

Common Mistakes by Asian Medical Writers

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Introduction

- • US-born graduate of US medical school
- • Professor at The Jikei University, Tokyo
- • 20 years' experience editing in Japan
- • Seen every kind of mistake
- • 5 common mistakes made by Japanese authors ➤➤

1. Abbreviations

Abstract: Are these abbreviations OK?

We report on a 82-**y.o.** man with **HCC**. The **PMHx** included **DM**, **COPD**, **HTN**, and poor **QOL**. Laboratory tests, including **RT-PCR**, **ELISA**, and **HPLC** for **HIV**, **HBV**, and **HCV**, were negative. Levels of **ALT**, **AST**, and **CRP** were normal. **CT**, **MRI**, and **X-P** confirmed a diagnosis of **HCC**. Treatment with **5-FU**, **CDDP**, **GM-CSF**, and **IFN** was performed. >>

Abstract: None are OK!!!

We report on a 82-~~yo~~. man with ~~HCC~~. The ~~PMHx~~ included ~~DM~~, ~~CORD~~, ~~HTN~~, and poor ~~QOL~~. Laboratory tests, including ~~RT-PCR~~, ~~ELISA~~, and ~~HPV~~ for ~~HIV~~, ~~HBV~~, and ~~HCV~~, were negative. Levels of ~~ALT~~, ~~AST~~, and ~~CRP~~ were normal. ~~CT~~, ~~MRI~~, and ~~XP~~ confirmed a diagnosis of ~~HCC~~. Treatment with ~~5-FU~~, ~~CDOP~~, ~~GM-CSF~~, and ~~IFN~~ was performed. >>

Hate Abbr

I hate abbreviations

- • $\geq 25\%$ of editing time
 - Looking up
 - Explaining
 - Removing
- • Japanese **love** abbreviations ➤➤

Japanese writers love abbreviations

- • Know and use abbreviation > full term
- • Use every possible abbreviation
- • Saves space and typing time
- • Don't explain: "Everybody knows" meaning
- • **Abbreviations increase misunderstanding**



Rules

Abbreviation rules

- 1. **What:** Only standard abbreviations
No single words (e.g., drug names)
- 2. **When:** Only terms used ≥ 3 times
(count in abstract and main text separately)
- 3. **How:** Explain all abbreviations at first use
“computed tomography (CT)”
(except SI units and those listed by journal)
- 4. **Abbreviations are not required. Use few!**
Reader understanding > your convenience

2. Inhumane language

Is this language humane? >>

We report a 34-year-old Japanese male case with cancer we recently experienced. After being biopsied, he was diagnosed as being hepatocellular carcinoma. He was then resected and administered cisplatin.

No, it is **Inhumane** >>

We **report** a 34-year-old Japanese **male case** with cancer we recently **experienced**. After being **biopsied**, he was **diagnosed** as being hepatocellular carcinoma. He was then **resected** and **administered** cisplatin.

“Inhumane” Japanese medical writing

- • **Disrespectful and insensitive** to patients
- • **Words used for patients** are same as words used for **diseases, animals, and treatments** ➤➤

“See the patient, not the disease”



Kanehiro Takaki
The Jikei University's founder

- • Basis for **humane medical treatment**
- • Basis for **humane medical writing**
- – **Patients** ≠ **diseases**
- – **Words for patients** ≠ **words for diseases, animals, and treatments** ➤➤

Case

“a 34-year-old case with cancer”

➤ **Case** = instance of **disease**

➤ ○ a **case of** cancer

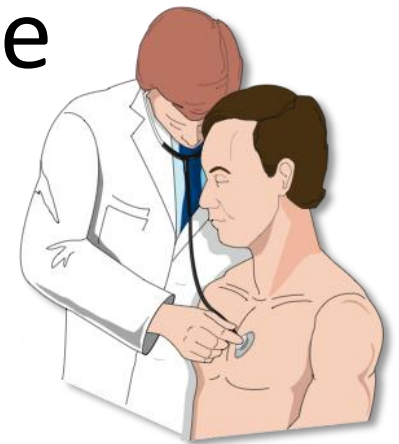
➤ ✗ a **case with** cancer

✗ a **case who** has cancer

➤ **Patient** = **person** receiving care

➤ ○ → a **patient with** cancer

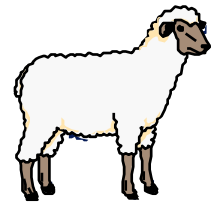
○ → a **patient who has** cancer



“The patient was a Japanese male”?

➤ Animals are “males” and “females”

➤ “Dolly the cloned sheep was a **female**.”



➤ Adult humans are “men” and “women”

(age \geq 18 years)



Diagnose

“Diagnose”

- ○ Always refers to **diseases/cases**
- ○ **Diseases** are **diagnosed** in patients
- ✗ **Patients** are **not diagnosed**
- ○ **Patients** receive/are given diagnoses
- **Patients** are found to have disease



Trx

Tests and treatments

➤ ✘ Patients are not:

administered drugs, biopsied, resected, x-rayed, or operated

➤ ○ Patients:

are **given** drugs or **treated with** drugs
undergo treatment, biopsy, resection, x-ray examination, or operations

✘ Inhumane Writing

Patient words = Disease/treatment words

We report a 34-year-old Japanese **male case with** cancer we recently **experienced**. After being **biopsied**, he was **diagnosed** as being hepatocellular carcinoma. He was then **resected** and **administered** cisplatin.

