

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS PLAGIARISM IN ACADEMIA

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### Abstract

This contribution probes into the attitudes towards plagiarism in academia as it details the results of a questionnaire study within the larger framework of a joint Bulgarian-German research project on plagiarism in academia. The questionnaire focused on investigating the scope of the notion of plagiarism as Bulgarian academics understand it and second, looking into the availability of a system of support to prevent transgressors and/or sanctions for transgressing academics across Bulgarian universities. The results of the questionnaire suggest that while there appears to be a consensus among Bulgarian academics about the different facets that make up the notion of plagiarism, the reported attitudes towards plagiarism practices vary greatly, reflecting a non-uniform perception of what constitutes an offense. It also shows a deep dissatisfaction with existing anti-plagiarism regulatory systems in Bulgarian scientific institutions.

**Keywords:** academic plagiarism; perceptions; anti-plagiarism policy

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## **Theoretical background**

The present study is part of a larger project focusing on plagiarism in academia and more particularly on text plagiarism in the social sciences in Germany and Bulgaria. This emphasis is triggered by the fact that although data falsification and data fabrication are also considered to be severe breaches of academic ethics, they are more likely to occur in the 'hard' sciences with their dependence on experimental data, while the social sciences rely predominantly on language for justifying claims and argumentation. One should, of course, not forget to mention in this context the plague of custom essay writing as a form of cheating, which has received special attention, for instance, in the UK (QAA 2016). From a more general theoretical perspective, the project concentrates on the evaluation of current definitions of plagiarism in terms of their variation, relevance in the digital age, ethical and legal aspects. The methodology includes literature survey, questionnaires and informal interviews with scholars in Germany and Bulgaria, plagiarism case studies in the two countries, as well as envisaging English-speaking academic cultures for comparison.

The problem of plagiarism in science is as old as science itself but at present it is further exacerbated by the ever-increasing development and spread of new technologies and the vast amount of information they provide, thus posing an extremely serious challenge to society as a whole and research institutions and scholars in particular in terms of the preservation of copyrights on intellectual products, which is also directly related to career and financial benefits. Gilgoff (2001, p. 51), for instance, states that: "as the Internet makes cheating easier and more tempting, many professors are putting less faith in honor and more in fear". At the same time, the Internet also makes plagiarism more visible, mainly through the existing plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin. This is substantiated by the fact that many developed countries constantly update their regulations on plagiarism, universities and other research organizations adopt stringent measures to nip it in the bud through regulations, special training of students in good academic practices and imposing strict penalties, including expulsion without the right to continue their education. Thus, if one looks at the websites of any university in the English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, the US, the UK, New Zealand), one would find thorough descriptions of what is considered to be academic misconduct, instructions on how to avoid it and punishments if committed.

Nevertheless, the views on what constitutes plagiarism vary among researchers engaged in the debate on its theoretical, as well as practical aspects. On the one hand, scholars such as, for instance, Flowerdew and Li (2007, p.164) maintain that:

There is an increasing consensus among scholars that rather than viewing plagiarism simplistically as dishonest behavior, it is necessary to distinguish between intentional and nonintentional plagiarism, characterized respectively by an intention to cheat, on the one hand, and ignorance of the expected conventions on the part of novices learning the target discourse conventions, on the other.

This understanding of plagiarism has been mainly fueled by the bulk of studies on student plagiarism that has attracted a lot of attention in the past couple of decades. For example, Sowden (2005) singles out cultural conditioning; Liu (2005) suggests insufficient language skills; different preventive measures one might undertake, such as assignment design, have also been proposed (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002; Wiedemeier, 2002; Heckler, Forde & Bryan, 2013), as well as training in paraphrasing (Walker, 2008) or 'revised institutional plagiarism policies combined with authentic pedagogy' (Howard 2007, p. 3). Pecorari (2015), among others, argues that one should distinguish between 'patchwriting' as a way of using sources by relying heavily on them and their wording, on the one hand, and 'prototypical plagiarism' (ibid., p. 1), where there is an intention to deceive. 'Patchwriting' is a term coined by Howard (1993, 233) and defined as: "Copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes". It is usually associated with texts produced by students who lack either experience, or knowledge, or understanding of how to integrate sources in their writing. Such texts are considered to be more typical of L2 writers but L1 writers are not excluded, either (see Howard et al. 2010). This is supported by a study by *The Times* (2016), which involved 129 UK universities and revealed that: 'Students from outside the EU were more than four times as likely to cheat in exams and coursework'. For instance, 'At Queen Mary University of London 75% of postgraduates found to have plagiarised were from overseas with a third from China' – facts that make the authorities speak of an extremely worrying cheating epidemic especially in post-graduate courses of studies.

Chandrasoma et al. (2004), on their part, differentiate between 'transgressive and nontransgressive intertextuality' depending on whether the intertextuality 'transgresses institutional conventions' (Chandrasoma et al. 2004, p. 172). They see transgressive intertextuality as socially embedded and suggest ten aspects that have to be taken into account in judging a text, namely: 'intentionality, development, identity, resistance, student epistemologies, common knowledge, mediated discourse, interdisciplinarity, variability, and task type' (Chandrasoma et al. 2004, p. 189).

Zwagerman (2008) offers a more psychological viewpoint on the results of staff and institutional efforts to eradicate plagiarism by maintaining that stringent measures do not lead to building up students' integrity but rather to creating scarecrows, thus dividing the students into plagiarists and non-plagiarists – something that creates further tensions in a university environment. This issue, however, will not be pursued further in the present paper since it deals with plagiarism by academics which should not be tolerated in any form.

Curiously, serious studies into plagiarism committed by academic staff are virtually nonexistent, unless we count punctual references to particular plagiarism cases, mostly in non-scientific literature: Martin (1984, 1994) is among the few who note the unequal share of attention given to student vs. staff plagiarism on the one hand, and to what he calls competitive (where the individual academic's career depends on the allocation of credit) vs. institutionalized plagiarism (ghostwriting and similar practices, accepted in our society as part of normalcy, 1994, p. 40). This distinction can lead to the legitimate question of why we take a moral stance on the former kind of plagiarism and tend to tolerate the latter. For obvious reasons, our study approaches the question from the point of view of competitive plagiarism, as our respondents are all academic staff whose career depends on the allocation of credit. However, an in-depth discussion of these matters goes far beyond the scope of the present paper.

