

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

We have just returned from São Paulo, where I attended the Second Seminar on the Performance Evaluation of Brazilian Periodicals in 2010 JCR, sponsored by the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the São Paulo state research funding agency Fapesp (Fundação de Apoio a Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo), Brazil's federal research funding agency CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico), the PAHO/WHO Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information, known as Bireme, and the Federal University of São Paulo research funding agency Fap-Unifesp (Fundação de Apoio à Universidade Federal de São Paulo). Papers are available online at the event site (<http://migre.me/5L7xa>).

The Journal Citation Reports is one of the services provided by Thomson Reuters, a powerful company operating in various fields of information and knowledge, fruit of a merger between Thomson Scientific (formerly ISI) and Reuters news agency. Its database covers over 7,600 scientific journals.¹

The latest version, 2010 JCR, confirms the growing international presence of Brazilian periodicals, 103 of which are indexed by JCR Science and JCR Social Sciences, up 43% over 2009. Eleven of these have an Impact Factor of more than 1, which in the eyes of the academic community signals the noteworthy progress of Brazilian scientific research.

Since many journals have only recently joined the ranks of those indexed in major databases, current JCR indices do not wholly reflect this internationalization. I am referring especially to the visibility of Brazilian periodicals. But we do know that the number of Brazilian articles published in international journals more than doubled from 1997 to 2007, reaching 19,000 per annum, and that Brazil's participation in international scientific publications rose from 1.7% in 2002 to 2.7% in 2008.²

What lie behind these figures are far-reaching structural processes entailing the globalization of societies, plus the current trend for Brazil to enjoy more of the spotlight on diverse fronts abroad, not only in the economic realm but also in music, literature, and other areas of cultural creation, including the sciences, however lopsidedly. We must bear other factors in mind too: the dynamics peculiar to the networks that interweave producers of culture and knowledge; the economic, political, and civilizational crisis now

¹ For more information, see <http://thomsonreuters.com/>, as well as our Editor's Note in volume 16, issue 1, 2009 (<http://migre.me/5L7Bn>).

² Antonio Carlos Santomauro, "Nas redes do conhecimento," *Presença Internacional do Brasil*, v.4, n.13, 2011, p.49.

assailing industrialized societies; and the policies adopted by a gamut of governments and their research and development funding agencies with a view to internationalizing their activities in some way.

In Brazil, these types of policies have held sway for some years now. According to Lea Velho³, their advocates argue that Brazil's participation in foreign research networks is still very limited and the focus of the country's science too centered on its own internal academic goals, and so even those Brazilian articles published in mainstream international journals have a narrow impact. Furthermore, although the number of papers indexed by the top bibliographic bases has climbed, the proportion of those written in collaboration with foreign scholars remains low.

This was in fact one of the obstacles pointed up by those in attendance at the Seminar. Despite the overall climate of optimism reigning at the event, important warnings were issued: we should pay attention not just to quantity but also to the content of what Brazilian science is publishing; we must understand how international indicators are generated; and we must cross-reference these with social, economic, and demographic data to avoid the pitfall of hasty, simplistic conclusions. Further, Rogério Meneghini, scientific coordinator for SciELO, showed how publication is only one stage in the cycle of scientific production⁴ – or in the cycles, if we heed another argument repeated at the Seminar: each area has its own singularities.

According to JCR data, the performance of Brazilian periodicals has displayed marked improvement as compared to other Latin American nations. Most comparisons were made between Brazil, China, and Spain, the latter represented by Félix Moya, of CSIC/SCImago Research Group.

As a component in the internationalization of scientific periodicals, SciELO has inarguably played a decisive role in achievements to date. Its collections have grown steadily and now encompass the Iberian Peninsula and South Africa (in the works). Since joining this virtual library, its open-access collections are all that much more visible. Of its total, 90 titles are indexed in Web of Science and Scopus – that is, almost all the Brazilian periodicals covered by JCR.

SciELO has become a protagonist in the world of big publishing and has helped Brazilian science position itself favorably in the world of big science.

A new, and unstable, correlation of forces has taken shape between two actors in these worlds and now reinforces hierarchical, concentrated, monopolistic, and privatizing tendencies. International indexers and publishers have swooped down on periodicals from emerging nations, including Brazil, sometimes incorporating journals that do not meet the quality standards appropriate to sound scientific indexing. A wave of mergers in the editorial market bred giants like Elsevier, who wage veritable business wars over this kind of merchandise. These companies have the power to extort high prices from the universities,

³ Lea Velho, "Internacionalização da ciência: acaso ou necessidade?," *Jornal da Unicamp*, Campinas, 2-11 set. 2011.

