

# How Not to Publish an Open Access Journal: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

A manuscript, an original research paper, was submitted to an open access (OA) journal, *Romanian Biotechnology Letters*, in February, 2012. Upon submission, no manuscript number was assigned. The journal “lost” the manuscript for 6 months, despite at least three e-mail requests to the editor-in-chief. After the authors requested peer comments, the manuscript was automatically accepted in August, 2012, although the acceptance letter also request the payment of a publication fee. Moreover, the publisher requested the authors to set the tables within the proof text. The authors were not informed once the manuscript had been officially published at the end of October, 2012. After the chance discovery of the final PDF of the paginated and published paper online, three out of 5 tables were found to be missing. Following an immediate complaint, the same paper with the same pages was re-published, although the text was squashed, the missing tables were poorly set and even data in one table was missing. The visual aspect of the final paper was unacceptable and different from other manuscripts in the same journal issue. The entire editorial process, from submission to publication, was flawed and did not conform to established industry standards. This paper, a case study, shows, step by step, how easily scientists can become victims of poor editorial mismanagement. Not only does it serve as an example of how a publisher should not to conduct the publishing process and to warn other scientists of the risks involved, whether for this journal, or for others. Consequently, the original paper is fully republished as an appendix. Scientists ultimately have the right to defend their intellectual data and contribution. The misrepresentation and mismanagement of the editorial process by a publisher should be recorded through case studies such as this one.

“Whoever commits a fraud is guilty not only of the particular injury to him who he deceives, but of the diminution of that confidence which constitutes not only the ease but the existence of society.” Samuel Johnson

“Among sinners, silence is an accomplice” translated by the authors from Mihály Babits: The Book of Jonah

**Keywords:** *erratum*, faith, honesty, principles, scholarly publishing standards, values

## BASIC EXPECTATIONS OF THE PUBLISHING PROCESS

Although the responsibilities of authors, editors, editors-in-chief (EiC), journals and publishers have been discussed in considerable depth elsewhere in this special issue (Teixeira da Silva 2013), some brief notes as pertains to some key responsibilities held by these parties are listed next:

- Upon submission of a manuscript to a journal, the journal has the responsibility to acknowledge that manuscript in a timely manner, and assign a manuscript number.
- If a journal claims to be peer reviewed, then it must conduct peer review.
- After a peer review is complete, the authors should be given a fair amount of time to make edits.
- Only when the final version of the manuscript is ready, having given the authors ample opportunity to make the required edits, should a proof be developed.
- A proof should be sent to at least the corresponding author, but ideally to all co-authors to ensure that all authors have had the opportunity to see the proof and check it prior to publication.
- The data and information contained within a manuscript should be faithfully represented within the published version of the manuscript, free of errors induced by the publisher and post-proof edits should not be made without the permission, or knowledge of the authors.
- The publisher is responsible for setting text, tables and

- figures, not the authors.
- After the proof has been approved by the authors, and once the paper has been published, either online or in print, the publisher has the responsibility of informing the authors that their manuscript has been published.
- Following publication, if there be minor edits, for example to data, references or text, then the publisher has the responsibility of publishing an *erratum*, unless, during proof development, the publisher has indicated that there is no *errata* policy, and that the authors have been duly informed. In the case where major errors exist (which in fact should not occur if the publisher has in fact conducted peer review and performed proper editorial work), and where the error has been made by the publisher, for example, the omission of a table or a figure, then the publisher has the responsibility of officially withdrawing the manuscript, and re-publishing it to faithfully represent the complete data set.
- Under no circumstances should a publisher manipulate a published PDF file in the case of an open access (OA) journal.

## CHRONOLOGICAL BREAK-DOWN OF THE SUBMISSION TO ROMANIAN BIOTECHNOLOGY LETTERS

In this section, we provide a detailed and precise date-by-date factual explanation of each and every aspect of the publishing process at *Romanian Biotechnology Letters* (RBL), and also pertinent e-mails in **Appendix 1**.

## LESSONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER

A brief summary of the RBL case:

- a) RBL "lost" the submission for 6 months (February 11 to mid-August).
- b) RBL assigned no manuscript number despite acknowledging receipt of the manuscript.
- c) The RBL "peer" review only started after 6 months, and even so, only after 3 complaints.
- d) Finally, there was no peer review at RBL, just an instant acceptance with a request to make payment (see **Online Appendix 1**). Even if it was only 50 EUR, this was fundamentally wrong. The RBL "Instructions for Authors" (see **Online Appendix 4**) clearly states (p 2) "All manuscripts are reviewed by 3 qualified foreign reviewers." Our manuscript was automatically accepted, i.e., not reviewed by any reviewers.
- e) The corrected version of the manuscript was submitted to replace an older version for proof development. Twice, RBL sent us the incorrect, old file for revision.
- f) RBL asked us, the authors, to set the tables into the proof text. If so, why are authors charged money?
- g) RBL published our paper, but failed to include 3 tables. Moreover, a false submission date was published: 10 January, 2012 (the correct date was February 11, 2012). This suggests that false information can be created by the publisher, and included in the final published document, without the knowledge of the public and scientists. The acceptance date is fairly accurate.
- h) RBL rushed the final publication in just a few days, including the assignment of pages. The paper was formally published online without informing the authors that the paper had been published.
- i) RBL manipulated the already published paper (**Online Appendix 2**) inserting the 3 missing tables, editing the visual of the manuscript such that it was different to other manuscripts within the same journal issue. The visual aspect of the manuscript, particularly the 3 missing tables, was unacceptable since table text and main text was indistinguishable and since some information in a few table boxes was masked (**Online Appendix 3**). In summary, a rushed, amateur and unprofessional representation of our data.

