

## Duplicate Publication: Justifiable in a Different Language?

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The final goal of professional medical publication is to make the results of studies accessible for the medical community. This can be more easily achieved, regardless of origin and language, these days thanks to the internet. The *Urology Journal* now enjoys its electronic archive and can be searched by Google. Other than electronic archiving, most Iranian biomedical publications have joined the international indexing systems. Since almost all journals published in a local language provide English abstract, their visibility on the internet is fairly comparable to the English medical journals, either internationally well-known or just locally distributed. All these have raised a serious concern about duplicate publication, warranting a reconsideration of its boundaries.

Duplicate publication, also known as redundant or dual publication, simply means “publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published.”<sup>(1)</sup> It is condemned and considered unethical, but there are some exceptions. In the Guidelines on Good Publication Practice published by the Committee on Publication Ethics, it is stated that “Republication of a paper in another language is acceptable, provided that there is full and prominent disclosure of its original source at the time of submission.”<sup>(2)</sup> In the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals, the term *secondary publication* is used and considered acceptable and *beneficial* provided that specific conditions are met, including approval from the editors of both journals, presence of a different group of readers for the secondary publication, proper reference to the primary publication, and faithful reflection of the data and interpretations of the primary version.<sup>(3)</sup> Despite the above, certain issues are still open to question: When is it beneficial to republish a paper? Who decides that a paper is beneficial to be republished? Who are a different group of readers?

During the recent years, we have witnessed an astonishing growth in the number of scientific papers by Iranian researchers (nearly 10-fold within

5 years). However, most authors are not familiar with all principles that govern the sophisticated world of the publication. Pessimistically thinking, some authors try to make their CVs voluminous by duplicate publication. However, it seems that most authors—unaware of the publication ethics—just want to make their study results not only internationally accessible, but also available for the Iranian readers in Persian. Justifications put forward by authors are mostly the following: publication of medical literature in Persian language should not be neglected, we should appreciate Iranian readers’ preferences, and we have to be in concert with the funders of research—mostly the government—who prefer to sponsor studies that are directly beneficial for the Iranian population, and thus, expect that the study results be published in Persian as well. In my opinion, these are not acceptable; firstly, adding too many medical papers in Persian does not necessarily help the medical terminology in Persian language evolve. Secondly, all the studies on Iranian subjects address the health issues of the Iranian; however, they may not have a great or direct benefit for Iranian people and they are not all nationally important. An abbreviated version or a gist of the study in non-peer-review Persian journals could be sufficient to meet the needs of the public. And thirdly, the main-stream biomedical journals are currently being published in English, and irrespective of their mother tongue, researchers and physicians have to first browse the literature in the most creditable international journals when they want to do research or update their knowledge, so they *have to* know English. Consequently, *a different group of readers* (who might make duplicate publication reasonable according to the ICMJE) may not exist! The audience of all local and international journals in English, Persian, etc could be everyone around the world who connects to the worldwide web to find their information of interest. In other words, terms such as local and international are disputable in medical journalism.

Consensus almost exists on the issue of duplicate

publications in another language. Our enquiry from the Thomson Scientific was answered as “One of the criteria for inclusion in our products is that a journal publishes articles that have not been published elsewhere, regardless of the language [personal correspondence].” Rogers, the editor of *the American Journal of Roentgenology*, describes previously published—an unacceptable characteristic—as “previously published in any language, previously published anywhere in the world, previously published in part or in whole, previously published in print or on electronic media, previously published regardless of whether that publication is listed in the *Index Medicus*, and previously published with or without the requirement for signing a transfer of copyright.”<sup>(4)</sup> Of course, some papers are worth or even necessary to be republished. However, it is not the author but the editor who can decide on this. It is shown that 67% of authors, but only 31% of editors, justify publication of a duplicate paper in a non-peer reviewed symposium supplement. Also, only 15% to 30% of both groups agree that it is justified to publish overlapping articles when there are different or non-English-speaking audiences, new data, strengthened methods, or disputed findings.<sup>(5)</sup> Other than the content of papers, an editor has to consider the costs of duplicate publication. Each published page in the *Urology Journal* roughly costs US\$ 100. Duplicate publishing costs and duplicate peer review are not reasonable unless a definite benefit for the audience is recognized by the editors of the journals. In this case, clear reference to any previous or expected future publications in the article is not only a requisite, but also necessary to avoid overemphasis of findings by the future meta-analyses. There are reports on such overestimations by erroneously taking into account one study as 2 separate papers in meta-analyses.<sup>(6)</sup>

It has been 3 years since we changed the language of our journal to English, which has been welcomed by our audience. However, many authors had questions about secondary publication of the articles in other journals that are indexed in *Index Medicus* or those published in Persian. Unfortunately, we encountered some cases of duplicate publication in our journal. One of the cases was easily detectable by Google, although the other journal was in Persian; there were 2 identical articles appearing next to each other in the search results. To avoid this problem we have updated

our Authors' Agreement Form that should be signed by all authors. This helps us inform all contributors of the regulations. In the recent form, we added “in any language” to emphasize its unacceptability. A notice of duplicate publication will be published if this ever happens. To our knowledge, such notices have not appeared in Iranian journals so far. Nonetheless, as those responsible for preservation of the standards of biomedical journalism, the editors of the *Urology Journal* are willing to actively approach this issue and publish notices in case any duplicate publication is detected.

From a national point of view, it is time to add publication ethics to the regulations and the authors and editors should be asked to comply with them. Education of good publication practice, even for medical students is crucial. On the other hand, a shift from quantitative evaluation to a qualitative one for promotions and grants should be considered. The number of publications as a criterion, although has encouraged the faculties to be more research minded, is not favorable in the long run. To summarize, after a national success in promoting the number of scientific publications, it is time to take quality and standards more seriously.

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