or 'no' should come only with their approval.

After the publisher has broadly indicated his approval of the subject and of its treatment, he passes on the manuscript to an editor, who may be the 'commissioning' or 'acquisition' editor, or to a copy editor. This editor (or editors) is briefed about the contents and treatment of the subject, what is the audience it is targeted at and how to edit the manuscript.

2.3.3 Author's Responsibilities

The author has, apart from spinning out a yarn about the subject, four major responsibilities:

a) He must ensure that the book is set in the milieu to which the text belongs. For instance, author Arundhati Roy in her book (**The God of Small Things**) has taken care that since the plot of the book is set in a small Kerala town, all the family relationships and the smells and sounds of a small town in Kerala come through to the reader.

b) He must ensure, as far as humanly possibly, that the grammar is not faulty.

c) He must ensure that the punctuation throughout the book cannot be faulted.

d) He must make sure that the capitalization is impeccable as far as he can manage.

A sentence or a paragraph beginning with a small letter puts off the editor and the reader, if left unattended. Similarly the name of a person beginning with a small letter, or sometimes with the capital letter and sometimes with the small letter, puts an unnecessary burden on the editor.

Far too many authors think it is the editor's responsibility to ensure proper capitalization or punctuation. Especially among reporters and writers for newspapers and magazines, it is not infrequent in this country to bang away on the typewriter (nowadays the computer) without caring for capitalization or punctuation.

Many authors seem to feel that a word processing program will take care of capitalization and spellings but this is not so. The editor will still have his work cut out even if the author has submitted a clean, word-processed copy.

The fact is that any manuscript published, whether in book form or as part of a newspaper or magazine, is the joint responsibility of the author, the publisher and the editor. After all, it is in the interest of all three that the book sells well. Since the manuscript starts with the author, it is his responsibility to make it as correct and complete as possible in all respects including punctuation and capitalization.

2.3.4 Publisher's Responsibilities

From the author the manuscript goes to the publisher in the case of a book and to the editor in the case of a newspaper or magazine article or news item. But the publisher's responsibilities are very different from the author's or the editor's.

The publisher looks at the manuscript from the marketing point of view. He must ask the following questions:

a) What is the audience for this kind of published material?

b) Will the manuscript entertain, inform or appeal to the emotions of the audience?

c) Is the book, newspaper, or magazine compelling enough for a large enough audience to buy it?

d) What typeface will be suitable for this kind of manuscript, and what title will be the best to attract attention?

e) What kind of illustrations will attract attention to the text?

f) In one word, what can be the best strategy to 'sell' the text to the audience?

g) Is the author a known authority on the subject so that the audience will be compelled to give attention to the text? Or is the manuscript a compilation of known facts and incidents?

It is possible that the publisher will be irritated by wrong punctuation or grammar or improper capitalization in the text. If that happens, he/she can take one of the following steps:

i) If the author is not an acknowledged authority on the subject, his manuscript may not be published.

ii) If the author is an authority on the subject, the publisher or the 'commissioning' or 'acquisition' editor may brief the subject-specific or a copy editor to look for these aberrations and correct them.

iii) Sometimes, even if the author is an authority on the subject, the publisher or the 'commissioning' or 'acquisition' editor may prefer next time to 'commission' a less well-known authority on the subject, an author who is better in the use of the language.

Activity 1

An author who is an authority on Pakistan submits a manuscript in the following style:

The pakistan Foreign Minister Shri Sartaj Aziz today met the Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, in Colombo, after official-level talks between the two sides, were deadlocked. Aziz and Jaswant, the two ministers worked out a formula to break the deadlock.

What will be the reaction of the publisher or editor to this piece?

Answer in the space given below in 50 words:

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of this unit)

2.4 PUBLISHER'S DEPENDENCE ON AUTHOR AND EDITOR

We have seen earlier how the author is dependent on the publisher, and will see later how he is dependent on the editor. The fact is that there is a three-way relationship of interdependence among the three. We have also seen that writing, editing and publishing are three parts of a joint effort.