## CONCLUSIONS

- a) OA publishers and online journals can easily modify the content of papers, for example HTML content or a PDF file, if they so wish. Consequently, the original or manipulated content will never truly be known. Currently, responsibility and transparency are neither quantifiable nor verifiable. Moreover, no global fraud watchdog in science and science publishing exists to adjudicate such cases.
- b) RBL, in this case, showed very little editorial responsibility and gross negligence during the entire publishing process. Even if this case is not representative of all manuscripts, its very existence should serve as a note of caution to RBL authors and to the wider OA community. For these reasons, RBL has been listed as a predatory OA publisher at [www.scholarlyoa.com](http://www.scholarlyoa.com).
- c) There are currently no robust or verifiable means to detect the substitution of a PDF file, post publication, of a publisher.

Scientists usually spend a long time preparing a manuscript for publication. Thus, they expect that it will be faithfully and correctly represented in the final published format. They do not expect the data to be manipulated, altered or edited in any way. Each and every aspect of the publishing process should be handled professionally and in a timely manner by the publisher. It takes time to develop a paper, and considerable energy, and in the case of a scientific paper, which includes often weeks or months of experiments, the scientific paper represents the maximum culmination of considerable investment (finances, human resour-

ces, time, effort, intellect). Thus, independent of the fame of the publisher, the trust that a scientist has that the publisher and its staff will correctly handle the paper from submission to publication is the basic cornerstone of the scholarly publishing process. When that trust has been betrayed, authors have several options: 1) request a manuscript to be withdrawn before publication; 2) request that a manuscript be retracted after publication; 3) make a formal complaint to an "ethics body" such as COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics, UK; [www.COPE.org](http://www.COPE.org)). However, COPE only evaluates case studies if the person or publisher issuing the complaint is a paid member, i.e., justice is commercialized. 4) In an extreme case, such as this one, where the entire process has been so unprofessionally handled, and where an "ethics body" such as COPE cannot be approached because neither author is a member, the entire manuscript should be fully republished, if necessary, in this format, as an annex or appendix (**Appendix 3**) with a clear indication of the original publication and the full reasoning behind republication.

## ROMANIAN BIOTECHNOLOGY LETTERS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PUBLICALLY AVAILABLE DATA

This manuscript highlights how one particular publisher has failed in 100% of the basic requirements and responsibilities that a publisher, its editors and EiC have (in particular a-j above), with respect to one manuscript. RBL is published by the University of Bucharest, Romania, but with financial support by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research and CNCSIS (National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education). In order to better understand how it is possible that such a massive publishing mismanagement could have taken place, we next provide some information based on what is available on the RBL web-site (**Appendix 2**).

Basic stats (5-year) and information (because the "About the journal" button and web-site are not working):  
 2008: 4085 pp + 165 pp suppl. published  
 2009: 4912 pp published  
 2010: 5828 pp + 370 pp suppl. published  
 2011: 6853 pp + 310 pp suppl. published  
 2012: 7880 pp published

Although inconsistent style in titles of published papers and excessive stylistic errors in the text and references can be observed, scientific content was not assessed. Participating authors are mainly (estimated 75%) Romanian scientists followed by Turkish, Iranian and Chinese in roughly equal amounts with scientists from very few other countries.

What remains unclear, however, is the following:

- a) How many similar cases such as this one have taken place at RBL?
- b) How many PDFs have been substituted at RBL without an *erratum* or public declaration?
- c) How many times are RBL papers being referenced in other journals with the objective of being increasingly indexed, referenced and thus to ultimately obtain an Impact Factor? The web-site states "The Journal is covered by Thomson Reuters services".
- d) Is RBL a conduit to artificially promote Romanian science and give a false impression that good work is being conducted, even though it is evident that no peer review is taking place and that papers are being published in the submitted state?
- e) How can RBL be so prolific (almost 8000 published pages in one year), i.e., how in fact is it possible to publish so many pages of research in one year in one journal?
- f) Are peer review reports open to the public if requested?
- g) Do 100% of authors pay the publishing fee and is the fee a guarantee of acceptance and publication?

