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ORIGINAL STUDY

Language Proficiency and *moves* in Turkish and English Research Abstracts

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ABSTRACT

The primary function of the abstract within a research article is to convince readers of the study's significance, encapsulating specific details such as its purpose, methodology, results, and discussions and/or conclusions. Notably, scholarly attention has been directed towards the rhetorical structures employed in abstracts found in scientific journals, as authors are believed to employ diverse structures to present their articles in an engaging manner that captures readers' interest. The varied rhetorical structures used in research article abstracts are often referred to as “moves”. This study investigated the impact of language proficiency and translation on these moves. Six Ph.D. students from the Department of Turkish Language and Literature of a state university in Turkey were tasked with composing abstracts for four published articles in a social science journal in Turkish. A month later, they were requested to write abstracts for the same articles in English. Subsequent analysis compared both sets of abstracts in terms of the moves they incorporated. It was observed that the introduction, purpose, result, and conclusion sections were present in abstracts written in both languages. However, notably, the method section was absent from abstracts in both Turkish and English. Additionally, it was found that the introduction section tended to be the longest in the abstracts regardless of the language, despite no statistically significant difference in the word count between the Turkish and English versions. The findings suggested that the differences were discipline, language proficiency, and writing conventions related.

Keywords: Moves, Turkish, English, Research abstracts

Introduction

There has been a rise in the number of scientific papers published thanks to the various opportunities presented via the Internet and online databases. Although this may sound like a source of joy for many researchers, sifting through a huge pile of papers only to reach the information needed is, in a way, looking for a needle in a haystack. Therefore, research article abstracts (RAAs) have become nearly as important as the research itself

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since they provide the information a researcher requires at a glance. As Kafes (2015: 240) mentions, RAAs act as a valuable tool for a researcher “who is challenged by digesting and synthesizing the ever-increasing flow of information in a limited time on the one hand and who has to ‘publish in order not to perish’ (Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008 cited in Kafes, 2015) on the other hand.” The author briefly summarizes the study and aims to present it to a wider audience to convince the readers about the merit of the study (Hyland, 2000). The authors and the audience have different but intertwined motives before writing/reading RAAs. The authors aim to persuade the audience to read the article by presenting certain information about the study while the readers seek information that suits their needs. In a way, RAAs are like samples of products that buyers try before purchasing and so, the importance of RAAs is undeniably clear for writers and readers.

As noted by Çakır and Fidan (2015), there has been considerable scholarly interest in the rhetorical structures of abstracts featured in scientific journals. This interest stems from the belief that authors employ diverse structures to present their articles in a compelling manner that captivates readers’ attention. Consequently, the study of abstracts offers insights into the cognitive processes of authors, as rhetorical structures serve as intriguing structures to analyze. This reflects authors’ strategies for engaging readers’ interest and highlights how they strategically craft their abstracts to attract attention.

Apart from presenting a persuasive abstract, the language of the article is also another factor that needs to be taken into consideration by the authors when publishing a research article. As Ahmadi (2022) highlights, English has become the dominant language of scientific communication and publication, which has led to the widespread adoption of English writing conventions in academic circles worldwide. As a result, it is quite normal for a researcher, willingly or unwillingly, to choose to publish in English to reach a global audience and increase the impact of their work. In this sense, strong English academic writing skills are crucial for building a solid academic reputation, nationally and internationally. However, non-native speakers of English are not as competent as native speakers to publish in English, naturally, and many non-native English-speaking authors struggle to achieve the necessary level of proficiency compared to native speakers of English (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003). Therefore, it is quite reasonable to see non-native speakers of English employ some strategies to overcome the language gap. Methodologies for enhancing text quality may encompass, but are not restricted to, the utilization of software applications, the implementation of writing assessment tools, and the execution of translation procedures. In this sense, since English has become a lingua franca, “translation and interpreting have become central to promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the information society and the development of multilingual content in global media networks and the audiovisual marketplace” (Baker & Pérez-González, 2011: 39). Therefore, to reach a broader audience, a non-native English speaker may prefer writing a paper in his/her native language, translating it into English and publishing the paper in English. In fact, as mentioned above, machine translation or software to translate any document into another language has often been used since the introduction of AI. AI and software have become an effective way out of the burden of publishing in English for non-native speakers of English. Along with the processing capabilities and the enormous data background of computers, computers have become faster and more efficient in nearly every language-related process. Unsurprisingly, this has reinforced the dominance of English in the world since the most informed design of input and output in machine translations is in English (Baker & Pérez-González, 2011). Also, since machine translation depends on vast corpora and databases, they have become more and more effective, and translating a research article abstract, as well as the article itself, has enabled any scholar to publish in English easily.

