

# Multilingualism within Scholarly Communication in SSH. A literature review

Ana Balula<sup>(a)</sup>, Delfim Leão<sup>(b)</sup>

a) University of Aveiro, <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8287-258X>

b) University of Coimbra, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8107-9165>

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**Contact:** Ana Balula, [balula@ua.pt](mailto:balula@ua.pt); Delfim Leão, [leo@fl.uc.pt](mailto:leo@fl.uc.pt)

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## ABSTRACT

It is undeniable that scholarly publication is boosted nowadays by the use of the English language, but this does not (and cannot) mean that the other languages have to be obliterated as scientific and cultural agents, equally valid and indispensable. Therefore, multilingualism is an expression of bibliodiversity that has to be protected and cherished, particularly in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), a field in which culturally and societally relevant studies are made in local languages, when approaching areas such as cultural heritage, education, migration, public administration. The main goal of this paper is to present a literature review in order to identify the main aspects influencing language selection and the use of multilingualism within scholarly communication, allowing for putting forward recommendations for future initiatives aiming at enhancing multilingualism, particularly in connection with the opportunities deriving from Open Science.

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## KEYWORDS

Multilingualism; Bibliodiversity; Language; Scholarly communication; Academic publishing.

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## Introduction

Historically, there is no surprise in identifying the need of having a language that works as a common facilitator of communication or as a *lingua franca*, as the concept is usually and widely known. To illustrate this, it is enough to evoke two long-lasting examples from the past. One is the ancient Greek *koine* that was widely disseminated with Alexander's exploits and with the new 'globalized' reality (in Greek, this was said *oikoumene*, implying the 'entire inhabited world') shaped after the death of the Macedonian king. This *koine* or 'common [language]' corresponded to a simplified version of the Greek spoken and written in Athens, because of the high cultural reputation that was recognized to it. The *koine* made possible civilizational accomplishments such as the Library of Alexandria or the Greek translation of the Bible known as the *Septuaginta*, a forerunner of the experience of collaborative work. The cultural importance of *koine* lasted for centuries, until it was superseded by Latin, in a movement driven by the Roman Empire, but that would live long after its decline, as language of administration, culture and, above all, as the medium par excellence for scholarly communication. Compared to these examples, the English domain is much more recent and nobody can tell whether or not it will last as long. At any rate, it shares with Greek *koine* and Latin some basic characteristics: a *lingua franca* provides to its native speakers a natural advantage in the commercial, political and cultural fields, and the stronger it is the more important and efficient it will become, leading others to the necessity of using this same channel of communication.

Nowadays, it is indisputable that scholarly publication is boosted by the use of the English language, but this does not (in fact, cannot) mean that the other languages have to be abolished as scientific and cultural agents, equally valid and indispensable. Therefore, multilingualism is an expression of bibliodiversity that has to be protected and cherished, particularly in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). Hence, the main goal of this paper is to identify the main factors that influence language selection and the use of multilingualism within the realm of scholarly communication, allowing for putting forward recommendations for future initiatives aiming at enhancing multilingualism.

## Methods

This is a qualitative study of exploratory nature and the method used is in the scope of an integrative literature review, summarising prior research to clarify research trends based on in vivo content analysis of the selected corpus (Cooper 1984). Thus, this method was used to provide direction for research and practice, since "new knowledge about previous research is created through critical analysis; synthesis builds on this to create new perspectives on the topic as a whole" (Torraco 2005, 363). Hence, it stands as a means to enable a more comprehensive understanding of topic, i.e. the clarification of how these are influenced by and/or impact rim areas, as well as research gaps and future needs (Russell 2005). The stages encompassed by the method are: problem formulation, data collection, data evaluation and selection, data analysis, interpretation and presentation of results (Russell, 2005).

As to the problem, this study focuses on filling in a gap in the recent literature, namely as to identifying factors that influence the dynamics underlying language selection and the use of multilingualism within scholarly communication. The database selected was Google Scholar and the search terms used

were ‘scholarly communication’ ‘language’ and ‘multilingualism’ – combined with the Boolean operator AND. The search, undertaken on 6 April 2020, yielded 152 works. These results were reviewed to exclude duplicates, PhD and Master’s dissertations, as well as works that did not meet this study’s research goals. In what concerns selection criteria, the works had to be published in open access, between 2019 and 2020, be written in English, French, German, Portuguese, Italian or Spanish (the languages known to the authors) and include abstract and keywords in English. This resulted in the selection of 12 documents, which were analysed resorting to qualitative content analysis of the abstracts and conclusion sections. Subsequently, the final category framework reflects the corpus codification structure that emerged from the analysis, as presented below.