The publisher's focus is on marketing a given text. He envisions who will be the audience, how numerous the audience will be, and whether the audience will be motivated enough to buy, given the degree of authority the author has on the subject.

Let us consider a manuscript on the dependence of the Kerala people on water. The publisher gets it but has been to Kerala only twice and each time for two days to attend weddings. He observed that Keralites bathe twice a day. But bathing is a habit in most parts of India. Secondly, he had no occasion to notice that Keralites have a

a) heavy dependence on fish, both from rivers and ponds and from the sea;

b) heavy dependence on water-borne transport to travel;

c) heavy dependence on water to irrigate their rice fields, coconut groves and areca nut plantations; and

d) an almost complete dependence on water for their rubber plantations.

Further the publisher does not know that the majority of households in Kerala have their own private ponds or stretches of stream. He also does not know that almost every household in the State has its own coconut grove even if it consists of only a handful of trees. Hence the publisher has to depend on the author's credibility. If the author has done no serious research, has not stayed in Kerala for any length of time and has written only from general observation and from conversations with Keralites, the book will mislead readers. If, further, the author has lifted passages from publications in Kerala, it will be a bigger flop. Besides, what credibility will the publisher and his company have after publishing such a book?

Let us remember that the audience for such a publication will be researchers and Keralites living outside the State who want to know more about the State. Many of those living within Kerala may want to know more about various communities living within the State.

A case worthy of being cited is Mr Romesh Bhandari's book on Goa. Bhandari is a Punjabi who has spent most of his life in the Indian Foreign Service, working in Indian embassies abroad or in Delhi and retiring as Foreign Secretary. Then he fought an election to the Lok Sabha and was, for brief periods, Governor of a few states. Among these states was Goa where he was Governor for about two years. He makes the claim in the book that the material for it was collected from exclusive sources.

Reviewers of the book in various prestigious magazines and newspapers have a different tale to tell. They have quoted passages from various published works about Goa purporting to show that many of Bhandari's assertions in the book are straight lifts from serious research work published at various times from the seventeenth century onwards. Indeed, some reviewers have cited instances from Bhandari's book purporting to show that the spellings, history and even names of some of Goa's monuments are wrongly quoted. If the reviewers are to be believed, Bhandari has pulled a fast one on the publisher.

The publisher's dependence on the editor or editors is equally heavy. A bad editor can do slipshod editing, spoiling the book's market. He can also be guilty of oversight. A good editor, given the kind of manuscript provided by Bhandari on Goa, will do some research himself on Goa to find out how far the assertions made by the author are correct.

2.5 HOW AN EDITOR FUNCTIONS

Once the manuscript comes to the editor, it becomes his baby. He cannot take refuge in assertions like 'this is what the author wrote, what can I do?' He has the following duties:

a) The editor must read the manuscript carefully and make his own assessment of its suitability for publication. Suitability includes an assessment of the audience. What

classes of people are likely to be interested in the publication and how numerous are these classes? Is the manuscript informative, entertaining and valuable enough to compel a sizeable number of the audience to buy the resultant publication? Will the publication be of enduring value, or will it become outdated after a time? Is the target audience of students of a particular discipline, or housewives, or adolescents, or children?

Assuming that the manuscript has a great deal of valuable information on a subject, is it published in a language with which most of the target readership is comfortable?

Activity 2

A researcher collects and intelligently interprets a large amount of valuable data on the economic condition of landless labourers in the backward eastern UP district Ballia. He submits the manuscript written in impeccable Tamil to a large publisher in the city of Varanasi. How can the manuscript be used? Give your answer in the space provided below:

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of this unit.)

b) Having read the manuscript, the editor finds that his assessment of it varies markedly from the briefing given by the publisher. In the case of the research work on the landless labourers of Ballia, the briefing given was to edit the manuscript for publication.

