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Mark Wyatt, University of Portsmouth, dr.markwyatt@gmail.com

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'The Fox and the Crow' or 'the Foolishness of Vanity Publishing in Fake Academic Journals': A Story from the Arabian Gulf

Mark Wyatt[1]

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ABSTRACT

Fake and predatory academic journals have the potential to do harm. If they promise to provide double-blind peer-review but do not deliver, they are misleading authors. If their carefully-chosen company name suggests they represent an august body of international standing when they are actually operating on a shoe-string out of someone's bedroom, they are misleading everyone. If researchers are so desperate for publication and international renown that they flock to these dubious enterprises, then many people are being tricked: students, fellow researchers, funding panels, promotion boards. There is the danger that an illusionary pseudo-academic world is being created in which bad research (which has not been properly peer-reviewed by reputable journals) is masquerading as good. This is a particularly serious problem at present as these fake and predatory (but also profitable) journals are spreading rapidly like viruses. This issue is explored here with reference to a particular example from the field of research into English language teaching in the Middle East and with the help of a fable to illustrate the motives of the actors.

"We pay a price for everything we get or take in this world; and although ambitions are well worth having, they are not to be cheaply won, but exact their dues of work and self-denial, anxiety and discouragement." (Lucy Maud Montgomery in 'Anne of Green Gables', 1908).

1. Orientation

1.1. A Fable

Aesop's fable of the fox and the crow is as well known to children in Oman as it is elsewhere, partly because it features in the 'English for Me' curriculum used in government schools. In the story, the crow, who has found a piece of cheese, retires to the branch of a tree to eat it. A cunning fox below,

[1] University of Portsmouth, dr.markwyatt@gmail.com, +44(0)7827329657

hungry for the cheese, wheedles a song out of the foolish bird, praising her beautiful voice (although it is actually ugly), begging to hear it. Out of vanity, the crow obliges, dropping the cheese as soon as she opens her mouth to caw. So the moral of the story is: guard against vanity, beware of flattery! In this article, I will draw on this story while considering crows of another kind, third-rate researchers (of both genders and many nationalities) seduced by the flattery of the editors of fake academic journals (crafty foxes who trick their victims financially and, more damagingly, can leave them looking a little silly, like the crow in Aesop's fable). I will illustrate my analysis by drawing on an example from the field of English language teaching (ELT) research in the Middle East.

1.2.The Size of the Problem

Fake academic journals have spread like wildfire in recent years, testimony to the adaptability of foxes; they have multiplied at astonishing speed. According to Kolata (2013) writing in *The New York Times*, Jeffrey Beall, a research librarian at the University of Colorado who has been tracking the problem, estimated in 2013 that there were approximately 4,000 'predatory' journals produced by at least 300 different publishers, 15 times more than there had been in 2010. So, this obscenely large business is rapidly expanding. It needs interrogating because of its obvious potential to do harm.

1.3. A few Key Terms

First, though, and before going any further, we need to define terms. I have used two already, 'fake' and 'predatory'. An OED (2013) definition of 'fake' includes "not genuine… claiming to be something it is not", while its definition of 'predatory' suggests this involves "seeking to exploit others". An 'academic' journal may be 'fake' in a number of ways. For example, it may promote itself rather grandly as a leading 'international' journal published by a distinguished-sounding but utterly spurious pseudo-academic body that appears to exist only to produce it and other 'dodgy' (i.e. probably disreputable) journals from the same over-populated fox-hole. To convince the gullible reader, it claims to operate a 'double-blind peer-review' policy, using terms here that also require explanation.

1.4. Peer-review

Peer-reviewing can be defined as "the evaluation of an author's manuscript by selected reviewers who make recommendations to the journal's editor as to whether or not the manuscript should be accepted, revised prior to publication, or rejected" (Mulligan, Hall & Raphael, 2013, p. 132). If revisions are recommended, detailed advice is often provided, which, my own experience suggests, can be immensely helpful, though reviewers occasionally have an axe to grind. There have been some criticisms of the whole process (e.g. Smith, 2006), but survey evidence suggests researchers in general strongly support peer-review (Ware, 2011). Indeed, Ware quotes a respondent as arguing: "Anything that isn't peer-reviewed… is worthless" (p. 26), while Smith (2006, p. 178) acknowledges its importance: peer-review is "at the heart of the processes… by which grants are allocated, papers published, academics promoted, and Nobel prizes won". Of the various forms of peer-review, 'double-blind' procedures, i.e. with authors' and reviewers' identities kept hidden from each other, are preferred by many researchers because double-blinding is thought to reduce bias and lead to outcomes that are fairer (Ware, 2011). Therefore, the general view of the wider research community is that if a journal claims to operate such a double-blind peer-review policy but does not, its deceitful behaviour may lead to the compromising of quality (Butler, 2013). Peer-reviewing does have drawbacks; e.g. the process can be lengthy and there can be inconsistencies (Smith, 2006). However, as Ware (2011) maintains, in the view of the overwhelming