## EXTRAPOLATION: ONE HYPOTHETICAL CASE

In closing, try to envision a hypothetical example. Try to imagine (as an extreme but easy-to-visualize case) a paper that was published by, let's say, a scientist from country A that claims, based on apparent empirical data, that a plant has very good medicinal, cancer-healing properties. This would be a significant finding with a positive consequence for human health and society. That scientist would pay a small fee to a predatory journal (as considered by [www.scholarlyoa.com](http://www.scholarlyoa.com)) which prolifically publishes work by scientists of country A. The scientist pays US\$ 200-300 for getting work published automatically as OA and the "miraculous" data set is published, most likely very rapidly. The world, which is now able to read about this "miraculous" discovery for free as OA, believes that this scientist is talented, having found a cure to cancer. The scientist is richly rewarded with good research funds, maybe even a better salary and a higher position. The paper is frequently referenced in other papers, even in papers within top class bio-medical journals, and possible even tested in another laboratory. However, a few cancer specialists from around the world start to scrutinize the paper and find that the data actually shows that the plant does not cure cancer, although that scientist in the meantime has become famous. In this circumstance, the scientist contacts the predatory publisher with "sincere" apologies and requests a change to the data set in the PDF citing that a serious mistake has been made. The predatory journal changes the data, replaces the PDF and removes, forever, the old evidence of the fraud committed by both country A's author and the publisher. That scientist might even be requested to pay an additional US\$ 50-100 to make edits in the PDF to have it replaced. Any new cancer researcher who now subsequently comes to the site sees only the new PDF file, claiming that indeed that scientist from country A and the data are of great merit and value. The scientist maintains his or her position, high

salary and research funds, and the cycle of fraud continues, possibly even with the same publisher, where the scientist knows that fraud is permitted (at a small cost, of course). In this case, the scientist from country A is the primary fraud, but is supported by the publisher, which is the secondary fraud. In this case, the publisher has acted unethically, because they have simply substituted the PDF file, eliminating all evidence of the former version of the PDF file. This exemplifies one of the weaknesses of the gold-OA model.

## INVITATION TO RESPOND AND RESPONSE BY ROMANIAN BIOTECHNOLOGY LETTERS

The formal invitation to submit a rebuttal and the rebuttal by RBL follows. A 250-word limit was requested within a 7-day period (similar to proof corrections). The request was made directly to the Editor-in-Chief but was also CC'd to all RBL editors to provide RBL a fair opportunity to provide a focused and collective public response. No member of the RBL editorial board responded, even up to 3 weeks (February 1, 2013) after the formal request and in fact, the Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Stefana Jurcoane, as well as the Managing Editor, Dr. Nicolae Corcionivoschi, requested all members to ignore the request:

"Dear all, please ignore this email."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DISCLAIMER

The authors wish to thank Mr. Jeff Beall (Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver, Denver, USA) for input. The case described and opinions expressed within this manuscript reflect exclusively those of the authors.

Appendix 1 Screen-shot of the top page of *Romanian Biotechnology Letters* (on 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2013).

The screenshot shows the homepage of the journal *Romanian Biotechnological Letters*. The page is light blue with a white header area. At the top left is a photograph of a classical building. The journal title "ROMANIAN BIOTECHNOLOGICAL LETTERS" is centered in blue. To the right is the logo of the University of Bucharest. Below the title is a navigation bar with links: "About the journal", "Editorial Board", "Instructions for Authors", "Archives", and "Contact us". The main heading reads "an international journal ISSN 1224 - 5984". A sidebar on the left has a blue background and white text for the same navigation links. The main text area contains several paragraphs describing the journal's scope and editorial process. At the bottom, a copyright notice states "Copyright © University of Bucharest 2007. All rights reserved." and the date "2013/01/05" is circled in red in the bottom right corner.

**Appendix 2** Chronological listing of e-mail exchanges between authors and *Romanian Biotechnology Letters* in a bid to provide a fully factual, transparent and balanced perspective of the case. All communications are unedited *verbatim* text except for e-mail addresses which have been removed, except for key, publically available and relevant ones.

Contacts:

Romanian Biotechnological Letters romanianrbl@gmail.com;  
rbl\_journal@yahoo.com  
Stefana Jurcoane (Editor-in-Chief): stefana.jurcoane@biotechgen.eu;  
jstefana@yahoo.com

From: Stefana Jurcoane  
Date: 2013/1/8  
Subject: Re: Romanian Biotechnology Letters: Official request and complaint  
To: all RBL editors

Dear all,  
Please ignore this email,

On Mon, Jan 7, 2013 at 10:26 PM, Romanian Biotechnological Letters <romanianrbl@gmail.com> wrote:

Please ignore the following email

Dr. Nicolae Corcionivoschi  
Managing Editor  
Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
National Children Research Centre  
Crumlin Road  
Dublin 12  
Ireland  
Tel: +353 1 4096597  
Fax: +353 1 4550201  
romanianrbl@gmail.com

From: Jaime Silva  
To: All RBL editors  
Sent: Tuesday, January 8, 2013 12:44 AM  
Subject: Romanian Biotechnology Letters: Official request and complaint

Dear Prof. Stefana Jurcoane,  
Editor-in-Chief, Romanian Biotechnology Letters (RBL)  
CC: RBL editor board members

Manuscript No: none (RBL 17 (5), 7639-7645)

You may recall a manuscript that was fairly recently published in RBL in Volume 17(5). Unfortunately, all of the events, from manuscript handling and e-mail communications held between the authors and the editorial staff (you, Dr. Stelian Matei Petre or others), right up to publication and eventual substitution of a published paper with another published paper led my co-author and I to believe that the editorial responsibilities at RBL were not only insufficient, they are fraudulent. Based on our experience, we have now drafted a paper that will soon be published, therefore please consider the Word file attached as the proof prior to publication. There are appendices but they all contain information and documents that are all publically available, therefore they have not been attached.

