EASE-Forum Digest: December 2012 to March 2013

When is deposition in a repository prior publication?

Peer-reviewed journals claim a prerogative to publish original material. Will Hughes discovered a manuscript under review by his construction management journal in a university's on-line repository, where it looked like a published paper with a journal name and publication date. Two aspects worried Will: the author had not disclosed that the paper was already in the public domain, and the paper had been posted as a 'working paper' but was identical to the manuscript submitted to his journal. Will rejected the paper because it had already been published. Was he right to do so?

Definitions of 'prior publication' vary between journals and disciplines. Irene Hames highlighted the variety of opinions on whether deposition in the F1000 Posters repository is prior publication: Science viewed it as such but *Nature* did not (http://f1000.com/posters/journalresponses). Liz Wager pinpointed physics as a discipline where manuscripts are often posted as preprints in repositories such as Arxiv, with the same research later published in peer-reviewed journals, which would not be acceptable for medical journals. She knew of no stipulation that the preprint must be substantially different from the final paper, however, the idea of preprints was to allow commentary and informal peer review before the permanent publication. Liz concluded that each journal should develop its own policy and, Irene joined, communicate it in the instructions to authors, which should also advise authors to check with the editor when in doubt. Liz recommended BioMed Central's guidelines as a useful model (http://www.biomedcentral.com/about/duplicatepublication).

Eric Lichtfouse wondered why a good article could not be published by several journals/repositories with different audiences to increase readership and citations. Liz concurred provided the journals could agree (conditions are set out in the ICMJE guidelines). Sylwia Ufnalska added the proviso that only the first version should be considered the primary publication (see the EASE guidelines). There is a danger, as Will said, that citations will be split, making the paper look weaker than it really is. To fulfil open access requirements, many commercial publishers allow the accepted version to be placed in an institutional repository before typesetting. Collections and anthologies validly re-publish works that have been published elsewhere. He suggested that to focus citations on the right version, online postings should provide a link to the version of record. Reme Melero made a fine distinction between making information publically available, as in a repository, and publication. She stated that repositories provide a metadata field to indicate where the paper has been submitted, accepted or published and the citation of the version of record. Many publishers have specific polices for archiving in repositories and personal webpages (see http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/).

How software should be used to detect plagiarism

Karen Shashok initiated a discussion on using software to detect plagiarism. She pointed out that overlap could result from repetition of materials and methods, statistical analyses, or "boilerplate" introductory material. There is no consensus on whether this type of overlap constitutes plagiarism, which Sylwia Ufnalska substantiated citing an article in ESE (http://www.ease.org.uk/sites/default/files/eseaug11essayhabibzadeh.pdf), which opines that non-English speaking authors' re-use of text as a template because of their lack of linguistic expertise does not constitute plagiarism.

Karen argued that a numerical cut-off, eg with iThenticate similarity reports, is inappropriate to decide if plagiarism had occurred because what was being measured was qualitative. A low percentage of unattributed overlap may be small in quantitative terms but high in qualitative terms, if it involves an original idea that leads to an important advance in the field. Marije de Jager urged editors to interpret similarity reports manually. However, Aleksandra Golebiowska wanted to know what percentage of matches should be set as a benchmark to alert editors to investigate possible plagiarism. Suggestions ranged from 5% (generally considered too low) to 80% (generally considered too high).

Marije thought that as every journal is unique, the best approach would be to screen some papers with iThenticate and extrapolate a cut-off based on the similarity of results in those papers. Karen stressed the importance of content (eg boilerplate or original data?), meaning (accepted knowledge or original thinking?) and centrality to the article's main messages (discussion of a secondary aspect or main conclusion or proposal?). Marije recommended physically removing titles (except the article title) and reference pages from the text submitted to iThenticate. It was not enough to ask iThenticate to "exclude bibliography" because the presence of a bibliography will skew the similarity score. A paper she had checked had a similarity score of 25% with the bibliography in the text but excluded from iThenticate screening and 35%, which should be considered the actual similarity score, when the bibliography was removed from the text.

Clarinda Cerejo endeavoured to answer Aleksandra's plea for guidance on cut-off percentages by reference to a recent survey of editors published in Learned Publishing (http://alpsp.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/alpsp/lp/2012/00000025/00000004/art00008). Of the respondents who used Cross Check, 66% also did a manual editorial assessment, but 20% relied solely on the software to reject a paper without any review if it had an unacceptably high score. 10% sent the software report to reviewers in suspect cases, and 4% asked authors for explanations. Respondents on average used the following cut-off percentages: 10%-20% to indicate minor plagiarism; 20-40%, moderate plagiarism;

40-50% serious plagiarism, and >50%, plagiarism sufficient to trigger a reject.