Nevertheless, when there is no access to any kind of AI, the translation of an article made by a non-native speaker will certainly differ from the translation done by the software. This study aims to focus on the rhetorical structures in research article abstracts written in the author's native language and their translations in a target language to see if there are any differences between the rhetorical structures in the research article abstracts.

Background of the study

As mentioned above, authors include specific information about the study in the research article abstracts (RAAs) to prove the scientific merit of the paper to the audience. The model developed by [Swales \(1990\)](#) puts forward some concepts for the analysis of the introduction section of a research article and is known as the Create a Research Space (CARS) model. In his model, [Swales \(1990\)](#) puts forward two concepts: move and step. As [Swales \(2004: 228–229\)](#) describes, a move is “the discursual or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse”. In other words, the coherent organization of structures to convey an idea in a written or spoken discourse can be called a move. On the other hand, a “step” is considered a subordinate action, positioned beneath each move. Each step serves a specific communicative function that aligns with the communicative intent of each move. The sequence of rhetorical moves as proposed by [Swales \(1990\)](#) includes three moves: establishing a territory (move 1), establishing a niche (move 2), and presenting the work (move 3). According to this framework, research article introductions typically commence by establishing the overarching subject under discussion. Within this initial move, authors may underscore the topic's significance within the field. Subsequently, authors carve out a distinct niche for their work within this established territory through various means, such as identifying gaps in previous research to justify their forthcoming study. This could involve presenting counterclaims, raising questions, or aligning with existing traditions to delineate a research space. In the concluding move, the authors delineate how their work contributes to filling this space, the niche. They may outline their research objectives, introduce the current study, highlight key findings, or provide insights into the structure of the research article.

Although different authors propose different names for the moves, the five-move pattern proposed by [Hyland \(2000\)](#) can be accepted to cover all the moves proposed by [Swales \(1990\)](#). [Hyland \(2000\)](#) introduces the concept of the five-move analysis aimed at discerning the distinctive features of abstracts as a recognizable genre. These moves, or communicative categories, encompass Introduction (Move 1), Purpose (Move 2), Method (Move 3), Product (Move 4), and Conclusion (Move 5), each fulfilling distinct communicative functions. For instance, Move 1 establishes the study's context and the authors set the stage for the paper and introduce the study of interest. Move 2 outlines its purposes and the researchers present the main reason for the study. Move 3 provides details on the research methodology, including the design of the study, and the how and what of the data. Move 4 presents the primary research findings. There, the authors give the findings of the study or the outcomes found as the data obtained, and Move 5 interprets results or discusses broader implications and elaborates on the results of the study.

Both the frameworks of [Swales \(1990\)](#) and [Hyland \(2000\)](#) are widely acknowledged and are frequently employed in academic settings, even though some studies follow different naming conventions. For example, in the study by [Soy et al. \(2023\)](#), which analyzes RAAs in high-impact international journals, five moves are identified and Background (Introduction) and Objective (Purpose) are regarded as conventional, while the rest of the moves are optional, and Introduction, Purpose, and Synthesis of Discussion (Product) being