Some of these aspects, namely identity, student epistemologies and common knowledge are related to another strand in plagiarism research, which emphasizes the impact of culture on the understanding of the concept. A plethora of studies have

devoted their attention to the differences between the Western and the Eastern cultural models and beliefs (e.g. Chien, 2014; Moon, 2002; Shi, 2006) that eventually pose enormous difficulties for both students and scholars from the Eastern part of the world when they try to enter the Western academia. Issues arise with identity in terms of collectivism versus individualism, epistemology in view of previous educational experience, socially accepted philosophy and ethics, as well as regarding what is considered common knowledge and what – not. Convincing as it may seem, the cultural explanation has been disputed a lot - Pecorari (2015, p. 4) displays its ‘fundamental contradiction’ as follows: ‘If factors inherent in some cultures cause a predisposition to plagiarize, then plagiarism does not violate a universal academic value; it violates a belief locally situated in the English-speaking world’ Pecorari (2015, p. 4). In any case, the present study does not aim at arriving at a specific definition of plagiarism, but rather at establishing scholars’ attitudes towards it.

Therefore, present article focuses on one aspect of plagiarism research, namely scholars’ attitudes to and understanding of the notion in Bulgaria, elicited through an anonymous questionnaire. In contrast to the above-mentioned, as well as other similar works, the main point of interest here is plagiarism committed by academics, not by students. It has to be mentioned here that, at present, we are not aware of studies probing the attitudes of academics towards plagiarism by their peers. Following Chandrasoma et al. (2004), some preliminary assumptions while preparing the questionnaire, therefore, were that experienced scholars: (1) are acquainted with academic ethics in general and what is considered plagiarism in particular, thus excluding the option of plagiarism being unintentional, non-transgressive or patchwriting; (2) are aware of disciplinary differences and the requirements of their own discipline; (3) have already developed their academic identities; (4) are not likely to resist established norms and standards for academic publications; (5) are aware of what is considered to be common knowledge in their field and would thus not necessarily require acknowledgement.

In cultural and epistemological terms, it is worth noting that present-day Bulgarian academic culture could be seen as one in a period of transition. From the end

of WW II until 1990, it was heavily influenced by the Soviet academic tradition which brought about a high degree of ideologization, epistemological restrictions, interrupted access to publications from outside the Eastern Block and the knowledge presented therein, as well as censorship. All this led to encapsulation of the academic community and its culture whose interrelationships and ethics were dictated more often than not by scholars close to the ruling Communist Party rather than scholars standing out for their professional achievements. At present, some of these scholars are still active, and their students, whose generation occupies the key positions in science and higher education management, continue to uphold some of the negative remnants of the old tradition. The probably most outstanding one is the practice of “scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours”, that is, anything goes and is positively appraised if publications under review, especially for promotion purposes, are authored by a related person. Reviewers thus tend to turn a blind eye even to cases of plagiarism, following the above-mentioned old tradition.

As a result, in spite of the fact that there are young Bulgarian academics who have studied abroad and/or have had contacts with foreign colleagues through collaborations, in spite of the unlimited access to publications and information, these young scholars cannot as yet gain enough influence and thus introduce Western academic standards and values in terms of adhering to the principles of academic integrity. Many scientists in Bulgaria believe that the decentralization of academic procedures, introduced by a new law in 2010, and giving the universities the right to award academic degrees and titles, has had a negative effect on the quality of promoted staff (see e.g. Benbasat, 2014) and has facilitated the flourishing of pseudo-science (or Google-science, as Benbasat calls it, (p.5)) in Bulgaria. These phenomena are not unheard of in Romania, which followed a similar development path to Bulgaria, and in Russia, where pseudo-science seems to have reached alarming dimensions (Rostovtsev, 2017). Lancaster (2017, slide 26) presents the results of two recent studies on ‘Academic Integrity Maturity’ in 33 countries, including various parameters, where Bulgaria holds the last position – a sad fact that demonstrates once again the urgent necessity of both research in the field and undertaking counter-measures.

Having in mind the above-said, as well as the fact that cases of plagiarism are, unfortunately, quite frequent in Bulgaria, the hypothesis tested through the questionnaire was that Bulgarian scholars would have a fuzzy, incoherent and probably distorted perception of what constitutes plagiarism and what adequate measures can be taken in order to combat it. The main driving motivation behind the study is a growing worry of dissolving academic standards to a point where scientific research loses its credibility due to a vast bulk of pseudo-science, eroding the merits of robust intellectual work. Regardless of the exact understanding the respondents who took part in the study have of the elusive notion of plagiarism, the leading sentiment is towards zero-tolerance of scientific white noise, which has the curious characteristic of perpetuating itself.

### **Questionnaire description**

The questionnaire was designed as a combination of an unprompted section, open ended questions, multiple choice questions, Likert-scale questions ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a 'neither agree or disagree' option, allowing for a more nuanced expression of the respondents' opinions. The questionnaire targeted the researchers' perception of several major issues: background information of the researchers' uses of academic resources; the nature of plagiarism and their attitudes towards plagiarism practices, the reasons for plagiarism and the controversial issues of unintended and translated plagiarism; finally, the issue of anti-plagiarism measures, where both existing punitive and preventive measures were addressed. Thus, the questionnaire can reliably provide a grasp of the Bulgarian researchers' attitudes toward plagiarism in their complexity and in considerable detail.

The questionnaire was disseminated online, via an emailed link, in Bulgarian in major scientific institutions and Bulgarian universities. It was tested for adequacy in a small pilot (three test-respondents); these results have not been included in the final report. The questionnaire was filled out by 88 respondents. There is considerable variation in the professional fields of the researchers across the total number of respondents: 41 of the respondents come from the field of natural sciences (including chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, plant physiology, ecology, geology, molecular

modeling, astrophysics, biophysics, Earth magnetism), 44 work in the field of social sciences (linguistics, psychology, philology, philosophy, literature, ethnology, communication, medieval studies, economics), and 3 respondents come from the field of engineering (robotics and technical science). The country of affiliation of the scholars is predominantly Bulgaria (84), one scholar each for Spain and Germany, and two for the US. For the purpose of keeping anonymity, especially considering the sensitive character of the content, the questionnaire was distributed in Google Docs and there was no question referring to the respondents' affiliation. Therefore, it was not possible to establish statistically which and how many universities and research institutions participated. Besides, despite the measures taken to ensure anonymity, considering the fact that Bulgarians are very suspicious about disclosing their identity, it was decided not to ask questions related to respondents' personal ways of dealing with plagiarism.

The respondents are for the most part in mid-career, with 22 % ranging between 11 and 20 years of experience, and 26% up to 30 years. Young researchers are a minority (around 10%) and end-of-career researchers make for the other 41% of the respondents. 69% of the respondents hold a habilitation as their highest title (associate professor or full professor), 26% hold a PhD. The country where the title was awarded is predominantly Bulgaria, with 5 of the titles having been awarded by countries other than Bulgaria, displaying the low mobility of researchers, who generally prefer getting their degrees in their home country.

Academic staff in Bulgaria report predominantly using online libraries and the Internet to look for literature and they are increasingly adopting scientific social networks such as ResearchGate.net and Academia.edu for the ease of reaching both published and unpublished research; concurrently, their interest in science metrics oriented databases such as SCOPUS or the Web of Science is equally on the rise. Interestingly, filing and sharing systems such as Mendeley, for example, are not very popular, making it difficult to apprehend the way Bulgarian academics manage the digital load of files which they download (if they do).