We invite you to please provide a coordinated response that does not exceed 250 words to our publication. Also feel free to add any edit (e.g., correction) to the Word file attached using text editor. Since this e-mail and file have been sent to the entire editorial board, we will assume that the response from RBL will represent the official and final response. Please provide the 250-word response within 7 days. The response will not be edited or altered in any way and will be published *verbatim*.

After the paper has been published, we will proceed to contact the Romanian Ministry of Education, which funds and supports RBL, to lodge a formal complaint, based on this formally published document.

The objective of this paper is three-fold: a) to indicate that RBL has not taken its editorial responsibilities seriously and has committed serious errors and fraud; b) to alert other scientists of the risks of publishing with RBL; c) to set a new precedent in science publishing where the publisher and editors are also held accountable for their actions in a public arena. Our hope is that if we are able to alert sufficient scientists to this case, that a greater level of awareness and pro-active action against fraud may start to be part of the publishing process.

We are confident that, even though you might not be pleased with this approach, that you will, as academics who share the same ideals of a fraud-free publishing platform for scientists, support and encourage this initiative.

We look forward to your 250-word response within 7 days.

Cordially,

Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva and Judit Dobránszki

To: RBL Journal  
Cc: Stefana Jurcoane  
Sent: Tuesday, October 30, 2012 8:34 PM  
Subject: Tables 3-5 missing!: Kindly note: Proof: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Prof. Jurcoane,  
Unfortunately your staff has completely missed publishing Tables 3, 4 and 5. Please re-set the proof with all 5 tables included and please re-send the manuscript with new page numbers.  
Thank you in advance,  
Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

From: RBL Journal  
Cc: Stefana Jurcoane  
Sent: Saturday, October 20, 2012 6:41 PM  
Subject: Re: Kindly note: Proof: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Mr. Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva  
I hope you received the message from Prof. Jurcoane Stefana.

*Following up, this is my personal opinion about this situation:*  
First of all, nobody wants to extort you (this is a serious false accusation), this is the standard fee for publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters. I have the proof that I send you the university bank account (not my personal bank account) where the fee must be payed. Secondly, every publisher has his own rules, if you read the instructions for authors before we didn't had this conversation, which is quite boring. In my first email and also in the documents attached I never said that your article WILL be published, my words were: "Was accepted for publication in No.5 /2012. In order to be published you have to pay the fee and confirm the final form of your article ...." Regarding the publication fee, please be sure that our board will prove the wisdom gathered over the years and will do a charitable and except you from paying the tax. Is a hard time during the financial crisis and we understand it. Please visit our website at the end this month for downloading your reprints and to see your article published in our journal.

Kind regards,  
Ing. PETRE Stelian Matei  
Revista Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Bd. Marasti, Nr. 59, Sector 1, Bucuresti

From: Stefana Jurcoane  
Sent: Friday, October 19, 2012 2:25 AM  
Subject: article for Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Dear Dr. Teixeira da Silva,

Firstly, I inform you that your article will be published in the issue no. 5, as I promised, and the setting of the tables will be done by our staff members ( though it is the obligation of the authors to do this, as you can see on the site of our journal - www.rombio.eu - in the chapter - Instructions for Authors ); Secondly, I will try to give you some explanation:

-concerning peer review, the subject of your article is a little different to those that we usually are publishing in our journal and this is why we had some problems with finding reviewers.

-all Romanian authors pay the publication fees (we have documents); in your case, we accept, this time, free publishing.

I apologize for all inconveniences,  
Sincerely,

Professor Dr. Stefana Jurcoane  
Vice-Dean Faculty of Biotechnology  
University of Agronomical Sciences  
and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest  
59, Bd. Marasti, 017464  
Bucharest, ROMANIA  
Tel/Fax: 00 40 21 2242693

From: RBL Journal  
Sent: Sunday, October 14, 2012 5:43 PM  
Subject: Fw: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Authors,

With this message I send you the last form of article and the payment informations. Please insert the tables in the text.

I wait your last form and payment document before 16 october 2012.

Kind regards,  
Ing. PETRE Stelian Matei  
Revista Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Bd. Marasti, Nr. 59, Sector 1, Bucuresti

Sent: Friday, October 12, 2012 4:16 PM  
To: RBL Journal  
Dear Dr. Matei,

My co-author and I did not receive a proof. Please send to us immediately as we need this paper included in the next issue because we are referencing the paper in other papers before December.

Thank you  
Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

From: RBL Journal  
Sent: Friday, October 12, 2012 3:21 PM  
Subject: Re: Thank you: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Author,  
I didn't received any proof from you and the deadline were passed about 1 week ago.  
If you send the final form of the article & the fee document these days I will include your article in this issue (last chance).  
I wait your response before 14 Oct. 2012. If not, the publication will be postponed and scheduled for the next issues.  
Kind regards,  
Ing. PETRE Stelian Matei  
Revista Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Bd. Marasti, Nr. 59, Sector 1, Bucuresti

To: RBL Journal  
Sent: Sunday, September 23, 2012 6:46 AM  
Subject: Thank you: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Ing. Matei,  
Thank you very much for accepting our manuscript for RBL. We look forward to receiving the proof in due course.  
Sincerely,  
Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

