Nana Aba Appiah Amfo*

# Managing authorship in (socio)linguistic collaborations

**Abstract:** This article examines the issue of joint authorship in (socio)linguistic publications. On the assumption that research work in the humanities has traditionally been performed on a "lone scholar" basis, discussion of authorship attribution has not dominated conversations in the arts and humanities as compared to the natural, health and engineering sciences. However, considering the increasing occurrence of collaboration in (socio)linguistics and its resultant joint publications, this article considers author trends in the humanities generally and linguistics in particular, who qualifies to be an author and how authorship ordering and assigning should be addressed in both an ethical and a fair manner. Considering the rise of collaborations in sociolinguistic research, varied sources of data used, and the growth of multi-site projects, authorship discussions in arts and humanities disciplines can no longer be muted.

**Keywords:** authorship; collaboration; humanities; publications; sociolinguistics

# 1 Introduction

Discussion of authorship attribution has often not dominated conversations in the arts and humanities[1] as much as it has in the natural and health sciences. This is partly to do with the "lone scholar" myth about authorship in the arts and humanities, including (socio)linguistics (McGrath 2011). Because scholars in the humanities have operated with this long-held assumption, issues of joint authorship within humanities disciplines, such as (socio)linguistics, have not

---

**1** Humanities is defined here as those disciplines which help us to make sense of the world around us such as literature, linguistics, history, philosophy and performing arts. Even though traditionally, qualitative approaches have dominated such disciplines, there appears to be an increasing use of mixed methods in investigating the questions that bother our humanism.

---

**\*Corresponding author: Nana Aba Appiah Amfo**, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana,
E-mail: namfo@ug.edu.gh

received much open discussion. This article revisits the discussion on the growth of formal collaboration among arts and humanities scholars. It suggests the need for clarity with regard to rights and responsibilities of authors of academic writings, within the context of joint authorship. It addresses what is involved in authorship – the credits and benefits, the responsibilities of authors, how authorship attribution can be managed in joint authorship situations, and recognition of significant contributors who do not meet the authorship criteria.

The discussion here acknowledges collaborative authorship practices in natural and applied sciences and the efforts to address its challenges through various publications (Gasparyan 2013; Gasparyan et al. 2013; Resnik et al. 2015; inter alia). Without attempting to reinvent the wheel, this article reviews earlier authorship discussions in the natural and applied sciences, puts collaborative authorship within the humanities into perspective, and within the limited space available for this edition, intends to ignite further discussion on appropriate collaborative authorship practices in (socio)linguistics in particular and other humanities disciplines in general.

## 2 Authorship trends in the humanities

Academic authorship indicates significant attribution for the people involved. In addition, it comes with certain intellectual, social and sometimes financial implications.[2] The role that one's publications play in one's career advancement as an academic cannot be overemphasized. The publish or perish – or even more recently publish and perish – syndrome[3] has ignited a certain clamor among academics to have a number of publications to their names, sometimes within a relatively short period. This has often been the drive behind certain unethical authorship practices, such as coercion authorship and mutual support/admiration authorship (Claxton 2005), all in an attempt to shore up one's publication numbers.

Even though it is believed that research and its resultant publication in the arts and humanities has traditionally been viewed as a lone endeavor, this "prevalent notion that humanities scholars work alone" (Palmer 2004: 356), has seen a

---

**2** Some institutions offer direct and indirect financial incentives to authors of articles published in certain reputable journals.

**3** "Publish and perish" refers to the phenomenon of publishing in predatory outlets. This results in a situation where on face value, one publishes, but this may not result in getting the desired promotion as reputable institutions frown on such practices and will not reward them with a promotion.

significant shift in the past 20–25 years. The expansion and evolution of arts and humanities disciplines that includes sociolinguistics, multidisciplinary requirements by funding agencies, as well as possibilities facilitated by new technologies, has resulted in an increase in collaborative work resulting in more jointly authored articles in the arts and humanities (Bulger et al. 2011; McCarty 2005). The 2008 Toolkit for the Impact of Digitized Scholar Resources (TIDSR) Survey of Humanities Scholars discovered that research collaboration among humanities scholars was on the rise. Of the respondents 53% had collaborated with someone in their department, while an even higher percentage (65%) had collaborated beyond their department (Meyer et al. 2009). McCarty (2005) suggests that what appears to be the solitary exercise of writing should not be confused with the general work environment of the humanities scholar, which tends to be communal. According to him, "[i]f you look closely at the solitary work, we have no problem seeing that the natural environment has been virtually communal" (McCarty 2005: 12). Thus, for him, creating scholarship in the humanities only looks like a solitary act. In reality though, there is a lot more engagement, which may result in formal collaborations, leading to joint publications.

A count of jointly authored articles published between 2004 and 2014 in *Language*, the journal of the Linguistics Society of America, indicates a similar trend. Out of 195 original research articles published during that period, 86 (44.1%) were single-authored, while 109 (55.9%) were published by two or more authors. Thus, authorship practices in linguistics seem to be following the trend of natural and applied science scholars, where there has been a move from single authorship to a largely joint authorship environment (Greene 2007). Claxton (2005: 33) reports that before mid-1900 "most scientific efforts and authorships could be clearly traced to single individuals". The number of authors per scientific article grew with increased research collaboration.

Given the increasing trend of jointly authored publications in linguistics, it becomes imperative for editors of (socio)linguistic journals to provide guidance on how to manage the question of authorship to avoid potential conflict, misgivings and unethical practices. In the next sections, I provide the requirement for authorship and discuss certain authorship decisions, such as the order of authorship and recognition of contributors who do not qualify as authors.