majority of researchers, the end product of a meticulous peer-review process, that can sometimes involve several revisions to the same article before eventual acceptance and publication, is likely to be better research. If authors are promised peer-review but do not receive it, they can feel cheated (Butler, 2013).

1.5. Predatory Journals

Many of the new pseudo-academic journals are 'predatory' as well as 'fake'. They exist to make a profit and, like the vanity presses that specialize in publishing unmarketable doggerel wrapped up prettily (McPherson, 1975), cash in on dreams (in this case, of academic stardom); the author pays. Describing the business model of these predators, Jeffrey Beall, quoted by Kolata (2013), claims: "this is easy money, very little work, a low barrier start-up". Some of these publishers, Kolata reveals, charge authors as much as $2,000 per article or more, and employ sharp practices; the bill can come as a shock to the unwary non-reader of the small-print. Undoubtedly, though, some third-rate researchers, desperate for recognition, must enter into the arrangement with fairly open eyes, seduced, like so many crows, by the pretty words 'international journal' and 'double-blind peer-review', uttered by so many foxes. They give up their cheese; they pay, motivated perhaps by the realization: Who else would pay for the public airing of their songs? These sometimes desperate wannabes might be facing a dilemma (casting couch or obscurity?), if they have not been able to convince themselves (Stockholm syndrome?) that the predators have a point: there are always some publishing costs, even if the end product is an open access online publication. What they perhaps do not realize is that genuine international journals in fields such as ELT never ask authors to pay; there is public demand for 'quality' research they offer. Vanity presses publishing pseudo-academic journals, on the other hand, are peddling a product that arguably no-one really needs to see in print except the author, so the author pays.

2. Dealing with the Situation

2.1. Reactions of the Research Community

It is likely that many academics simply ignore work published in 'dodgy' journals without losing too much sleep over it. They might amend their advice to students, though, in light of the recent 'bogus' journal publishing boom; e.g. *evaluate any 'international peer-reviewed' journals you wish to cite from carefully, as they might not be what they seem!* Nevertheless, if offered, such advice might be undermined by the sometimes careless indexing practices of search engines such as EBSCOhost and ERIC, which, by listing them, can give predatory journals undeserved credibility, at least fleetingly. Consequently, there is unfortunately a very real danger that poor research masquerading as 'quality' peer-reviewed output might partially succeed in misleading some non-specialist readers, funding panels and promotion boards, at least for a short time. To illustrate this point, I draw on a specific example from the field of research into ELT in the Middle East. Unfortunately, as Beall (2012) points out, it is from this part of the world and Asia more generally that many researchers are sucked into the vanity publishing scams, which is not to suggest that researchers from other continents, including Europe and North America, have not also fallen into the trap. However, a quick survey of the contents page of the current issue of one notorious journal (*International Education Studies*, of which I say more below) carried out by the author on 16 June 2016 seems to confirm Beall's words. The 20 studies in this issue (9/6) were conducted in Kuwait, Israel, Turkey x 2, Indonesia x 5, Iran x 5, Russia, Pakistan, the UK, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia x 2, respectively.