the common move pattern. However, regardless of the model, as pointed out by [Swales \(1990\)](#), there can be changes in the weights of the move patterns in the abstract based on the discipline, writing conventions, or the language of the writers. For instance, in some research article abstracts (RAAs) published in different disciplines, a move can be found to be obligatory while another move might be absent. In a study comparing the structure of research article abstracts (RAAs) across three applied linguistics sub-disciplines (English for specific purposes (ESP), psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics), [Saidi and Khazaei \(2021\)](#) analyze 120 RAAs and report Purpose, Method, and Product to be the most common moves across all three sub-disciplines. They also show that while ESP and psycholinguistics abstracts in their corpus include Introduction and Conclusion moves more frequently than sociolinguistics abstracts, no statistically significant structural differences between the sub-disciplines in their use of the five moves are found. In another study focusing on the differences between disciplines and moves, [Samraj \(2005\)](#) compares RAAs in conservation biology and wildlife behavior and finds greater similarity in function and organization among these elements in conservation biology than in wildlife behavior and concludes that disciplinary differences in academic writing affect not only the structure of individual genres but also the relationships between them. [Pho \(2008\)](#) analyzes 30 RAAs published in applied linguistics and educational technology, compares the rhetorical structures, and finds that Presenting the Research, Describing the Methodology, and Summarizing the Results are the three obligatory moves found in these disciplines.

Depending on the conventions of the language the research article is written, the use of rhetorical structures might also vary. For instance, at the end of the study analyzing the use of first-person singular and plural subject pronouns in textbooks used for teaching Turkish to foreigners, [Güçlü \(2024\)](#) suggests that the first-person plural is used as an engagement marker and more frequently, which might be attributed to the agglutinative and pro-drop nature of Turkish along with a more collective identity tendency seen in Turkish culture. Therefore, writing rhetorical structures affected by sociocultural conventions can lead to differences among the moves used in RAAs written in different languages. For example, [Farzannia and Farnia \(2017\)](#) study 60 English and Persian Mining Engineering RAAs to identify rhetorical moves and find four conventional moves in the English abstracts and five in the Persian ones. However, while a statistically significant difference is seen in Purpose between the two languages, no significant difference is seen for Product, Method, and Conclusion moves. [Viera \(2019\)](#) compares the rhetorical organization of 80 RAAs of humanities (education and sociology) and science (electronics and agronomy) published in Ecuadorian and American journals and finds a rhetorical variation across disciplines and a non-hierarchical five-move structure with three stable moves (Purpose, Method, and Product). The findings support the idea that discursive conventions and discourse community practices influence writers' rhetorical choices. [Martin \(2003\)](#) compares the rhetorical structures of RAAs in experimental social sciences, examining differences between English-language abstracts in international journals and Spanish-language abstracts in Spanish journals. [Martin \(2003\)](#) finds that Spanish abstracts generally adhere to international conventions established by the English-speaking academic community, including the four basic moves (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Conclusion). However, he also comes across some differences, especially in the frequency of the Results and Purpose. He concludes that such variations likely reflect differing expectations within the international and Spanish scientific communities. [Al-Khasawneh \(2017\)](#) analyzes twenty applied linguistics abstracts written by native and non-native English speakers, selected from prominent journals in the field, and explores differences in the rhetorical structure of these abstracts. In the end, it is seen that while both groups follow the three moves of Purpose, Method, and Conclusion, significant differences are found in the Introduction and Conclusion moves.

The native speakers use these two moves more frequently than non-native speakers. Another study utilizing two corpora of RAAs written by native and non-native speakers of English by [Ahmadi \(2022\)](#) compares the commonalities and distinctions in how Moves are used. [Ahmadi \(2022\)](#) reports that although the frequency and sequencing of Moves and Steps differ significantly between the corpora, similar types of Moves are seen. Both groups of researchers consistently include background information, results, and discussions. However, notable differences in their commenting strategies (i.e., the Steps taken) are found. [Ahmadi \(2022\)](#) suggests that sociocultural conventions are likely to be responsible for the varying use of specific Moves and Steps. The author concludes that the main reasons for such differences depend on translation strategies, and they “notably affect rhetorical structures”. In another study comparing the introduction sections of PhD theses written in English and Spanish, [Soler-Monreal et al. \(2011\)](#) focus on the relationship between the authors’ linguistic backgrounds and the use of rhetorical strategies. They report that Spanish theses generally require “Establishing the Territory” and “Occupying the Niche” (moves 1 and 3), with “Establishing the Niche” (move 2) being optional while English theses more closely follow the M1-M2-M3 sequence and exhibit more complex organization through move combinations and embedding. While both languages rely on background information and work presentation, English introductions emphasize the writer’s original work and its contribution more strongly, displaying more embedding and overlapping steps.

