

Nurse Author & Editor

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The Value of Trusting No One

The Value of Trusting No One and Using Similarity Checkers

Roger Watson

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It is now routine in most universities that students are required to submit a similarity report—normally done using the platform Turnitin© (although other software is available) and it is increasingly commonplace that leading academic journals run manuscripts through similar platforms such as iThenticate©. In my experience, using a similarity checker has saved me from at least two very embarrassing incidents when co-publishing. Regardless of how much information you provide, and how dire you make the consequences, it seems that some people either do not believe you or wilfully

defy you. In one of the above incidences the similarity checking was carried out by the journal to which we submitted a co-authored manuscript, largely written by my colleague, and the editorial office drew the similarity to our attention. That incident prompted me to check another co-authored manuscript prior to submission which revealed an unacceptable level of similarity. Needless to say, there was a full and frank discussion of how serious these incidents were and—had the manuscripts been published and the similarity then discovered—how damaging this could have been to my career. Since then I have made similarity checking a routine prior to submission if I have the slightest doubt about the originality of the material I am reading in co-authored articles. My attitude, otherwise, when I see retractions or correspondence about similarity in academic journals has been ‘there but for the grace of God...’. Until now.

I was shocked recently to have a substantial level of similarity in one of my published co-authored articles (Pinar, Ataalkin, & Watson, 2010) drawn to my attention. The allegation was serious and, up to a point, accurate; our article contained a paragraph from another paper—one we had cited—reproduced verbatim. I had no suspicions about the work at the time of submission, and this preceded my more frequent checking for similarity. The incident taught me that there is at least one other situation when similarity checking is worthwhile prior to submission and that is when translators have been used. Our original manuscript was written in Turkish and then translated, professionally, into English and it transpires that the translator simply lifted a whole chapter out of one of the background articles. We did not notice and the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*—which I was editing at the time—did not routinely run similarity checking which was established shortly after the article

by Pinar et al. (2010) was published.

My immediate resignation was not accepted by Wiley, for which I am very grateful. That also gave me time to get the incident into perspective. I knew I was blameless and the first author of the paper made strenuous efforts to trace back through the process of writing the manuscript until she realised the stage at which this had happened. Needless to say she was equally shocked. I realised that the incident could not and would not be overlooked and a corrigendum was duly published in *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. Without seeming to 'protest too much' (paraphrased from Shakespeare) I agreed to report on the incident and the lessons learned. This article is the report and the lessons learned form the basis of the title: trust no-one and use a similarity checker prior to submission of co-authored and translated manuscripts.

REFERENCE

1. Pinar, R., Ataalkin, S. & Watson, R. (2010). The effect of clothing on sphygmomanometric blood pressure measurement in hypertensive patients *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 19(13-14), 1861-1864. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2010.03224.x

RESOURCES

- Turnitin – <http://www.turnitin.com/> “Technology to improve student writing”
- iThenticate – <http://www.ithenticate.com/> “iThenticate is a solution for ensuring content originality”
- Grammarly – <https://www.grammarly.com/> Plagiarism and grammar checker; Citation generator

- Text Recycling Guidelines for Editors from COPE (the Committee on Publication Ethics) – <http://publicationethics.org/text-recycling-guidelines>
- Research Ethics: Decoding Plagiarism and Attribution from iThenticate – <http://www.ithenticate.com/resources/papers/decoding-plagiarism> Includes a research report and a downloadable infographic of “10 Types of Plagiarism in Research”
- “The Plagiarism Spectrum: Tagging 10 Types of Unoriginal Work” from Turnitin – http://turnitin.com/assets/en_us/media/plagiarism_spectrum.php

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ETHICAL ISSUES

