

Editorial 31(4): What copy editing of reference lists reveals

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The topic for this Editorial musing may seem at first to be simply revisits to topics or themes well-represented in recent Editorials [1], especially 29(4) [2], 30(3) [3], 30(4) [4] and 31(1) [5]. However, new insights arise, and in the case of reference lists, two key phrases have come to our attention, *citation contamination* and the *politics of citation*. These define new perspectives that are very relevant for the copy editing of reference lists, because IIER's procedure is to verify a web address for every reference, if possible, starting with an address provided by the authors or by using Google searches or other procedures. Viewing the abstract page or even the full text for a cited article is necessary to attain high accuracy and completeness in bibliographic detail. The procedure also obtains information on *citation contamination*, if relevant, and the positioning of a references list in the *politics of citation*.

We encountered the term *citation contamination* initially in a Cabells blog by Simon Linacre (2021) [6] and an article by Rick Anderson (2019) [7]. Simon Linacre expressed a concern "that research is not lost to predatory publishing activities", and discussed "a step forward in preventing 'citation contamination', where articles published in predatory journals find their way into legitimate journals by being referenced by them directly." [6]

However, Linacre could be falling into a simplistic assumption that you can judge the quality of an article by 'the company it keeps'. This unhappy circumstance is familiar, having been experienced with actions by Australia's ARC (Australian Research Council) during the years 2008-12, when it pursued its attempt to rank the merit of research work according to the ARC's categorisation of the "research outlet" (journal of publication). "Outlets" were categorised in "four Tiers", A* (top 5%), A (next 15%), B (next 30%) or C (bottom 50%) [8, 9]. The attempt was doomed to failure, because authors may choose to publish highly meritorious research in a lowly ranked journal, among other reasons for failure. Expressed in another way by David Crotty, "We live in an article-level economy, and an individual article should be judged for its own merits, not averaged in with its neighbors." [10]

There are further problems with Linacre's proposed step forward being based upon a paid subscription to "Cabells Predatory Reports database" [6]. From the perspective of IIER and our authors, and perhaps many other small scale publishers, new expenses must be avoided. There are no spare funds. Also, many authors are likely to resent being told that a citation they have made in their article is a "contamination", as it implies some kind of fault on their part. One should be careful with accusations about predatory publishing, as some authors who have examined the APCs ("article processing charges") specified by big multinational publishers for open access status in their prestigious journals, may feel the

definition of "predatory publishing activities" should be broadened to include cases of excessively large APCs.

IIER 31(4) contains 995 references, all subjected to our copy editing routine that aims for high accuracy and completeness in bibliographic detail. The 31(4) copy editing revealed that the perspective of *citation contamination* has little or no utility in IIER's context. We rely very much upon good judgments by the citing authors that are based upon their own reading of the cited article. Presumably that is a sounder method for assessing, compared with that used for compiling Cabells' Predatory Reports database, which seems to depend mainly or even wholly upon examining the activities of publishers rather than actual reading of individual published articles.

Notwithstanding the criticisms above, a knowledge of characteristic features of predatory journals may occasionally be useful when copy editing references lists. For example, earlier in 2021, routine checking of a citation encountered a title page including the line, "Received: 18 February 2020 / Accepted: 18 February 2020 / Published: 19 February 2020" [11]. That is a 'too good to be true' speed for publication of a journal article! Could that be a case of a predatory publisher or a 'citation contamination'? Perhaps worth checking further, but on doing so it quickly became clearly evident that it was not such a case (though it is without doubt an almost unbelievably rapid speed of publication for a refereed and copy edited academic article). Sorry, authors, IIER cannot emulate, but you could note that in this case the journal's APC for open access is 'moderately large' and 'infinitely larger' than IIER's APC, which is zero.

In contrast to *citation contamination*, the term *politics of citation* has considerable utility, perhaps especially in the case of IIER. The term was encountered initially in an email from Margaret Merga, drawing our attention to her article with Shannon Mason, themed on the politics of citation [12], and their article on internationality of journals [13]. The two authors are well-known to IIER, with Shannon being published in IIER 26(3), 29(3) and 30(4), and Margaret in IIER 25(3), and the present issue, 31(4). Their comments on the politics of citation sought citation practices that could "broaden and contextualise what counts as 'prestigious' research and create a more equitable publishing environment for research outside of core anglophone countries." [12]. That aligns well with IIER's perspective upon "*servicing authors most in need*" and "*How can we extend opportunity*", as outlined in Editorial 30(3) [3].

The insights that copy editing of reference lists provides into IIER's positioning in the *politics of citation* are intangible, as an interpretive framework, a way of discerning a pattern, and an insight into what compels authors to "reproduce a certain set of citations, a certain model of reference" (Kim, 2020) [14]. At a basic level that helps sustain a task that could be dreary and daunting (995 references were edited for this issue, perhaps averaging 2-3 minutes per reference, but occasionally much longer).

However, to attain a higher level of insight, it will be necessary to create a much larger dataset, for example including for each of the 995 IIER 31(4) references its Scopus or Scimago quartile; country or world region for data collection; authors' country or

countries or world region; authors' gender; sector or sectors of education; risk (in any) of being regarded as a *citation contamination*; and perhaps other items. That is daunting, though not necessarily dreary, given that in Editorial 30(2) [15] we have mapped out a set of actions and concerns that could be well-served by such a dataset and a framing in the *politics of citation*. But Roger needs to persuade himself that he is not out of practice since *Journals with borders, journals without borders* in 2013 [16].

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Stop press: During the final proof reading for the references above, we encountered a very recent article by David Crotty [10]. The article is:

Crotty, D. (2021). Market consolidation and the demise of the independently publishing research society. *The Scholarly Kitchen*, 14 December.
<https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2021/12/14/market-consolidation-and-the-demise-of-the-independently-publishing-research-society/>

The demise of the independently publishing research society? Such as those who sponsor IIER? Not so. We'll address the challenge (again) in several of our 2022 editorials. Meanwhile, all the best for your scholarly endeavours in 2022!

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