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## *Editor's Corner*

# *Double Publishing: A Dilemma of Language*

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AS EDITOR of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, I view the *Journal* as a tool for serving the needs of researchers and clinicians in the alcohol and drug field. Whenever possible, I want to make it easier for our contributors to submit a paper, to have it expertly and efficiently reviewed, and for us to publish important research in a timely manner.

Now and then I stumble across an issue that seems to complicate the process. Often, as in the case of establishing appropriate guidelines regarding prepublication release of information, the difficulty involves conflicting objectives. The result is that both *JSA* and the authors are caught between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." A recent example of this kind of difficulty concerned an issue related to the definition of double publishing (also known as redundant or duplicate publishing).

An author from Europe submitted a manuscript to the *Journal*, noting in passing that the paper had already been published in the author's native language as a report from the institute at which the author works. When I questioned the extent of the prior publication, I was informed that, while the original report was a good deal longer than the paper submitted to us, almost all of the relevant information had been incorporated into the present paper. The author argued that, because the work had been initially supported by a foundation in the country of origin, it was important to first publish the results in that country's language. Then, in order to more widely distribute the results, the author sought publication in an English language journal.

The author also expressed frustration with the amount of time it can take to get an article out in an English language peer-reviewed journal, a process likely to take months or even years if the original paper is initially rejected for publication. According to this individual, these delays almost force non-English-speaking authors to publish first in their own languages.

Furthermore, the author argued that, in general, English language journals *were* willing to review and potentially publish papers previously reported in the author's native language. The author felt that, if such papers were not accepted for review, the process of scientific publishing would discriminate against non-English-speaking researchers. It would also create an illusion that only English-speaking researchers and clinicians are doing worthwhile work.

Many editors of journals are guided by the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (1994). Here, a redundant publication is defined as one that "overlaps substantially with one already published." The basis for the emphasis on original manuscripts involves concerns regarding copyright laws and ethical issues involved in publishing the same or highly similar material in

multiple places. As I argued to the author, it does not seem appropriate for an individual to receive credit for publishing virtually the same study in multiple languages. Where does one draw the line? Are two languages acceptable? Three? Can it not also be argued that individuals who publish first in English would benefit from having their work read in German, then in French, and so on? In the United States, publishing the same work in two different places leaves an individual open to the charge of infringement of copyright, with potentially disastrous results for his/her career if sanctions are applied by a university or the National Institutes of Health.

I suggested two possibilities to this author. The first is that, if an English language (or other nonnative language) journal is chosen for the original publication, the authors should publish first in that language and then publish the material in their native language. This would require permission from the original nonnative journal to reprint the article as a secondary publication. In this instance, the material published in the author's native language would clearly state that the paper had been previously published. This option was unpalatable to the author because of the delays that can occur in getting an article out in an English language peer-reviewed journal. However, as I responded, *all* researchers face the same delays in the peer-review process and the inevitable time lag between acceptance and publication. I see no unique impact related to the original language in which the article was developed.

The second major option would involve publishing the material in one's native language and then submitting the same or a similar manuscript to an English language journal under the heading of what the Uniform Requirements publication describes as an "acceptable secondary publication." These are defined as appropriate: (1) when the authors have received approval from the editors of both journals, (2) have provided the editor of the second journal with a copy of the primary version, (3) when the primary publication has been released at least one week before the secondary (unless otherwise negotiated by both editors), and (4) when the paper for the secondary publication has a different audience or targeted group of readers. A footnote on the title page of the secondary publication should state the full reference for the original paper.

These choices appear to me to be both straightforward and fair. They give options to individuals who wish to publish in a language other than their own, but who want to make certain that the paper is available to clinicians and researchers in their own country.

On the other hand, I recognize that there are other ways of looking at this problem. Therefore, I would be most

grateful if readers who might hold similar or other points of view would write to me either in confidence or for potential publication as Correspondence in the *Journal*. As always, I want to be certain that *JSA* is meeting the needs of our readers by publishing the highest quality work possible while following the highest ethical conduct. I look forward to hearing from you.

### Reference

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF MEDICAL JOURNAL EDITORS. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals and Supplemental Statements from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (single copies available free of charge from the Secretariat Office, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Philadelphia, Pa.), 1994.

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