ACADEMIC WRITING IN SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES: SELF-CITATION IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINARY AREAS

ESCRITA ACADÊMICA EM ARTIGOS CIENTÍFICOS: AUTOCITAÇÃO EM DIFERENTES ÁREAS DISCIPLINARES

ESCRITURA ACADÉMICA EN ARTÍCULOS CIENTÍFICOS: AUTOCITA EN DIFERENTES ÁREAS DISCIPLINARIAS

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the presence of self-citation in ten most cited scientific articles from two areas of knowledge - General Medicine and Linguistics - which were published by Brazilian authors in the period from 2015 to 2019. The focus is on the functions and meanings of self-citation in writing and problematizing the insertion of researchers in academic literacy practices. The data indicate that self-citation, as well as the citation of others, is a recurrent resource in the production of experienced researchers, with the objective of valuing continuous work within the same research group and promoting a character of reliability to the reader.

KEY-WORDS: Self-citation. Academic literacies. Academic writing. Scientific articles.

RESUMO: O presente artigo analisa a presença da autocitação em dez artigos científicos mais citados de duas áreas de conhecimento - Medicina Geral e Linguística – os quais foram publicados por autores brasileiros no período de 2015 a 2019. O foco recai sobre funções e sentidos da autocitação na escrita acadêmica, além de problematizar a inserção dos pesquisadores em práticas de letramentos acadêmicos. Os dados indicam que a autocitação, assim como a citação de outrem, é um recurso recorrente na produção de pesquisadores experientes, com objetivos de valorizar trabalhos contínuos dentro de um mesmo grupo de pesquisa e de promover um caráter de confiabilidade frente ao leitor.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Autocitação. Letramentos acadêmicos. Escrita acadêmica. Artigos científicos.

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RESUMEN*: Este artículo analiza la presencia de la autocita en diez artículos científicos más citados en dos áreas de conocimiento - Medicina General y Lingüística - que fueron publicados por autores brasileños de 2015 a 2019. El foco está en las funciones y significados de la autocita en la escritura académica, además de problematizar la inserción de los investigadores en las prácticas de alfabetización académica. Los datos indican que la autocita, así como la cita de otros, es un recurso recurrente en la producción de investigadores experimentados, con el objetivo de valorar el trabajo continuo dentro de un mismo grupo de investigación y promover un carácter de confiabilidad frente al lector.*

PALABRAS CLAVE*: Autocita. Alfabetizaciones académicas. Escritura académica. Artículos científicos.*

Introduction

The discussion about self-citation in scientific articles has attracted the attention of researchers from different fields in recent years. In addition to bibliometric studies that present analysis of impact and relevance, different views are offered on the subject (HYLAND; JIANG, 2018). Hyland (2003) brings a reflection on the broad social networks that are behind the scenes of the current competitiveness of the academic world, which seeks recognition and investments. Thus, we approach the studies of self-citation and academic literacies (LEA; STREET, 1998; 2006; LILLIS, 2008; CURRY; LILLIS, 2016; OLIVEIRA, 2012; FUZA, 2016) in the investigation of the writing modes of researchers from different areas knowledge, without forgetting the power relations and the institutional context in which the authors are involved. To emphasize, we understand academic literacies, according to Lea and Street (1998; 2006) as a set of social practices, in an academic-scientific context, which are flexible, include diverse readings and writings and are constituted by virtue of epistemological relationships, of power, identities and meanings.

In line with these initial considerations, the present study analyzes the presence of self-citation in ten most cited scientific articles from two areas of knowledge - General Medicine and Linguistics - which were published by Brazilian authors in the period from 2015 to 2019. For that, we look for academic writing in scientific articles to understand functions and meanings of self-citation, in addition to problematizing the insertion of researchers in academic literacy practices. We also consider that self-citation, as well as the citation of others, is a recurrent phenomenon in academic production, due to the need for dialogues with others and with scientific knowledge. The presented objective is, therefore, coherent with the conception of academic literacies, from a sociocultural perspective (LEA; STREET, 1998; 2006), in university contexts, to emphasize the specialized nature of the languages and texts that are

conveyed and that provide the opportunity for construction of knowledge, the social roles of students, teachers and researchers, as well as the relationships established with knowledge.