○ Humane Writing

Patient words ≠ Disease/treatment words

We report on a 34-year-old Japanese man with cancer we recently treated. After undergoing a biopsy, he received a diagnosis of hepatocellular carcinoma. He then underwent resection and was given cisplatin.

3. The “scientific” style

Is this good, modern writing?

- • “Prior to the initiation of chemotherapy, tumor debulking surgery was performed.”
- • “In order to facilitate the elucidation of the etiology of Rolfe’s disease, an investigative study was undertaken by the authors.”
- • “It has been reported by Carlson et al that Okazaki syndrome is one of the most common causes of infertility.”

Boring, unclear, hard-to-read, old-fashioned “scientific” style

Special words/long phrases

- “Prior to the initiation of chemotherapy, tumor debulking surgery was performed.”
Long, complex grammar
- “In order to facilitate the elucidation of the etiology of Rolfe’s disease, an investigative study was undertaken by the authors.”
Impersonal
- “It has been reported by Carlson et al that Okazaki syndrome is one of the most common causes of infertility.”
Lists of authors and reports

Special

Special words/Long phrases

✗ BAD

- in order to
- elucidate
- prior to
- due to the fact that
- in a considerable number of cases
- in close proximity to
- one of the most common tumors

○ BETTER

- to
- clarify
- before
- because
- often
- near
- a common tumor

Long, boring → Simpler, livelier

- • A comparative study of the treatments was performed by the authors...
 - → We compared the treatments...
- • A diagnosis of cancer was made.
 - → Cancer was diagnosed.
- • There was a marked improvement in the 5-year survival rate.
 - → The 5-year survival rate markedly improved.

If a previous finding is a fact, don't mention reporter or reporting

➤ ✗ It has been reported by Tanaka et al that the FOLFOX protocol increases survival in Japanese patients with colorectal cancer (22).



➤ ○ The FOLFOX protocol increases survival in Japanese patients with colorectal cancer (22). ➤➤

4. Plagiarism

Recent Japanese research misconduct



Shigeaki Kato

Data manipulation at Tokyo University
25 articles retracted so far

Haruko Obokata, Yoshiki Sasai

Nature “STAP” cell article retracted
Sasai committed suicide



Diovan (Valsartan)/Novartis

Jikei University *Lancet* article
retracted for data manipulation

Plagiarism

“An author documents or reports **ideas, words, data, or graphics**, whether published or unpublished, of another as his or her own and **without giving appropriate credit.**”

Four types: Direct plagiarism, paraphrase, mosaic plagiarism, insufficient acknowledgement



American Medical Association Manual of Style, 10th Edition, 2007.

Mosaic plagiarism

- “Nice” words stolen
- No quotation marks
- Mix with own words
- Source cited/uncited



- **Stolen words easily identified** during editing:

➤ The patient was firstly operated and the successful prognosis has resulted **but ultimately opted to forego the second stage of pharyngeal reconstruction.**

Insufficient acknowledgment

- **Cite** source but **don't admit extent** of taking
- Steal words (no quotation marks) and/or ideas
- • **Case reports:**
 - **Steal** description, discussion, structure, and references of previous case report
 - **Insert new details** from your case
 - **Cite source only as previous case**

Plagiarism of words and structure from cited case report with **new details** ←

Source report, 2002

A previously healthy 2-year-old girl presented to our outpatient clinic with a 2-hour history of vomiting, diarrhea, and irritability. She was afebrile. A tentative diagnosis of viral gastroenteritis was made on initial examination.

Shortly thereafter, a symmetrical generalized clonic seizure without cyanosis occurred, which lasted for 5 minutes, and ceased spontaneously. She retained consciousness immediately after the seizure subsided. Her physical examination, including neurologic examination, remained

normal. Emergency laboratory tests included normal complete blood count, routine blood chemistry, and

urinalysis; however, blood glucose was elevated at 208 mg/dL. A computed tomography scan of her head was normal. The test of her stool for Rotavirus antigen by enzyme immunoassay was negative.

She was admitted to our hospital for closer observation after her unexplained convulsion. One hour after admission, she vomited again. In her vomitus, we found some pieces of

chewed ginkgo seeds. In reply to our inquiry, her parents revealed that she had eaten 50 to 60 pieces of roasted ginkgo seeds (Fig 1) 9 hours before presenting to our hospital. At this time, 2 hours after the seizure, we diagnosed probable ginkgo seed poisoning and administered 30 mg (2 mg/kg body weight) of pyridoxal phosphate intravenously, and 4 mg (0.5 mg/kg) of diazepam rectally.

