

Good quality research can be published in all languages

Kulczycki, Emanuel ¹

¹ Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland

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ABSTRACT

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Multilingual publishing is not “publishing in a different language by default: than English”. I believe “wording” is essential. Multilingual publishing is publishing and communicating in all languages and not in a different language than English.

We must remember that almost half of the Europeans are not able to speak any foreign language well enough to hold a conversation. Only a little more than one-third are able to do so in English (the most widely spoken foreign language). Thus, if research is communicated exclusively in English, it is inherently limited.

In the ongoing reform of the research assessment system in the social sciences and humanities, the call for multilingualism is the most notable omission.

Making science actually open requires promoting diverse, multilingual and relevant research accessible for different audiences.

One of the main goals of the UNESCO Recommendation for Open Science is to make “multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone”.

Machine translation is not a substitute for publishing research results in multiple languages, to different audiences. This is primarily because major corporations and publishers target languages with the largest number of users and translate mostly from English to other languages. Languages with fewer users are too often overlooked and thus become invisible.

Exactly the same is true for publications in languages other than English in the largest citation indexes. Therefore, open science and research evaluation must support researchers in publishing research in multiple languages.

Not all local publications need to be translated into English and not all publications in English need to be translated into local languages.

My talk aims to emphasize that we have empirical evidence that SSH is multilingual in Europe. It is not only an anecdote of some scholars but verifiable facts that should be used in European science policy.

Within the framework on ENRESSH, we conducted various studies on publication practices of European scholars. The evidence-based picture of European publishing practices shows that researchers in the humanities and the social sciences are multilingual. Science policy must support them in multilingual publishing.

Evidence from eight European countries shows that the Web of Science database covers only a small part of all peer-reviewed publications in the social sciences and the humanities.

Scholarly book publications – in various languages - have been an important way of communicating research but they are invisible in Web of Science or Scopus databases.

For instance, only 15% of all publications of Polish scholars from SSH are indexed in Web of Science and only just over 50% of all publications by Danish scholars.

Fortunately, for over a decade, various European countries have been using national current research information systems, thanks to which we can obtain a good picture of the whole publishing landscape in academia.

Evidence shows that Web of Science and Scopus databases cover only one-fourth of all peer-reviewed journal articles published by researchers from seven European countries between 2013 and 2015.

And only a few percent of the articles published in the local languages. In this way, intended or unintended language priorities in assessment may lead to a systemic undervaluation of SSH research and researchers.

The clearest example of the everyday language bias comes from the manuscript peer review, where it is frequently reported that reviewers judge research basing on the quality of non-native English speakers' writing instead of the content of the manuscript.

In this way, the excellence of research is too often equated with English-language publications, especially those published in journals having an Impact Factor or those indexed in global citation indexes.

Good quality research can be published in all languages.