

EASE-Forum Digest: June to September 2015

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How can authors credit work when they did not approve the manuscript?

Moira Hudson posed the scenario of a person who had taken part in a study and was an author during the preparation of a manuscript but had been removed before submission for failing to approve the final draft. She needed advice on how that person could reference his or her involvement in the study in a curriculum vitae (CV) or funding application. Tom Lang suggested an explanation in the article's acknowledgments and on the CV, listing this or the article with the person as a dissenting author. Andrew Davis thought there could be no justification for claiming credit for the paper because guidelines required all who met requirements to be listed as authors. On the contrary, said Tom citing Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet* (but he could not find the citation), an author could withdraw his or her name from a manuscript. The issue was viewed as one for the authors not for a journal to police or investigate. Tom posted the question on the WAME listserver, where George Lundberg, a former editor of *JAMA*, pointed to the "Manuscripts Based on the Same Database" section of the ICMJE Recommendations that had been created after a dispute involving Erdem Cantekin, details of which could be found in the pdf of the 2008 version of the ICMJE's Uniform Requirements. He said that at *JAMA* they would try to get the authors to agree to a revision and reject the paper if this failed. Conclusions that go beyond the data were one of the greatest errors authors made and should in his view be preventable by journal editors. An alternative would be a formal acknowledgement specifying the contributions, but not the disagreements, with the wording approved by the dissenter. The editor could also solicit a letter to the editor from the author in which the different conclusions would be stated and explained. Steve Goodman from *Annals of Internal Medicine* agreed stressing the author should certainly document his or her perspective and intellectual contribution made to the original paper in the literature.

Guidelines for transparency in writing style

Reme Melero posted a link to a bibliography of papers on plagiarism, most of which are in English but some are in Spanish and Italian.

Ed Hull was surprised that guidelines on publication ethics did not include transparency in the style of writing articles. Unless an article was clearly understandable, he considered it could be neither transparent nor credible—no matter how robust the data and the research. Like Ed, Andrew Davis encouraged his students to write clearly but the students questioned why they should struggle when published papers were not written clearly and ethics guidelines not followed. In his opinion, scientific publishing was becoming less clear,

statistics were increasingly used inappropriately or wrongly and the proliferation of guidelines had not been reflected in any improvement. Journal editors, indeed everybody involved in the publication process, have a responsibility to resolve these problems. Ed agreed and suggested EASE could motivate journals to be more critical of what they publish.

Are book chapters worth the effort?

Tamar Sadan had been asked to write a book chapter but was wondering whether writing it would be worth the effort. He had read a posting by Kent Anderson on Scholarly Kitchen titled "Bury Your Writing—Why Do Academic Book Chapters Fail to Generate Citations?" Kent referred to Oxford University professor Dorothy Bishop's comparison of citations generated by academic book chapters and journal articles. Using Google Scholar, she found the book chapter citation rate was about 1/3rd of that of the articles. (<http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/08/28/bury-your-writing-why-do-academic-book-chapters-fail-to-generate-citations/>)

Tamar was also interested in the chances of publishers allowing online access to individual chapters (even based on a fee) or agreeing to the author uploading the chapter onto an institutional server.

Tom thought that although chapters are of little value in academia and were not financially rewarding, writing one could be good for authors early in their careers. Françoise Salager-Meyer mentioned that Handbooks attracted more citations in general than "regular" books. Kersti Wagstaff had noticed in the comments after the Scholarly Kitchen blog entry that some publishers tagged book chapters and made them indexable and accessible online. She suggested asking the publishers if they intended to do this and Irene Hames added they should also be asked if the individual chapters would have DOIs. Another concern, raised by Elaine Seery, was the lack of peer review, but perhaps a chapter could form a basis for a future article submitted to a peer-reviewed journal (although a journal could consider a chapter a prior publication)?

Do copyeditors edit out pompous words?

As style manuals often advise us to favour a shorter word over a longer one and avoid pompous words in scientific text, I asked whether people were surprised by the words listed and their order in the article titled "The Increasing pseudodignification of medical prose" (EASE journal, ESE, May 2015) which traces the increase in prevalence of some words in scientific text compared with in general English. I was also interested to know if copyeditors changed the words to simpler/more precise/less pompous words.

