Rising from Plagiarising

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Received: 18 March 2014 / Accepted: 19 September 2014 / Published online: 21 October 2014
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Abstract Amongst the various forms of scientific misconduct, plagiarism has become increasingly prevalent in today's scientific process. Plagiarism is copying another author's ideas or words and portraying them as your own. Inclusion of another source's contents without giving credit to the source results in this unethical practice. Text derived directly from a source must always be put under quotation marks. Decreased awareness about plagiarism and what exactly constitutes it results in unintentional plagiarism. Plagiarism can be that of the ideas in which the author projects others' ideas as his own. It can also be that of the text also known as word to word plagiarism. Mosaic plagiarism is another form. Various guidelines formulated by esteemed scientific bodies such as World Association of Medical Editors, Committee on publication Ethics have provided an insight to authors, editors, publishers and peer reviewers into the practice of ethical writing. By understanding the true essence of plagiarism and following strict guidelines, it is certainly possible to avoid plagiarism. Various softwares are available to detect plagiarism. These softwares have a wide database which is scanned to reveal any kind of malpractice. If detected, it can have grave consequences causing not only retraction of the article but also loss of dignity. Failure to detect plagiarism reflects negatively on a journal. Originality is the true essence of any research or scientific paper. Any violation of this fact is an unforgivable offence. Thus, this review article attempts to cover the meaning, types, risks and ways to avoid plagiarism.

Keywords Plagiarism · References · Citations · Self plagiarism · Manuscript

Introduction

The sole purpose of writing a scientific paper is to convey an original idea, study or an invention. This demands the content to be clear, concise, accurate and honest [1]. While an unclear and lengthy article may still be pardonable, a dishonest, fraudulent text may clearly go against the terms of ethical writing. Plagiarism is one such malpractice in ethical writing.

Definition

The word plagiarism is derived from the Latin word "Plagiarius" which means a kidnapper. As defined by The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), plagiarism can be defined as

"... the use of others published and unpublished ideas or words (or other intellectual property) without attribution or permission, and presenting them as new and original rather than derived from an existing source" [2].

Plagiarism thus involves using others ideas and/or text without duly acknowledging the source. This results in a false belief amongst the reader that the author himself is the creator of the idea or the text.

Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism can be of various types:
These include:

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Plagiarism of ideas:

Using ideas, thoughts or inventions of another person is justified when acknowledgment is given to the person. However, failing to give credit to the worthy creator of the idea constitutes plagiarism of ideas. This form of plagiarism is difficult to detect [3] but once detected, can have grave consequences.

Plagiarism of Text

As described by Roig [1], Plagiarism of text involves “...copying a portion of text from another source without giving credit to its author and without enclosing the borrowed text in quotation marks”.

Other terms used include direct plagiarism [4] or word to word plagiarism [3]. When using text directly from another source it is mandatory to include the text in quotation marks in addition to including the original author. When taking exact words from a source if quotation marks are avoided in spite of citing a reference, it results in plagiarism. This is because it creates a delusion amongst the readers that the combination of words and formation of the sentence is originally by the author.

With the widespread use of computers and internet, this form of plagiarism has become a common practice. All one needs to do is “copy-paste” the content. In this form of plagiarism, students in academics have found a convenient alternative to an original manuscript. Not only text, even images, tables or case reports must be included only after mentioning the source. Appropriate referencing is mandatory whether the source is a scientific journal, textbook or a website. A copy-paste operation even in a power-point presentation without appropriate referencing is a clear case of plagiarism.

Plagiarism of Sources

While using another author's citations if one fails to acknowledge the source of citations, it results in plagiarism of sources. Not actually reading the sources (cross referencing) and merely picking up the source name from another author's bibliography also results in serious plagiarism [3, 5].

Often the detailed information about the source is not mentioned. Such a practice is often considered as an attempt to disguise other forms of plagiarism by preventing the readers to actually reach the source [8].

