

## EASE-Forum Digest: December 2015 to March 2016

You can join the forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to [majordomo@helsinki.fi](mailto:majordomo@helsinki.fi). Send in plain text, not HTML. Details at [www.ease.org.uk/node/589](http://www.ease.org.uk/node/589).

### What authors should do on learning after publication that quote marks should have been used

Karen Shashok presented a case of a young researcher who was the first author on a paper published in a respectable basic science journal. The coauthors were senior members of the research team. After publication the researcher attended a manuscript writing course and realised that 35 words taken verbatim for another paper should have been placed in quotation marks. A citation to the paper had been given. Karen asked if the researcher should contact the journal to request a correction. Amanda Morgan, Helle Goldman and Liz Wager all thought that the researcher should inform his/her coauthors and contact the journal.

As a citation had been given Pippa felt the researcher should not worry unduly. An email to the editor with the coauthors' consent apologising for rather than requesting a correction of the error should suffice. Rod Hunt agreed that the mistake was regrettable but should be treated as one to learn from. Journals in his view should not be used as blogs that allow careless authors to fiddle with their work ad infinitum. Helle would publish a corrigendum in her journal *Polar Research*, which would not interfere with the original publication. She explained that she accepts limited self-plagiarism in the Methods and authors are allowed to resubmit if short passages of text from published papers are found elsewhere with iThenticate on submission.

Karen resolved to advise the researcher to obtain the coauthors' consent and ask the journal how it wished to handle the problem. She explained that the researcher faced the conflict between wanting to do the right thing and fear of editorial censure, which was understandable as the journal concerned had the unusual policy when plagiarism was discovered of stamping every online page of an article with "plagiarism".

Now that the forum is closed to non-members, Karen suggested a channel should be opened for non-members to consult members on difficult problems such as this one. Pippa reminded that the LinkedIn and Facebook forums were still available to non-members to post questions.

Interestingly, we learned from Karen and Judith Baggot that Spanish and Italian authors often failed to understand the difference between "citation" and "quotation" because the same word is used for both in their language.

### Do journals' guidelines require authors to use active/passive voice?

Andrew Davis had discovered two journals in the fisheries field that expressly forbade use of the active voice. One was published by Wiley, whose general guidelines actually state, "Use of the passive is fading." Andrew wanted to know how

widespread journal recommendations about the use of active or passive were.

Anna Sharman found that 5-10% of her students had previously been told to use the passive voice. Tom Lang had encountered authors who intentionally or by habit wrote in the passive as this was once considered more "objective". He thought there were studies showing text in the passive was no more difficult to understand than text in the active voice and believed it was useful in the Methods. Rod Hunt informed that as a consequence of research by John Kirkman commissioned by the British Ecological Society (BES) which found members much preferred reading text in the active the BES recommends "The passive voice is preferred in describing methods and results. The active voice may be used occasionally to emphasize a personal opinion (typically in Introduction and Discussion sections)."

Tom considered the main problem for readability was the passive combined with nominalizations. As for avoiding person pronouns Tom suggested showing any proponents an article on the topic with a quote from the *Lancet*, "The first person singular – the naked I – is no longer thought immodest. Elaborate garments such as *we* and *the author* do not disguise a writer's identity unless they also disguise his [sic] meaning ... " (*The Lancet*, 1937; cited in Fishbein M. *Medical Writing*. Chicago: AMA Press, 1938. P 54)

Carol Norris presented a solution for using the active even in the Methods, giving an example: instead of the passive "Data were analyzed" or the active "We analyzed data", write the active "Analysis of the data showed/indicated/revealed", which provides more information faster. For further instruction she recommended her twice-annually revised course book, which is open access: <http://helsinki.fi/kksc/language.services/AcadWrit.pdf>

Ed Hull pointed out that what we accept in 21st century science is always subjective because researchers act in a subjective way by virtue of choosing their experimental methods, etc. He quoted Philip Ball, a former editor of *Nature*, who wrote in his book *Curiosity*, "... researchers are part of the data." He felt with Carol's suggestion researchers were still avoiding responsibility and proposed amending it to, "Our analysis of the data showed/indicated/revealed ... (Table 1).", to make the researchers accountable for their data.