From: RBL Journal  
Sent: Thursday, September 20, 2012 3:02 AM  
Subject: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Authors,  
We are pleased to inform you that your article, attached to this message, was accepted for publication in N0. 5 / 2012 of Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal. All informations regarding the fees and the manuscript are attached to this message.  
I wait your answer latest October 3, 2012.  
Best regards,  
Ing. PETRE Stelian Matei  
Revista Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Bd. Marasti, Nr. 59, Sector 1, Bucuresti

From: RBL Journal  
Sent: Wednesday, September 19, 2012 9:02 PM  
Subject: Article publication in Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal  
Dear Authors,  
We are pleased to inform you that your article, attached to this message, was accepted for publication in N0. 5 / 2012 of Romanian Biotechnological Letters Journal. All informations regarding the fees and the manuscript are attached to this message.  
I wait your answer latest October 3, 2012.  
Best regards,  
Ing. PETRE Stelian Matei  
Revista Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Bd. Marasti, Nr. 59, Sector 1, Bucuresti

From: Stefana Jurcoane  
Sent: Sunday, August 19, 2012 12:38 AM  
Subject: Re: RBL article for publication  
Dear Jaime Da Silva,  
I received the manuscript; it will be published in the issue number 5 of our Journal because the number 4 is ready for publishing (next week will be on the site); Regarding the supplementary file, it is possible; send us the file,  
Best regards,  
Professor Dr. Stefana Jurcoane

From: Stefana Jurcoane  
Sent: Friday, August 17, 2012 12:31 AM  
Subject: article from RBL

Dear Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva ,  
Today I receive your mail forwarded by one colleague; I would like to inform you that I change my mail six months ago; Sorry for inconvenient; Please, give me details about the paper and what we must change,  
Best regards,  
Professor Dr. Stefana Jurcoane  
Vice-Dean Faculty of Biotechnology  
University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest  
59, Bd. Marasti, 017464  
Bucharest, ROMANIA  
Tel/Fax: 00 40 21 2242693

To: jurcoane stefana  
Cc: RBL Journal  
Sent: Thursday, August 16, 2012 7:03 PM  
Subject: Reminder 2: Update request: New submission: Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Dear Prof. Jurcoane,  
Could you please provide an update on the peer review of the Collaboration in Hungary manuscript submitted in February, 2012.  
I will be forced to make an official complaint to the Romanian Ministry of Education if you do not respond by next week Monday.  
Thank you,  
Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

To: jurcoane stefana  
Cc: RBL Journal  
Sent: Friday, July 20, 2012 11:05 PM  
Subject: Update request: New submission: Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Dear Prof. Jurcoane,  
Could you please provide an update on the peer review of the Collaboration in Hungary manuscript submitted in February, 2012.  
Thank you,  
Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

From: jurcoane stefana  
Sent: Saturday, February 11, 2012 10:34 PM  
Subject: Re: New submission: Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Dear Jaime Silva,  
This manuscript will be reviewed and after that it will be published in one future issue,  
Best regards,  
Professor Dr. Stefana Jurcoane  
University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest  
Faculty of Biotechnology  
59, Bd. Marasti, 011464  
Bucharest, ROMANIA  
Tel/Fax: 00 40 21 2242893  
Email: jstefana@yahoo.com

To: jurcoane stefana  
Cc: RBL Journal  
Sent: Saturday, February 11, 2012 5:34 AM  
Subject: New submission: Romanian Biotechnological Letters  
Dear Prof. Jurcoane,  
NOTE: 2 files are attached.  
I wish to submit another manuscript which is very similar in theme to the manuscript that has already been accepted for RBL. The accepted paper deals with Italy, while this paper deals with Hungary. We feel that if you could publish this paper side-by-side with the Italy paper, it would be extremely useful and helpful for Romanian biotechnologists and scientists more broadly.  
Please let me know if this paper can be accepted for publication together with the Italy paper.  
Sincerely,  
Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

# What Constitutes Ethical International Scientific Writing Collaboration, Co-Operation and Partnerships in Hungary?

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## ABSTRACT

The biggest difficulties in research and publishing in Central European countries arise from the heritage of former socialism which crumbled more than 20 years ago. Any forms of international research co-operations, partnerships or collaborations, such as common research projects and indeed even writing co-operations as one of sub-set of research collaborations, there exists a unique possibility to focus the available resources and to generate new ones. If we examine the ethical value of international writing cooperation we should first consider what the importance of the publication is. The success of scientific research needs efficient completion of at least three sub-processes: a good basic idea (hypothesis), conducting the necessary experiments successfully, and finally, successful presentation of the results. All of the sub-processes require scientists with specific and different intellectual skills and practices. If any scientist participates in any sub-process with important intellectual contribution, then authorship is considered to be ethical and the determination of authorship is the right and sole responsibility of scientists that participated in the whole process of the successful research from implementation to publication.

Both authors contributed equally to the intellectual and structural content of this manuscript. This manuscript has been re-published as **Appendix 3** of Teixeira da Silva and Dobránszki (2013) How Not to Publish an Open Access Journal: A Case Study.