## Results and Discussion

The categorisation of the corpus regarding the dynamics between multilingualism and scholarly communication in SSH were identified *in vivo* and translates into: 1. Research relevance, 2. Content curation, 3. Reputation and 4. Balanced multilingualism (see Table 1).

Categories		Studies
1. Research relevance	1.1. Global Englishisation	Balula and Leão 2019, Costello 2020, Giglia 2019, Guns, Eykens and Engels 2019, Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam 2019, Kulczycki <i>et al.</i> 2020, Luzón 2019, Sivertsen, Guns, Kulczycki and Pölönen 2019
	1.2. Language competence	Balula and Leão 2019, Costello 2020, Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam 2019, Kulczycki <i>et al.</i> 2020
2. Content curation		Balula and Leão 2019, Giglia 2019, Ibrahim 2019, Koutsomitropoulos 2019, del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville 2020
3. Reputation		Balula and Leão 2019, Costello 2020, Guns, Eykens and Engels 2019, Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam 2019, Kulczycki <i>et al.</i> 2020, Luzón 2019, Sivertsen, Guns, Kulczycki and Pölönen 2019
4. Balanced multilingualism		Balula and Leão 2019, Guns, Eykens and Engels 2019, Kulczycki <i>et al.</i> 2020

Table 1. Categorisation of the corpus regarding the dynamics between multilingualism and scholarly communication in SSH

### Research relevance

Starting with the category *Research relevance*, it refers to the language selected for scholarly communication purposes and subdivides into two sub-categories, i.e. 1.1. *Global Englishisation* and 1.2. *Language competence*. Regarding the former, English is assumed, worldwide and in multiple societal contexts, as language of communication, posing as important means to disseminate (share

and search for) information. When it comes to research, the results of the literature review undertaken by Balula and Leão (2019, 4) underline that “In terms of information availability, which underpins the co-construction of knowledge, the use of English as *lingua franca* promotes the dissemination of research outputs and breakthroughs”. In this respect, Luzón (2019) recalls that, in the Science and Technology fields, most authors use English as the default working language within the disciplinary community. Nevertheless, many SSH researchers frequently develop culturally and societally relevant studies in their local languages, in particular, because their aim is to contribute to the debate, decision-taking and innovation processes in specific areas, such as cultural heritage, education, migration, public administration, etc. (Kulczycki *et al.* 2020; Giglia 2019; Luzón 2019).

Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam (2019, 1007) point out that, although the “contemporary scientific communication pattern amongst CEE countries regarding social sciences is unknown”, it seems that SSH issues, in particular those focused on national or local realities, tend to be more relevant to national (rather than international) scientific communities and, thereof, scholarly communication is undertaken in native languages. Giglia (2019, 143) also emphasises that “SSH research is often grounded in specific cultural or geographical areas, hence the persistence of native languages opposed to English as *lingua franca* in STEM”. This trend seems to reflect in institutional research websites, once, as Luzón (2019) concluded for the case of Spanish research groups, those presented only in native language seem to aim at having a local impact. Even though some researchers also provide links to works written in English to reach a wider (more international) community, most tend to write in their native languages because their funding and resources (including time) are limited (Luzón, 2019). Within European scholarly publication in SSH, there is “a huge number of small size players of different types and quality serving local scientific communities and specializing in narrow fields of research” (Giglia 2019, 143). In this scenario, the sole use of national languages can pose as a relevant fragmentation element (specially for languages used by less population, such as Finnish), inhibiting international information-sharing and co-construction of knowledge (Balula and Leão 2019). Thus, authors as Kulczycki *et al.* (2020) and Balula and Leão (2019) underline that global Englishisation of scholarly communication can have two main consequences: on the one hand, it can facilitate the sharing of research data and results, but, on the other hand, it can also restrict important contributions from non-Anglophone researchers. Besides, the analysis of information produced in native language may contribute to enrich the readers’ multicultural and multilingual awareness and competence, and allow the scientific community to skim and scan for information.

In his study, Costello (2020, 3) concludes that “the pre-eminence of English hence appears to be edging out other languages in an increasing trend. It is assembling an unassailable claim to be the language of legitimation, the language of science and scholarship – the language of knowledge and ultimately, of truth”. In this respect, Guns, Eykens and Engels (2019) highlight that, although the number works published in English by non-Anglophone authors is tending to increase (almost doubling), the number of publications in the non-English researchers’ native language does not seem to be decreasing.