## Results and discussion

The core of the questionnaire concerns the very notion of plagiarism and it starts with a general ranking of the basic breaches of academic misconduct. The results are displayed in Figure 1 below:

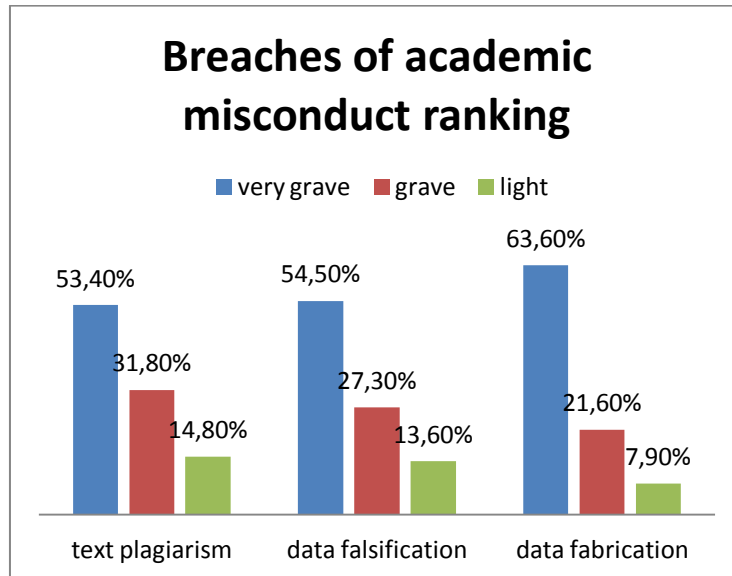


Figure 1. Ethical offences ranking

Data fabrication is considered by a vast majority of our respondents to be the most serious offence at almost 64%, followed by data falsification (54.50%) and text plagiarism (53.40%). It is significant that the number of respondents who ranked the offence as being light is lower for data fabrication (7.90%) in comparison to data falsification (13.60%) and text plagiarism (14.80%). The comparative moral weight of making up results is thus evaluated to be bigger than for falsifying results; as for textual plagiarism, the respondents were less categorical about what the weight of the offence is. This question reflects the intuitive idea that there are degrees to the fraudulent behavior, which our respondents perceive as outright lying for data fabrication (where there is no study to speak of), tweaking the data as less straightforward lies in data falsification and borrowing the language as less significant in comparison. Notably, 35.23% of the respondents gave the same estimate three times, thus expressing their perception of the gravity of the offenses, but refusing to propose a ranking. Interestingly, when they considered questions 9 and 10, the respondents seemed to have predominantly textual plagiarism in mind.

Figure 2 presents the details about the researchers' attitudes towards plagiarism elicited under the form of several statements on different aspects of text plagiarism practices:

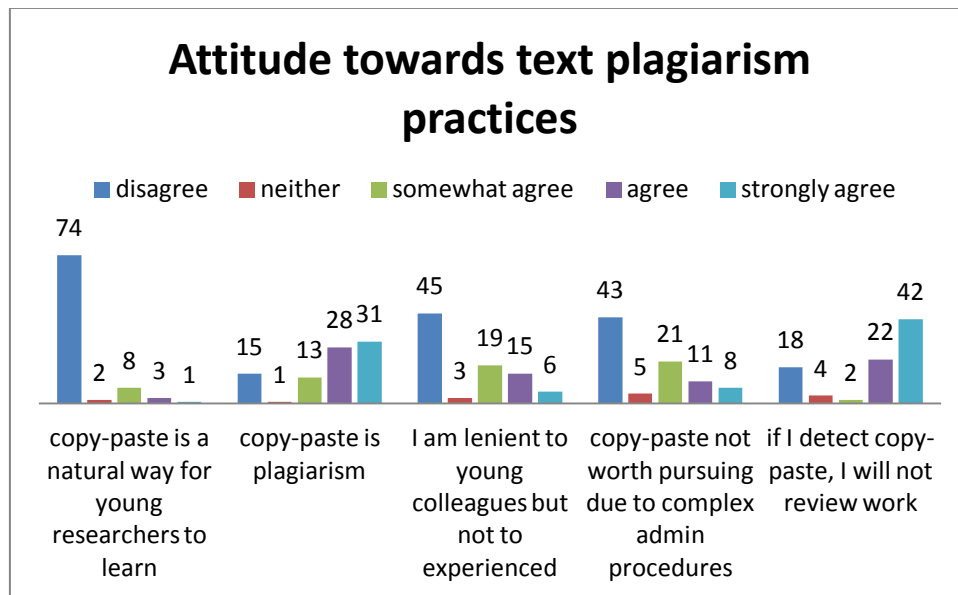


Figure 2. Attitude towards text plagiarism practices in absolute numbers

Even though the respondents agreed almost unanimously that copy-pasting is not the proper way to learn to do research (with 84% of the respondents categorically endorsing this statement), they are less uniformly eager to condemn text plagiarism regardless of the amount of text plagiarized, with 15 people who disagree, 1 undecided and 13 who agree to an extent, making up for 29 people who have reservations about accepting the statement (about 32% of the respondents). This reservation echoes concerns about some practical issues around certifying the fact of plagiarism, namely how much text taken verbatim from a source which is not properly referred to should be enough to ascertain the fact of plagiarism. However, the phrasing of the statement suggests several small chunks found in a manuscript and the researcher's attitude toward this occurrence should follow the logic of the peer/ instructor, not the logic of the judge; thus, any instance of copied verbatim text without proper attribution should be recognized as being an instance of plagiarism.

It is interesting to note that most of the respondents are willing to apportion relative blame for plagiarism according to the experience of the researcher, with 43 respondents (almost 50%) who would either excuse young researchers for plagiarizing, or who are inclined to do so. And this regardless of the fact that the majority of the

respondents agree that young researchers should not learn academic writing by plagiarizing the works of others. The logic behind this answer is unclear: whether our respondents believe that it is a more common occurrence to see plagiarized work from young researchers than from experienced researchers is hardly the case, as among the reasons for plagiarism lack of experience has not been cited (see below). The respondents are divided on the issue of exposing and pursuing cases of plagiarism, with about half of the respondents replying categorically that cases of plagiarism should be pursued, and the other half of respondents presenting answers across the entire spectrum of nuances. To anticipate, the responses to questions 16 through 19 provide a partial context to the answers given here, painting a picture of virtually inexistent anti-plagiarism procedures and a general feeling of hopelessness in the face of the plagiarism tolerance perceived by the respondents in the Bulgarian academic community.

