The discussion of research integrity (RI), which includes plagiarism, in Latin American science has received scarce attention, though awareness of its importance is increasing. In Brazil, attention to plagiarism has begun to grow among journal editors and in some graduate programs. For most of these programs, however, formal policies are not clearly established. On the one hand, lack of consensus about what constitutes plagiarism in science appears to be widespread in the country’s research community. On the other, Brazilian researchers, educators and policy makers have not engaged in the recent RI conversations led by the US and European countries.

This situation has resulted in mixed views of, for example, textual borrowing in an Anglophone setting, even among senior scientists, an observation that is supported by recent focus-group research. To what extent these views are shared among graduate students needs further attention and has now been investigated at UFRJ. This presentation will look at conceptions and misconceptions of plagiarism in Brazilian academia and include preliminary results of a research project on graduate students’ conceptions of RI in science, including plagiarism practices.

Overall, this talk should give insight into the relevance of including RI discussions in initiatives to boost the productivity of young and senior researchers in the Brazilian scientific community.

“If we consider the expressive growth in Brazilian scientific production resulting from the implementation of an extensive national system of graduate education, it is important to focus efforts on enhancing and upgrading the mental health care system.”

Focus Group Interviews

- Senior Scientists at Public Research Institutions (2008)
- Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows in Engineering at a Public Institution (2010)

Our Focus Group Interviews

- Perceptions of Plagiarism
- Plagiarism and the “Publish or Perish” Culture
- Linguistic Competence to Publish in English

The “Publish or Perish” Culture: Increasing Plagiarism Practices?

In a letter published in the Bulletin of the Brazilian Physics Society, a Brazilian scientist expressed his concern about the effects of the mechanics of “counting papers” on the Brazilian research environment (Oliveira, 2006)…may have detrimental effects on this environment and lead to unethical behavior in the Brazilian scientific community. (Vasconcelos et al, Embo Reports, 2009).
We noted the same feeling in the following comments from our focus groups:

“I think…publications, the demand for producing texts and patents…we’re overwhelmed by the mechanics of being productive; it’s something mechanical, and we end up…accepting things that used to be unethical but that have now become acceptable.”

“…this pressure for numbers and demand for quantity that has increased in the research environment…people do not have time to consider what makes a real contribution [to science]…this mechanization looks at productivity from a numerical perspective.”

Among the 16 researchers interviewed, 12 expressed a positive assessment of their writing competence in English. Some of the comments were as follows:

“…I spent many years abroad during my PhD, which helped me a lot…my competence in writing was developed during my PhD…[Concerning manuscripts], I do everything… but I only derive intellectual pleasure out of writing the discussion… the other sessions are rather boring and take up a lot of time…”

“…I don’t have much trouble to communicate in English, to read or write…sometimes I feel the need for more skill than I have, and I send it [the manuscript] to a language editor, but not usually. I write it and each colleague in my group tries to correct the text a little bit…”

The concept of plagiarism appeared to be rather ill-defined among our respondents. Among the 16 participants, only two expressed the full definition of plagiarism, that is, including not only the use of someone else’s ideas and results without attribution but also inappropriate textual borrowing… Most respondents considered that textual plagiarism in science would be a serious offense than copying data. In a recent article, Bouville claims that “copying a few sentences that contain no original idea (e.g., in the introduction) is of marginal importance compared to stealing the ideas of others.”

“To me, plagiarism is results, copying results…this already happened several times: You talk to somebody about the results you obtained and the person ends up developing the same… This is plagiarism. The same idea you had the person develops, right? Ideas: this is plagiarism. Only ideas… I have my doubts about the text…”

“To me, plagiarism in science is copying results, for sure… [Plagiarism] in an article is… [When] you copy and paste an excerpt [sentence] larger than six, seven or eight words. I think you shouldn’t do that.”
In Brazil, it appears that some cases of textual borrowing have been interpreted as editorial problems rather than academic plagiarism.

This interpretation reinforces the idea that there is a cultural component behind notions of plagiarism among researchers, which cannot simply be ignored.

"Borrowing sentences in the part of a paper that simply helps to better introduce the problem should not be seen as plagiarism. Even if our introductions are not entirely original, our results are — and these are the most important part of any scientific paper. In the current climate of 'publish or perish', we are under pressure to publish our findings..."

(Conference, Nature 449, 8, 2007)

"... the misappropriation of language from other authors has been noted and the trend is quite significant... This almost exclusively occurs when the principal, usually first-named, author... does not have English as their mother tongue, and struggle to represent their background to their work in good English. As the Introduction is to explore, articulate the significance of the results in the Discussion and Conclusions." (Editorial, Biomaterials, 2007)

"Steal my words, and you steal my authorship. Steal my idea and you steal my identity as a scientist." (Laffolette, M.C., Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, 2000)
Differences in National Approaches to Doctoral Education
Implications for International Research Collaborations
Mélissa S. Anderson, Felly Chitingo Koti, Yiynn Hu, Takibito Kamata, Aliza Kishhabekova, Christine C. Lejkowski, Maria A. Shaw, Martha M. Sorenson and Sonia M. R. Vasconcelos
2009. International collaborations between researchers who have different views and expectations about research and publication ethics can easily lead to awkward misunderstandings. Cross-cultural problems in international collaborations have been discussed at length elsewhere (Global Science Forum, n.d.; Nature, 2008), and they should not be assumed to be irrelevant in the Brazilian scientific community.

Entre o plágio e a autoria: qual o papel da universidade?
Obdália Santana Ferreira Silva
Universidade de Estudos da Bahia, campus BH, Departamento de Educação
Renta Brésil de Educação s. 11 n. 11 março 2011

Some questions we may ask:
- What makes a scientific author?
- Is having his/her own voice in the language of science a relevant issue?
- How much ownership of the writing of a scientific paper should an author have in this Anglophone research setting? (So far, it does constitute an intellectual capital not open-yet-to-negotiation.
- Is our research environment likely to favor the process of writing papers for junior researchers who have to respond to a publication culture that has established severe sanctions for those involved in plagiarism (of data, ideas and/or text)?

Concluding Remarks
- So far, plagiarism, especially textual plagiarism in science, is not a clear cut issue neither among senior researchers nor among graduate students participating in the focus groups. Other issues such as scientific authorship, appropriate citation, and redundancy in science also showed that perceptions may vary and be sources of confusion.
- Larger groups will be surveyed for a broader picture of the problem (including a national survey on plagiarism, self-plagiarism and redundancy with PhDs registered in CNPq database). However, the insight given by these focus groups, the poorness of RI discussions in Brazil, and recent cases of retractions of papers by Brazilian authors may lead us to the following considerations:
- Is it not timely for our research community and policy makers to broaden the agenda for policies that aim to foster the productivity of junior researchers?

Muito obrigada!