2.2. The Struggle to Publish Faced by ELT Researchers in Oman

At Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Oman (at number 2,621 in the world, the highest ranking and most prestigious university in the country), academics involved in ELT research are under pressure to publish as they are elsewhere (Al-Issa & Al-Balushi, 2011). However, they face challenges, these authors report, that relate to their status as non-native researchers in ELT. According to this definition and to notions of 'native-speakerism' (Holliday, 2006), they have to compete on an unequal footing in a field dominated by English native-speakers. As a result, these fledgling Omani ELT researchers might "conceptualize the process of publication as extremely daunting, time-consuming, and ultimately demotivating" (Al-Issa & Al-Balushi, 2011, p. 3). Similarly, in other parts of Asia, Chinese and Indian researchers can find it difficult to make the breakthrough, according to Ware (2011), partly perhaps because many of the reputable academic journals they wish to publish in are based in Western countries, employing reviewers also from the West, perhaps with Western cultural and linguistic expectations. Researchers in some disciplines might find it particularly tough. Huang (2010), for example, suggests reviewers of science journals tend to have a particularly low tolerance of language errors. In contrast, though, in Cheung's (2010, p. 134) study of applied linguistics researchers in Hong Kong, there was a perception that "reviewers and editors of English language journals were sympathetic" towards non-systematic language use.

2.3. Ways of Coping

Despite the challenges, some Omani ELT academics carrying out independent research at SQU have succeeded in getting published in international peer-reviewed journals based in Western countries, e.g. Al-Issa (2005). And sometimes Omani partnerships with Western colleagues have resulted in prestigious publications, e.g. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). Such successes are valued by the university, with its annual 'best researcher' award and efforts to move up the world rankings (Al-Issa, 2011). Unfortunately, though, within this university, at least one Omani ELT researcher appears to have engaged with academic journals of a very dubious quality, seemingly to advance a personal agenda I question below. I am referring to Dr. Z (pseudonym used), an Assistant Professor at SQU and apparently a contributor to the coffers of the vanity presses since 2011. One of her 2012 articles, which I subject to post-publication review below, appeared in *International Education Studies* (mentioned above), one of the numerous journals issued then *six*, now (in 2016) *twelve* times per year by the Canadian Center of Science and Education (CCSE).

3. A very Specific Example of the Problem

3.1 A Notorious Publisher

Have you never heard of CCSE? The organization has become notorious quickly (Kolata, 2013). According to Professor Weber-Wulff (2011) in her blog on plagiarism and scientific misconduct, *'copy, shake and paste'*, the grandly-named Canadian Center of etc etc… (CCSE) is located in a shopping mall. Searching for its offices with the help of *'google streetview'*, she is able to reveal "it has interesting neighbours: a grocery, a Subway, a nail studio, a dentist, a florist, a shoe repair". "Is this a legitimate scientific endeavour?" she asks rhetorically before replying for us: "I think not". Of course, besides its location, there might be other indicators of its dubious status, e.g. the ungrammatical English of its 'editors' (Weber-Wulff, 2011), who include Cindy Xu and Susan Sun, which might be pseudonyms. I cannot find them attached to any university.

3.2. Profiting from Predatory Publishing

However, despite its notoriety, CCSE has also pulled in riches. The article publication fee is $400 and in the December 2012 edition of *International Education Studies* (which is just one of the publisher's fleet of journals) there are 27 articles. So the income from this one issue (from the authors who thought that publication in this journal was going to enhance their reputations) could have been as much as $10,800, although some discounts may have been given. This suggest there is lots of money to spend in the nearby nail studio and the florist's, unless, of course, a vast amount of work is being put into editing and reviewing, and this is charged (although reviewers usually work for free).

3.3. Peer-review CCSE-style

How thorough is their peer-reviewing process? According to the journal's website:

> We use double-blind system for peer-review; both reviewers and authors' identities remain anonymous. The paper will be peer-reviewed by three experts; one is an editorial staff and the other two are external reviewers. The review process may take **2-3 weeks** (Paper selection and publication process, 2011).

I love the grammatical errors and use of bold. The editors obviously feel prospective authors will have to be very patient, waiting for a whole 2-3 weeks! The ultimate test of the journal, though, is the quality of the end product and to assess this I submit a sample article (Dr. Z, 2012) to post-publication review.

3.4. Research Design Issues with a Sample CCSE Article

Investigating the reasons for what she perceives as Omani students' low English proficiency, Dr. Z (2012, p. 264) reports administering a qualitative questionnaire to exactly one hundred university undergraduates and conducting follow-up focus group discussions (with two of her classes). Unfortunately, she provides no other information about these discussions, in terms of the number of them and their length, the size of the groups, the questions asked. She appears to have been effectively an insider, interviewing her own students, but although such a relationship may have influenced the results, particularly if her prior opinions were well-known, nothing is said about this aspect of the methodology. It is unclear how free the students were to provide their own opinions in practice, even though Dr. Z claims from a theoretical perspective that a strength of focus groups is that "participants have the "opportunity to express their opinions unreservedly" (p. 264). Nor is there any discussion of ethical issues. Confidentiality and anonymity, for example, are not addressed.