This work, therefore, is justified by understanding the speeches of researchers around language, in different areas of knowledge, General Medicine and Linguistics, which make up impact journals. The look at academic writing and the self-citation process is accompanied by broad benefits for Education and all disciplinary fields, covering the paths that researchers, in dialogue with Higher Education, follow when seeking to insert themselves into scientific publishing practices. This is reinforced with the journal evaluation system in Brazil, which is undergoing changes, migrating to understanding the impact factor as one of the direct ways of classifying these journals (CAPES, 2019). The insertion in scientific publication practices is not only related to individual desires for sharing research results, but also to structural coercion through publication in journals with a high impact factor, which requires a deeper look around academic writing. In addition, many researchers in the large area of Education work in partnership with different areas of knowledge and provide opportunities for interlocutions that include the functioning of different languages from Basic Education to Higher Education.

Material and Method

The analysis material in this work has ten articles in the area of Linguistics and ten articles in the area of General Medicine. In meetings with the groups of the Universal CNPQ 2018 and CAPES PRINT UNESP projects, the main concern, over a year (2019), was the definition of criteria for the selection of scientific articles, since we did not want a random selection for this scientific research. To find the best way to select articles, it was necessary, first, to have a deeper understanding of the databases. We carry out training and guidance with librarians from different institutions involved in the indicated projects. We strive to understand that there is no official classification on the areas of knowledge and that each database has a specific form of organization. To exemplify, we sought, throughout 2019, to understand the meaning of impact factor, H index and relevance, which the bases use to classify and order the search results. After several attempts, we chose to use the Web of Science platform, and selected all the bases: Web of Science Core Collection, Derwent Innovations Index, KCI-Korean Journal Database, Russian Science Citation Index and SciELO Citation Index. For the selection of articles in Linguistics, the advanced search was carried out by the Linguistics area, in the period between 2015 and 2019, considering articles written by Brazilians (the filter by country/region refers to the author's address and not to the journal or language that article was published). For

the articles of Medicine, the same period and region criteria were used, applied in the General & Internal Medicine area. The option for Linguistics is the fact that it uses languages as objects of study and that, directly, has dialogued with the Education area, either in conducting and publishing research, or in teacher formation. Medicine, in turn, because it is an area in which there are many journals with a high impact factor, with great social relevance, with a vast history of national and international partnerships, which challenge publication, always, in journals of high visibility and access around the world.

The ten articles in each area were numbered according to the sequence in which they appeared in our search, from the most cited to the least cited. In this work, we refer directly to the works with self-citation for each area. Therefore, Linguistics works will be mentioned individually, as follows: L3, L4, L5, L6 and L7. Those of Medicine, in turn, will be called: M1, M3, M6, M7 and M10. As can be seen, only five articles in each area are self-cited, so this set of articles represents the object of study in the present work.

Theoretical reflections - dialogues with the object of study

Despite the similarity, the two areas of knowledge under analysis have the same number of articles with self-citation, among the selected articles, the use of this resource is diverse, even within each area in isolation. We seek the concepts of functioning of the citation, treated by Boch and Grossmann (2002) and by Rodrigues (2018), in relation to the other's discourse, to understand functions and meanings of self-citation - a specific type of citation - in academic writing. According to these studies, we can divide the forms of reference to the other, in written discourse, into two categories: evocation and reported discourse. In the evocation, there is only mention of authors and works, without necessarily summarizing their content. In the reported speech, we have the synthesis or excerpts of other works, divided into three categories: reformulation, in which, whoever writes, reformulates, in his own way, the content worked by another author; the presence of the other is referenced, either by using the author's name and year or by the corresponding reference number; quotation marks or italics are not used. The quotation, in turn, is an excerpt extracted as it is found in another work; it can be marked with quotation marks, italics or typographical block. Finally, there is the citational islet, in which there is the use of quotation marks, italics or other markings for the voices of others in the text, in order to integrate the concept of someone else with the work of the writer, which comes through few words or expressions, unlike the quote.