SSH research is being published in both local and international journals (Sivertsen, Guns, Kulczycki and Pölönen 2019). When it comes to language selection, several authors point out the reasons underpinning the choice of English, which are closely interconnected, namely: research outreach, the need for internationalization, collaboration practices and target audience (e.g. Kulczycki *et al.* 2020;

Luzón 2019; Guns, Eykens and Engel, 2019; Balula and Leão 2019). In this context, it is important to underline that there are non-English journals that reach a wide international community and some international journals are increasingly accepting and promoting the use of English *pari passu* with other international languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.) or even multiple languages (Sivertsen, Guns, Kulczycki and Pölönen 2019). In this respect, Kulczycki *et al.* (2020, 2) underline that “publishing in more than one language not only reaches a wider audience but supports a diverse perspective on research”. Thus, there seems to be a slow shift in the way language issues are being dealt with in research, valuing, for instance, the combination of “different languages to cater for various audiences” (Luzón 2019, 54) within scholarly communication platforms. Authors such as Sivertsen, Guns, Kulczycki and Pölönen (2019) and Guns, Eykens and Engels (2019, 2) sustain this trend, once the results of their study reveal that SSH researchers “write a substantial share of publications in a local language, in addition to publications in English or other international languages”, which may evidence a shift of scholarly communication towards inclusive multilingualism, as defined by the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication.

Concerning the sub-category *Language competence* (1.2., see Table 1), it is important to start by underlining that, in scholarly communication, the selection of a certain language has an impact on the way information is conveyed and understood, as concepts and narratives are constructed and deconstructed within dynamic linguistic (and cultural) lines and linguascapes (Kulczycki *et al.* 2020). Nevertheless, several authors (e.g. Balula and Leão 2019; Sivertsen, Guns, Kulczycki and Pölönen 2019; Costello 2020) conclude that research not written in English seems to be undervalued.

Considering that culture is embedded in language itself, the production of research in a foreign language is necessarily demanding and complex for non-native speakers, since it implies “the transference between different conceptual mind-sets” (Balula and Leão 2019, 4). In the case of some researchers that have low foreign language proficiency (and in particular, in English), there are cases in which “some resort to practices of copying and pasting fragments of English text, before then attempting to edit and refactor these reproductions to new ends: trying to build a picture, but with pieces drawn from different jigsaws” (Costello 2020, 3) – and this tends to undermine publication itself. Thus, having a multilingual approach to research is not always easy for scholars, not only because of the lack of a good command of foreign languages, but also because budget for translations is often scant or non-existent.

After having the English version of the research, authors face another great challenge – the peer review process. Regarding language, after submitting a research output written in English, many scholars often receive a variation of the following critical remark: “This manuscript could benefit from proofing by a native English speaker” (Costello 2020, 1). Although there are cases in which it fully applies, this also happens when works are written by (proficient) native speakers, a situation that definitely underlines the power of language competence within research, as well as the clear empowerment of reviewers as language specialists. In fact, on the one hand, studies written in English are often revised by non-Anglophone scholars and works written in other languages are not widely reviewed by Anglophone peers and, on the other hand, “not all ‘natives’ have high competence in English [or any other language], just as ‘non-natives’ do not necessarily lack this competence” (Costello 2020, 2). Costello (2020) even associates ‘native speakers’ with the so-called ‘digital natives’, i.e. the same way we should not expect the latter to know by instinct how to use digital technology to

identify reliable information sources, or to use a specific software for learning or at work, we should also not assume that proficient native speakers master the academic jargon of several specific areas. In a closer look into research work, a study focussing on seven European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Flanders [Belgium], Norway, Poland, and Slovenia) points out that most “articles in English were more often written by multiple authors rather than one author. We also found that, for all countries, articles that were written in local and other languages were more often single-authored than multiauthored” (Kulczycki *et al.*, 2020, 10). In addition, a commonality unveiled in the study developed by Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam (2019, 1007), for the case of central and eastern European countries, is that “almost all quotes were from authors from their native countries”, which may also evidence the dramatic effect of language barriers in scholarly communication, and subsequent co-construction of knowledge. Thus, Englishisation does not seem to fully address research intended main goals, concerning information sharing and discussion, as well as co-construction of knowledge, for which multilingualism can pose as an important asset, while promoting inclusiveness and equity of researchers (Balula and Leão 2019).