3.5. Further Issues with the Research Methodology

However, given the way results are then quantified and tabulated in the article, it seems that rather than draw very much on focus group discussions, the author may have relied largely on the questionnaires, which contained two items. The first of these is as follows: "Why are so many public school graduates (she means 'school-leavers from the state secondary schools') weak in English?" (Dr. Z, 2012, p. 271). So she starts with a leading question, a question type which Bell (1993) advises beginner researchers to avoid. Her leading question seems to indicate her bias (she has already decided "*so many*" [my italics] are weak in English) and invites the apportioning of blame, from respondents whose

perspectives may inevitably have been limited by their capacity to remember, if they are being asked to reflect on their entire education in the English language (a limitation that should have been acknowledged). Whether she was asking the most appropriate population is a further issue, since her respondents were SQU students, who had gained entrance to the university through fiercely competitive public exams. Therefore, although some of these students would have required a foundation year in English before reaching Dr. Z's class, comparatively (in relation to the population at large) they were amongst the most successful secondary school 'graduates' in the country. Consequently, would they have been less likely to have suffered from difficulties with English themselves? To what extent would they have been able to reflect empathically on difficulties that others faced with English? Moreover, what of those (a minority?) who would have come to the university from private school? Would they have had much knowledge of the state school sector? Again, these are limitations that should have been acknowledged.

3.6. Over-generalized Results

The results of the study were as follows: The students mostly blame teachers, the curriculum and themselves in that order, and Dr. Z (2012) then over-generalizes from the data. She claims, for example, on the apparent basis of these and no other data, that:

> Many English teachers seem not to care about their profession or about improving, or even maintaining, their own level of proficiency… the study suggests that they do not try to change student attitudes or improve their motivation. They themselves avoid using English outside the classroom and so are poor models for their students. Moreover, the Ministry of Education seems to ignore effective supervision, student guidance, and any system of accountability. Hence, teachers are neither well-prepared pedagogically nor professionally well-monitored (p. 265-266).

3.7. Lack of Critical Distance

While there are no direct quotes from her respondents that would have provided more convincing 'evidence', of course it may be the case that Dr. Z (2012) based these generalizations on individual students' comments, but surely, as a researcher, she should have interrogated her data critically rather than accept (nearly) everything told her as if it were a 'fact'. One might ask, for example, if the former secondary school students Dr. Z surveyed really did have inside information about how their teachers were being supervised. It seems implausible. And how would these students know to what extent their teachers used English outside the classroom? As Al-Jardani (2015) has commented, these data cannot be generalized.

However, rather than attempt to triangulate her data, surely advice any peer-reviewer worth their salt would have given, Dr. Z (2012) appears to present her results uncritically, and has been allowed to do so by CCSE. The safety net of peer-review appears to have been missing, which is most unfortunate, since good advice pre-publication may have saved her from making some of the mistakes described above. However, rather than actually help her, the CCSE predators may have simply pocketed the $400 she appears to have paid them for publishing her work (unless she benefited from some kind of discount) and then turned a blind eye to the work's lack of quality. This is problematic since some (uncritical) readers may have been convinced. CCSE's full name in itself (Canadian Center for Science and Education) can sound impressive to the unwary reader, conjuring up the notion of an establishment-supported scholarly enterprise representing a whole country, and it is only when one digs a little deeper, e.g. in the manner of

Weber-Wulff (2011), that the pseudo-academic posturing is laid bare. Nevertheless, one has to ask: why did Dr. Z pay to publish this?

3.8. A Top-down Research Agenda

Her personal agenda becomes more evident when one considers the following announcement published in the *Oman Daily Observer* in May 2012:

> The Government of Oman attaches much importance to English in the education of Omani youth and their preparation for a multinational, multicultural world of employment and socialisation. Hence, it has poured resources into supporting English language teaching and learning in schools, colleges and universities. Dr. Z says "Unfortunately, this major investment, involving qualified manpower, free textbooks, computer laboratories and classroom aids, has not yielded commensurate results". Supported by His Majesty's Research Grant, Dr. Z and colleagues will examine how students are taught English at public schools and why this teaching is not producing the desired results (SQU celebrates university day, 2012).