The original manuscript was published in *Romanian Biotechnology Letters* as:

Teixeira da Silva JA, Dobránszki J (2012) What constitutes ethical international scientific writing collaboration, co-operation and partnerships in Hungary? *Romanian Biotechnological Letters* **17** (5), 7639-7645

**Keywords:** collaboration; English and science writing skills; Central and Eastern Europe; Hungarian Academy of Sciences; partnerships in science writing

## HOW DOES COLLABORATION APPLY TO SCIENCE?

In science, collaboration, a partnership or co-operation (CPC) has its main purpose to move forward a proposal and to reach a common goal. From the point of view of scientific research this common goal can be different if we consider the possible forms of co-operation. Using a metaphor, scientific research can be likened to a plant and can be divided into three phases similar to the developmental phases of a plant. The seed can represent the germ of thought when one or more parties set up a hypothesis (CPC – Part 1). Then, in the next phase, these parties, together with others, establish and realize a research project (CPC – Part 2) to prove or reject the basic hypothesis, similar to the vegetative development of a plant from seed. In the final phase the plant bursts into flower and seed in order that new plants can develop and complete the cycle which it initiated. This process symbolizes the last phase of scientific research when scientists establish writing or scientific research partnerships or CPC and publish their findings (CPC – Part 3). Publishing the results from research projects results in new hypotheses, similar to seedlings, and promotes the development of a new cycle of the 3-part process. From this description it is clear that all three phases are built on each other and that the successful realization of all phases is necessary for reaching and achieving the target of the scientific research. In each phase, common goals can be determined and scientists, who are the specialist of the subsets of the task to be solved in any one phase, work together to reach this common goal. Such

a goal could take the form of a research project or a scientific publication, i.e., research or publishing CPC (Teixeira da Silva 2011a, 2011b, 2011d, 2012; Zeng *et al.* 2011; Teixeira da Silva and Muscolo 2012).

Science plays it integral role in society, and often the power and possibility of one is intricately interrelated to the other (Teixeira da Silva 2011c).

Social and political factors, like the fall of the Soviet Union and the democratization of the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe and their joining the EU, are likely to have influenced the ranking. The direction of this trend changed even during the last 10 years. According to the data of SCImago Journal and Country Rank (SJR; 2011) the number of documents, considering all subject areas, in Eastern European countries accounted for only 19% of the documents from Western European countries both in 1999 and 2009, although it increased by 60% in both regions during this period. In Eastern European countries CPC has a tradition; while in 1996 the number of international collaborations was almost the same in both regions, in 1999 it was 14.5% more in Eastern Europe compared to western countries although this lead decreased to 7% by 2009. There is no data regarding the number of co-operations between western and eastern parts of Europe nor is there any logical explanation as to why this decrease may have taken place. Regarding plant science, the percentage of documents with more than one country (international collaboration) was 7 and 10% lower in 1999 and 2009, respectively, in eastern European countries compared to western European countries. However, the number of documents accounted for only 18 or 22% of the total number of documents from wes-

**Table 1** Factors which Hungarian scientists consider to be important when selecting a journal of choice.

Factor	Rank*	Importance**
Does the journal have an IF?	1	4
Is the journal listed on Thomson Reuter's ISI/SCI?	3	2
Is the journal listed on Elsevier's Scopus?	3	2
Is the journal listed on other data-bases?	1	5
Is the journal Open Access?	3	1
Does the journal have an international editorial board?	3	2
Are there publication or submission fees?	1	5
Is colour printing free?	1	4
If the journal is not Open Access, is there a paid free-view option?	3	2
Is copyright retained by the authors or transferred to the publisher?	2	3
What is the speed of acceptance?	2	3
Is the review process (i.e. acceptance) easy?	2	3
Others (please specify)		

\* Please rank factors as: 1 = most important, 2 = second most important, 3 = third most important, etc.

Importance should be placed on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 = not important (not necessary); 2 = slightly important; 3 = important; 4 = very important; 5 = extremely important (i.e., absolutely necessary)

IF = Impact Factor®

tern European countries in 1999 and 2009, respectively. Specifically, in Hungary, in the agricultural and biological sciences, as a result of the above-mentioned socio-political factors, and as it became increasingly important to publish in high level journals (a requirement for awarding a PhD degree), the number of research papers increased by 111% between 1999 and 2009 despite the number of international co-operations increasing by only 8% (SJR 2011).

In all of these analyses there is no explanation regarding the form that scientific collaboration or CPC can assume or its ethical nature.

This manuscript seeks to close that gap in our knowledge between how research is conducted, how scientific publishing is interpreted and achieved and an understanding of the decisions required to establish research and publishing ethical guidelines within Hungary as a sub-set of the Eastern bloc of EU countries

### WHAT DIFFICULTIES ARE EXPERIENCED BY SCIENTISTS IN HUNGARY?

Although the increase in the number of publications in SCI journals of agricultural and biological sciences between 2005 and 2009 (SJR 2011) was 32% in Western European countries and 59% in Eastern European countries (38% in Hungary), the rate of documents from the Eastern bloc is still only 19% of the those from the Western bloc.