As Turkish speakers are not native speakers of English, there is a whole body of research on moves and the way authors use them in their abstracts in Turkish (see [Çakır and Fidan, 2015](#) for a list of studies). Yet, similar studies comparing moves can be found in Turkish as well. For instance, [Kafes \(2015\)](#) compares English and Turkish research article abstracts (RAAs) to determine if authors from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds use the same rhetorical strategies and linguistic expressions. The findings show that while Turkish academic writers largely adhere to North American abstract writing conventions, they also maintain aspects of their local academic writing culture, particularly by consistently using a three-move structure (Presenting the research, Methodology, and Results). On the other hand, [Çeşme and Yağız \(2020\)](#) form a corpus including 150 RAs (75 Anglophone and 75 Turkish writers) on English language teaching, analyze the rhetorical structures, and report some moderate variations but similar rhetorical organization in both groups. [\(2018\)](#) analyzes 75 research article introductions in English (by American writers) and in English and Turkish (by Turkish writers) and shows that while all three groups generally follow the moves in [Swales, \(1990\)](#) framework, they differ in the frequency of specific steps. [\(2018\)](#) reports that Turkish writers’ introductions, in both English and Turkish, largely resemble English discourse conventions with some variations reflecting local Turkish academic writing practices, which might be based on socio-cultural factors.

Also, speakers, as well as writers of native languages, feel more free when they are writing or speaking in their native tongue and this might lead to differences in the use of rhetorical structures ([Al-Khasawneh, 2017](#); [Farzannia and Farnia, 2017](#); [Martin, 2003](#)). However, unless an author of an article is competent in another foreign language, s/he uses his/her native language as a stepping-stone and in most cases, s/he translates the abstract into the target language, which might lead to differences in the rhetorical structures used. For instance, in a study concerning the effect of translation, [Cunha and Mikel \(2010\)](#) point out that the abstracts they study have differences in the use of moves, even though they are translations of the same abstracts. Yet, keeping a possibly cross-culturally oriented difference at hand, studies comparing moves in translated abstracts are very rare.

Based on the assumption that disciplines and languages might have different writing conventions to affect rhetorical structures in RAAs, this preliminary study focuses on

comparing the move strategies used by Turkish scholars in both English and Turkish abstracts. To be more precise, the objective of the present study is to find out if translation leads to a difference in the rhetorical structures and the number of words used in RAAs written in the native language (Turkish) and target language (English). Therefore, this study sets out to answer the following research questions:

- Is there a difference between the moves in RAAs written in Turkish and their translated versions in English?
- Is there a difference in the number of words used in the move structures in RAAs written in Turkish and their translated versions in English?

Method

Participants and corpus

Unlike some studies in the literature that focused on participants from English language medium departments, non-foreign language-related departments were focused in the study. The reason for that was to see the effects of translation better because participants from English language medium departments would have higher levels of proficiency and would be more involved in the writing conventions of English. However, it was assumed that participants with lower levels of English might reveal more clear-cut differences in translation as they were neither taught nor involved in English writing conventions. Also, the participants were expected to have an academic background since writing RAAs required some academic training. Therefore, participants from the Turkish Language and Literature department of a state university were asked to take part in the study as they fit the requirements of the study better. In the end, six Ph.D. candidates from the Turkish Language and Literature Department of a state university volunteered to take part in the study. They were native speakers of Turkish and their ages ranged from 28 to 32 (four male, two female). Since they were required to have a certain score from the national language exams according to the regulations, they also had an intermediate level of English according to their scores and their statements.

As the participants were of social sciences background, the corpus included randomly selected four articles published in 2014 (Volume 1) in *Temâşâ Journal of Philosophy*, an international journal publishing papers on philosophy in Turkish and English. However, the corpus included the articles written by Turkish native speakers only. Also, although every article selected for the corpus was written in Turkish and had Turkish and English abstracts, their abstracts were discarded, and the corpus included full-text articles only.