A charitable view is that Dr. Z (2012) wishes to address failings of the education system that have been documented by others, e.g. more recently by Al-Saadi (2013), who highlights that many school-leavers lack sufficient English to find well-paid employment or transition easily into higher education without first taking an extra year of English in a university foundation programme. Any exploratory research that would lead to beneficial changes in policy and/or practice and improve educational outcomes must surely be welcome. The question is, though: does Dr. Z seem well-placed to conduct it?

3.9. The Subjects of her Research

There are currently over 7,000 English language teachers working in government schools in Oman (Rich et al., 2014), and to attack these teachers and their supervisors in the way Dr. Z (2012) does seems disrespectful. In the schools-focused ELT literature in Oman produced by English teachers, their supervisors and teacher educators (some expatriate), a very different picture emerges from that presented by Dr. Z, a picture of teachers working in a dedicated way to improve the learning outcomes of their students, sometimes in difficult circumstances. For example, there is evidence from small-scale action research studies designed and conducted by teachers around the country, in the context of a University of Leeds in-service teacher education programme, of efforts to help young learners assess their own progress (Al-Jardani, 2006; Al-Sinani, 2008; Al-Asalam, 2009), benefit from group work (Al-Maqbali, 2008; Al-Marzooqi, 2008), develop speaking skills and communication strategies (Al-Farsi, 2008; Al-Senaidi, 2009), read more extensively (Al-Sheedi, 2008), strengthen process writing skills (Al-Jardani, 2008), and gain more from parental support in early literacy development through teacher mediation (Al-Biloshi, 2009). Additionally, case studies of Omani teachers on the same teacher education programme (drawing on observations and interviews conducted at regular intervals over a three-year period) have provided 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of deeply-committed teachers trying to help their learners in many of the same kinds of ways and others, e.g. gain in motivation through deeper involvement with materials (Wyatt, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Moreover, there is increasing evidence in this national context of the spread of more collaborative, less directive approaches to mentoring and supervision (Al-Sinani, 2009; Al-Zadjali, 2009; Wyatt and Arnold, 2012), while deeply-principled in-service teacher education courses provided by the Ministry of Education (e.g. Al-Jardani, 2009; Rich et al., 2014) now include an 80-hour 'Research for Professional Development' course for teachers (Etherton and Al-Jardani, 2009); this is facilitated throughout the country by Omani regional teacher trainers/advisors.

As Al-Maskari (2015) reports, one of the strengths of this research course is that it has a strong practical orientation, leading to engagement in classroom research and reflective practice; Al-Maskari also indicates that it tends to be very positively received by participating teachers around the country. Indeed, in light of all the effort clearly being put into improving educational outcomes by dedicated and inspiring teacher trainers such as Anisa Al-Maskari and Salima Al-Sinani (who have also spoken about their work at international conferences such as IATEFL), Dr. Z's (2012) sweeping criticisms of all those working in the state education system, including teacher educators and supervisors, based on such flimsy evidence, seem unfair.

3.10. Money and Success

Nevertheless, despite apparently having relatively under-developed research skills herself (unless these skills were simply left dormant by the peer-reviewers of her 2012 article), Dr. Z has managed to get funding to 'help' the people (teachers, teacher educators and supervisors) for whom she appears to have such little respect. One can only wonder whether her three CCSE publications (at a combined authors' cost apparently of $1,200) helped sway the research panel's funding decision (i.e. if they took them at face value without investigating further). Am I being over-critical? Dr. Z has fulfilled an additional role too, as the Associate Editor of a South-East Asian publication that has been described as predatory; it charges authors $150 and publishes numerous articles per issue that appear to be of very variable quality and are likely subject to minimal peer-review (given the very limited time, only a few weeks between issues, seemingly allocated to this). One can only speculate as the extent to which, should Dr. Z achieve further power and influence within Oman (a context where a professorship at SQU carries considerable weight), she will have the capacity to use this influence to help educational development within the country.