Yet, respondents predominantly state they would refuse to review works if they detect plagiarism. It should be noted here that agreeing to review work that turns out to be plagiarized does not entail producing a positive review of the work; this may well be the opportunity to expose a plagiarist; refusing to engage with such works thus contradicts the responses to the previous question. It might be that besides each researcher's personal experience with plagiarism (plagiarizing students, the occasional breaking news story or unfortunate personal experience of coming across a plagiarized manuscript/work), our respondents may be lacking a comprehensive grasp of the scope of the practice and the proper responses towards such cases. It should also be mentioned that the common practice in Bulgarian institutions does not encourage the staff's getting acquainted with each other's scientific production; internal seminars aiming at presenting each member of staff's research are an extremely rare occurrence and thus having one's work critiqued by colleagues is equally highly unusual. Often, when cases of plagiarism are uncovered about a colleague, they are not publicly discussed, and people are reluctant to discuss them in private. This policy of silence may be exasperating and seem wrong to many researchers; however, the tendency presented by the answers to this question reveals that plagiarism is not an issue that is comprehensively thought about by every researcher and attitudes toward the occurrences presented here are not the result of a specific ethical viewpoint on the issue. Of course, not embracing a zero-tolerance attitude toward plagiarism is not a sign

of low ethical values; it is merely a sign that the lack of an integrative and consistent approach to plagiarism in the affiliated institutions can impact the researchers' attitudes toward particular occurrences of the practice.

Figure 3 depicts our respondents' take on the very notion of plagiarism and its different facets. This question reflects the extensive literature on the issue of the different practices that have been identified as plagiarism or unethical academic practices. Bulgarian respondents in their majority identify those as instances of plagiarism; for some of the practices there is a degree of variation which will be expounded below.

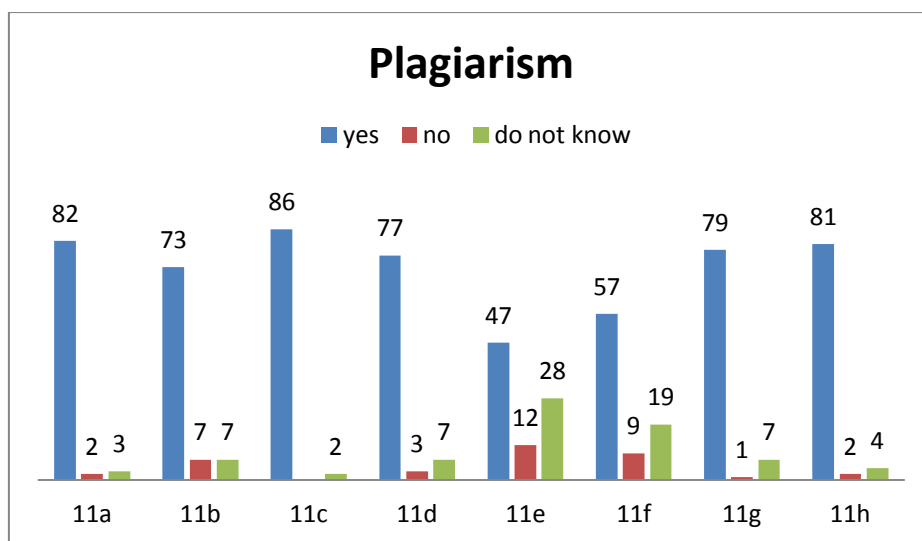


Figure 3. The notion of plagiarism in absolute numbers

11a: Stealing or buying a complete work that is not your own in any format, with the intention of presenting it as your own: 5 respondents were unsure about whether stealing or buying counted as plagiarism.

11b: Paraphrasing portions of work that is not your own, without referencing the source: 14 respondents unsure of whether this counted as plagiarism.

11c: Copying portions of work that is not your own, without referencing the source: only 2 respondents unsure whether this is plagiarism.

11d: Adopting the ideas of others, without referencing the source: curiously, 10 people did not think it was plagiarism, when 14 thought paraphrase (which essentially borrows the message or the idea of the work) was not plagiarism.

11e: Adopting the structure of an existing analysis, without referencing the source: this question has split the opinions of the respondents as 53.41% thought it is plagiarism, 31.82% do not know whether it is plagiarism, and 13.64% believe it is not plagiarism.

11f: Hiring a ghostwriter to do the work also elicited different responses, as 21.60% do not know if this counts as plagiarism and further 10.23% think it is not.

11g: Creating a text using a patchwork of different paragraphs, all from one or several different original documents, without referencing the source(s) is less controversially an instance of plagiarism, with 7.95% being unclear about the issue.

11h: Translating texts from sources and presenting those, without referencing the source, is also unequivocally recognized as a plagiarism practice by the respondents.

Several observations about these results come to the fore: generally, our respondents tend to associate the practices described with plagiarism. The most divisive practices for the respondents are hiring a ghostwriter for academic purposes and borrowing the structure of an existing analysis. While the former results may be surprising – it goes against the very core of academic excellence if someone else has penned the work, so the expectation is that this practice will qualify as fraud, fraudulent practices in academia tend to be regrouped under the heading of plagiarism – the latter result may be partially explained by the variation in interpretation. It has to be mentioned here that contract cheating is on the rise in Bulgaria and there is a large number of firms offering these services. It is of course the case that particular academic genres share a common structure; for example, a research article is composed of an introduction, literature review, aims and methods section, discussion section and conclusions section. It may be the case that the respondents interpreted ‘structure’ in the question to refer to these broad categories of the way the exposition is presented. However, the structure of an analysis often includes not merely a formal sequence of elements, but an approach, a particular view or direction of the analysis, which reflects an original author’s voice and is usually the result of a complex relationship between the chosen theoretical framework and original ideas about the treatment of the data.

The results reflect the methodological problem of recognizing paraphrasing plagiarism, which has been taken up by Bulgarian legislators who passed an anti-plagiarism bill in 2018. However, the Member of Parliament proposing the bill in a

surprising move suggested that exposing cases of paraphrasing plagiarism is a matter of subjective evaluation and opinions can vary as to whether or not a piece of text has been plagiarized. Interestingly, with the liberalization of free access text-matching software and the amount of research directed to detecting paraphrasing plagiarism, expectations about the degree of certainty in acknowledging a piece of writing as plagiarized ought to increase. On the other hand, the level of sophisticated language work on borrowed content could translate as a clear indication of intent in disguising fraudulent acts. Curiously, regarding sources in a foreign language, translating paragraphs and using them without due credit is less controversially attributed to be a plagiarism practice by 92% of the respondents. It is unclear what difference our respondents saw between paraphrased passages without due credit and translated passages without due credit, as in both of the cases the original source material is not taken verbatim.

Certainly, text-matching software is not the save-all solution; despite clear advances in technology and recent research going into teaching such software to match for translated text (Turnitin has started offering such an option since September 2018), software can yield false positives, can miss instances of plagiarized text completely, and it can be tricked (Foltynek, 2018). The use of text-matching software is increasingly being promoted as a pedagogical tool, helping inexperienced writers to produce texts (Bretag, 2018); concurrently, its institutional uses and applications are (almost) predominantly oriented towards students (thus, learners), with academics being generally opposed to using the software to sift through expert production (personal communications from German scholars; their opposition being mainly due to fears of leaking content before publication and improper use of intellectually protected content).