Data collection

To see if translation would lead to differences in the rhetorical structures and the number of words used in the abstracts in different languages, the participants were asked to write an abstract for each full-text article in Turkish under the supervision of the researcher. Since there were four different articles, the abstracts were to contain a minimum of 150 words to minimize fatigue. A month later, the participants were asked to write a similar abstract for each article in English, and they were provided with Turkish-English dictionaries only. However, before data collection, they were asked if they would like to take their previous abstracts in Turkish and translate or re-write the abstracts in English, which resulted in translating the previous abstracts, which had been anticipated. The first session took one hour while the second session lasted for two hours including a fifteen-minute break.

Analysis of the rhetorical structures

The RAAs were analyzed to determine the presence or absence of rhetorical moves and the distribution of move patterns across the texts using the framework proposed by Hyland (2000). This involved identifying and classifying each move within each abstract. Grammar and/or spelling mistakes were corrected and the total number of moves was calculated for each text. Also, the number of words used in every move structure in every abstract was recorded. To ensure reliability, in addition to the researcher, another linguist analyzed the moves independently and their findings for each abstract were compared to verify the results. To see if translation affected the move patterns used in the abstracts, the types of the moves in abstracts were compared and the number of words used in each move across languages were analyzed via *Independent samples t-test*.

Results

First, the data was analyzed for the presence or absence of the moves. The introduction, purpose, result (product), and conclusion sections were present in every abstract in Turkish and English. However, regardless of the language, the move about the methodology section of the study was absent in all abstracts. Secondly, the total number of words used in abstracts in Turkish and English were compared cumulatively and separately in terms of the move they were in. It was seen that there was not a statistically significant difference between the total number of words used in abstracts written in Turkish ($M = 135.13$, $SD = 35.15$) and English ($M = 126.75$, $SD = 44.70$, $t(30) = .583$, $p = .564$). The number of words used in every move in Turkish and English abstracts was compared separately as well. As mentioned above, the move concerning the methodology section of the study was not present in any abstract and was not included in the analysis. Yet, the statistical analysis showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the number of words used in the introduction section in English ($M = 43.00$, $SD = 10.15$) and Turkish abstracts ($M = 22.75$, $SD = 13.65$, $t(5) = 2.144$, $p = .074$). Similarly, the difference between the number of words used in the purpose section in English ($M = 20.00$, $SD = 14.53$) and Turkish abstracts ($M = 28.50$, $SD = 19.49$) was not statistically significant ($t(5) = .630$, $p = .556$). The difference between the number of words used in the product (result) section in English ($M = 12.00$, $SD = 8.00$) and Turkish abstracts ($M = 28.00$, $SD = 23.81$) was not statistically significant ($t(4) = 1.103$, $p = .332$) either. Finally, no statistically significant difference was found between the number of words used in the conclusion section in English ($M = 13.00$, $SD = 7.00$) and Turkish abstracts ($M = 35.00$, $SD = 18.74$, $t(4) = 1.905$, $p = .129$).

Discussion and conclusion

The present study sets out to see if translation, as a reflection of low language level, leads to a difference in the rhetorical structures and the number of words used in RAAs written in the native language (Turkish) and target language (English). As for the answer to the first question, the results should be discussed concerning the discipline. In terms of the moves used in the abstracts, except for the move where the methodology of the study was to be explained briefly, every other move was present. In other words, the moves including the introduction, purpose, result, and conclusion sections were present regardless of the language the abstract was written in. In this sense, it can be said that the frameworks by Hyland (2000) and Swales (1990) were actively presented in the abstracts as most of

