



Editorial Abuses

To the Editor:

The recent statement on the ethics of publication broadcasted in this journal and aimed to foster research integrity (1), gives me the occasion to describe a new instance of what I believe is unfair or unethical editorial behavior, namely a non-consulted and non-approved manuscript modification.

In June 2017, I got accepted the Letter to the Editor (in Spanish) “Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome: self-plagiarism or simple missed citation?” to be published in the Spanish journal *Revista de Neurología*. As usual, I signed the copyright transfer form which features the original title; then, I was waiting for the galley proofs but never got them. So, I was surprised to find out that my letter was published on 1 September 2017 (2). In reading it, I was very disappointed because the original title has been changed to the nonsensical one “Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome: simple missed citation?” and above all by the elimination of the following crucial section and respective reference (3): “Even if such an omission may be irrelevant, it can hardly be ascribed to authors’ careless. According to the rules of publication ethics, this omission configures a self-plagiarism or “meat extender” practice whose essential feature is the lack of references to previous articles on the subject by the same authors (3)”. I emphasize that these modifications were made by the journal without any warning and without my authorization. Faced to such editorial abuse, I reluctantly wrote to the journal office to express my unconformity and ask for the publication of an erratum. In his answer, the journal’s Director argues that “the publisher... reserves the right to modify their contents [of Letters to the Director] without prior notice according to space requirements or in the event that the text contains expressions or inappropriate words in the field of scientific communication”. Then, how could them accept my letter and tell me nothing about its content or length? Why the original title was preserved in the copyright transfer form? Why I did not receive the galley proofs? (the original MS in Spanish, signed copyright transfer form, and e-mail correspondence are available upon request and are held by the *Journal of Korean Medical Science*).

I remark that the concerned journal’s website (<https://www.neurologia.com/proceso-revision>) makes explicit the review process and specifically declares that the galley proofs will be sent to the corresponding author before publication for a final revision. I also emphasize the contrast between the tangential and incongruous response of the editorial office regarding my unconformity letter and the journal’s announcement of having

an ombudsperson (*defensor del autor*) whose function is to deal with ethical issues inherent to the editorial process.

Although the instance here described may belong to the “excessive editing” category of editorial misbehaviors (4,5), in my view it is still worst because the crucial point of self-plagiarism was purposefully effaced from both the letter’s title and content. By the way, the self-plagiarism highlighted in my letter (2) cannot be dismissed as innocent textual reuse (6). Regardless of whether such editorial decision resulted from a conflict of interest or other reasons (1), it diverges from the editorial duties as required by the Committee on Publication Ethics’ code of conduct (7). Specifically, the undue and abusive modification of my letter militates against the expected editorial commitment to “champion freedom of expression”.

Whether this instance amounts to misconduct or is a questionable editorial practice is irrelevant inasmuch as it illustrates again the imbalanced editor-author relationship (5,8). The fact that editorial misconduct is seldom exposed and often neglected (4,9,10) reflects the editor’s power and the difficulty of publishing the respective complaints rather than a rare occurrence of such malpractices (11-14).

In brief, editors must adhere to ethical guidelines regarding their role and duties toward authors (15) and should not remain unaccountable and completely free from any obligations to those who depend on them (11,14).

DISCLOSURE

The author has no potential conflict of interest to disclose.

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Received: 20 September 2017 / Accepted: 22 September 2017