Andrew pointed out that the discussion had concentrated more on whether the active was preferable than on what journals actually recommended. Only one editor had answered the question, Farrokh Habibzadeh, who said his journals did not mention voice in their guidelines but copyediting to the active was done in-house to comply with the journals' style.

Andrew had, however, learned from the discussion that research on 55 journals in the biological and physical sciences found only two required the passive (R. Sheldrake, *New Scientist*, 21 July 2000), the *BMJ* specifically asked for the active, and *The Journal of Animal Ecology*, but not all other BES journals, states a preference for the passive in the Methods and Results. Andrew's concern was that students

he advised to use the active face opposition from their seniors, who were not aware of any guidelines (eg the EASE guidelines mentioned by Sylwia Ufnalska) that recommend use of the active. Directors in the Max Planck Society and in the National Center for Science Research as well as professors in several universities in the UK and other European countries, and in Japan, had told him, “There are no guidelines.”

### Correct terminology for “non-native speaker”

Pippa asked if there is an accepted term for non-native speaker. Here I quote Valerie’s answer in full as a useful guide for others faced with the choice of correct terminology. “The choice of term should be suited to how it will be used. If we are talking about academic writing, then ‘native speaker’ and ‘non-native speaker’ are not useful terms, because we know that one’s native language (learned in childhood) is not the main factor that makes one a good writer (or editor). Also, some non-native speakers become proficient (accurate and fluent) at the ‘native’ level and may even surpass many ‘natives’ (not too difficult!).

Some linguists prefer EAL for using ‘English as an additional language’ because today many people speak more than one language from birth and there is no clear definition of what is a ‘native’ language (some bilinguals feel that they are native speakers of one language but native writers of another, depending on what they spoke at home and wrote at school). Certainly, ESL or ‘English as a second language’ is only appropriate in some cases (not applicable to someone who grew up speaking French and Swahili, or Italian and Venetian dialect!). You could, however, say I speak Italian as a second language (being monolingual English from birth).

EFL for English as a foreign language seems unfriendly (and out-of-touch with today’s global use of English), and is easily confused with ELF or English as a lingua franca, something altogether different!

Perhaps we need to avoid generic, broadly applicable terms, and choose the best one for each study or essay.”

Elisabeth Heseltine added that the United Nations defined “mother tongue” as that in which a person had received their secondary education.

Karen thought members of the forum might be interested to read a career profile “How I made my own opportunities” by a

young researcher, Ahmed Waqas, whose first language was not English: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/351/6279/1358> article-info. *Science* 18 Mar 2016: Vol. 351, Issue 6279, pp. 1358 DOI: 10.1126/science.351.6279.1358.

In the article Ahmed explains how AuthorAID had helped him. Karen is one of the authors’ editors who give their time voluntarily to AuthorAID.

### Writing blogs of journal content

Valerie noted that researchers applying for funding were usually asked how they would disseminate the results of their research to the public (in addition to research articles). As one answer might be that they would use new media, she wondered if anyone on the forum edited new media content written by non-native English-speaking researchers, who could find writing in colloquial English difficult without the help of a language editor.

Eric Lichtfouse answered that his journal posted the content of their articles (<http://www.springer.com/journal/13593>) as blog posts (<http://www1.montpellier.inra.fr/agronomy-blog/>) in a form readable by the public and scientists in other disciplines. This policy was inspired by Alan Cann’s talk at the EASE Tallinn meeting (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX12qRSwloo>). Their blogging strategy is described in <http://fr.slideshare.net/lichtfouse/journal-blog>. Authors are asked to submit a one-paragraph draft of the blog post but most were unsuitable because scientists do not know how to communicate to the public. Eric therefore rewrites most posts.

The discussion on whether someone can be an author of a manuscript submitted in English to an English language journal if their ability in English is insufficient for them to write and critically revise the manuscript discussed on the forum in March 2016 will be summarised in the next issue of *ESE*.

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## 5th World Conference on Research Integrity

May 2017, Amsterdam

Organiser, Lex Bouter

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