Mosaic Plagiarism

When an author aggregates his thoughts with those of the source without giving due credit to the latter, it results in

mosaic plagiarism. Authors often change a few words here and there which results in text almost similar to the original sources except a few phrases. In such cases, when the reference is not cited properly, it results in plagiarism [4].

Self Plagiarism

Does one need to acknowledge himself officially in the article? Yes, when the content is taken from one's own earlier publication, it becomes necessary to provide a citation. When mentioning any data or a study from an already published paper, even when it is one's own, a correct reference of the publication must be provided.

A member of WAME's Ethics committee has stated that while writing a review article by the same author there should not be an overlap of more than one-third of the content [6].

Ghost Writing

When authorship is not given to a person who has been an important part of the research or a paper, it is termed as ghost writing. It is closely associated with another practice in which false credit is given to a person who actually has no contribution in the paper (guest authorship) [7].

Identifying Plagiarism

Committee on Publication Ethics has provided a set of individual guidelines for editors, publishers, peer reviewers and retracting articles to encourage transparency and best practice in publishing [9].

Experts in a particular field while reviewing can detect defects due to plagiarism easily. Electronic plagiarism checks can be used. These tools indicate certain suspicious areas. The article is then kept next to the source from which plagiarism is suspected. Cross checking then reveals plagiarism if any [10].

The various softwares designed to detect suspected plagiarism include Document Source Analysis, Glatt Plagiarism Services, Inc. Integrigard, EVE2.

Avoiding Plagiarism

The first essential step in avoiding plagiarism is to know intricately what it means. Roig [1] outlines the following guidelines to avoid plagiarism in all forms.

- “Guideline 1: An ethical writer ALWAYS acknowledges the contributions of others and the source of his/her ideas
- Guideline 2: Any verbatim text taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks
- Guideline 3: We must always acknowledge every source that we use in our writing; whether we paraphrase it, summarize it, or enclose it in quotations
- Guideline 4: When we summarize, we condense, in our own words, a substantial amount of material into a short paragraph or perhaps even into a sentence
- Guideline 5: Whether we are paraphrasing or summarizing we must always identify the source of our information
- Guideline 6: When paraphrasing and/or summarizing others’ work we must reproduce the exact meaning of the other author’s ideas or facts using our words and sentence structure
- Guideline 7: In order to make substantial modifications to the original text that results in a proper paraphrase, the author must have a thorough understanding of the ideas and terminology being used
- Guideline 8: A responsible writer has an ethical responsibility to readers, and to the author/s from whom s/he is borrowing, to respect others ideas and words, to credit those from whom we borrow, and whenever possible, to use one’s own words when paraphrasing
- Guideline 9: When in doubt as to whether a concept or fact is common knowledge, provide a citation
- Guideline 10: Authors who submit a manuscript for publication containing data, reviews, conclusions, etc., that have already been disseminated in some significant manner (e.g., published as an article in another journal, presented at a conference, posted on the internet) must clearly indicate to the editors and readers the nature of the previous dissemination.”

Risks of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of scientific misconduct. It sets a bad example to the masses who consider scientific papers as

means to enlighten themselves with the on going scientific developments. It also reflects poorly of the journal and the publishers, since they have failed to detect the malpractice. Detection of plagiarism results in retraction of the article. The plagiarising author may face consequences such as a ban on publishing in future. When information about his misconduct reaches the organisation he is a member of or is employed with, it can result in loss of dignity, membership or even employment [4].

Conclusion

Transparency is of great value in scientific writing. Adapting others’ ideas and words is not a crime when given the credit to the deserving. In fact, it makes the scientific piece more informative and useful to the reader. A scientific paper without demarcation between your original work and the derived content is inexcusable.

As said by Walter Colton “Most plagiarists, like the drone, have neither taste to select, industry to acquire, nor skill to improve, but impudently pilfer the honey ready prepared, from the hive.”

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