These results confirm Martin's concern (1994) that regardless of whether we consider student plagiarism or plagiarism of experienced academics, we might focus too much on the least serious cases: contract cheating, of which ghostwriting is an accepted form of institutionalized plagiarism (Martin, *ibid.*) where students (or academics) hire somebody to pen the paper for them, is extremely difficult to catch or prove. The complexity of plagiarism practices and the way particular cases are treated betrays nonetheless a tendency to overemphasize student offenses and to downplay the scope of plagiarism in peers.

Our respondents' take on the issue of translated plagiarism, which is the practice of inserting passages translated from a foreign-language source without proper acknowledgment, can be seen on Figure 4 below:

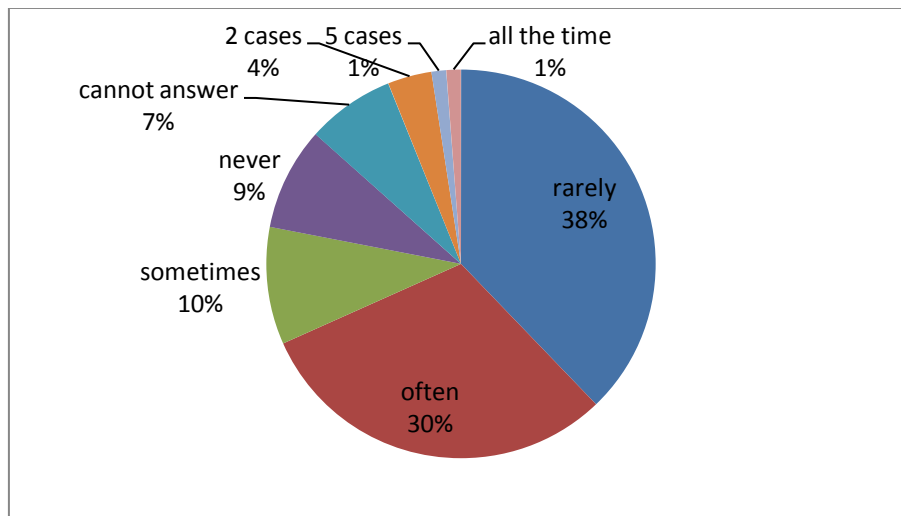


Figure 4. How often have you come across translated plagiarism?

Although the issue of translated plagiarism is not exactly new, it has received less attention in comparison with textual plagiarism. Because of its nature, it has gone largely unnoticed, and this peculiarity transpires in the answers: the number of the respondents who have never come across such cases or cannot tell whether they have is at 16%, with 38% of the respondents reporting having come across translated plagiarism rarely. Adding here 5% who have seen at least 2 to 5 such cases, it amounts to two thirds of the respondents who have had little experience with this kind of plagiarism practice. One third of the respondents consider that it is a common occurrence.

Translated plagiarism poses a significant challenge for plagiarism detecting programs, although in the past decade attempts have been made to develop translated plagiarism detecting systems which translate and match up text in electronic repositories; it is often human reviewers who are better able to detect inappropriately used translated content. For a vast majority of the respondents, detecting the act of translated plagiarism has been an accident – 35 (39.8%) report that they happened to know the originals, thus recognizing the deed; 2.3% detected it by accident. In both cases, it was familiarity with the content which gave the plagiarist away. Some respondents (13.6%) cite style differences, language incoherence or bad language as being the elements raising their suspicions about or as being indicative of translated

plagiarism. One respondent cited as a suspicion-raising element the lack of intellectual potential of the author for conducting research. In two cases the respondents were able to recognize translated plagiarism as their own production had been plagiarized. Respondents also report that they had been forewarned of translated plagiarism, that they had a colleague complain publicly about being the victim of plagiarism, that they always use plagiarism detecting software and that they directly compared with the sources. 18 respondents did not provide answers to this question and further 4 indicated the question did not apply (because they had answered the previous question by the negative). It is apparent from these results that researchers are generally well-attuned to deviations in language and style and that they are able to identify familiar content, even when presented in another language, as belonging to a particular author. It is reasonable to assume that unless the researcher is looking for fraudulent practices such as translated plagiarism, only familiarity with the sources which have been plagiarized can raise suspicion of wrongdoing. All the more surprising seems the reluctance of some of the respondents to identify paraphrases without due acknowledgement as plagiarism – taking the translation perspective, paraphrases translate an idea into the same target-language.

The source-language and target-language in translated plagiarism identified by our respondents reveal a tendency of plagiarizing from foreign language sources in order to publish in Bulgarian: English (40%), Russian (16%), French (7%) and German (4%) were among the most frequently cited source-languages, with Polish and Arabic mentioned by one respondent each. 5% cited Bulgarian as the source-language. 23% did not answer the question. Some respondents commented that so-called 'rare' languages are chosen for this as plagiarists believe those are less spoken among the academic community; however, the predominance of English language sources reveals a tendency in Bulgarian scientific production to draw from English-language sources replacing Russian-language sources.

In spite of the assumption underlying this study, namely that unintended plagiarism will not be considered as feasible in the case of experienced academics, a question related to this issue was included in the questionnaire in order to grasp the respondents' viewpoint. This question, surprisingly, elicited a vast array of responses, with 17% of the respondents abstaining from answering and 6.8% unable to make a



suggestion. The most common responses were “there is no such thing as unintended plagiarism” (17%); 15.9% cited arriving at the same conclusions/results or a coincidence of ideas; 6.8% suggested unintended plagiarism could occur when citing somebody who had plagiarized. Part of the answers concerned memory or organization problems (given here in absolute numbers): forgetting to add the reference (3), problems of note-taking (1), using examples without the sources (1), sloppiness (1), forgetting about the source of an idea one has heard (1), technical mistake (2), or mistakes occurring as a result of manual compilation (1), and reproducing phrases up to 7 words (1). Some respondents identified using co-authored text as one’s own (1), auto-citation (1) and appropriating ideas (3), the structure of the methods section (1), citing common knowledge (2), and citing digital encyclopedias (1) as being instances of unintended plagiarism. Part of the responses point out poor professional training (2), poor language knowledge (4), lack of knowledge about plagiarism (1) and more specifically students’ lack of knowledge about the rules (3) or point the blame toward the advisor (2).