The editor's assessment is that though the manuscript is a valuable piece of research, if published it will find few takers. This is because it is in Tamil which very few people in the North interested in Ballia know. Besides, Tamil-knowing scholars in the South are by and large not likely to be interested in Ballia.

What should the editor do? A simple solution is to get the manuscript translated into Hindi or English, preferably both, and publish it. That way it will reach a very large audience of scholars interested in Ballia. The editor's duty is to give such advice to the publisher. The matter is discussed and it is decided to get the Tamil text translated into Hindi and English.

c) The third important duty of the editor now is to go through the manuscript para by para, sentence-by-sentence and word-by-word.

The idea is to look for things like discrepancies of facts, repetitions, etc. It is possible that the author's sample consisted of 10,000 persons in Ballia whom he laboriously interviewed or from whom he got a questionnaire filled, but while writing the report he mentioned by oversight the figure of 1,000. However, where the details are given, the total of persons giving various answers comes to 10,000 and not 1,000.

The solution to this type of situation is not to jump to the conclusion that the author has slipped up. It is the duty of the editor to ask the author whether his sample consisted of 10,000 persons or 1,000 persons. This consultation may take place preferably through a face-to-face meeting where the discrepancy is sorted

out wherever it occurs throughout the research work. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, correspondence is the only solution.

M. Chalapathi Rao, who was editor of the National Herald, Lucknow, for about three decades from 1948 and was considered a great copy editor apart from being a brilliant writer and political analyst, was a great one for such attention to detail. Time without number he would spot the same news item going at two places on the same page of the same edition of the daily. Often a local news item would come from a news agency and would be included in the news-in-brief column, and a detailed report filed by a staff reporter would be on the same page as a separate news item. On several occasions he noticed that in a cricket score board the total of all the runs scored did not tally with the total as given in the news story accompanying it.

d) When the editor is examining the manuscript sentence-by-sentence and word-by-word, he may notice wrong expressions used. Or he may notice that different words or expressions have been used to describe the same kind of situations. Where this is an obvious slip, the editor may make the words or expressions uniform. But in most cases the editor has to consult the author whether he means one thing or the other.

e) It is also the duty of the editor to watch out for aberrations of grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. 'Ram Dhan a landless labourer, works in the rice fields of Shri Kant, a landlord' has one comma missing. It should be 'Ram Dhan, a landless labourer, works....' This is because 'a landless labourer' is a parenthetical clause describing who Ram Dhan is.

An example of faulty capitalization is: 'To the east of the farm is a temple, to the West the road connecting the village to the town.' If 'east' begins with a small letter, why should 'West' begin with the capital letter? Ideally, both should begin with a small letter.

Where, however, east, west, north and south refer to specific regions and not to specific directions, it is better to begin each of them with a capital letter. In such cases it is preferable to point this out to the author and arrive at a consensus.

Activity 3

Pinpoint, in the space provided below, the capitalization mistakes in the following sentence:

'Hindi is the predominant language in the north where almost everyone understands it, but in the South there are four distinct languages and in the west there are two.'

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.)

f) In most languages, but more especially in English, the sequence of words makes a vital difference. Here is an example of a wrong sequence of words making the meaning of a sentence different from what was intended:

'Sita bought a skirt from an old woman that was bright red.'

The author obviously meant that the skirt was bright red. He could not have meant that the old woman was bright red. Yet the sequence of words as given makes it appear that the old woman was bright red. It is the editor's duty to reword the sentence in such a way that it is clear that the skirt and not the old woman was bright red. The sentence should be reworded as follows:

'Sita bought a bright red skirt from an old woman.'

Similarly 'Shyam alone came to school' is not the same thing as 'Shyam came to school alone.' When the word 'alone' comes immediately after 'Shyam', it means that he was the only one to come to school. When, however, the word 'alone' comes last in the sentence, it means Shyam was not accompanied by anyone while coming to school.