At first, we had doubts about how to classify self-citations within the proposed nomenclature, considering the differences between ABNT and Vancouver standards, present in our corpus. The authors cited discuss the forms of mention with examples that refer to rules in which we have the names of the authors referenced in the body of the text, as is the case with ABNT. In the Vancouver standard, which is used in medical articles, the reference is indicated by numbers in the body of the text. Regarding the differences between the standards cited, we consult comparative material available on the library website of the College of Public Health of the University of São Paulo. With the help of this material, as we continue to analyze these occurrences, we realized that the intention of each form of mention was present throughout the corpus. Evocation, for example, in the ABNT standard will be identified by the evocation of names, while in the Vancouver standard we will have the evocation of numbers. Despite this difference in writing, the intention to evoke is the same: to mention previous works without synthesizing their content. The same happens in the reformulation, in which the author's name is mentioned in the text following the ABNT norms, while in the text that uses Vancouver the author that was reformulated is indicated by its corresponding number in the references; however, the intention of reformulation, which is the synthesis of a process present in another work, formulated in other words, remains in both cases. In the case of the citational islet and the quotation, these phenomena are marked with quotation marks or a typographical block in both standards, so they are in line with the proposed explanation. Thus, we conclude that the use of nomenclatures proposed by Boch and Grossmann (2002) and Rodrigues (2018) would be relevant in our work, regardless of the norm present in each analyzed article.

Boch and Grossmann (2002) also raise the question that, in the work of specialists - experienced researchers, when compared to the work of beginners, the greatest recurrence in citations is evocation and reformulation. The authors reflect on this being a natural situation in the writing process and getting used to the peculiarities of academic writing happens gradually. Hyland (2017, p. 10) states that in hard sciences, such as Medicine, authors tend to minimize their presence by referring to inanimate beings or by using tables and graphs that communicate what is necessary. Thus, we relate this "distance" to the quote in a typographic block, in the sense of making that voice more explicit. Although there is dialogue with the ideas brought there, there is less interference in the dialogue with the other, according to the referred author.

Another issue that we problematize in our corpus is related to the insertion of researchers in academic literacy practices. According to Street (2003), literacy practices involve a cultural issue "about the specific ways of thinking and doing reading and writing within cultural contexts". Thus, for this analysis, we are guided by Hyland (2003; 2017; 2018), about the

functioning of academic writing in different areas of knowledge, in Gee (2008), about literacy practices, and in Bourdieu (1996) on social capital. Although the first author is not exactly part of the group of well-known specialists in Literature Studies, focusing on the areas of academic discourse, writing in a second language and English for academic purposes, his dialogical and social approaches problematize disciplinary discourses, ways of academic writing coming from groups, which brings us to reflect on ways of reading and writing from a sociocultural perspective, on how self-citation could represent ways of expressing specific groups. Gee (2008) addresses specific questions about literacies and insider and outsider conditions, related to those who are inserted in a social practice that involves writing and reading, as a process of belonging to these groups. Finally, we join these approaches to the perspectives of Bourdieu (1980) on social capital that corresponds to a kind of profit, advantage, obtained through the union of social groups that are strengthened in relations of exchange, to reflect on the formation of groups of researchers in the construction of articles that include self-citation.

A legitimate academic-scientific path

In the articles selected in the present work, in both areas, the forms of self-citation, for the most part, occur through evocation and reformulation, corroborating the research cited, considering that the selected articles are written by expert authors. However, despite the similarity in both the choice and the way to self-quote, there are considerable differences in the number of occurrences from one area to another. In Linguistics we had, in the self-citation, three cases of evocation and eleven occurrences of reformulation. In Medicine, we found five cases of evocation and 305 occurrences of reformulation. This great numerical difference in the cases of reformulation between the areas is due, in part, to the presence of the article M1, which is much more extensive than the others and brings 44 authors. We will talk more about this article in a specific way later. Still referring to the ways of approaching the other, by Boch and Grossmann (2002), in the quotation item, only one work, in Linguistics, brings an excerpt of quotation, using a typographic block. In Medicine, no article has this feature in self-citation. As for the use of the citational islet, one occurrence was found in a Linguistics article and another in a Medicine article.

One of Hyland's (2003) approaches to the presence of the self in scientific articles, points to self-quotation as a tool that allows the author to connect with other research of his, in order to legitimize his work in the area and still assist the reader in construction of a researcher profile.