Among these results, the responses which define unintentional plagiarism as a mistake where there is no intention to deceive, or as a coincidence amount to 25%. Ignorance about plagiarism makes up for 27% of the responses. It may be suggested that our respondents see the intention to deceive as a necessary part of the definition of plagiarism as most of its definitions seem to suggest. The dimension of intent complicates further the already complex problem of plagiarism identification. Including the intent to deceive shifts the point from identifying instances of plagiarism to demonstrating the intention to deceive and this was apparent in the answers to the next question: “Unintended plagiarism is not a crime – agree or disagree” (see Fig. 5). Overwhelmingly, the respondents endorsed the statement that unintended plagiarism is fundamentally different from plagiarism in that it lacks the intention to commit fraud: 4% fully agree, 17% agree and 44% rather agree, for a total percentage of 65% of the respondents. 15% more are unwilling to commit to the statement, leaving only 20% who do not accept the statement. The way the question is phrased has our respondents subscribe to the idea that unintentional plagiarism should not be punished.

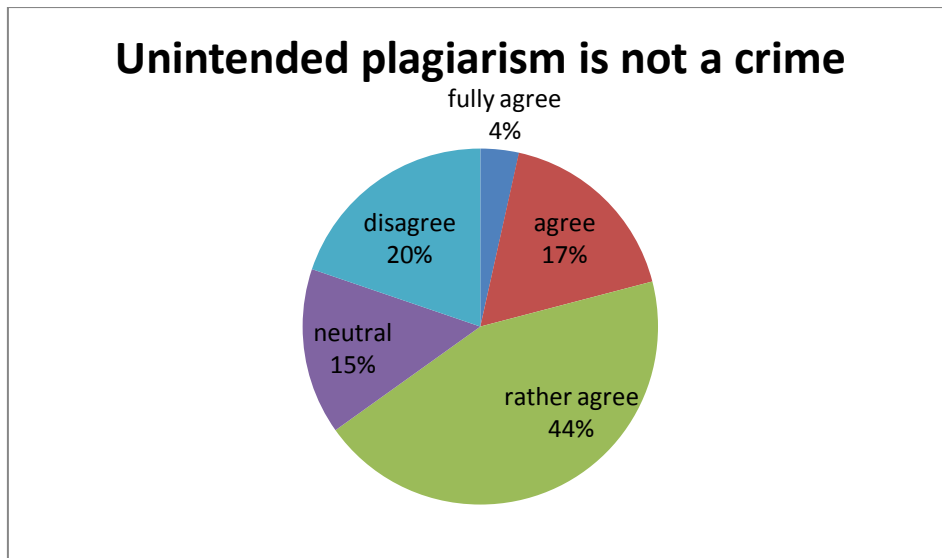


Figure 5. Attitudes towards unintended plagiarism.

While the respondents do not see fault with cases where they assume there is no intention to deceive, they identify many different reasons for plagiarism, with 81.82% of the respondents selecting more than 2 answers. Fig. 6 depicts the most popular answers, which are the inability to conduct research (for 79.55%) and lack of punishment (for 75%). Around 34% mention carelessness, 27% insist on the pressure to publish, and 29.5% cite lack of knowledge about plagiarism as the reason. Most of these answers suggest a clear intent to plagiarize on that part of plagiarists: they either know they are not up to conducting research and plagiarize, or else they take advantage of the loose system which does not punish the guilty. It is less clear whether it is reasonable to assume that members of the academic community may be ignorant about plagiarism or, even conceding that they may, assume they lack intention to deceive in appropriating someone else’s content.

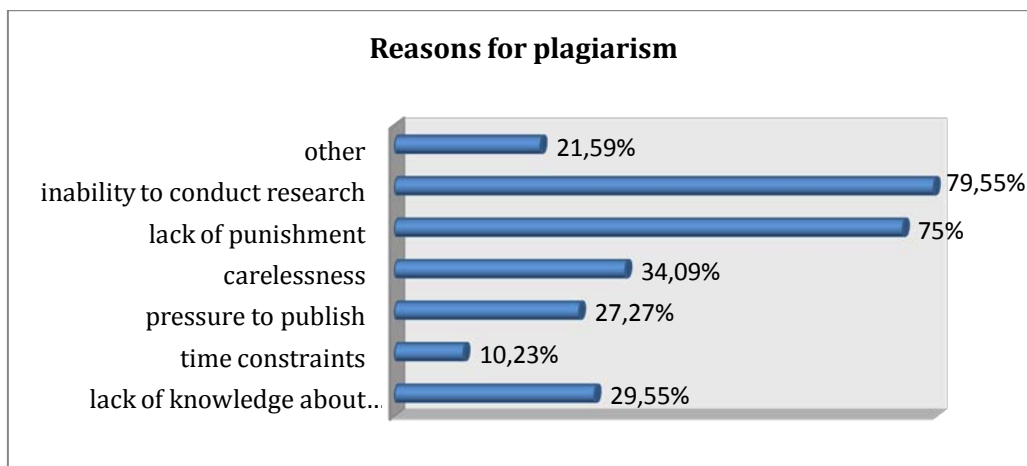


Figure 6. Reasons for plagiarism according to the respondents

Our respondents offer an array of different additional reasons for the deed: lack of ethics (3), the deed is tolerated in our society (2), ambition which exceeds the abilities of the plagiarist (6), a complex of inferiority (2) or by narcissism (1), for money when the institution rewards publications (1), unawareness of similar studies (1) or bad language (1), and one respondent suggested it was done because it was easier and faster. Finally, one responded that the question was a paradox as 'scholar' and 'plagiarism' should exclude each other. It is interesting to note that the majority of our respondents see plagiarism from a moralistic point of view, as a practice that should be shamed or which exposes a deficiency of character or ability in the plagiarist.

The next series of questions concerned the existing anti-plagiarism measures in Bulgarian institutions, so that the scholars' attitudes could be put into perspective with regards to existing anti-plagiarism legislation and/or regulation in Bulgaria. First, the respondents provided information about the consequences of exposed plagiarism in their affiliated institutions. Many respondents pointed out that no consequences befell plagiarists in their institutions (40.9%), while 13.64% did not provide any answer. The latter could be interpreted as either that their institution did not have any procedure or that no consequences could be reported on; either way, it amounts to more than 50% of the respondents endorsing the claim that plagiarists enjoyed complete impunity in Bulgarian institutions. 13.64% answered not having any knowledge about the matter. The rest of the answers can be grouped under two headings, real consequences and moral consequences. Among the real consequences – a punishment which affected the plagiarist's career – the respondents cite delays in the habilitation procedures (5), loss of title (1), loss of position (6), court trials (2) and testimony in front of an ethics committee (2). One respondent reports on a case in their institution in which the plagiarist eventually lost their job, but for reasons unrelated to plagiarism as plagiarism is not punished in the institution. Moral consequences include shame (1), loss of public trust (1), public blaming (2) and private conversation with the plagiarist (1).

