

INVITED REVIEW

Scientific Publishing with Integrity: Self-plagiarism, Salami Slicing, and Copyright Infringement – Part II

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is a serious concern in recent era, wherein one copies from others' work without properly citing the source, making redundancy in literature. This ever-growing problem ruining scientific database can be controlled if one knows clearly about the consequences of copying from other sources. The first part of the article has dealt with the various aspects of plagiarism and this second and final part will deal with its legalities. This part will highlight the areas of self-plagiarism, copyright infringement, and the funniest part of various excuses made by people who often plagiarize.

Keywords: Copyright infringement, Ethics in publishing, Salami slicing, Self-plagiarism.

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INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism, a serious violation of academic honesty, is the main ethical issue faced by editors, publishing companies, and scientific literature at large. The bottom line of plagiarism is not just duplicating one's work but not crediting the original source, making the lifted material original to the copied person. It is considered as a heinous act these days as it involves even deception and sometimes violates copyright laws. The growing increase in rate of plagiarism is clearly evident from the 10-fold increase in rate of article retractions by the journals in the last decade.¹ Whether the act is intentional or unintentional (failure to cite the original source or misuse of summary or paraphrase of a cited source), the author and the publishing house have to face the legal consequences. This is due to breach in contract by the author with the publisher, in which they have clearly expressed the rules for submission forbid such conduct. This can range from paper retraction,

note in the journal, and banning from future publication (mostly 5 years). The severe punishment of holding the degree back in this regard was given to an English student in his university for cheating in publication. The funniest part was that the student went to the court with a case against the university, claiming that the university never told him that "cutting and pasting" was not allowed.²

CONSEQUENCES OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism, once caught by any publisher, will raise suspicion in the author name and it can reflect in their professional as well as academic career. iThenticate, the leading software, which is famous for plagiarism detection, outlined the consequences of plagiarism as:³

- Destroyed student reputation
- Destroyed professional reputation
- Destroyed academic reputation
- Legal repercussions
- Monetary repercussions
- Plagiarized medical research can ruin lives.

In short, the act of plagiarism makes one pay with their reputation in the professional career, revoked awards, recognitions and designations, and also a suspicious eye into the academic degrees he/she holds. The first part of the article detailed the types of plagiarism and this final part will detail with self-plagiarism, copyright infringement issue, and legal issues with the act of plagiarism.

SELF-PLAGIARISM

Self-plagiarism is defined as a type of plagiarism in which the writer republishes a work in its entirety or reuses the portions of previously written text while authoring a new work.⁴ Roig⁵ detailed the types of self-plagiarism as:

- Republishing the same paper, i.e., published elsewhere without notifying the reader or the publisher of the journal
- Publishing a significant study as smaller studies to increase the number of publications rather than publishing a larger study (also known as salami slicing)
- Reusing the portions of a previously written (published or unpublished) text.

Some authors submit an article to two journals at the same time with a good intention that the article will be of interest to readers of both the journals, which cater

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different specialties. One common instance in which duplication is observed is when an expanded version of the article, which initially published as conference proceeding or abstract, is published in a journal. It should be made clear in these instances that the editors of both the journals are aware of the fact and agreed upon a dual appearance of the article. The flip side is the notoriously competitive nature of journal space, which is robbed by this act reducing the opportunity for other authors to publish their work. The other major drawback is the possibility of arriving at erroneous conclusions while performing meta-analysis on this topic, wherein two same studies of the same authors are counted by the person who performs it. It can also lead to distort the scientific literature, ultimately resulting in formulating flawed public health policies. A typical example of this is the established pulmonary side effect, which was actually a false finding, of a cardiovascular drug, published by the same medical school in two different journals, 5 months apart.⁴

Data fragmentation or salami slicing is a method often resorted to increase the number of publications. This will often lead to impression among readers that the study subjects and methods are different in two studies reported but in reality, it is not. This will lead to distort the literature database. Data fragmentation often leads to partial publication of data in one journal and the half in other. This will lead to incomplete understanding of the study results and methodology among readers, while reading both the article will give a proper meaning. The example provided by editors of the journal, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, is a typical example for this. They have published an article on controlled intervention in a birthing center and its effect on mothers. The second part which described its effect on infants was published in some other journal. Combining both can only provide meaningful conclusion to the study or have an impact rather than reading a single article.⁶ A similar type of practice is data augmentation, wherein the authors conduct further research on their already published material and bring in more conclusive evidence. They then use the data from previous article too, to make a new paper to submit to some other journal, probably with a high impact factor. These sorts of practices will only make scientific database a junkyard of repetitions.

COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT WHILE PLAGIARIZING

Copyright infringement is defined as “the unauthorized use of copyrighted material in a manner that violates one of the copyright owners exclusive rights, such as right to reproduce or perform the copyrighted work, or to make derivative works that build upon it”.⁷ The

author of any original work gets copyright automatically to his/her effort, even if he/she does not label it with copyright symbol or name. The only prerequisite is that the work must be fixed in some tangible form, i.e., it should be stored in a physical medium, such as paper, canvas, compact disc, or hard disk. He/she can decide who can legally make copies of that work and it is considered illegal if you copy large amount of an original work without permission, even if you give due credit to the original author.⁸ We should know that plagiarism is an academic term while copyright infringement is a legal term. One can infringe upon copyright in various ways, such as duplicate a work, rewrite a piece, perform a written work, or do anything, i.e., normally considered to be the exclusive right of the copyright holder. It is a matter of panic that a wide range civil punishments can be levied against people who infringe upon copyright and in some cases even criminal proceedings can be initiated.

If you know the limits of copyright protection, one can easily avoid violating it. Any idea or a single word cannot be copyrighted as is functional objects, such as a fork. It can be concluded that copyright infringement is specific to copyrightable works. But once identified, copyright infringement is litigated in the court and can either be a civil or criminal offense depending upon the severity.⁹ There is always a “fair-use exemption” applicable to all written scientific works, which allows a legal copying of small amount of work. A few precautions while writing scientific article will exempt you from copyright infringement, such as:

- Put the word in quotation marks or intend to make the reader aware that the portion is not your words
- A footnote to credit the original source or author
- Keeping the length of quotations down to a few sentences.

IS PLAGIARISM A CRIME?

Plagiarism is often referred to as academic crime and is not considered as a national crime, but copyright violation is. Plagiarism is considered a “fraud” and is considered cheating. Academic institutions punish subjects doing this sort of fraudulent act based on the school’s rules and regulations. They see it as a “breach of contract” based on the contract between the student/staff and the university. In short, though theoretically possible, a criminal case coming out of plagiarism act is rare. But ethically looking, it is a violation of ethics if you are a student or a teacher. If copying someone else’s idea is faster, easier, and more convenient than crafting a proper idea or observation, we should be ethical enough to cite the source – “give credit to where credit is due.”

SIX MOST COMMON EXCUSES AFTER PLAGIARIZING

There are some common excuses which an editor/publisher hears after one is identified with charges of plagiarism.¹⁰ They are as follows:

- “I did not mean to plagiarize” – as a scientific writer, you are expected to know the limits of copying and the importance of novel ideas in research. It is to be understood that breaking basic rules will make you guilty of academic misconduct
- “But I just forgot to go back and add the references” – this excuse is often heard of authors who perform lots of cut and paste in their article. They will often forget from where these materials are obtained and will often intentionally forget to put quotation marks. The best way to write an article is thinking and writing along with quoting and signaling as appropriate. Stringing together words downloaded or copied from another source has no value in the area of true writing and is never considered a way of writing even the first draft
- “I just was not careful enough to make the writing in my own words” – never paraphrase by copying someone else’s words into the manuscript you are writing and then fiddle with it around to create new sentences. Usually, this requires more work than what is required in original thinking and writing and will never help improve your writing skills. You will always try to resort to internet pages to write an article, which contain not even one sentence from your brain
- “But I’m presenting facts, not ideas” – Even if it is a fact or idea, original writing is a must. If one has thoroughly understood the matter, he/she will be able to put it in paper in his/her own style and writing language. When one writes from their own understanding, the expression will look more original than a plagiarized one
- “But this writer said it so much better than I can” – if one understands and gives it a chance to operate, he/she also can express in the same manner than the other writer or even better. This also requires a thorough surfing through the literature than resorting to a single source. The only cure to this problem is only “more research and more thinking”
- “But plagiarism only applies to term classes or English classes” – it is still plagiarism if you copy from class textbook or professors’ website and claim that you yourself has written it. The professors do understand that an assignment cannot be completed without copying a large amount of text from your sources of reading. This does not mean that the same can be performed while making research papers too. You

should be proper in quoting citations and references while you do this unlike when you prepare an assignment for the course of study.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that you should know what exactly plagiarism is in order to avoid performing it. This two-part article was aimed at making the readers aware about the areas where one has to be careful in writing a scientific article. You should always remember that the purpose of any article is to show your own thinking and not to patchwork with existing sentences and writings of others. The journal editors and publishers are very well aware of these ever-growing problems and installed detection softwares in their journal submission sites. In order to avoid banning from writing articles and to protect academic, career, and monetary reputation, it is essential that one should refrain from habits of misconduct in publishing. By not plagiarizing, we are helping to keep the hygiene of our literature, at the same time helping authorities in government form correct policies that suit the general public, which includes us too.

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