Scientists from Eastern European countries are interested academically to write and submit papers to English peer-reviewed journals; however, they have serious difficulties because of different factors. Scientists have little skill in writing science papers with skilful English. English revision services operate from abroad (at least in Hungary) and their costs can not be paid for by scientists since the expense of an average manuscript revision and editing is equivalent to a monthly salary. These expenses can not usually be financed from the budgets of research projects. In many cases, scientists try to publish their results in peer-reviewed journals with or without an Impact Factor® (IF) in their home country; however, the majority of peer-reviewed journals and even journals with IFs operate from non-Eastern European countries. Regarding plant science journals, within the agricultural and biological sciences, journals from the United States, United Kingdom and Netherlands fall into the top 10 in the journal ranking according to SJR in 2009 and only one journal (Preslia) from an Eastern European country (Czech Republic) is ranked in the top 100, in 78<sup>th</sup> place (SJR 2011).

### HOW DO HUNGARIAN SCIENTISTS SELECT AN APPROPRIATE TARGET JOURNAL?

Hungarian scientists tend to find the following factors important when selecting a target journal of choice (**Table 1**).

The most important viewpoints of journal selection include whether the journal has an IF, or if it is listed on international data-bases. Also, a very important factor is that publication and submission should be free of charge; in most cases figures are printed in black and white because of the high costs of colour printing. During the selection of a journal the speed and ease of acceptance are also considered, as is the transmission of copyright.

### WHAT CONSTITUTES AUTHORSHIP TO A SCIENTIST IN HUNGARY AND WHAT ARE THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS?

Ethical requirements for scientific publications are regulated in writing as part of the Rules of Scientific Research by each Hungarian university or research institute, and also at our university (University of Debrecen; 30/05/2002) (only in Hungarian). According to this regulation, a publication is defined as a description of original scientific results which are realized by the authors, which aims to present the results of the scientists and promote the use of these results for and by other scientists. Determination of the order of authors is the task, responsibility and exclusive right of the participants and the results of a consensus. Authorship is considered to be unethical where there is a lack of important intellectual contribution (**Table 2**). The second author (JD) believes that the corollary is not true, i.e., if anyone who makes an important intellectual contribution to a paper but he/she is then not considered as a co-author, then this reflects ethical misconduct or unethical behaviour.

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) takes responsibility for the preservation of morality and authenticity of Hungarian scientific research. The Science Ethics Code of the HAS (also available in English) (HAS year) was accepted in 2010 and according to this codex "The person who, due to his or her scientific work, has given an important contribution to the planning or accomplishment of experiments, the evaluation and control of results shall be indicated as author. A position held in the institution or institute, or a role played in the financing of the research shall in itself not entitle anyone to pose as the author of the publication. Nor can honorary authorship be allowed ..... The indication corresponding author may only be used by the consent of the other authors. Only those who have played a decisive or co-ordinating role in the communication may be indicated as such. .... It is an ethical misconduct to deny deserved authorship, insist on or grant undeserved authorships, and in general to indicate merits relating to authorship in a false way." "...In the case of a suspicion of misconduct infringing scientific ethical standards starting and carrying out the procedure shall always be the obligation of the institution (university, research or other institution), where the researcher suspected of committing such misconduct is working." HAS "...authorises its

**Table 2** Differences between what constitutes co-authorship in Hungary and as established by ICMJE.

Code of function/activity	ICMJE		University/Research Institute		Hungarian Academy of Sciences†	
	Eligible author*	Ethical**	Eligible author	Ethical	Eligible author	Ethical
1	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes††	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	No	✘	No	No	No	No
7	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	No	✓	No	No	No	No
11	Yes	✓	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12						

\* Yes = Eligible to be author; No = Not Eligible to be author.

\*\* ✓ = is ethical according to ICMJE; ✘ = is unethical according to ICMJE (2006; exploratory analysis in Teixeira da Silva 2011c).

† Although listed for HAS, the identical rules apply to all Hungarian universities and research institutes.

†† The rate of the contribution will be reflected in and determined by the order of authors; the importance of a contribution can not, in general, be measured as a per cent and is difficult to quantify

**Code of functions/activities:**

1. The person who designs the experiment
2. The person who does >50% of the research
3. The person who does >25% of the research
4. The person who does a small part (<5%) of the research
5. All people who do ANY part of the research
6. The supervisor (junior or senior professor) who does nothing
7. The supervisor (junior or senior professor) who does at least one function
8. The person who writes the paper
9. The person who makes significant improvements to language AND scientific content
10. An English teacher who revises the manuscript's English only
11. A statistician who conducts stats analyses and analyses the data
12. Others: please explain

Science Ethics Committee to proceed upon request in all cases that injure or endanger the integrity of scientific research already on suspicion of a science ethical misconduct. In this role the Science Ethics Committee can also act as a forum of appeal in cases decided by the science ethic committees of research institutes, higher education, or other institutions and organisations.”

### HOW IS RESPONSIBILITY IN RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING DETERMINED IN HUNGARY?

Fundamental moral and ethical principles of scientific research, such as honesty, reliability, objectivity, impartiality and independence, openness, duty of care for participants in and the subjects of research, candour in presenting the work of others and providing references, responsibility for future science generations, disinterest and impartial participation in scientific public life, are described in the Science Ethics Code of the HAS (HAS 2011). The same document contains the guidelines for fulfillment of the research programme, among which the responsibility of the programme leader and the rules of communication of scientific research are explained.

