

Detective stories: references in manuscripts

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Guidelines or Instructions for Authors, however long or short they may be, always contain information about how to prepare the references, often causing stress to authors because of different house styles. However, it is frustrating to find again and again that some authors do not care to check their references for accuracy (with all the technical possibilities they now have and of which we could not even dream 30 years ago). It seems they just copy some of the references, certainly without having read the paper, but also without realizing that there is always a risk involved in doing so.

As editors, we first check the submissions. At this step the “reference detective story” often begins. For example, we may spot names that catch our attention:

“AHMAD, A.K., GLALAMREZE, S. M and RENATO V. (2005): Agricultural risk analysis in Fars province of Iran: A Risk-Programming Approach: *In Agricultural and Resources Economics*; U.K: University of New England.”

Here I found two names that alerted my editorial eye: Glalamreze (I perceived this name as rather strange) and Renato (indicative of an Italian first name, and that turned out to be correct). A Google search yielded no results. I therefore asked the author to provide me with the title page of the original. It arrived the next day. I was not surprised when I saw the names: Ahmad Ali Kehkha, Gholamreza Soltani Muhammadi, and Renato Villano. No wonder that I could not trace the work myself. A European editor may be puzzled by the Arabic names. A few emails with the author resulted in clarifying the order of cited authors’ last names. It is always advisable to double-check the correct writing of names.

Another, rather humorous example:

“ARTHUR F.H., DAVID W.H., PAUL W.F., CARL R.R., THOMAS W.P. (2006): Insect Populations in grain residue associated with commercial Kansas grain elevator. *Journal of Stored Product Research*, (42):226-239.”

These were the last three lines on a page, and, as I was fishing for misprints or spaces, suddenly the line filled with a string of first names caught my attention: Arthur, David, Paul, Carl and Thomas. Immediately I checked the Web of Science and this was the result:

Insect populations in grain residues associated with commercial Kansas grain elevators

Author(s): Arthur, FH (Arthur, FH); Hagstrum, DW (Hagstrum, DW); Flinn, PW (Flinn, PW); Reed, CR (Reed, CR); Phillips, TW (Phillips, TW)

Source: JOURNAL OF STORED PRODUCTS RESEARCH Volume: 42 Issue: 2 Pages: 226-239 DOI: 10.1016/j.jspr.2005.02.003 Published: 2006

We keep pointing out to authors their duty to provide exact references and yet we find again and again some authors ignoring these simple requests. Here is another such example of utter ignorance on the part of authors:

“AMADOR B.M., YAMADA S., YAMAGUCHI T., PUENTE E.R., SERRANO N.A.V., HERNANDEZ J.L.G., AGUILAR R.L., DIEGUEZ E.T., GARIBAY A.N. (2007): Influence of calcium silicate on growth, physiological parameters and mineral nutrition in two legume species under salt stress. *Journal of Agronomy and Crop Science* 193: 413-421.”

A search in the Web of Science resulted in the following: Influence of calcium silicate on growth, physiological parameters and mineral nutrition in two legume species under salt stress

By: Murillo-Amador, B (Murillo-Amador, B.); Yamada, S (Yamada, S.); Yamaguchi, T (Yamaguchi, T.); Rueda-Puente, E (Rueda-Puente, E.); Avila-Serrano, N (Avila-Serrano, N.); Garcia-Hernandez, JL (Garcia-Hernandez, J. L.); Lopez-Aguilar, R (Lopez-Aguilar, R.); Troyo-Dieguez, E (Troyo-Dieguez, E.); Nieto-Garibay, A (Nieto-Garibay, A.). JOURNAL OF AGRONOMY AND CROP SCIENCE, Volume: 193, Issue: 6, Pages: 413-421 Published: DEC 2007

At least the two Japanese authors had their names in good order.

Another example, with two citations: the citing author paid no attention whatsoever to the names of the cited authors. Otherwise he could have noticed the problem with the last author in the two following references as they occurred in the manuscript:

“Faixová Z, Faix S, Maková Z, Prosbová M (2004): Ruminant enzyme activities in sheep from industrially exposed area, *Folia veterinaria*, 48,161-164.

Faixova Z, Faix S, Zuzana M, Vaczi P and Marta P (2006): Effect of divalent ions on ruminal enzyme activities in sheep, *Acta Veterinaria (Beograd)*, 56,1,17-23.”