Tom retorted research (he did not give a citation) showed that not shorter but more familiar words were desirable. Andrew Davis gave an example: his Japanese students knew 'gradient' but were flummoxed by 'slope'. Aleksandra Golebiowska, who is Polish, had not understood 'smug' until she had been told that it meant 'self-congratulatory'. When I put these examples to Neville Goodman, the author

of the ESE article, he said it did not surprise him that gradient (a jargon word in maths) was better understood than slope; and smug was unlikely to be part of schoolchild English. He thought that for most of his paired words the favoured were familiar.

In Andrew's experience words were often more familiar to authors than to their readers. It was important for authors to correctly identify their readership. 'Pompous words', he added, were anyway not necessarily related to length or familiarity. I rejoined asking if the repetitive use of the same words (administer, perform, elucidate) might be a reason for scientific text being boring to read. I also suspected most non-natives knew the more familiar words and I asked why learning some vocabulary could be a problem.

Elisabeth Heseltine agreed—I thought—that simpler words were preferable, pointing out that 90% of readers did not speak English as their first language. The English they learnt was correct, basic English and they did not need to have it complicated by multisyllabic words when simpler words were all that were needed. The English of scientific articles should be simple, correct and listed in a dictionary. Neologisms and unnecessary abbreviations and acronyms may be fun for native English speakers but they were no fun for a busy non-native-English-speaking scientist. Andrew understood her comment to mean a scientific paper should not be a medium for teaching readers vocabulary. He viewed scientific papers as a stereotyped format for information transfer and anything that made the transfer less effective was to be avoided. For him, the excitement in a scientific paper should be in the material, not in the vocabulary used. Accordingly, he did actually edit out obscure, unfamiliar and pompous words!

Françoise passed the question to her (medical graduate) Venezuelan students to whom she teaches scientific reading and writing. Only 8% replied that they found scientific papers boring, but she mentioned that they were not specifically referring to stylistic matters but more to conceptual ones. The rest found the papers interesting and helpful (Neville thought they must have been reading the wrong papers!). She wondered if it was only native English speakers who found scholarly papers boring. I asked her if other factors could have influenced her students' replies, eg a reluctance to admit that they found the papers hard to understand because they believed they were to blame as they perhaps lacked linguistic competence. I also suggested that non-native English speakers were less critical of poor English style. She agreed, although she preferred to think that her students thought that they were not competent enough in English to judge whether a paper was well written or not. They were thus not critical of (poor) English style precisely because of their rather low level of English competence. She moreover wondered whether one could appreciate if a paper was well or poorly written if one did not understand well enough the content of a paper. Not only that, as most of her students wrote rather poorly in their mother tongue but were nonetheless convinced that what they wrote was properly written, how could they tell the difference between a well and a poorly written paper in a foreign language? In any event, when writing papers in

English, Françoise's students imitated what they had read and considered native (English) speakers' prose as a model that should be followed. They were used to seeing words such as 'elucidate' or 'perform' over and over again, and considered them normal. Furthermore, such 'pompous' words were often of Latin origin and were therefore more familiar to Spanish speakers than 'give', 'do' etc. She concluded by saying that native English-speaking scientists had a huge responsibility because their non-native English-speaking counterparts tended to imitate their prose.

Experiences with large editing companies

Pippa Smart asked for recommendations and comments about large editing companies, which she defined as editorially anonymous companies as opposed to small independent editing companies who provided personalized service. Anna Sharman, who runs a small editing company, had worked with larger companies and listed the main ones worldwide: Edanz (China/Japan), Enago/Crimson (India), Editage (India) and American Journal Experts (AJE, USA). She was most familiar with Edanz and MSC, which she found to be good and to pay well enough. Editage and Enago were often discussed on the SfEP forum, mainly regarding low rates of pay. Nearly all the companies she listed recruited professional freelance editors but she was sceptical of AJE because they used postgraduate students and postdocs at US universities rather than professional editors. She thought that most of the large academic publishers who provided their own language editing service were actually using AJE.

Based on the turn around times and fees Andrew had seen advertised by the large companies, he had difficulty believing that their editing was thorough. He suspected they were using PhD students from low-income locations such as Bangladesh or Malaysia. Alan Hopkins also thought the fees were low and gave an example of a UK-based company advertising a fee of 9 GBP per 1000 words. This surely meant the copyeditors could not be spending much time on each job. He thought such fee levels were absurd in the context of the size of many research contracts. Alan, however, found the main problem to be copyeditors' lack of familiarity with the terminology of the subject. This view was supported by Judith Baggott's comment. She had enlisted the help of an American company to revise some text and found the copyeditor flagged questions mainly, Judith thought, because he or she had not tried to figure out what the author wanted to say and did not know the subject area well enough.

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