Let us accept that none of the two sentences about Shyam coming to school is wrong. It is a question of divining what the author meant to say. Frequently this can be done from the context. Where, however, there is the slightest doubt what the author meant to say, it is safer to consult him.

2.6 AUTHOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The author is well within his or her rights to decide what to write, whom to approach for publishing his or her work and even to withdraw it or have second thoughts. But this creates ill-will in an industry of the world's worst kept secrets. Word will go around and the possibility of his finding a willing publisher will be dim indeed. Earlier, of course, it was easy to 'catch' an author who makes multiple submissions because the carbon copy could always be identified but in the days of technology, each copy is a first copy. However, the uneasy truce between authors and publishers is warning enough that ethics cannot be so easily forgotten.

To deliver the manuscript in time, to read the proofs, making only corrections and changing at the most ten percent of the text, the first time around, to listen to the suggestions of the publisher/editor and to supply copyright information, illustrations or to index the book are just a few of the author's responsibilities. The Agreement with the Publisher (discussed elsewhere) would cover the details.

2.7 A 'MANTRA' FOR ALL

Both the author and the editor must pay heed to the following mantra:

'If it is worth writing/editing, it is worth checking/revising; if it is not worth checking/revising, it is not worth writing/editing.'

All of us have seen how newspapers and magazines frequently, and books occasionally, are pockmarked with mistakes. In some cases this may be because the author could not word his sentences properly. In most cases, however, this is because the author neglected to revise what he wrote.

In this matter, the responsibility of the editor is greater than the author's. The author's attention is divided between fashioning a plot for the manuscript and crafting the sentences. The editor's primary responsibility is the careful scrutiny of the grammar, spellings, punctuation and capitalization. The plot and the crafted sentences have already come from the author. Occasionally, the editor may have to reword sentences and paragraphs to make them more intelligible for the reader. We have seen the example of

Sita buying a bright red skirt and Shyam coming to school. If the crafting of some sentences is confusing as in the examples given above, it is the duty of the editor to clear up the confusion. But while clearing up the confusion, it is mandatory for the editor to revise what he has done. It is negligence first by the author and then by the editor to saddle the reader with the sentence "Shyam alone came to school" when what was meant was that he was not accompanied by anyone while coming to school.

2.8 SUMMING UP

Publishing a manuscript is a joint effort of the author, the publisher and the editor. The author provides the manuscript, the publisher accepts it, rejects it or briefs the editor on how to edit it, and the editor edits it.

In Europe and America, there is the institution of the 'literary agent' who is a freelance evaluator of manuscripts. The author submits the manuscript to the 'literary agent' who, after making his own evaluation, approaches the most appropriate publisher with his recommendation.

The publisher makes his own evaluation, sometimes assisted by a 'commissioning' or 'acquisition' editor, and then briefs the subject-specific editor on how to edit it.

The subject-specific editor makes sure that the spellings, grammar, punctuation and capitalization are correct and uniform.

Finally, what is worth writing/editing is worth checking/revising; if it is not worth checking/revising, it is not worth writing/editing.

2.9 AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

Pakistan should begin with a capital P. Shri is a uniquely Indian horrific. It should be Mr. Sartaj Aziz. Jaswant Singh should have a Shri or Mr. in the beginning. The commas after Colombo and sides are incorrect. It should be Mr. Aziz and Shri or Mr. Jaswant Singh. The publisher and editor will be irritated by such shoddy writing and punctuation.

Activity 2

A manuscript on the landless labourers of Ballia in eastern UP should be in Hindi and /or English, not in Tamil. It should be translated, accordingly.

Activity 3

Like South, North and West should each begin with a capital letter.

2.10 FURTHER READING

1) Course 3 "Writing for Children" **Creative Writing in English** Programme, (IGNOU)

2) Jolly, G. S. **Authors and Publishers: Love-Hate Syndrome**, Har-Anand Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi © G S Jolly.

3) Robinson, Patricia A. **Fundamentals of Technical Writing,** Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston, 1985) TchEdWrt@netscape.net