4. Evaluation

4.1. A Worldwide Problem

In illustrating the threats posed by predatory publishing I have used an example from the Middle East, questioning the academic practices, research skills, motives and decisions about where to publish of one researcher. However, there are numerous other researchers from a variety of contexts flocking, like so many crows, to CCSE publications and similar 'publishing houses' with grand names and incongruous addresses in shopping malls or even low-rent residential apartments (Beall, 2012). The problem is endemic; the foxes are multiplying rapidly. Their practices need to be exposed, as otherwise readers will continue to be duped. This raises the question as to what can be done to solve the problem. I offer a few suggestions.

4.2. Exploring the Issue in more Depth

First, it seems important to avoid a two-tier system in academic publishing, as it would clearly be unhealthy if non-native ELT researchers from Asian countries felt that getting published in prestigious journals edited in the West was beyond them, as Al-Issa and Al-Balushi (2011) seem to suggest might be happening. As noted above, this concern is shared by researchers in other disciplines, such as science (e.g. Huang, 2010). This is not always felt to be the case in ELT (Cheung, 2010), though Cheung's research was conducted with researchers who had enjoyed some success. Of course, numerous researchers from outside the English-speaking West do succeed in this field. On 3 June 2013, I carried out a quick review of the current issues of four leading journals - *TESOL Quarterly, ELT Journal, System* and *Language Teaching*

Research, and found that while just over a third (36%) of the 33 main articles were written solely by natives of Kachru's (1985) inner circle countries (e.g. the UK, the USA, New Zealand), the others had one or more authors from elsewhere. So, for these journals then (operating double-blind peer-review policies) the passport (and native standard) might not be the determining factor! Although this might be of little solace to Omani ELT researchers getting rejection after rejection, the over-riding challenge they face may not be bias (although this cannot be discounted) but the reality that the competition to publish in prestigious journals is fierce and is getting fiercer.

4.3. A Variety of Ethical Outlets

These researchers should not despair, though. Besides well-established print journals published in the West, there is also a growing number of good-quality print and online journals based elsewhere, including, for example, the journal this article is appearing in: *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning*; these good quality journals employ double-blind peer-review procedures and do not charge authors. Of those locating themselves through their titles in Asia, the *Asian EFL Journal* has published numerous 'non-native' ELT researchers active in Oman in recent years, e.g. Al-Hussaini (2006), Al-Issa (2006), Al-Saadi and Samuel (2013), El-Okda (2005, 2011), Lochana and Deb (2006), Moheidat and Baniabdelrahman (2011), Radwan (2011). Other reputable online journals that publish authors from the region include the *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching* and the *Journal of Asia TEFL*. If researchers find that genuine 'international' journals such as these are not interested in their work, they could approach 'national' ones instead, e.g. the *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*. A last resort might be 'local' journals, e.g. those produced by provincial colleges, perhaps edited by a member of the English department. These tend to make absolutely no pretensions, but in terms of quality may be equal to or better than the 'fake', 'predatory', so-called 'international' journals of the type produced by CCSE.

4.4. Getting Mentoring Support

Inevitably, though, ambitious researchers will aspire to international publications; these can be difficult to achieve for inexperienced researchers of any nationality or educational background, even after the completion of a PhD, and regardless of whether English is their mother tongue or is a language they have subsequently learned. However, mentoring can provide the required scaffolding, helping fledgling researchers develop the necessary skills. PhD supervisors have a role here, as do senior members of the university department who already have a track record of publications. A problem, though, is that some advisors can be overpowering, eroding the autonomy of the novice author (Huang, 2010). It is crucial, then, that the mentoring of academic writing is sensitive to the needs of the individual and their culture. Hands-on, structured support can help (Cheung, 2010).

4.5. The Importance of Motivating Peer-reviews

Sympathetic, carefully-written and context-sensitive peer-reviews also have the potential to be invaluable. The researchers in Cheung's (2010, p. 139) study, for example, were grateful for the "comprehensive comments and suggestions" they had received, which had helped them achieve success. However, Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011) suggest that the expectation of rejection can prevent some novice researchers from trying. It is also likely to be the case that comprehensive comments might sometimes be less forthcoming if the manuscript is so poor the only possible outcome is rejection. Reviewers might produce more detailed comments if they feel that after careful revision the manuscript will be publishable, as their unpaid reviewing will then have been more obviously worthwhile. However, if reasons for

rejection are too brief, the author can be left in the dark, frustrated, perhaps considering less legitimate routes to publication.

