

Editorial

The Emperor of All Academic and Cultural Maladies in Scientific Writing: Plagiarism and Auto-Plagiarism

As Editor-in-Chief, I got a note in August 2011 that a suspected highly overlapping of word to word repetition was found in a Lancet article (*Lancet*, 2004 Sep 11-17, 364(9438), 985-996) and an article published in *Curr. Drug Targets Inflamm. Allergy*, 2005 Dec, 4(6), 675-683. The source was: “Emerging targets of COPD therapy” by Barnes PJ, National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College, London, UK.

At that time, I was not responsible for the journal, but now, I am responsible for an adequate reaction to this note.

Plagiarism can be separated into two parts: plagiarism of ideas and plagiarism of words (verbatim) [1]. Plagiarism in any form is a scientific misconduct, even fraud, and can be hazardous to any career. It is apparently that many leading academics and administrators are extremely reluctant to take actions against plagiarist colleagues – especially against well-known and recognized senior academics, who support the phrase “publish” or “perish” for their own success, for the success of (in-) dependent individuals and research institutions. Moreover, as long as it is believed that scientific money follows those articles published in highly ranked and indexed journals, mainstream-wise and not unconventional ideas, plagiarizers might speculate that laziness is the most likely cause and excuse of plagiarism for authors, and especially for those who are not native English speakers and lack to generate an original text.

The significance of plagiarism can vary widely, depends on its extent and context in which it occurs. One sentence or paragraph would not usually be cause for concern, whereas sections and paragraphs copied almost verbatim would be considered a gross violation of academic norms.

Any retraction of a paper should follow the COPE guidelines and, above all, the author(s) should be given a chance to respond to the comments. I tried to establish this contact, but failed. Dr. Peter Barnes is in respect to his publication oeuvre with more than 1300 publications listed in PubMed- NCBI an outstanding research person and clinician. Because of the academic privation experienced, the publishing house Bentham Science and I decided to retract the paper by Peter Barnes from *Inflammation & Allergy - Drug Targets*.

We are fully aware that this act will not tackle Dr. Barnes’s ranking within the clinician stardom and this misconduct is not heralded far and wide in the academic world. But it is a sign and attempt to reduce authors’ temptation taking and using as one’s own thoughts, writings, or inventions of another or, to increase personally the number of publications by essentially duplicating a previously published paper.

We know that money and politics are also behind this plague of plagiarism. As long as the academics receive bonuses and promotions based on how much they publish and not based on what is the predictable impact of the publication e.g. for the society, for the human being, for the patient or for the natural environment, in general, for the increasing quality of life at this planet earth, episodes of committed plagiarism will have their ups and downs in science.

As an Editor-in-Chief, I am committed to fight against scientific fraud. This journal is especially widely open to invite and accept articles from those scientific communities of the world, where growing science becomes a hallmark for the future, for freedom, social and financial prosperity and we should therefore encourage the best and brightest students, researchers and clinicians from these countries not to start the “publishing career” by plagiarism, but to rely on the ethical education, scientific self-confidence, knowledge and scientific curiosity. The purpose of any publication is to show the own thinking and not to create a patchwork of borrowed ideas. However, it is the individual’s intellectual performance to give proper references to all the readings and ideas encountering during the process of chain studying and eventually solving a problem or answering a scientific question.

Electronic informations are easily available, but that does not mean that they are “free”. For example, the numbers of websites that have the endorsements of universities are steadily increasing and part/all of the content for a certain theme can easily be downloaded to be used for “copy” and “paste”. Resist the temptation to use this material without giving those people the credit

who actually deserve it. Many software programs for detection of plagiarism are now developed to counter-attacking this misconduct [2].

Plagiarism is a complex, socially, financially and culturally constructed loaded concept which causes a lot of individual and society oriented problems – it is a crime against the academic community within one unified and scientific world. It is an important and mandatory task of universities, editors of scientific journals and administrators/academic staff to educate as a preventive approach the young academics to take away the anxiety of plagiarism from them by encouraging recognition of and engagement with cultural diversity in scientific writing, but in parallel, to obey ethos and values of academic honesty and integrity. Any deviation from this philosophy constitutes academic misconduct and should incur appropriate sanctions.

REFERENCES

- [1] Roig, M. Plagiarism and paraphrasing criteria of college and university professors. *Ethics Behav.*, **2001**, 33(3), 307-323.
- [2] Habibzadeh, F.; Marcovitch, H. Plagiarism: the emperor's new clothes. *Eur. Sci. Edit.*, **2011**,59(3): 67- 69.

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