It should perhaps be added that these three examples come from manuscripts of African authors. Their own names differ substantially from any others and it may well be that some authors just do not have the right feel for other types of names and therefore may easily produce or miss errors, as in the above examples. Such cultural differences may cause problems, and the authors should pay even more attention to the preparation of references. Going to the original paper is the only remedy. A quick and superficial Google search may just perpetuate all these mistakes. Another kind of cultural differences may, I imagine, arise for authors using different types of

script (eg Arabic or Chinese logograms) in their mother tongue – these authors often have difficulty using correct punctuation, spacing and upper- or lower-case letters in names of persons and journals when using the Latin script.

Valuable for us, editors, is our experience and feel for journals and their age – so when we discover a citation like this:

“Urmenyi, A.M.C., Franklin, A.W., 1961. Neonatal death from pigmented coliform infection. *Lancet* 1, 313-315”

we know there is something wrong. However, this citation can be found many times in Google. The Web of Science shows the entry as 1961, volume 1, issue 717. There seems to be a different citing system in WoS, since a search of *The Lancet* itself results in the following information:

Neonatal death from pigmented coliform infection, A.M.C. Urmenyi M.D. Berne, A. White Franklin M.B. Lond., F.R.C.P., Feb 11, 1961, *The Lancet*, Vol. 277 No. 7172 pp 313-315

By the way, this title is rather interesting, too. I can hardly imagine a pigmented infection.

With these examples I want to show how stubborn we need to be in this kind of detective work; we cannot rely on authors themselves despite all the information retrieval systems they may or may not have access to. The core of these problems, however, seems to be in often hastily prepared manuscripts. Pressure for time, pressure to publish bring along these unfortunate results - superficiality and lack of critical thinking on the part of many authors. Not only wine but also a scientific article should be given time to ripen.

The question is, how deep do we have to dig into information resources, how much energy do we have to spend? How much education should we give to our authors? How can we make them understand that they undermine their own credibility besides adding extra work for editors and reviewers, and robbing the incorrectly cited authors of their citations?

Red and green apples: can your readers tell the difference?

Worldwide, up to 8% of men cannot distinguish red from green yet authors and journals frequently use this colour combination in figures.

Allred *et al*, in a letter to *Nature*, call for all journals to provide alternative versions of figures that are more accessible to such individuals.

Editors: Does your journal allow for this?

Freelancers: Are your authors aware of this?

Reference

S. Colby Allred, William J. Schreiner, Oliver Smithies. Colour blindness: Still too many red-green figures. *Nature* 2014; Volume 510, p340. doi:10.1038/510340e

Plagiarism – a prevalent and persistent problem

Denys Wheatley

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Stealing works of others

Many editors can become suspicious of plagiarism, and we have to rely on several different ways of detecting it before being certain. In science, we rely heavily on accurate definitions. Plagiarism is “the act of or practice of plagiarising”, a plagiarist being “one who steals the thoughts and writings and gives them out as his own” (Latin word *plagiararius* means kidnapper). For an excellent article on the basic features of plagiarism, see Karen Shashok’s chapter in the *Science Editors’ Handbook*, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2506-1390.

We are concerned with the misuse of more than just the act of stealing other people’s writing, which creates many problems for the literary sleuth regarding any publication. Stealing other people’s *thoughts* must be a much trickier business, and the mind boggles at how it can be policed. Plagiarism is a frequent research misconduct, but its prevalence is not known; we probably see only the tip of the iceberg. There are several questions we, as editors and researchers, have to address: (i) when is it an unintentional rather than an intentional act; (ii) when is it truly “stealing”; (iii) how can we detect as much of it as possible; (iv) what sanctions or penalties are appropriate for offenders, particularly persistent offenders; and (v) how can we prevent plagiarism and educate authors to ethically write their articles without infringing copyright law?

Culture versus copyrights

Editors, authors and publishers have to realise that there can be instances where plagiarism is rooted in culture. In China, for example, quoting verbatim words of one’s mentor is an act of reverence, and no direct attribution is necessarily given. Chinese authors submitting their papers to international periodicals and other publications should conform to globally acceptable rules of scientific communication and respect copyrights. My most embarrassing occasion as an editor was when *Cell Biology International* published a paper in good faith that failed to be detected as an almost complete plagiarism of another paper by a completely unrelated set of authors, with only the cell type used being different. Indeed it was as close to duplication as one can get before the editor of the first one published in 2007 contacted us (*International Journal of Cardiology* 118, 381–388, 2007: Compare *Cell Biology International* 32, 899-905, 2008). A major problem is what the editor and publisher can do about papers, especially those in hard copy, that have gone into the public domain. A withdrawal notice can be issued, but it is always too late and usually goes unnoticed. Today, online papers can be wiped, but sometimes they will still be listed in publication databases.