



## Manuscript preparation by proxy



In the animal kingdom, kleptoparasitism is a foraging strategy in which an individual (the kleptoparasite) obtains food, or other objects, that have been found, captured, collected, prepared or stored by another (the host). The host may, or may not, be aware of the kleptoparasite's activities. A common example given of kleptoparasitism in mammals is the relationship between spotted hyenas and lions, hijacking 'kills' from each other. Similarly, sperm whales are kleptoparasites when they steal fish from fishermen's lines.

Kleptoparasitism may be obligate or facultative. With the former, the kleptoparasite depends on this strategy to fulfil its energy or survival requirements; whereas with the latter, the kleptoparasite has other alternatives and is not totally dependent on this strategy to fulfil its energy or survival requirements. Kleptoparasitism may also be interspecific or intraspecific. In interspecific kleptoparasitism, whatever is obtained is from members of other species or close relatives of the same species; while in intraspecific kleptoparasitism, it is from members of its own species.

There are a number of advantages with kleptoparasitism; these include savings in terms of time, energy, effort and gaining access, relatively risk-free, to food, or other items, which the kleptoparasite could not obtain itself. However, the kleptoparasite runs the risk of injury if the host, becoming aware, chooses to defend and prevent the misappropriation strategy. Therefore, kleptoparasitism not only requires resourcefulness and planning but cunning, athleticism and agility.

By now you may be wondering why this Editorial is dwelling on this obtuse subject with, seemingly, little to no relevance to the title? For some time now, I have noticed the phenomenon of

'manuscript preparation by proxy' – a form of kleptoparasitism. The way it works is this. Author(s) will submit a paper to a journal for publication. With peer-review journals, the manuscript will then be sent out to referees for assessment. Depending on scientific rigour, relevance, impact, or quality of scholarship etc, and hence the referees' report, the Editor will then decide if the manuscript should be rejected or accepted, with or without the need for revision. Where the 'kleptoparasitism' occurs is when, having rejected the paper, the author(s) subsequently resubmits a revised manuscript to another journal for consideration. While this by itself is not new, what is emerging is the observation that author(s) may be relying on referees as proxies to revise and refine their manuscript, incorporating changes, through successive rounds of submissions, reviews and resubmissions. Routinely, referees will make comments and suggestions on how to improve the submitted manuscript; sometimes providing a line-by-line critique. Many kind-hearted referees may even have meticulously annotated the manuscript for the benefit of author(s). It is a form of kleptoparasitism because the successful outcome, i.e. the paper being accepted for publication, is not actually through the efforts of the author(s) but the generosity and work of the referees.

It may be argued that this strategy is more akin to plagiarism, which may be defined as 'passing someone else's work or ideas as one's own, whether you meant to or not'. Plagiarism includes close paraphrasing, copying from the work, or using the ideas of another person and incorporating it into your work without proper or full acknowledgement. Maybe a more appropriate term would be 'kleptoparasitic-plagiarism'?

Whether it is kleptoparasitism, plagiarism or even kleptoparasitic-plagiarism, referees should watch out for, and authors should refrain from, this practice. If detected, referees have the mechanism to report its occurrence via confidential comments to the journal editor. 'Manuscript preparation by proxy' abuses the goodwill of journal referees and corrupts the

peer-review process; if unchecked, it will destroy the virtue of scholarship.



BS Chong



## Thank you

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We would like to apologise to anyone we have inadvertently left out by mistake.



Edgar Schaeffer



and

Bun San Chong