

## EASE-Forum Digest: December 2011 to March 2012

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### One or two subjects

Yateendra Joshi asked for views on whether the subject in the following sentence takes a singular or plural verb 'the classification and identification of XYZ [is/are] based mainly on morphological characters'. Most respondents thought there were two subjects and favoured the plural. John Taylor mulled over the possibility that classification and identification were being used jointly as one criteria, when the singular would be correct. However he thought the plural would be correct if the organisms are to be classified firstly according to their structure and secondly according to their identification.

The sentence sounded strange in any event to Mary Ellen Kerans who suggested a re-write: XYZ is identified and classified mainly based on morphology/morphological characteristics/morphological features." This view was echoed by Peter Hovenkamp who believed the solution might be to delete either classification or identification because one implies or excludes the other.

Francoise Salager-Meyer compared 'classification and identification' as two subjects with collective nouns, which she saw as singular subjects. She gave 'the council is unanimous in their decision' as an example of a collective noun (council) taking a singular verb. Maria Craig considered that in this example Americans would use 'is' and the British 'are'. Elisabeth Heseltine went a bit further and quoted Fowler as an authority for British English allowing either the singular or plural and American English favouring the singular. The argument in my (British English) experience is that if the collective noun (council, majority, public or whatever) acts as a single unit, as the council does in Francois's example because all members of the council think the same way, it takes the singular but if the council were to disagree they would not be acting as a single unit and would therefore take a plural noun, i.e. The council are not unanimous in their decision'. Stuart Handysides saw things slightly differently. He thought the council should always take a plural verb because it must have the opportunity of being other than agreed.

### Which version is the original?

The Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education has

changed its criteria for evaluating those scientific journals that do not have an impact factor. Marcin was concerned that the change threatens to exclude many good foreign journals as publication venues for Polish authors. The Ministry has proclaimed that to be evaluated every issue must include a statement as to whether the original version, defined as the one which was published first, is online or in print. Angela Turner had not heard of this requirement but each article in her journal, *Animal Behaviour* published by Elsevier, gives the online publication date. She pointed out that as it is usual for journals to publish articles online first it would be pointless to include a statement about whether articles appeared in print or online first. Marcin agreed but this was what the Ministry wanted.

Liz Wager raised the point of which version was considered the definitive 'publication of record'. She had noticed that there was considerable variation in what publishers post online. Some post the accepted version before it has been copyedited or typeset, others post the version after copyediting but before typesetting, others after these procedures but before the proof is corrected and yet others post the corrected proof, i.e. the print version without page numbers or the print version with page numbers. Some, like the *BMJ*, post a longer version online than in print and consider the online version the definitive version. She added that CrossRef are about to launch CrossMark which will identify the definitive and latest version of the article (<http://www.crossref.org/crossmark/index.html>) and a speaker will be explaining this at the EASE conference in Tallin this year.

### Do journals consider long abstracts online prior publication?

Conference abstracts used to be short and published in a booklet given to participants at the conference but there is an increasing trend to put them online where they can be freely accessible. Angela Turner's journal had received an article where the substantive part of the article was already online in the form of an abstract that contained considerable detail and gave the main statistical results. People who replied to this question thought it was not prior publication because it was an abstract and was published in the context of conference proceedings. Liz Wager quoted the ICMJE guidelines ([http://www.icmje.org/publishing\\_4overlap.html](http://www.icmje.org/publishing_4overlap.html)) which state that journals can consider papers presented at a scientific meeting that have not been published in full for publication. She also referred to BioMed Central's statement that manuscripts resulting from abstracts presented at meetings or published as part of a conference represent a formal advance to the citable scientific record and should therefore be considered for peer review [by the journal as they would have already been reviewed by the meeting committee] (<http://www.biomedcentral.com/about/duplicatepublication>)

But surely the question here is when does an abstract cease to be an abstract and become a full publication that

can be considered a prior publication. Journals should decide whether to consider a manuscript, of which substantial parts are already public, for publication on a case-to-case basis taking account of their readers' interest in the topic and the space available in the journal.