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(1) Excerpt from article L3 - 11. "The excerpts from the interviews that will appear in the analysis of this article are part of **Beatriz Furtado Alencar Lima**'s PhD project, under the guidance of **Izabel Magalhães**. The project is linked to the UFC Postgraduate Program in Linguistics and was duly approved by the UFC Research Ethics Committee: number 185/11, protocol COMEPE, number 134/11" (LIMA; MAGALHÃES, 2019, p 10, authors' highlights).

This evocation, present in article L3, appears in a footnote in the item "Methodology" of the article in question. In addition to being an explanation of the origin of the interviews that are used in the work, this maneuver, although subtle, allows the reader to visualize a commitment to the subject addressed by the authors that is already present in previous works. In the same article we have another occurrence of self-citation:

(2) Excerpt from article L3 - "For this, we will analyze texts from two interviews we conducted with her, in the context of a critical discursive research of an ethnographic character, following the theoretical-methodological precepts recommended by **Magalhães (2000)**, Resende (2009) and Rios (2009)." (LIMA; MAGALHÃES, 2019, p. 11, authors' highlights).

Still in the item "Methodology" of the article, there is the resource of evocation, as highlighted, this time only by Magalhães and in the body of the text, referring to a previous work, together with evocation of other authors. In this case, even in a different context from the previous one, which justified the origin of the analyzed material, the data indicate the connection with this other work that has an implicit impact on the current one.

We find a similar situation in the medical articles. In the excerpt below, taken from article M6, in the "Methods" section, there is also mention of previous work by one of the authors regarding the study of ERICA.

(3) Excerpt from article M6 - "All students of the selected classes were invited to participate of ERICA. More details about the design of the sample of ERICA **can be obtained in a previous publication** 23" (CUREAL *et al.*, 2019 p. 3, author's highlights).

Em seguida, outro excerto do mesmo artigo faz menção a trabalho de outro coautor ainda referente à metodologia de pesquisa de ERICA:

(4) Excerpt from article M6 - "The research protocol of ERICA was described **by Bloch et al.4** In summary, after being selected, the schools were contacted and invited to participate in the study. ERICA data collection involved the application of a structured questionnaire, anthropometric assessment, measurement of blood pressure and blood collection. The variables used in this study were obtained by structured questionnaire, filled by the adolescents on their own, inserted into an electronic data collector (personal digital assistant – PDA)." (CUREAL *et al.*, 2019 p. 3, authors' highlights).

In excerpts (3) and (4), the self-cited work is accompanied by linguistic complements that indicate, in a more explicit way, that its content is interconnected with the subject addressed in this article. In excerpt (3), with "*can be obtained in a previous publication 23*" (can be obtained in a previous publication); in the excerpt (4) in "*was described by Bloch et al. 4*" (was described by Bloch *et al.* 4). But there is also a recurrence of self-citations in which previous works are cited without special emphasis, as in M10:

> (5) Excerpt from article M10 - "Even though others enzymatic assays for GA have been launched into the market, currently there are only foreign suppliers available **(34).** It makes the GA a costlier test than A1C in Brazil. Recently, we compared two different assays for GA and the price per test was around U$ 4 to 6, in contrast with A1C test that is around U$ 2 to 3 in Brazil **(34).** However, this outlook is likely to change in a near future". (FREITAS *et al.*, 2019, p. 299 /4, authors' highlights).

Both articles follow the same format, using superscript numbers to refer to the mentioned works, due to Vancouver standards. However, with excerpts (3) and (4), from M6, we understand that authors can use linguistic resources to highlight one work or another if they wish. In the excerpt (5), from M10, there is not the same tone of indication, as there are no other resources to emphasize the reference beyond what the standard provides. This comparison makes it possible to reflect on the ways the author finds so that his research trajectory is present in his written texts, even if he does not use the first person in his speech.

Self-citation and self-mention

Of the ten articles with self-citation, only one uses the first person's speech in the text. In L4, Maia (2019) cites three previous works, an article co-written with Braga (2017), the master's thesis, from the year 2013, and the doctoral thesis of 2017. In the excerpt highlighted below, we have the use of self-citation combined with first-person use:

> (6) Excerpt from article L4 - "In their turn, the combative statements produced by the residents of Complexo do Alemão are, therefore, products of survival literacies. This concept - proposed by Adriana Carvalho Lopes and colleagues in recent articles (LOPES; SILVA; FACINA, 2014; LOPES; SILVA; FACINA; CALAZANS; TAVARES, 2017, 2018) and also developed **in my doctoral thesis (MAIA, 2017)** - stems from the perception that survival goes through the constitution of these literacies and causes the texts produced based on them to emerge from a daily life in which violence manifests itself in the most diverse ways, with the most varied forces" (p. 969, authors' highlights).

