Where Does Originality End and Plagiarism Start? Discussing Plagiarism in Information Science

Elke Greifeneder[1], Lynn Silipigni Connaway[2], Tingting Jiang[3], Michael Seadle[4], Debora Weber-Wulff[5] and Dietmar Wolfram[6]

[1] University of Copenhagen

[2] OCLC Research

[3] Wuhan University

[4] Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

[5] Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin

[6] University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Abstract

This paper describes a session for interaction and engagement to be held at iConference2014. The session for interaction and engagement focuses on researchers at iSchools and as such is an intellectual follow-up to the systematic check of all iConference2014 paper submissions in a copying detection system. The session offers a platform for discussing whether the use of such a system is justified for a conference that attracts submissions from highly respected researchers. Panel members and the audience will discuss the amount of text a researcher is allowed to reuse and when a submission would no longer be considered to be original and starts to be considered self-plagiarism. Parts of the discussion will center on the question of whether information science researchers can actually avoid repeating the same words when today they have to publish results from research projects in as many publications as possible.

Keywords: plagiarism, plagiarism software, publishing practices

Contact: ljb301@iva.ku.dk (Elke Greifeneder), connawal@oclc.org, tij@whu.edu.cn, seadle@ibi.hu-berlin.de, weberwu@htw-berlin.de, dwolfram@uwm.edu

1 Session proposal

Publish or perish is the boon and bane of editors and conference chairs. It is a boon, because it means editors and chairs receive more submissions each year. It is a bane, because the pressure that authors face today might lead to copying from others or to reusing one's own text.

During the last year, the journal *Library Hi Tech*, Emerald Group Publishing, received a record number of submission, with one submitted every other day. Of these, 24% had to be rejected because they contained a significant portion of copying. Most articles with large copied passages in *Library Hi Tech* came from developing countries, where using the words of others is considered to be a form of homage that recognizes the expertise and authority of earlier authors.

It would be too simplistic to interpret this copying as just a problem in these countries. In Germany, for example, more than 50 doctoral theses of, among others, scholars and politicians, have been documented in *VroniPlag Wiki* (http://de.vroniplag.wikia.com/wiki/Home) as having extensive plagiarism. Since 2011, three politicians, the former vice president of the European Parliament, the Minister of Defense, and the Minister of Education stepped down from their positions in the wake of their dissertations being revoked. A core player in uncovering these plagiarisms was an initiative of pseudonymous persons who have been documenting plagiarism in dissertations and habilitations. The session will discuss the activities of these scientists and explore how they define and detect plagiarism.

This session for interaction and engagement is not primarily about authors from developing countries or German politicians who needed a doctoral title for their reputation. It is about researchers at iSchools and as such is an intellectual follow-up to the systematic check of all *iConference2014* paper submissions in a copying detection system. The session offers a platform for discussing whether the use of such a system is justified for a conference that attracts submissions from highly respected researchers.

This year, the *iConference* received 113 full papers and 74 notes submitted. The acceptance rate was 35% and 49% of the submissions. Two submissions were rejected because identical research had been published before; two other submissions were rejected because the authors had already published several articles on the same subject and the submissions' content did not contain enough new research to warrant publication.

The competition between researchers in information science is high. Only the most productive researchers will be awarded academic or research positions. Results of research projects are often published in as many articles as possible in order to increase a researcher's output. It has started to be a common practice to publish one article about preliminary results, one article on survey results, one article on follow-up focus groups and a last article summarizing all results. This "salami-tactic" or "least publishable unit" approach increases authors' publication lists, but is a nightmare for readers.

It also creates a challenge to both editors and authors. While the results of these articles are different from article to article, there are only few ways to explain how one collected, for example, data with a survey. Since the background also is the same for all studies, it becomes hard for authors to write an appropriate method and background section without copying from previously published articles.

The session discusses the amount of text researchers are allowed to reuse and when a submission is no longer considered to be original and starts to be considered self-plagiarism. Parts of the discussion will center on the question of whether information science researchers can actually avoid repeating the same words when today they have to publish results from research projects in as many publications as possible.

2   Panel Members

Initiating discussion points will be made by the following panel members:

- Prof. Dietmar Wolfram, in his function as Paper Chair of iConference2014
- Ass. Prof. Elke Greifeneder, in her function as Co-Editor of Library Hi Tech and Program Chair of iConference2014
- Dr. Sven Fund, in his function as Publishing Director of DeGruyter
- Prof. Debora Weber-Wulff, in her function as German plagiarism researcher and VroniPlag Wiki participant
- Prof. Michael Seadle, in his function as Head of the Commission on Research Ethics at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Dr. Lynn Silipigni Connaway, in her function as an author
- Prof. Tingting Jiang, in her function as an author