### **We invite you to rewrite your article and publish it in our journal**

What would you make of an invitation to write an article based on one you had already published but 80% different from the published article? Marcin Kozak was astonished when he received such an invitation from a journal he did not know "to promote the development and communication in the field". As he saw it they were asking him to publish the same material as had already been published. He wondered if others had received such invitations. Tom Lang suspected the journal was non-ISI indexed and its ulterior motive was to get enough citations to become indexed. Marcin doubted this notion because it was a new journal that only published 6 papers in 2011, so was unlikely to get indexed any time soon; rather he thought it was desperate for authors as it was one of very many new open-access journals. Chris Sterken did not see this as an open-access only practice as he had also received such invitations from editors of for-profit publishers. The true motive behind the invitation would be revealed Sylwia Ufnalska suspected if Marcin suggested that they reprint the original paper (with permission from the copyright holder).

### **An interesting blog**

Kersti Wagstaff directed forum participants to Anna Sharman's blog, <http://sharmanedit.wordpress.com/>, which includes postings on dangerous formatting errors, choosing a journal for your manuscript, The Research Works Act, open access and publisher boycotts. It's a really worthwhile blog.

### **The wrong way to measure scientific performance**

Leiden University in the Netherlands recently published its list of the top research universities in the world ([www.leidenranking.com](http://www.leidenranking.com)). The listing is based on measurements of scientific performance. Ed Hull questioned the relevance and credibility of such a list as well as the consequences of it and asked the forum for views. One of the main criteria Leiden University uses to assess performance is (unsurprisingly) the number of articles published in high impact factor journals. With the Dutch researcher Diederik Stapel who faked research data in at least 30 scientific papers in mind, Pat French wondered if account had been taken of retracted papers that had been cited by others. Eric Lichtfouse from France saw another inadequacy of the measurement as most university laboratories in France belong to National Research Centres (eg Cnrs) and the addresses of scientists on papers either did not mention their university or the university's name was buried in the middle of the address. As Thomson Reuters Web of Science database only takes account of the first two words of the address, French universities and research centres are underestimated because up to 40% of their publications were

missed. Sylwia Ufnalska said that the addresses of Polish universities also hardly ever had the university name as the first two words. Pointing to the following address given on an American paper she saw this as a general problem: Laboratory for Developmental Studies, Department of Psychology, Harvard University Cambridge, MA, USA.

Tom Lang felt the problem was that, like others, Leiden was counting what was countable rather than considering factors that couldn't be counted but were more important. Universities are information-generating institutions but as information is impossible to measure he thought the *consumers* of the information were what needed to be measured. Marge Berer agreed and said in her field of reproductive health she was seeing an epidemic of demand for measurement of things that could be measured quantitatively and rejection of things that could not. The result was a refusal to fund whole areas of the work of civil society organisations. She saw this as arising from neoliberal politics, in which measurement = value = money.

### **Buyer beware it might be open access elsewhere**

Karen Shashok complained that NewsRx was charging \$3 for access to an article which she had published open access in BMC Medical Research Methodology. Chris Sterken thought that if she had published it with a Creative Commons Licence she would still have the copyright and NewsRx could have breached her copyright. Pippa Smart by contrast mentioned that the licence allows reuse for commercial gain. However, she had heard that some larger publishers were investigating this entity because they were also offering copyright-protected works. Mary Ellen Kerans suggested that they were not selling Karen's article but a journalistic rehash of it, in which case they would be entitled to charge for their commentary on the article but should cite Karen's original article. Readers would then have the opportunity to read the original article open access. Karen's analysis of the Creative Commons license that applies showed that commercial reuse is allowed but that NewsRx may have violated her moral right, as copyright holder, to "integrity of the work" by not making it clear why other authors are mentioned and not seeking her approval for any changes they may have made. Karen contacted BioMed Central, Springer (owners of BioMed Central) and NewsRx. BioMed Central advised her that they had asked NewsRx to remove the item from their site. NewsRx and Springer had not replied by the time this Forum Digest item was written.

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### **Discussion initiators**

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