[coerle] Final report on plagiat accusation

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Expéditeur : coerle-request@inria.fr

Objet : [coerle] Final report on plagiat accusation

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Répondre à : Claude Kirchner
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Claude Kirchner to:
Sunayana Ghosh,
Florence Bertails,
Alexandre Derouet-Jourdan,
Joelle Thollot.

Copie to:
Chris Hankin, President of Inria’s scientific board,
Michèle Leduc, President of CNRS’s ethic committee,
Michel Cosnard, President of Inria,
François Sillion, Director of Inria Grenoble Rhone-Alpes
Research Centre,
Members of COERLE (Inria’s IRB).

Dear Colleagues,
You will find enclosed the report made by two independent scientific personalities about the plagiat accusation made by Sunayana Ghosh against Florence Bertails, Alexandre Derouet-Jourdan and Joelle Thollot.

The report clearly states that there is no plagiat. It will be published on the public internet page of the COERLE.

Sincerely yours,

Claude Kirchner
President of COERLE

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reportMetivierPottmannAboutAccusationByGhosh.pdf
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Dear colleague

In response to your request of expressing our judgment about the accusation of plagiarism made by Sunayana Ghosh against three researchers working at Inria: Joelle Thollot, Florence Bertails, and Alexandre Derouet-Jourdan for their paper "Floating tangents for approximating spatial curves with G1 piecewise helices" (http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cagd.2013.02.007) and having closely looked at the documents you sent us, we arrived at the conclusion that the plagiarism accusation is not at all founded. Our opinion is based on the following analysis.

The common definition of plagiarism is "the act of using another person's words or ideas without giving credit to that person" (Merriam Webster) or "to copy another person's ideas, words or work and pretend that they are your own" (Oxford).

In their paper, Derouet et al. clearly and openly refer to the thesis by S. Ghosh, giving her many credits both for the used results and for the ideas of proofs they borrowed. The high priority of Ghosh's thesis among all other references is well supported by the fact that it is already mentioned in the abstract. The reference to the thesis was the correct one, according to one of the mails. So there is no dissimulation, and S. Ghosh explicitly recognizes this fact.

Her accusation relies on the fact that the paper by Derouet et al. partly rewords some of her results. The document where she lists the incriminated lines is clear: according to her, these lines are directly taken, or could be easily deduced, from her thesis. According to Derouet et al., they had to include proofs for the corrections and extensions they introduce, but for the sake of readability of the paper they found it better to include a complete proof, repeating in part what was already known. S. Ghosh recognizes the existence of the extensions, but minimizes their importance and their difficulty.

It is important to say also that the paper by Derouet et al. is not limited to the completion of the proof of S. Ghosh’s theorem, but also contains a new application. However, it is not our task to assess the magnitude of that contribution, this was the role of the referees.

At this point, it is difficult for us to give a definite answer to the question: was it absolutely necessary to include a complete proof and rewrite part of S. Ghosh’s proofs? Maybe the proof by Derouet et al. could have been shortened: in one direction, the result is well known anyway (special case of the projection theorem on velocities of a rigid system), and in the other direction, symmetry properties of helices could be more effective than their differential geometric characterization via constant curvature and torsion. However, presenting a too complicated and too detailed proof has nothing to do with plagiarism. Moreover, even the
presentation of a minor and simple extension of another author's work is not a case of plagiarism if that author gets correctly cited; such a paper would just be a weak contribution. It is the role of referees and editorial board to judge quality and magnitude of a paper's contribution and to find the path between clarity and novelty. This question is raised very frequently and solved in a natural way: authors have to give all necessary credits to all sources from which they borrow ideas, results or proofs. When one uses results or ideas of others, it often happens that one has to modify or adapt them, sometimes slightly, sometimes more deeply. For clarity of presentation, one may prefer to reconstruct a proof from the beginning. Again, the absolute rule is to give all the credits to the people one follows. We strongly believe that the paper by Derouet et al. completely follows this rule, and therefore we are convinced that one cannot speak of plagiarism in the present case.

Helmut Pottmann

Guy Métivier