4.6. A Peer-review of the Article under Discussion

If I had been asked to double-blind peer-review Dr. Z (2012) for an international journal, I would certainly have recommended rejection, but would also have tried to provide some helpful feedback. "It is an interesting topic", I would have told her, "though rather large and in this draft not very clearly focused. I agree with you that students' voices should be heard when we are evaluating educational reform and in this sense it is good you have sought these out. However, the research design is flawed. You ask university students a leading question that asks them to generalize all their English language learning experiences over 9-12 years! These students would have come from very different types of school (e.g. from small schools in the mountains and deserts, large schools in urban areas where there are high levels of environmental literacy) from all regions of the country (with all their differing sub-cultures) following different systems (Basic or General Education, the two systems followed in Oman). Some would have attended well-run schools with brilliant teachers at some levels (primary and secondary) all or some of the time and others not. I am sure these undergraduate students would have interesting experiences to share if they were asked to recall them in depth at length with all the contextual nuances you could take account of. However, in a single answer to a leading question they can hardly do justice to this rich experience. Furthermore, the research method is not very well explained and it is unclear whether the research met ethical guidelines. So I suggest you redesign the study, drawing too on the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as educational administrators, teachers and parents. You might also wish to narrow the focus down so that it is more manageable." This is what I would have told her.

4.7. The Harm Done by Predatory Publishing

Publishing in fake, predatory, pseudo-academic journals is a kind of vice that feeds the development of a kind of pseudo-academic world (Kolata, 2013) in which boundaries are blurred in all sorts of surreal ways. What is real? I have never met Dr. Z and, for all I know, she may be an outstanding teacher and a kind person. I hope so, but have no idea whether or not this is the case. What I am conscious of is that she is becoming prominent as a funded 'research-active' Assistant Professor at the top university in Oman, entrusted by the research council with the task of investigating the problems with English language teaching and learning in government schools. At first glance, her research CV looks impressive, but to a certain extent the pedigree is illusionary, boasting a long list of 'international' publications that are not quite what they seem. This becomes an issue when publications such as the one under scrutiny in this article (appearing insufficiently peer-reviewed, thanks to the trickery of the CCSE predators) have the potential to harm others in her research environment (in this case, the supervisors, teacher trainers and teachers Dr. Z has gained funding to research). Others potentially damaged by a climate in which it is acceptable to submit manuscripts to predatory publishers might include junior university colleagues looking for ethical guidance and leadership.

4.8. Non-researching Academics are under too much Pressure

Academics are under considerable pressure to publish. Unless they are employed at high ranking institutes where they are given the needed support, perhaps we should not expect all of them to do so, a point that has been made by Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012); after all, there is always teaching to do and administrative work. Non-researching academics should not be stigmatized for not writing articles.

Unfortunately, if unwilling authors or authors with limited writing capacity feel pressurized to research and publish, this is only likely to contribute to the continuing upsurge of predatory journals, so universities have a responsibility to release this pressure experienced by their academic staff.

4.9. Crafty Foxes

The tactics employed by the 'editors' of predatory journals are clever; they rely on flattery like the fox in Aesop's fable, as Weber-Wulff's (2011) blog also highlights. And unfortunately some honest academics fall for their cunning wiles, realizing too late that they have been duped, as an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this manuscript testified. It pays to be wary. Indeed, just yesterday, while I was working on this article, I received an email from Mandy Xu, the editorial assistant of the *International Journal of English Linguistics*, another CCSE publication. The second sentence begins: "I have had an opportunity to read your article 'An English teacher's developing self-efficacy beliefs in using groupwork' published in *System* [*Oh heaven! She has read my work!*] and can tell from your work that you are an expert in the field of language studies." [*Oh yes, Mandy, yes!*] How to resist such flattery? Well, sorry Mandy, this might surprise you, but actually I do not really wish to burst into song, submit my manuscript, give you $400 to spend in the nail studio (with your friends, Cindy Xu and Susan Sun) and wave goodbye to my self-respect. Sorry!

5. Closing Thoughts

Actually, though, when I reflect a little further, maybe I should have sent the first draft of this article to Mandy to test her journal's peer-review policies. I can believe that, her eyes Disneyesque dollar signs, she would have been ready to publish it unread!

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