the research on moves suggested (e.g., [Soler-Monreal et al., 2011](#); [Kafes, 2015](#); [Çeşme and Yağız, 2020](#); [Al-Khasawneh, 2017](#); [Martin, 2003](#)). However, as mentioned above, the methodology section was missing in every abstract, which was different from the findings of [Samraj \(2005\)](#), [Pho \(2008\)](#), [Çakır and Fidan \(2015\)](#), and [Saidi and Khazaei \(2021\)](#), where the method section was always present in RAAs. Interestingly, in their study, [Çakır and Fidan \(2015\)](#) reported that only introduction and conclusion moves were optional, and other moves, including Method, were obligatory. This might be related to the discipline in which the abstracts were written. This study included participants and a corpus from social sciences. The research papers were taken from a journal of philosophy and the participants were from the Turkish Language and Literature department. As the articles were of philosophical origin, they were theoretical instead of experimental. If this was not the case, the participants should have excluded one or more moves as well, but the only missing move was related to the experimental aspect of any research paper. Therefore, the methodology might have been left aside, not only by the participants but by the original authors themselves. In fact, though some studies reported variations among RAAs (e.g., [Çeşme and Yağız, 2020](#); [Kafes, 2015](#), [2018](#)), they also reported that those variations were minor. In this sense, concerning the relationship between the weighting of the moves and the discipline the study belongs to, the findings seemed to support the assumption of [Swales \(1990\)](#). Another possible reason for the discrepancy between the findings concerning the absence of the methodology move and the literature might be related to the nature of the papers compared. The studies analyzed in the literature were taken from journals, which received comments and revisions suggested by reviewers. In other words, reviewers might have affected the RAAs and asked the authors to include some moves in the abstracts. However, all the RAAs in the present study were written by the participants and were neither reviewed nor written to publish. In other words, they were only written for the sake of this study, which might have caused the absence of the methodology move.

Regarding the other research question of the study, the effect of translation on the number of words used in abstracts, no statistically significant difference between the number of words used in different moves was seen. However, when inspected closely, it could be seen that the participants used more words when writing in Turkish. This was an expected finding since the native language of the participants was Turkish. Also, they had limited language proficiency (intermediate level of English) to re-write or summarize the papers in English. Therefore, when they were asked to write new abstracts for the papers, they preferred translation, and while translating they might have trimmed down some sentences in Turkish and written them as short, simple, and comprehensible as they could. However, they were competent in Turkish and as [Al-Khasawneh \(2017\)](#), [Farzannia and Farnia \(2017\)](#), and [Martin \(2003\)](#) suggested, speaking or writing in the native language might have led to differences in the use of rhetorical structures in the target languages. In this sense, the findings in the number of words in every move are similar to [Cunha and Mikel \(2010\)](#), who claimed that translation caused differences in moves in different languages, even though no statistically significant difference was seen.

Another finding worth mentioning was the length of the moves. The first move, the introduction section, was the longest in Turkish and English abstracts. At first glance, this might propose that as the participants were native speakers of Turkish, they extended the introduction section by summarizing the article instead of translating it, which might have felt easier due to their competence in their native language or more common in their discipline. However, this was not the case only in Turkish and the abstracts written in English had a similar length. Therefore, this might suggest that the participants paid more attention to introducing the paper to the audience and focused more on presenting the background of the study or making a pitch for the work. Given that the introduction

section exhibited the highest word count in both Turkish and English, one could posit that participants may have perceived the cultivation of a favorable impression through the presentation of a comparatively extensive introduction as significant, irrespective of linguistic context.

Move patterns can be accepted as reflections of idiolects in written form. They are used widely in abstracts of research articles to attract the attention of the audience and there are different models of moves as classified in the literature. The study aimed to find out if there was a difference between the moves in abstracts written in Turkish and English as well as the number of words used in the move structures to see if translation, as a result, would affect the moves. It was found that except for one move, the methodology, every other move was present in the abstracts written in Turkish and English. In addition, the abstracts written in Turkish had more words in every move than the ones in English but there was no statistically significant difference and the introduction section was the longest in Turkish and English abstracts. In the end, the findings were accepted to be discipline, language proficiency, and writing conventions related.

Since this was a preliminary study, there were some limitations and even though the findings might point to certain outcomes, they should be treated with care. In this sense, in a future study, a higher number of participants could be used for a broader view to represent the effects of translation on move structures. Also, although the departments of the participants and the articles used in the study were of the social sciences origin, they might not be suitable to suggest a generalized opinion on moves and language proficiency. In a future study, participants from language departments can be asked to re-write or translate research abstracts, and the effects of translation on moves can be analyzed. Also, to highlight the discipline-based differences in RAAs, a new study including participants and papers from physical and social sciences can be designed to see the presence and absence of any moves across disciplines. Yet, this paper can be used to shed light on future studies on move structures, language proficiency, and translation.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Author contribution

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

AI usage statement

During the preparation of this work, the author used Claude.ai to improve language and readability. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the publication's content.

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