When we talk about proofreading and (copy-)editing services, precisely what is meant by these terms, what is involved, and what is the difference between them?

Needless to say, very formal and detailed (and long) definitions of the two things exist in many places (see, for example, the Society for Editors and Proofreaders FAQ webpage: http://www.sfep.org.uk/about/faqs/).

Sometimes a practical example can provide a far more powerful explanation, so here is an example of the application of simple **proofreading**:

You can see that the changes typically concern minor details. Thus, in order of appearance:

- A full stop after the section number has been removed to reflect the document style in use;
- Hyphenation of a term ('decision making') has been changed to match the style that has been applied throughout the rest of the document;
- An extra, unnecessary word ('in') has been removed;
- A minor grammatical correction has been made ('studies **on**' changed to 'studies **of**');
- A singular noun has been replaced with the more appropriate plural ('emphas**es**' instead of 'emphas**is**');
- Unnecessary commas have been removed from the first set of citations to bring them in line with the format in use in the document;
- A Latin abbreviation (et al.) has been italicized as per the Oxford Style Guide.

The construction and content of the text itself has barely been changed at all. Great care and experience have been applied to the text in order to pick out such details but, because

the underlying text is not being changed, such proofreading can be conducted relatively quickly.

Just how quickly typically depends on the complexity of the text. Very technical text, for example, has to be checked more thoroughly: a mistake in some technical manuals could be life-threatening, and there can be little or no approximation in scientific, technical and legal texts (something I spent much of my earlier career trying to explain to non-technical project managers). As a result, these take longer to proofread (or copy-edit) than a piece of fictional prose, for example.

Now let's take a look at a piece of **copy-editing**:

Religion works alongside culture to ~~operate at~~influence all levels of contraceptive decision -making. Polygyny, an institution supported in Nigeria by both culture and religion, protects the interests of patriarchy and has been argued by representatives ~~from~~ of w~~W~~omen's groups to ~~lack an engagement with~~have been largely ignored in terms of its ~~the~~ consequences ~~of polygyny~~ for fertility within the targets set ~~in~~at the policy. They protested the four~~4~~ births per woman target as discriminatory because men, by contrast, were allowed by custom and religious law to have as many children ~~per~~ by each of their wives, subject ~~the limited number of wives within~~to their available resources ~~as allowed by customary and religious laws~~ (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1988; Dixon-Mueller & Germain

The most obvious difference to the proofreading example above is the much larger amount of change, again highlighted in blue. Careful study of the text reveals that the content has undergone some minor change – which is, ideally, as it should be, preserving the author's essential intention and expression – but the construction of that content has changed much more significantly. This is not only to improve the grammatical correctness of the text (something that proofreading may also do), but also to improve its clarity and readability. The impact of this can be seen more clearly by comparison of the original text (a) with the copy-edited version (b):

(a)

Religion works alongside culture to operate at all levels of contraceptive decision-making. Polygyny, an institution supported in Nigeria by culture and religion, protects the interests of patriarchy and has been argued by representatives from Women's groups to lack an engagement with the consequences of polygyny for fertility within the targets set at the policy. They protested the 4 births per woman target as discriminatory because men were allowed to have as many children per the limited number of wives within their resources as allowed by customary and religious laws (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1988; Dixon-Mueller &

(b)

Religion works alongside culture to influence all levels of contraceptive decision making. Polygyny, an institution supported in Nigeria by both culture and religion, protects the interests of patriarchy and has been argued by representatives of women's groups to have been largely ignored in terms of its consequences for fertility within the targets set in the policy. They protested the four births per woman target as discriminatory because men, by contrast, were allowed by custom and religious law to have as many children by each of their wives, subject to their available resources (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1988; Dixon-

Copy-editing is a much more intensive process than proofreading. It demands more imagination and more grasp of the subject in order to put oneself in the author's shoes and maintain his or her essential voice, and it also demands the vocabulary to find the correct words to enhance the clarity and expression of that voice. In consequence, it is a slower process than proofreading.

The amount of editing applied to the copy in the example above represents a typical median: some paragraphs will be changed less, some will be changed more. With some non-native English writers, in particular, a much heavier and more time-consuming edit may be required, as in the following example (with changes highlighted in red this time):

Finally, from ~~the point of view of improvement in~~ accuracy of estimates, ~~improvement point of view —~~ "~~s~~Super~~-~~ stable" schedules should be considered as a potential sign of problems. A ~~z~~Zero bias in ~~accuracy of~~ estimat~~ion~~ accuracy~~es~~ is ~~least likely~~very unlikely to be achieved and the~~.~~ ~~l~~Lack of ~~existence of~~any such residual volatility may indicate the presence of inefficiency. It may be ~~an example~~ the result of hidden and "consumed" overestimation, ~~extensive~~ use of over-extended resources, or ~~and potentially~~ other potential factors. In addition, the data collected ~~data~~ indicates that there are some ~~unique~~ particular cases where the ~~number~~ amount of legal regulation and/or other constraints~~s,~~ ~~constraints~~ effectively remove ~~voids sense and~~any possibility ~~to~~ of ~~efficiently~~ improv~~ing~~e the accuracy of estimates in an efficient fashion. Some examples of this were found in the public sector.

Again, the original text (c) and edited version (d) are presented to clarify the impact of the changes made:

(c)

Finally, from accuracy of estimates improvement point of view - "Super stable" schedules should be considered as a sign of problems. Zero bias in accuracy of estimates is least likely to be achieved. Lack of existence of residual volatility may indicate inefficiency. It may be an example of hidden and "consumed" overestimation, extensive use of resources and potentially other factors. In addition, collected data indicates that there are some unique cases where number of legal regulations, constraints voids sense and possibility to efficiently improve accuracy of estimates. Some examples were found in public sector.

(d)

Finally, from the point of view of improvement in accuracy of estimates, "super-stable" schedules should be considered as a potential sign of problems. A zero bias in estimation accuracy is very unlikely to be achieved and the lack of any such residual volatility may indicate the presence of inefficiency. It may be the result of hidden and "consumed" overestimation, use of over-extended resources, or other potential factors. In addition, the data collected indicates that there are some particular cases where the amount of legal regulation and/or other constraints effectively remove any possibility of improving the accuracy of estimates in an efficient fashion. Some examples of this were found in the public sector.

There's now quite a lot of difference between the two and we are entering the territory of developmental editing, in which a piece of work is substantially rewritten and/or restructured to ensure that it is logical, consistent and its message is conveyed successfully to its intended audience. Here at *The Language Editor*, we refer to this as **premium editing**. A background in an area related to the subject matter becomes important for editors working at this level.

All work undergoes the cycle of developmental (premium) editing to start with, even if only by the author themself, followed by copy-editing and finally proofreading. In practice, most work we receive requires some proofreading, some copy-editing and some premium editing. The service we offer is tailored to the material provided and it is usually only by seeing a sample that we can advise you as to where the balance between these lies in your own work, how much time and effort will be required as a result, and how much it will therefore cost!