Liz Wager invited people to comment on COPE's discussion paper on plagiarism: http://publicationethics.org/files/COPE_plagiarism_discussion_%20doc_26%20Apr%2011.pdf

Apostrophes in eponyms

Elisabeth Heseltine was mistaken when she described her problem as petty. She asked for a reference to a rule that allows you to drop an apostrophe from an eponym, which is a word or name derived from the name of a person. Alois Alzheimer discovered a debilitating disease in 1904. Some have argued in favour of abandoning eponyms. They say eponyms "lack accuracy, lead to confusion, and hamper discussion in a globalised world". The motion's opponents argue that eponyms are "often practical and form a medical shorthand" and "they bring colour to medicine and they embed medical traditions and culture in our history".[1]

Elisabeth's question though was about the apostrophe. It seems as time goes by we can't be bothered with it although, as Vivienne Mawson reflected, plenty of unhappy possessive pronouns such as "it's, her's, their's, your's" can be found in scientific journals. Vivienne referred to section 5.38, Eponymic Terms, of the Council of Biology Editors (CBE) Manual "Scientific Style and Format" 1994 (6th edition), which states that it has long been the practice to use the possessive form for eponyms, but then proceeds to recommend that they be eliminated "so that they can be clearly differentiated from true possessives" (p 97).

Liz Wager thought the apostrophe was more common in the US than in the UK. Angel Turner agreed. Her journal follows the *New Oxford Dictionary for Scientific Writers and Editors,* which lists Ringer's solution. Elisabeth had mentioned this eponym as an example. The *BMJ* also uses apostrophes in eponyms. Furthermore, Narayan and colleagues' research of the frequency of 'Down's syndrome' and 'Down syndrome' in medical books and journals found a shift from 'Down's syndrome' to 'Down syndrome' between 1998 and 2008, with the frequency of the possessive form more predominant in European than in American publications.[1] They recommend the nonpossessive form should be used as the standard to avoid problems in literature searches created by inconsistency.

Mary Ellen thought it was a matter of publisher's house style. As for rules, there are none; only disorder, as epitomised by Mary Ellen's report of a small translation team's discussion of Ringer's solution. The team concluded that the advice to omit apostrophes from eponyms (given in the CBE's and also the American Medical Association's style guide) was only for diseases and syndromes, so they'd put one in Ringer's solution. She also drew attention to "Eiffel Tower".

Definition of ± symbol

What does the symbol ± mean in the following text "… dilatation rate was significantly reduced after treatment as compared to controls (0.77 ± 1.36 mm versus 1.35 ± 1.55 mm, p=0.026)"? Rod Hunt answered this question posed by

Ed Hull: 'plus or minus' values can be standard deviations, standard errors or confidence limits, which are different things. Authors should explain how their statistical treatment has led to the particular conclusion. Ed re-joined that he would like editors to disallow ± and use SD, SEM or 95%CI, which are unambiguous. Furthermore, symbols and abbreviations should be defined in every section of the paper not only when they first appeared in a paper.

Opinions on a new pre-peer review system

Pippa Smart asked the forum for opinions on Rubiq, a new pre-peer review system where authors pay for review and reviewers are paid http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj-journals-development-blog/2013/02/21/rubriq-the-future-of-scientific-peer-review/.

Irene Hames posted Scholarly Kitchen's survey on Rubiq:http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/02/15/privatizing-peer-review-a-short-survey.

Eric Lichtfouse thought the service would save editor's time. His journal rejected about 50% of papers at submission because authors did not read instructions. He said EDANZ was also pre-reviewing: http://www.edanzediting.com/services/expert_scientific_review.

Angela Turner believed the service could help inexperienced authors write better papers but they still might fail to follow instructions for authors. Her journal, *Animal Behaviour*, did not intend to rely on pre-reviews because the reviewers were unlikely to suggest changes that would meet its particular needs, eg the journal's requirement for a detailed section on animal welfare. She questioned if editors would receive more complaints from authors when their 'pre-reviewed' paper, supposedly now readable and focused, was rejected.

There were concerns about the quality of reviews. Tom Lang thought getting three reviews for $500 was cheap but probably not enough to pay for thorough reviews. Karen asked if Rubiq, which states "satisfaction guaranteed or your money back", defines any desired or "guaranteed" outcomes of its service. She thought good authors' editors could provide a similar service. Another concern was that the system could present a hurdle for authors in developing countries who could not afford to pay for reviews.

Elise Langdon-Neuner (compiler)
a.a.neuner@gmail.com

Discussion initiators

Will Hughes: w.p.hughes@reading.ac.uk; Karan Shashok: kshashok@kshashok.com; Elisabeth Heseltine: e.heseltine@gmail.com; Ed Hull: edhull@home.nl; Pippa Smart: pippa.smart@gmail.com

Reference

1 Narayan J, Sukumar B, Nalini A. Current use of medical eponyms –a need for global uniformity in scientific publications. *BCM Medical Research Methodology* 2009;9:18. Available at: http:// www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2288/9/18