

Editorial

Arrogant misquotations from reference citations

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It is very easy to find medical references these days, as computers are now in general use and we appreciate the endless benefits that they bring. In earlier times, though, perhaps as recently as 10 years ago, one had to work very hard searching for references using the “List of Journals Indexed for the Japan Medical Abstracts Society Database,” printed and published periodically. However, at least we were able to read the original medical research papers. Nowadays, I rarely come across reports that make me believe authors have actually read the “original” papers they are citing, published some time in the past. I think this is attributable to the ease with which references can be found now. These reports citing previous papers seem to lack the necessary depth, and when reading them one often receives the impression that the authors are trying to imply that they performed the original research themselves. Therefore, authors need to be more modest and acknowledge the fact that most human achievements have been built on a foundation laid by our predecessors; it cannot be said that similar research never existed in the past.

As most cited references used in recent reports are found via the Internet, there can be some difficulty in obtaining information about detailed research work relating to the year in which an original report was published. Finding this information requires a lot of time and much work, searching papers not only from the twentieth century, but sometimes also the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This appears to be why some people tend to plagiarize information from recent reports, pretending they have read the original papers, but often omitting important facts or cutting things short. This kind of sloppiness creates a great deal of misunderstanding and is a reflection of the author’s casual attitude.

Figure 1 shows a list of cited references used by famous orthopedic surgeons from the United States in their reports, published in one of the leading American medical journals. It is clear that incorrect German and French words have been used. These incorrectly cited references formed the basis of the original research on the disease and the various methods of treating it. It is disappointing that such well-known surgeons in the United States should have misquoted these renowned German and French scientists and their pioneering work. I can only assume that the authors did not bother to read the original work or ignored it, or that the misquoted references were not checked thoroughly by their editors. I would say that this is a basic error and was probably caused by their negligence.

I know that reports submitted to American medical journals in the United States and written by non-English speakers, including Japanese, are subjected to a good deal of correction, which is understandable. However, I think that American publishers should be equally critical of reports submitted by famous researchers from the United States, because quite often, some of their reports do contain incorrect information. Just because a journal happens to be American does not mean that the content is necessarily reliable or trustworthy.

I, myself, have found embarrassing mistakes when reading some of these publications, with misquoted titles and authors’ names, along with other incorrect information. This is why it is so important to do thorough research beforehand, to make sure that everything is correct. I truly believe this is the very least we should do, to show some respect for the original authors.

Generally speaking, it is quite noticeable how ignorant some American authors can be, with regard to their knowledge of and attitude to languages other than American English. As English is spoken all over the world, Americans appear to have become somewhat arrogant. This situation is analogous to the time of the Roman Empire, when the Romans erroneously believed

- 1. König F: Ueber freie Körper in den Gelenken. *Dtsch Z Chir* 27:90-109, 1888
2. Yvars MF: Osteochondral fractures of the dome of the talus. *Clin Orthop* 114:185-191, 1976
3. Berndt AL, Harty M: Transchondral fractures (osteochondritis dissecans) of the talus. *J Bone Joint Surg Am* 41:988-1020, 1959
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22. Johnson RP, Aaberg TM: Use of retrograde bone grafting in the treatment of osseous defects of the lateral condyle of the knee. A preliminary report of three knees in two patients. *Orthopedics* 10: 291-297, 1987
- 23. König F: "Ueber freie körper in den geelen. *Dtsch Z Chir* 27: 90, 1887-1888
24. Langenskiöld A: Can osteochondritis dissecans arise as a sequel of cartilage fracture in early childhood? An experimental study. *Acta Chir Scand* 109: 206-209, 1955
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5. JULIUSSON, R, MARKHEDE, G: A modified Hauser procedure for reucrrrent dislocation of the patella. *Arch Orthop Trauma Surg* 103:42-44, 1984.
- 6. ROUX, C: Luxation habituelle de la retule; traitement operatoire. *Rev Chir Paris* 8:682-689, 1888.
7. GOLDTHWART, JE: Dislocation of the patella. *Trans Am Orthop Assoc* 8:237-238, 1895.

Fig. 1. Misquotations from three articles (arrows) written by famous authors from the United States

15. Koch, W.: Ueber embolische Knochennekrosen. *Arch. Klin. Chir.*, 23: 315, 1879.
- 16. König, F.: Ueber freie Körper in den Gelenken. *Dtsch. Z. Chir.*, 27: 90, 1888.
17. Landells, J.W.: The reactions of injured human articular cartilage. *J. Bone Joint Surg. [Br.]*, 39: 548, 1957.

Fig. 2. Precise citation (arrow) by Dr. Paul Aichroth. (Osteochondritis dissecans of the knee, in *Surgery of the Knee*, edited by J. N. Insall, New York, Churchill Livingstone, 1984, p. 167-189)

that they were infallible. This arrogance and lack of respect for different cultures is not confined to the world of medical publishing, but seems to be a reflection of American foreign policy in general, in which everything is expected to be handled purely on American terms. This is in sharp contrast to the attitude shown by American scientists in earlier times, when they

appeared quite humble by comparison. For example, Finkelstein, when referring to a German research paper, quoted the original German text very accurately and on numerous occasions, in his own report, with regard to "de Quervain tenosynovitis (1895)". It is evident that Finkelstein very much admired de Quervain, who was Swiss and worked at universities in Basel,

Berne, and other cities where German was spoken. Harry Finkelstein was an American and published this report while he was working at The Hospital for Joint Diseases, New York, in 1930.

In my opinion, British scientists — who of course also speak English — have always shown, and still show, a more professional attitude when it comes to knowledge of original research work and correct quotation of references. For example, the British orthopedic surgeon Dr. Paul Aichroth made a very accurate reference to König (Fig. 2), whom I mentioned earlier. I do believe that Europeans are naturally courteous to other Europeans, but I sincerely feel that showing respect for other cultures and being professional is the correct attitude to take. Fortunately, I have had the privilege of meeting Dr. Aichroth, who is an eminent scholar with a calm and good-natured personality, and he was more than happy to answer my questions, despite my limited English. I would feel more inclined to trust the content of a scientific report written by someone with

a sincere nature such as his, regardless of whether I had read it or not.

There is no doubt that Japan seems to regard the United States as a world leader in every field. In the medical field also, we read American reports graciously and perhaps even imitate their style, simply because they are American. It is also indisputable that Japanese researchers strive to have their reports published in American journals, or to seek research experience in the United States, as a means of gaining international credibility and furthering their careers. Against this background — and the remarkable achievements of the United States must be acknowledged — I think that, at the very least, a dignified attitude is important when writing a report. There is no place for negligence or arrogance where scientific studies are concerned. Finally, although it is necessary to write accurate reports that reflect our personalities, I do come across some reports now and again where I would wish to say to the authors “Don’t be so conceited.”