⁴ "Cientista, infraestrutura, projetos, desenvolvimento de projetos, resultados, discussão informal com os pares e publicação (nacional e internacional)."

scientific institutions, and individual scholars who need the information contained in periodicals now under monopoly control.

Félix Moya showed how the number of Spanish journals in Scopus and Web of Science increased after these periodicals were bought out by publishers, but he raised the question: “What periodicals are *authentically* Spanish today? Where does Spanish science stand in this?”

For those who attended the First Seminar on Performance Evaluation of Brazilian Periodicals in JCR, back in 2010, it is remarkable how the siren song of big capital is ever more seductive. One editor working for a company in this field stressed the cautions that must be exercised with ‘clients,’ that is, the authors, reviewers, and readers of articles. Another suggested that the financial hardships faced by most periodicals could be addressed by charging per published article, until each journal’s time comes to be snapped up by an international publisher.

With big capital playing hardball in the diffusion of knowledge, SciELO faces new challenges, not only to protect open access as a democratic value championed by other local and international organizations but also to offset Brazilian periodicals’ weak spots, reiterated by many Seminar participants, especially the dispersion, fragility, and amateurishness characteristic of a good share of these journals, generally part of graduate programs or scientific societies, fund-starved journals kept afloat by skeleton crews and a lot of volunteer work, their editors dividing time among an array of academic endeavors.

SciELO is getting ready to operate as a publisher, coordinating efforts and affording periodicals mechanisms that will maximize journal capacity to process and release articles, while providing the scientometric tools that make SciELO itself a respected indexer at home and abroad.

Maurício Rocha e Silvia, editor of *Clinics*; Luís Reynaldo Ferracciú Alleoni, editor of *Scientia Agrícola*; and Luiz Carlos Dias, editor of *Journal of the Brazilian Chemical Society* showed how self-citations represent a substantial portion of the rankings for, say, the United States and China; if excluded, their citation indices drop sharply. The Brazilian case is unique not only because it offers open access but also because SciELO strengthened its periodicals prior to including them in international bases, and in this regard self-citations provided valuable leverage and continue to carry significant weight in indices compiled by international rankers. For Rocha e Silvia, researchers and editors need to get over the “low self-esteem syndrome typical of nations of Latin-based languages,” increasing their self-citations – but in a diligent and non-opportunistic style, warned Alleoni.

Disciplines differ from each other and have their own dynamics, and this should be taken into account when evaluating the rankings drawn from citation indices and impact factors. It’s no wonder “Where is the impact of human sciences periodicals?” (“Por onde anda o impacto dos periódicos das ciências humanas?”) was the title of the paper presented by Charles Pessanha, the sole representative of these fields who was invited to present at the São Paulo gathering. Pessanha, editor of *Dados*, the Brazilian journal covered longest by JCR, underscored the importance of books in the production of local social scientists and emphasized the heterogeneity of the periodicals in which they publish and the languages as well (albeit with Portuguese predominating, of course).

Like other periodicals, those in the human sciences have to meet certain challenges, such as professionalizing their editorial processes, enhancing editor feedback to authors, reviewers, and readers, and dealing responsibly with self-citations. Yet from the angle of internationalization, no periodical faces any greater challenge than acquiring the technical and financial capacity to publish articles in the most widely used language on the planet today: English.

In the specific field of history, there is a line of thinking hostile (and rightfully so) to the 'colonized' view that only foreign periodicals are good, a line that understands internationalization primarily as an effort to expand the ability to attract articles by foreign historians, in Portuguese, for publication in local journals. This may indeed be true as well, so long as one steers clear of a mistake often made by national periodicals: the mere translation or recycling of articles already published abroad, presented as original.

In this age of accelerated globalization of scientific communication, when periodicals have no choice but to stake out a claim on the worldwide web, it is more important to allow our peer communities around the globe access to Brazilian scholarship through the English language, while of course preserving Portuguese as our means of communication with native speakers and the vast Lusophone world. It is equally worthwhile to recruit international reviewers to evaluate locally produced articles as a way of keeping authors in tune with the international state of the art on their objects of research and also as ways of making Brazilian periodicals more familiar outside the country and of enlisting foreign contributors. In the realm of historiography, current lines of thought place growing emphasis on comparative approaches and networks of actors while showing that the more successfully the scale of analysis is reduced, the farther the analyst must go to find his sources. To be dense and rich, the study of a national, regional, or local case must have a broad frame of reference that extends beyond all types of boundaries.

The times in which we live offer an opportunity for Brazilian periodicals to carve out their space as internationally respected channels of scientific communication, and language barriers must be overcome if this is to be accomplished. As Abel Packer pressed home, editors must carefully select which articles should be published in English *as well* and which should be published only in the language of their own country.

Jaime L. Benchimol
Scientific editor