With the considerations described in the codex of HAS, the structure of a programme, namely a vertical or horizontal structure of the command level, can be very different depending on the characteristics of the programme, on the participants and on the number of participants. Generally, the programme leader has the main coordinating power and main decision role but participants responsible for a sub-task have the right and responsibility to decide in it. “Within the research working group the free circulation of information relating to the research shall be ensured. During the execution of the research programme all participants shall be aware of what can be revealed on the research to persons outside the research.” (HAS 2011). When the results are published, the determination of the authors, and the order of the authors are the results of a consensus of the participants in accordance with the guidelines and rules of HAS and universities or institutes. In general, the first author will be responsible for the sub-tasks assigned to other co-authors and from which the results will

be derived for publication; the first author makes the largest contribution to the experiments. The programme leader will appear as the last author. However, these are not rules and can be different. The corresponding author selected by the consent of the other authors plays a decisive or coordinating role in the communication.

### WHAT BENEFITS DO HUNGARIAN AUTHORS RECEIVE?

In Hungary, the importance of publication activity has been increasing but judging success depends on the subject area; it is very different inside the plant sciences (for example plant protection, plant breeding, plant cultivation, forestry, agricultural biotechnology, horticulture, etc. are represented by different scientific committees of HAS). The different scientific sections of HAS have decided minimal scientometric requirements (MSMRs) in each area for awarding the doctor of academy (a degree higher than a PhD degree). In these MSMRs one of the most important factors includes the publication activity of a scientist beside other factors (MTA 2011). The scientific sections and inside each section the scientific committees have determined the publication requirements, as well, namely how many publications in high level journals are necessary, including journals with an IF and high level journals without an IF but which are of great importance in the science area. This latter group of journals are listed on the HAS web page but are available only in Hungarian. These recommendations by HAS scientific sections are accepted by all Hungarian universities and research institutes.

As a microcosmic example of the Hungarian profile, the CPC publications as a fraction of all CPC projects at CAAES is presented in **Tables 3** and **4**.

Scientists receive real benefits based on their publication success and academic activity. Although it has no direct influence on their salary but it is considered in accordance with the requirements of the HAS scientific committees during qualification of a scientist, during application for a higher academic position or for research grant or funding. Unethical behaviour is punishable (**Table 5**)



**Table 3** Total number of papers published in journals of different levels by CAAES scientists.\*

	SCI journals	Non-SCI journals		Others	Total
		Hungarian	Foreign		
CAAES	23	36	35	not registered in data base	94

\* Data (2009 and 2010) collected from CAAES database.

**Table 4** Total number of papers published with or without research and/or writing collaboration by CAAES scientists.\*

	Research collaboration (CPC)		Writing collaboration (CPC)		Paid writing/editing	Total
	Hungarian	Abroad	Hungarian	Abroad		
CAAES	16	75	-	3	no	94

CPC = collaboration, partnership or co-operation

\* Data (2009 and 2010) collected from CAAES database.

**Table 5** Consequences suffered by Hungarian scientists as a result of one or more of these unethical actions.

Unethical action	Consequence (provide details and indicate if I or G)
Data is stolen	I and G
Copyright is infringed	G
Patent is infringed	G
Data is falsified	I
Experiment is falsified	I
Plagiarism	I
Self-plagiarism	I
Inclusion of guest/honorary authors or omission of author*	I
Failure to disclose/acknowledge ghost-author/writer	?
Failure to acknowledge funding body	I
Submission to two or more journals simultaneously	I
Publication in two or more journals of the same data set in English	I
Publication of the same data set, once in English and once in Chinese	Allowed in certain cases**
Physical or psychological abuse by one lab member towards another (independent of rank)	I
Forcing someone to pay for English revision services	I
Forcing someone to do any action (e.g. including choice of authors, journal)	I

I = institutional; G = Government

\* Guest author is defined as someone who is invited simply for convenience without satisfying any of the conditions for authorship as defined by ICMJE. The United States National Academy of Sciences, however, warns that such practices "dilute the credit due the people who actually did the work, inflate the credentials of those so 'honored,' and make the proper attribution of credit more difficult." (<http://www.nasonline.org>)\*\* "It is not proper practice to communicate a particular experimental result in several separate publications for the purpose of augmenting the number of articles published by the researcher. Cases where the original article was written in a foreign language shall be excepted. In such cases, while in full deference to copyrights, publication of the Hungarian language version is desirable for the purpose of the availability of the research results to wider Hungarian professional circles and for the care of an Hungarian scientific-professional terminology. The practice of after-publication accepted in certain professional areas may also be an exception." Cited from ethical codex of HAS ([http://mta.hu/data/cikk/12/68/86/cikk\\_126886/etikai\\_kodex\\_angol\\_.pdf](http://mta.hu/data/cikk/12/68/86/cikk_126886/etikai_kodex_angol_.pdf))

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to thank Dr. Szilvia Vincze for collecting publication data.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest (ethical, cultural, academic, financial, intellectual) between them or between them and their research institutes and/or funding bodies. This manuscript is not funded. All authors have contributed equally and have approved the final version of the manuscript for submission. Parts of the manuscript may appear in a similar series of manuscripts covering the topic around the world. Only data or information which was freely and publically available from web sites (in some cases only in Hungarian) and in the publication data-base of CAAES was used, and which were collected by Dr. Szilvia Vincze, who is the person responsible for this system.

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