It is interesting to note that 14.8% of the respondents use highly hedged expressions to report of the punishment: "it depends on the researcher's social capital", "probably", "most likely", "could", "should not", and "highly likely". The use of hedges points at the respondents' uncertainty in the real application of the punishment and/or uncertainty in the procedures that are actually established in the institution. The

language our respondents used to report on the matter shows clearly that they do not believe the institution to be equipped with the necessary procedures to cope with plagiarists and that not every case receives a public outing. In three cases the respondents suggest that the concrete reaction of the institution will depend on the researcher under suspicion, with four suggesting that the institution will prefer to hush up the scandal to “protect [that] institution’s reputation”. In further three of the answers the respondents suggest that plagiarists exist in their institution but feel protected by the lack of a clear definition of plagiarism in the Bulgarian Penal Code and by the lack of proper procedure in the institution’s rulebook. The general feel of the answers is that the respondents do not have any faith in the ability of the institutions to combat academic plagiarism and that institutions cover by their silence plagiarists in an ill-guided attempt to protect the institution’s reputation.

The next two questions probed the use of text-matching software in the respondents’ affiliated institution. The results largely conform to our expectations, as Bulgarian universities have not universally adopted the use of text-matching software: 52.27% of the respondents report that no such software is used, with further 23.86% reported not knowing whether it is the case. We feel inclined to interpret these answers as negative, because, if plagiarism detecting software were implemented in an institution, the staff would be required to use it with students’ papers and hence would be aware of such a requirement. 13.64% of the respondents report using such software (of which one reports using such software privately, not in the institution), with 2 more reporting they used alternative methods of plagiarism detection, text corpora and search engines to match text, especially for students’ papers. Considering the volume of student plagiarism (about which we have also written, Breuer et al., 2014; Chankova, 2017), ignoring the problem of plagiarism at the undergraduate and graduate level seems extremely worrisome; one of the few public scandals exposing plagiarists in Bulgaria showed that the researcher had used her students’ papers to pass them as their own, which were poorly written and/or plagiarized (as exposed in Benbasat, 2014). Few universities in Bulgaria seem committed to combat the problem by requiring students to submit papers through an online system, which checks for plagiarism; it is unclear, though, whether the same procedure is applied to researchers. On the question how exactly the plagiarism detecting software is used, 43.2% of the respondents report

that the question does not apply or that such software is not used; 38.64% give no answer. Only 18.2% respondents provide answers on the use of such software, with few reporting that the use is 'superficial' (2), probably meaning that there is no formal procedure to use it; or that it is optional (3) or that students use it (1). Few others state the use of software is successful (1), through Moodle (1), or that the software is accessible (3). 3 respondents report that such software is used to check manuscripts (other than students').

The next question targeted the aspects of the existence of support measures for plagiarizing colleagues or pre-emptive measures to deter plagiarism practices. The existence of such practices would be the mark of the awareness of the need to coach both students and young researchers and of the concern of the institution about preserving its ethical integrity. Most of the respondents reported that no such measures exist in their institutions (43.2%), and those who are unaware of the existence of such measures are 12.5%. 15.9% left blanks. 14.8% of the respondents report that there are practical measures which aim at elevating the research standards in institutions, such as practical seminars on academic writing, with emphasis on proper use of sources, offered to undergraduate and graduate students. 6.8% cite the existence of ethics committees, which two of them describe as "useless". Talks with the plagiarists (6.8%) and signed affidavits of authorship (2.3%) are followed by special rules in the institution's statutes (1). Two of the respondents commented on the question that plagiarists are incompatible with researchers and the institution should not be attempting to help them in any way. With 71.5% of negative answers, it is clear that Bulgarian institutions do not take the issue of academic plagiarism with the seriousness it deserves. Respondents share in their answers their disgust at hushed up cases of plagiarism, their indignation about a staff member who lost their job after exposing a plagiarist; it thus seems that almost every researcher in Bulgaria has knowledge of a plagiarist who enjoys impunity in their institution. This is supported by a number of publications in the mass media, specialized journals and reviews, which demonstrate parallel texts – the original and the plagiarized parts. The existence of pseudo-scientific outlets in the form of departmental proceedings volumes or pseudo-scientific journals – which are not peer-reviewed, but publish any manuscript which comes their way – further help establish the low scientific culture in Bulgarian academia.

When prompted to comment on the effectiveness of the measures (if such exist), overwhelmingly the respondents answered by the negative (57.95%) or reiterated that there are no measures (22.73%), with 6.82% leaving a blank field, for a total of almost 88%. 5.7% of the respondents consider that there are (some) effective measures and 6.82% are unable to decide whether the existing measures in their institution are effective. Those results suggest first that any anti-plagiarism measures, if such exist in the institution, are merely nominally fighting plagiarists without any actual effects. And second, Bulgarian institutions do not have a consistent system of preventing/ fighting plagiarism, regardless of whether students or members of staff are concerned. Even in case there is such a system, our respondents have very little faith in its effectiveness to prevent and fight plagiarism.

Thus, our respondents' reaction to the final open-ended question of the questionnaire – whether we need additional measures to fight against plagiarism more effectively – was well anticipated. Only 3 of the respondents believe no additional measures are necessary, with further 3 who are unable to tell and 7 blank answers. Out of the remaining 75 answers, 38 of the respondents answered by the affirmative (Table 1).

Table 1

*Suggestions on Additional Measures to Combat Plagiarism, in Absolute Numbers*

Yes	38	fire plagiarist	1
review control	3	special institution	3
Affidavit	1	Prison	2
positive measures	1	No	3
strip away title	3	do not know	2
plagiarism laws	16	pseudo-science does plagiarism	1
Software	2	it cannot be done in Bulgaria	1
trials are useless	1	constant battle	2
public shaming	2	n/a	1
use Google/Facebook experience	1		

Interesting insights about the feelings and perceptions of the extent of the problem and how it impacts our society and the academic community in Bulgaria can be gathered from the suggestions to this question. One researcher shared his sad

experience with finding his own works plagiarized on two different occasions; after consulting lawyers, he was told that such trials do not go well in Bulgaria, following which he decided to drop the charges. His feeling of disgust transpires through the words he used, calling Bulgarian justice system “ineffective and corrupt”. This is related to the (heretofore) lack of anti-plagiarism legislation, a concern which is reflected in many respondents calling for anti-plagiarism legislation – 18.2%, or the creation of an independent committee with the power to issue binding decisions on cases of plagiarism (4.55%). Many respondents point out another aspect of the problem - the existing high tolerance towards plagiarism in the academic community and the complicity of reviewers for PhD theses and habilitations, who provide positive reviews regardless of the value of the work and/or whether it has been plagiarized. Many believe that poor education may be at the root of the problem, saying that graduate students should be better educated. Several of the respondents believe that such measures could not be implemented in Bulgaria, pointing out that officials received titles while being employed in the public sphere and that the very perception of plagiarism in society needs to change. Some believe that anti-plagiarism measures should be implemented at the institution level, while insisting it should be a constant effort to reform the mindset and not a sporadic big-case hunt. Some respondents believe that additional measures are necessary, but are unable to articulate the kind of measures needed to address the problem. Interestingly, there are respondents who believe that public shaming could be deterring from plagiarism; these suggestions seem a little naïve as the high-profile cases that have flooded the media attracted much public shaming, to no avail.

