My Words or Your Words?
Detecting and Investigating Plagiarism

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Simple Definition
Definition in Scholarly Publishing

Copyright Infringement

Reusing someone else’s words or work without permission and proper attribution

AND

Reusing your own published work without permission and proper attribution

Two Tales of Potential Plagiarism

Style differences are key to identification.
Tale 1: Invited Review
Japanese author

Clue 1
In search for reviewers found article in a review journal with a very similar title and abstract...
by the same author!
Clue 2

Submitted manuscript text was very different in style and English usage than was all correspondence with author.

Investigation

Step 1: Obtain full text copy of the highly similar review article
Step 2: Compare overall organization of the two articles (submitted and published)
Step 3: Read and compare an entire section
Step 4: Examine reference list and order of cited references
Findings

- Structure and organization identical
- Beginning and ending sentences in paragraphs identical
- Text identical within a section
- References mostly identical
- References presented in same order

Self-Plagiarism Confirmed: Next Steps

- Document issue and place copy of plagiarized review in tracking system with manuscript record
- Reject manuscript with clear explanation of issue to authors
- Place copy of author response in tracking system with manuscript record
Author’s Response

**Thought**

online journal publication

so can republish own work published in print journal in an online-only journal

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**Tale 2:**

Primary Research Article
Clues

Odd phrasing of a sentence in the Introduction

Undefined abbreviation

Awkward sentence on a topic related but not central to authors’ expertise

Phrasing contrasted with that in the rest of the paragraph

In published article’s abstract:
“Loss of Pum1 caused progressive motor dysfunction and SCA1-like neurodegeneration with motor impairment, primarily by increasing Ataxin1 levels.”

In submitted article’s introduction:
Mouse and human PUM1, one of two PUMs encoded in mammalian genes, repress ATXN1 mRNA and loss of PUM1 leads to SCA1-like neurodegeneration with motor impairment. Other report showed that PUM2 controls axon potential in rat neurons by maintaining proper amount of voltage-gated sodium channel transcript (NaV1.6). PUM1 or PUM2 knockout mice showed reduced body mass and defect on fertility.
Plagiarism?

Technically, no.

But could be a red flag

Follow Up

Check a few other cited articles for copied content

If no
- recommend to authors that they rephrase
- or consider citation adequate

If yes
- document in tracking system
- alert authors to problem
- require rephrasing
- or reject
Common Clues

- Mismatched writing style between correspondence and article within paragraphs of article
- Introduction of a new abbreviation for a term consistently abbreviated elsewhere in manuscript
- Statements with citations but lacking appropriate context or interpretation
- Inability of authors to rephrase or clarify upon request

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