In his research, Hyland (2003) observed that the use of the pronoun 'I' appears more frequently in human science articles. The author points out that the use of the self puts a more emphatic character about the decisions regarding research approaches. Thus, it leaves room for the reader to realize that the results presented are the result of personal decisions that were made, therefore, they could not be the same if treated by a different author. Hyland (2017) also addresses a common dichotomy between hard and soft sciences, in which it is believed that the author, like I personalized, lives a distance from research when he avoids its explicit presence, such as when using first person, positioning himself, apparently, as just a technician who handles data, which could be handled by any other researcher, which would lead to different interpretations. Thus, the appointment of the first person in the self-citation in only one of the ten articles shows us a consensus, even if unconscious, on the distance that is made between researcher and research. Although academic writing is heterogeneous, the authors of the articles often follow patterns that are consolidated in literacy practices, possibly to belong to social groups as insiders (GEE, 2008). The appointment of the first person, explicitly, as Boch and Grossmann (2002) propose in relation to citations, seems to be part of a familiarity and strengthening as an author within their social group.

The relationship between co-authorship and self-quotation was another issue found in the corpus. In the ten most cited articles selected in Linguistics, only one is written by only one author; in all others, there is co-authorship. In the 10 of Medicine, there is collaboration in all articles, and the article with less collaboration is from three authors. In Linguistics, the largest number of co-authors is three. Hyland (2018) points to a growth, in the area of Linguistics, in relation to hard sciences, with regard to self-citations, since studies have increasingly covered more diverse topics. Still, the easier access to both the practice of publishing and the publication of scientific articles in digital format, provides an opportunity to strengthen their own works as authors and researchers. In this perspective, table 1 compares the data referring to the number of authors in each article, the authors who use self-citation and the number of works cited.

Table 1 – Self-citation in Linguistics and Medicine articles

ARTICLES	NUMBER OF AUTHORS	AUTHORS WITH SELF-CITATION	NUMBER OF SELFCITATED WORKS
L3	2	2	2
L4	1	1	3
L5	2	1	2
L6	2	2	3
L7	3	1	1
M1	44	37	113
M3	3	2	4

M6	10	4	6
M7	6	1	8
M10	3	3	5

Source: Devised by the authors

Self-citation by employees is diverse. In Linguistics articles, there are two written by pairs, L3 and L5. In L3, the two authors are self-cited, and one of the referenced works had been developed by both; in L5, only one author is self-cited. In medicine we have something similar to what happens in L3; the article M10, written by three authors, has in its references a 2016 article in which the three had already worked together. Still in Medicine, article M1 has forty-four collaborators, in which only seven of them do not have self-citation, and many of these authors have already co-authored these self-cited works. The same number of articles with self-citation marks in both areas proves Hyland's (2018) proposition about the increase in self-citations in the area of Linguistics, but also points to disciplinary differences in literacy practices, if we note that the number of authors included in a group in the area of Medicine is larger, since the hard sciences have an apparently more interdisciplinary character, which also ends up increasing the number of self-citations.

Collaborative writing and self-citation: groups that get stronger

Weeks *et al*. (2004) problematize the collaborative writing present in the field of Medicine. The authors noticed that, in the period from 1980 to 2000, there was an increase of 15% in collaborative productions and a considerable decrease in individual works. Darvin and Norton (2019) argue that collaborative writing can be a way for beginning and more experienced researchers to socialize and exchange experiences, therefore, a beneficial practice for scientific research. In view of this, it is possible to observe that the question of the continuity of work in the area and the search for credibility happens individually, but also with groups of researchers, since an association of these authors that builds the collaborative team is built. In the social sphere, there is a strengthening of groups in this type of literacy practice, in which power relations are distinguished through the maintenance of social capital, which may be symbolic or not, since belonging to certain prestigious groups brings advantages, be they symbolic or material, such as recognition in prestigious partnerships and access to academic, professional opportunities (BOURDIEU, 1980).