### **Conclusions**

The results from the survey suggest several general tendencies in the attitude of Bulgarian scholars to plagiarism:

- They are fully aware of the problem and the fact that it is widely spread in the country;
- They fail to acknowledge some types of plagiarism as such: unintended plagiarism tends to be a recognized category, while structural plagiarism seems to be unclear for many respondents;

- ‘Inability to conduct research’ and ‘lack of punishment’ are perceived as the two main reasons for resorting to plagiarism, where the first is person-oriented, while the second is institution/academic community-oriented;
- Plagiarism detection occurs mainly coincidentally; text-matching software is implemented very rarely at just a few institutions; some of the respondents were not even aware of the existence of such software products;
- There is general reluctance to deal with cases of plagiarism due to a feeling of disillusionment as far as the implementation of efficient measures and punishment are concerned;
- There is a clearly expressed desire for the introduction of anti-plagiarism measures, with ‘introduction of laws’ as the leading one, which once again demonstrates scholars’ discontent with and lack of trust in the academic institutions, as well as the academic ethics of the community.

The study as a whole should call for a necessity for a deep change of attitude on the part of scholars in Bulgaria towards plagiarism of any kind, as well as for provoking public intolerance which inevitably involves the support of the mass media. Any such change of attitude can be realized not only through educational but also with legal measures to be enforced at all levels in science and education. However, as mentioned above, in spite of the plethora of publications in the mass media exposing dire cases of plagiarism, as the saying goes, dogs bark, but the caravans move on, so the necessity of resorting to legal measures seemed inevitable.

In fact, while the manuscript was being prepared, the Bulgarian Parliament voted in the long-awaited anti-plagiarism amendments in the legislation (March 2018), which consists of a legal definition of plagiarism, creates a special independent committee (consisting of 5 members) and opens up the possibility to investigate plagiarism allegations regardless of the time of the offense. It is envisaged that the offenders’ academic degrees and titles will be revoked and the offenders – dismissed immediately. The legislation came after prolonged public debates on the issue and as it was passed, it provoked controversial reactions: some scholars point out problems with the independent committee and the apparent inability of the new legislation to stop fraudulent habilitation procedures. Besides, the definition of plagiarism enshrined in



the law is extremely sketchy: “Plagiarism’ is the presentation of academic works as one’s own, which are fully or partly written or created by someone else, without due referencing, for the procedures for acquiring academic degrees or titles’ (Law amending and supplementing the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria 2018, p. 9).

First, the word ‘partly’ used in the definition is too vague and may lead to a wide variety of interpretations and thus – to controversies and endless debates, possibly also court proceedings with an unpredictable outcome. The latter statement is fully supported by the results described above. Second, it is not clear whether the definition refers to ‘one-to-one’ copies or also (as it should), to the theft of ideas. And last but not least, the text refers only to cases of plagiarism established in the course of procedures for acquiring academic degrees or titles, while it is no secret that the phenomenon can widely be observed in all kinds of publications and at all stages of a scholar’s academic career. Nevertheless, the new law seems to be at least a first step towards combating plagiarism in Bulgaria – a wish expressed by practically all respondents in the present study.

The Commission on Academic Ethics started its work in November 2018. By now (February 2019) it has discussed 4 cases, all of them related to procedural problems, where three of them were deemed irrelevant. No cases of plagiarism have been put on the table so far (MON 2019).

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### Appendix: Questionnaire

1. Field of research, country, number of years as a researcher
2. What is your age? 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 66 or older
3. What is the highest degree you have completed?
  - Bachelor degree
  - Master degree
  - PhD
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
4. In which country did you receive this degree? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where do you look for information for your research? Please number in order of frequency (1 being the most frequent, 3 the least frequent)
  - Physical libraries
  - Online libraries
  - Academic search engines (e.g. Mendeley, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia) and academic electronic databases (e.g. JSTOR, Eric, Project MUSE, Scopus) for searching or for storing information
6. Please specify which academic search engines and electronic databases you use
7. Please arrange the following types of academic misconduct in order of perceived severity in your field (1 being the most severe and 3 the least severe):
  - Text plagiarism                      Results falsification                      Results fabrication
8. How do you react to other researchers' 'copy and paste' of texts from the Internet or other sources without acknowledgement? (You may tick more than one answer)
  - This is a natural way for young researchers to learn academic writing  
strongly disagree - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree
  - This is a pure case of plagiarism even if small chunks of texts are concerned  
strongly disagree - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree
  - I am more lenient to young researchers than to experienced scholars in this regard  
strongly disagree - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree
  - It is not worth pursuing cases of 'copy and paste' due to complex administrative procedures  
strongly disagree - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree
  - If I detect 'copy and paste' I will not accept to review the manuscript  
strongly disagree - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
9. Are the following practices instances of plagiarism?
  - Stealing or buying a complete work that is not your own in any format, with the intention of presenting it as your own  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Paraphrasing portions of work that is not your own, without referencing the source  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Copying portions of work that is not your own, without referencing the source  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Adopting the ideas of others, without referencing the source  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know

- Adopting the structure of an existing analysis, without referencing the source  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Hiring a ghost-writer to do the work  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Creating a text using a patchwork of different paragraphs, all from one or several different original documents, without referencing the source(s)  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Translating texts from sources and presenting those, without referencing the source  
a) Yes                      b) No                      c) Don't know
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- 10.** Have you ever come across translated plagiarism?
- 11.** If yes, how did you detect it?
- 12.** Which was the source language \_\_\_\_\_ and which was the target language \_\_\_\_\_?
- 13.** What, in your opinion, constitutes "unintended plagiarism"?
- 14.** Do you agree with the following statement: "Unintended plagiarism is not a crime"?
- strongly disagree      - disagree - neither disagree nor agree - agree - strongly agree
- 15.** Which, in your view, are the reasons for a scholar to resort to plagiarism (You can tick more than one):
- Lack of knowledge of what is defined as plagiarism
  - Time constraints
  - Ineptitude for conducting research
  - Institutional pressure to publish
  - Simple carelessness
  - Lack of punishment / consequences
  - Other (please specify).....
- 16.** What would happen if a scholar at your institution was found guilty of plagiarism in one of their research publications?.....
- 17.** What digital tools or other techniques are available at your institution for helping to detect plagiarism by scholars?
- 18.** How are these tools used?
- 19.** What services and support are available at your institution for discouraging plagiarism by scholars?
- 20.** Do you find the regulatory mechanisms for combating plagiarism among scholars at your institution efficient?
- Yes, because.....
  - No, because.....
- 21.** What other kinds of measures should be introduced and at which levels in order to make plagiarism among scholars combating efficient?