Plagiarized, 2006

A previously healthy 3-year-old girl presented to the emergency unit of the X University Hospital with a 1-hour history of frequent vomiting and irritability. Shortly thereafter, an afebrile symmetrical generalized clonic seizure without cyanosis occurred, which lasted for 1 minute and ceased spontaneously. She regained consciousness 15 minutes after the seizure subsided. Results of physical examination, including neurologic examination, remained normal. Results of laboratory tests, including a complete blood count, routine blood chemistry, and urinalysis were normal. The patient's past history was unremarkable. On the basis of the initial examination, a tentative diagnosis of viral gastroenteritis with afebrile convulsion was made.

The patient was admitted to the emergency unit for closer observation after the unexplained convulsion. She was treated with 4 mg diazepam (0.26 mg/kg) rectally. In reply to our inquiry, the patient's mother revealed that she had eaten 50 to 60 roasted ginkgo seeds 2 hours before presenting to the hospital. We diagnosed probable ginkgo seed poisoning and immediately administered 20 mg (1.33 mg/kg body weight) of pyridoxal phosphate orally. After overnight observation, the patient was discharged without gastrointestinal symptoms or neurologic signs.

Literature review: **structure**, words, references from multiple cited sources

Sources, 1995-2011

6. Yamada K, et al. *J Hand Surg*, 2011; 15E: 77-78.

4. Taras JS, et al. *J Hand Surg* 1995; 20A: 276-277.

5. Fitzgerald BT, et al. *J Hand Surg*, 2005; 30A: 479-482.

Plagiarized, 2014

Taras et al. first reported a case of rupture of the right flexor pollicis longus tendon in a 62-year-old patient with trigger thumb four years after two corticosteroid injections. This patient had a primary repair that failed by the re-rupture of the tendon and was ultimately treated with a tendon transfer⁴). Fitzgerald et al. secondly reported a case of rupture of the right middle FDP and FDS tendons in a 77-year-old patient with trigger finger thirteen months after two corticosteroid injections. This patient received a placement of a silicone rod as a tendon spacer, but finally opted to forgo the second stage of tendon reconstruction⁵).

Excuse

Excuse for Plagiarism?

“For those of us whose mother tongue is not English, using **beautiful sentences** from other studies...is not unusual.”

“**Borrowing sentences...should not be seen as plagiarism.**”

— Letter from Ihsan Yilmaz, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey (*Nature* 449,658;2007)

Why?



Why do Japanese authors plagiarize?

- • Medical students plagiarize
- • Don't think they are “plagiarizing”
- • Believe plagiarism is “victimless crime”
- • “Everyone” plagiarizes
- • Don't expect to be caught

Plagiarism in Japan today

- • Common: majority of papers?
- • Under-recognized, and under-reported
- • Some kinds easier to find, if you look
- • Whose job to find plagiarism? Who has time?
- • New world: all authors might be plagiarists?



5. The problem of the “Native Check”

Examined papers published in Asian journals

- *Journal of Korean Medical Science*
- *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association*
- *Chinese Medical Journal*
- *Journal of Gynecologic Oncology*

- Articles peer-reviewed and edited for publication

Quality of writing in Asian journals

- **Varied widely** (within and among journals)
 - **Worst:** Basic errors of grammar/punctuation
 - **Best:** Superficially correct, level of educated native-speaking “layperson”
Not at level of best Western journals
- **Problems**
 - Abbreviations, inhumane language, old-fashioned “scientific” style
- **Numerous other style and usage problems**

Style and usage problems not found in best Western journals

- **Medical jargon:** “patient was **started on** drug X,” “**pathology** showed,” “survival was **impacted**”
- **Hyphens for prefixes:** “pre-operative,” “anti-cancer”
- **Number usage inconsistent :** “**six** of 22 patients”
- **Incorrect word usage:** “**prognosis**” (vs. “outcome”), “**parameter**” (vs. “variable”), “**retrospective** review”
- **No spaces between numbers and units:** “**120mmHg**”
- **Wrong tenses:** “Fig. 4 **showed,**” **past-tense conclusion**



Editing by “native check”

- • Native English speaker checks grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.
- • **Any native** can do!
- **No training** or knowledge needed
- • Suggests authors know everything about biomedical writing, but aren't fluent in English



“Native checkers”

lack knowledge, training, and confidence to make needed changes

➤ Can't or won't fix:

- Inhumane language, abbreviations, old-fashioned “scientific” writing style
- Other style and usage problems
- Problems that most native speakers make ➤➤

Raise

To raise Asian writing standards

- • **Trained, specialist medical editors needed**
- • **All writing must be edited**
 - Avoid uncorrected “Boss’s English”
- • **Good spoken English not enough**
 - Dangerous “experts” who have studied abroad
 - Most native English speaker write poorly ➤➤

Conclu

Conclusions

- **Minimize abbreviations**, explain all
- **Patient words** ≠ disease, animal, treatment words
- **Don't use old-fashioned “scientific” style**
- **Learn correct, modern usage and style**
- **Don't plagiarize** words, structure, or references
- **Trained, specialist editors**, not native speakers

➤ **Thank you for your attention**
Any questions?