# 3  Who qualifies to be an author?

Authorship ascribes both credit and responsibility at the same time. As a result, authors should be persons who have made substantial intellectual contributions to a research project and its resultant output in the form of a publication. At the same

time, these authors are expected to be fully accountable for their published works, such that they can adequately respond to questions emanating from the publication. For example, all listed authors are held liable for ethical breaches such as data falsification and plagiarism.

The four criteria suggested by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) "intended to reserve the status of authorship for those who deserve credit and can take responsibility for the work" are relevant for (socio)linguistic work as well. They are:

– Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
– Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
– Final approval of the version to be published; AND
– Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

In collaborations, the expectation is that persons involved in the conceptualization and design of the research work will have shared responsibilities in drafting and revising the publications that result from the joint work, and give final approval before publication. Note that the criteria listed above are all-inclusive; an author is one who has fulfilled all these requirements, and everyone who has been part of the above described process is entitled to authorship.

Often collaborators leave out the issue of authorship of resulting publications until it is too late. At the start of a research project, authors should anticipate the number of publications expected from the project, and discuss and agree on authorship rights and obligations. Certainly, these agreements should be subject to further negotiations and change as the project proceeds and the dynamics change.

# 4 Order of authorship

Even though there is increased acceptance that research work these days has become increasingly collaborative, and everyone who made a substantial contribution in terms of research conceptualization, drafting and revising of manuscripts should be given authorship rights and responsibilities, first-listed authors (often deemed as lead authors) and corresponding authors appear to get the most recognition and rewards. The first-listed author is deemed to be the one who actually carried out the bulk of the research work and often the writing as well.

In the case of publications resulting from theses (PhD or Masters), the first author should be the student who actually carried out the research. The supervisor, who provided direction, guidance, and in some instances funding, may be the last author. For many journals, the convention is to have the senior researcher, even if s/he is not the originator of the research idea, listed as the last author. Often the last author signifies a seniority role in relation to a particular research project.

In crosslinguistic studies, where three or more authors write on their respective languages of specialization, the lead or senior author would usually be the one who conceptualized the research and invited the others to participate.

As indicated earlier, next to the first author, the corresponding author assumes significant credit and responsibilities. S/He takes up the responsibility of communicating with the journal via its editors through the submission and reviewing process until publication and in some instances in the post-publication stage. This person therefore ensures that the journal guidelines are followed, queries are responded to, revisions are made following recommendations of reviewers/editors, and reported accordingly. The actual performance of some or all of these duties may be delegated to other co-authors, but the corresponding author takes up the responsibility of connecting the rest of the team to the journal editors.

# 5 Non-author contributors

Persons who make significant contributions to the research and writing process yet do not meet the four author criteria stated above are recognized in the acknowledgements section. Earlier suggestions to give them contributor status have not yet gained popularity (Gasparyan 2013; Smith 2012). Such contributors, listed in the acknowledgements, may have given advice, supported the acquisition of funds, provided direction on data interpretation, or played a mentorship role without being directly involved in that particular research project. Others could be those who provided language consultancy and general language support – editing, proofreading etc.

# 6 Conclusion

Authorship attribution in academia has critical implications for credits and responsibilities. Career progress of academics also depend heavily on publication outputs. Research collaboration in the humanities, with its resulting joint publications, will continue to be on the rise, as the sources of data for humanities researchers increase and multi-site projects become prevalent, the question of

authorship of publications resulting from collaborative humanities research need to be more deliberate than aleatory.

# References

Bulger, Monica, Eric T. Meyer, Grace de la Flor, Melissa Terras, Sally Wyatt, Marina Jirotka, Katherine Eccles & Christine Madsen. 2011. *Reinventing research? Information practices in the humanities*. London: Research Information Network (RIN).

Claxton, Larry D. 2005. Scientific authorship Part 2. History, recurring issues, practices, and guidelines. *Mutation Research* 589. 31–45.

Gasparyan, Armen Y. 2013. Authorship and contributorship in scholarly journals. *Journal of Korean Medical Science* 28(6). 801–802.

Gasparyan, Armen Y., Lilit Ayvazyan & George D. Kitas. 2013. Authorship problems in scholary journals: Considerations for authors, peer reviewers and editors. *Rheumatology International* 33. 277–284.

Greene, Mott. 2007. The demise of the lone author. *Nature* 450. 1165.

International Committee of Medical Journal. ND. Defining the role of authors and contributors. http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html (accessed 1 September 2020).

McCarty, Willard. 2005. *Humanities computing*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

McGrath, Laura. 2011. *Collaborative approaches to the digital in English studies*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press/ Computers and Composition Digital Press.

Meyer, Eric T., Kathryn Eccles, Michael Thelwall & Christine Madsen. 2009. *Usage and impact study of JISC-funded phase 1 digitisation projects & the Toolkit for the Impact of Digitised Scholarly Resources (TIDSR)*. Oxford: JISC.

Palmer, Carole. 2004. Thematic research collections. In Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens & John Unsworth (eds.), *Companion to digital humanities*, 348–365. Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell.

Resnik, David B., Kevin C. Elliott & K. Miller Aubrey. 2015. A framework for addressing ethical issues in citizen science. *Environmental Science & Policy* 54. 475–481.

Smith, Richard. 2012. Let's simply scrap authorship and move to contributorship. *British Medical Journal* 344. 157.