

Introductory words to the discussion on plurilinguism

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TO CITE

Colella, S. (2022). Introductory words to the discussion on plurilinguism. In *Proceedings of the Paris Institute for Advanced Study*. <https://doi.org/10.5072/zenodo.1114989>

PUBLICATION DATE

16/05/2022

ABSTRACT

Evaluation of Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe. Hcéres Colloquium Proceedings - Paris IAS, 16-17 May 2022. Session 2 "Multilingualism" - Introduction

In the social sciences and humanities research landscape, multilingualism is both an asset and, to a certain extent, a problem. It is an asset as research published in the local or national language stands better chances of achieving wider social impact and dissemination among stakeholders' communities. Multilingualism in scholarly communication also contributes to fostering a healthy ecosystem of knowledges that values diversity and avoids the risk of 'monoculture'. The problematic aspects are contingent on the dominance of English as lingua franca and the increasing pressure to publish in English medium international journals, which tend to result in a subsequent devaluation of local or national languages in academic

publishing. Two questions, therefore, are paramount: how to strike a good, if not a perfect, balance between the demands of international communication and multilingual publications practices; and what needs to change in national and international research policies and evaluation frameworks for multilingual outputs to be given their fair due. Diversity of languages is an ‘epistemic necessity’ in many disciplines within the SSH remit, as Andrea Bonaccorsi argues. The Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication strongly advocates for better national infrastructures to sustain locally relevant research, and for more granular research assessment criteria capable of capturing excellence regardless of the language of publication. The community of scholars is clearly alert to the relevance of language diversity in the research ecosystem. The European Commission is currently engaged in the process of ‘re-evaluating evaluation’; as Milena Zic Fucs remarks, the question of multi- or plurilingualism ought to be given due consideration in this process. For SSH scholars to have an impact on the way research policies are being shaped, speaking the language of science policy, and speaking it fluently, is the best option.