Below, we have table 2, which exemplifies the number of works self-cited in article M1, which has 44 authors, 37 of which are self-cited. Among the self-cited works, there is the previous collaborative writing by some of these authors.

Table 2 – Self-citation in article M1: collaborative writing in self-cited works

Written by a co-author	Written by two co-authors	Written by three co-authors	Written by four co-authors	Written by five co-authors	Written by six co-authors
69	25	8	4	1	1

Source: devised by the authors

From the numbers expressed in this Table, we approximate what Ioannidis (2015), a medical scholar, proves in research: the use of materials extracted from books and magazines whose author of the current work is the organizer of the work cited, even if not the author of the text in question, which also sets up a form of self-citation. This phenomenon is present in article M1, outlined in the table below:

Table 3 – Self-cited works in which there is a co-author and/or book organizer in M1

	One author and an organizer	One author and two organizers	Two authors and two organizers	Same person as author and organizer	One organizer	Two organizers
ARTICLES	2	1	1	1	2	3

Source: Devised by the authors

In Linguistics, the article L3 has a similar occurrence, since a book chapter written by Fairclough (2012) is referenced, in which Magalhães, who is one of the authors of L3, was organizer. There is also the cited chapter by Silva (2013), which is extracted from a book "*Contribuições da Análise de Discurso Crítica no Brasil: uma Homenagem a Izabel Magalhães*" (Contributions of Critical Discourse Analysis in Brazil: a Homage to Izabel Magalhães). Although Magalhães is not part of the organization of the work and is not the author of the cited text, the work is a tribute to her contributions within the area, so it is possible to read an indirect form of self-citation.

These two tables, therefore, indicate collaborative production in writing practices and scientific publication of articles with a high impact index. Particularities of each area are manifested, as well as common occurrences in the functioning of academic writing, referring to self-quotation, in the two areas of knowledge under analysis in this article.

Conclusions and suggestions for other studies

Although we found similarities in the use of self-citation in the two areas of knowledge addressed, we consider that our research objective, which is to understand the functions and meanings of self-citation in academic writing, in addition to problematizing the insertion of

researchers in academic literacy practices in distinct areas of knowledge has been achieved. We can point out as similarities found the number of articles with self-citation in both areas and the preference for the use of evocation and reformulation, according to Boch and Grossmann (2002), as form of reference to the cited works. Despite this common data, the total number of self-citations and authors in the two areas is different, highlighting the formation of larger groups in the area of Medicine. However, in each occurrence found in the corpus, in isolation, we are faced with different possibilities for analysis. The comparison between excerpts (3), (4) and (5) is an example of this, since in the three cases we have the option to use reformulation. This resource made it possible to indicate possible intentions on the part of the authors, as each reformulation presents a different approach. Therefore, non-adherence to this area of knowledge - general medicine - can be a methodologically limiting factor in the research now presented, but it does not disallow discursive-linguistic discussions that mark academic writing in this area.

The data made it possible to reflect, in a particular way, on functions around the self-citation phenomenon. The articles under analysis point to collaborative productions, to the practice of self-citing work with partnerships that are repeated in these collaborations. This movement demonstrates a possible purpose, on the part of the authors, in making public continuous works within the same research group, to mark reliability with the reader. In addition, self-citation can be seen as an instrument for maintaining a social capital in which groups strengthen their internal relationships, maintaining relationships of continuity, joint work and paths that can result in collective recognition and inter-recognition. As previously discussed, collaborative productions, especially in the area of Medicine, have significantly increased over the years. Therefore, the question of the authors' presence as a group is a relevant topic in academic writing and can be analyzed and deepened through the lens of self-quotation.

Thus, we consider that self-citation is a recurring phenomenon in academic production, not only in an individual form, but also in a collaborative way, presenting connections with other factors that permeate academic writing, such as national and international functioning, with resources, from large research financing agencies. For these reasons, self-citation deserves to be studied and understood within the context in which it is inserted. Discussions of this nature remain in force by the authors of this article, in partnership with other research groups, as previously mentioned, in order to deepen understandings around academic writing practices, their publications in journals and the impact indexes of texts in different knowledge areas.

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