## Content curation

There are several initiatives trying to facilitate multilingual and multiformat interaction between researchers from several areas, as well as the promotion of bibliodiversity (e.g. European Commission’s *European Open Science Cloud*, OPERAS, etc.), which may play a very important role in conferring societal relevance to research (Balula and Leão 2019). Some initiatives, such as OPERAS, are working on the creation of platforms, which allow for “all European researchers in SSH to discover, from a single point of entry, open resources (data, publications and other materials) relevant to their research. The added value consists in the feature of indexing resources with disciplinary ontologies and thesauri and to align them across several languages” (Giglia 2019, 151–152) and, in this scenario, *Content curation* (see 2., Table 1) plays a pivotal role.

Some authors report on their contribute in this area, i.e. the development of platforms, such as: *Isidore discovery platform* (<https://isidore.science/>) – a research discovery platform (Mounier 2018 *cf.* Balula and Leão 2019), or *OpenMethods* (<https://openmethods.dariah.eu/>) – which “is intentionally interdisciplinary and multilingual to facilitate a timely, global disclosure and dissemination of knowledge and to raise peer recognition for open Digital Humanities tools and practices” (del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville 2020, 3). In both cases, the embedment of multilingualism within the scholarly communication ecosystem seems to promote equity among scholars in and from different linguistic and cultural communities and allow for “raising awareness to the value of language diversity by enhancing visibility and recognition of languages and cultures other than English, thus weakening the hegemonic position of English” (del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville 2020, 6).

Authors as del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville (2020), as well as Koutsomitropoulos (2019), identify some traits/ functionalities/ tools that should be considered in the design and management of search platforms, including:

- the selection of a working team according to the “fields of expertise and language skills as one aim is to be able to cover as a group the selection and curation of relevant content in various languages” (del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville 2020, 3);
- the creation of a multilingual landing page, thus, democratizing access to knowledge in the context of arts of humanities research/scholarship usually grounded in regional, national and language-specific communities” (del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville 2020, 9);
- the possibility of filtering and searching for information, using “several content enrichment and categorization efforts” (del Rio Riande, Tóth-Czifra, Wuttke and Moranville 2020, 2) undertaken by content curators;
- the addition of a short English introduction, as well as a link to the original research, in the visualisation of search results, to enhance research outreach of non-English publications;
- the possibility to expand search using different criteria (author, language, topic, etc.);
- the use of automatic annotation to minimise the workload.

As to this last matter, Ibrahim, Fathalla, Yazdi, Lehmann and Jabeen (2019) also refer that most studies in ontology enrichment focus work upon English ontologies from English sources only; nevertheless, the authors sustain that there are advantages in focusing on Ontology Enrichment using Cross-lingual Matching (OECM), i.e. the use of “multilingual ontologies, where a class label is presented by several natural languages, from monolingual ones. Such approach supports the ontology matching process with multiple translations for a class label in order to enhance the matching results” (Ibrahim, Fathalla, Yazdi, Lehmann and Jabeen 2019, 216). Consequently, the option of having “semi-automated approach to enrich ontologies from multilingual text or from other ontologies in different natural languages” (Ibrahim, Fathalla, Yazdi, Lehmann and Jabeen 2019, 216) should be considered. The possibility of having reliable multilingual research information will definitely contribute to an efficient dissemination of research (and research data) produced in national languages, as well as communication among publishers and researchers – thus promoting the development of intercultural, comparative and/or complimentary studies in SSH. In this context, content curation is crucial and very sensitive, once it can determine the way researchers interact with other works/authors, namely in terms of peer discussion, co-construction of new knowledge and integration of research outcomes (Koutsomitropoulos, 2019).

## Reputation

Regarding the category *Reputation* (see 3., Table 1), Luzón (2019, 39) defines scholarly reputation as “the expert appraisal of a scholar’s standing in their collegial reference group, which is collectively determined on the basis of their research achievements”, which is closely interconnected with research visibility. In the scope of SSH, European researchers have a long tradition in resorting to national publishers, especially because their primary target audience is also national – a situation that, to a certain extent, may pose as “a barrier in global scientific communication” (Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam 2019, 1007). The type of publication also appears to assume relevance, in particular because bibliographic and citation databases (e.g. Web of Science and Scopus) primarily address articles and journals, and books were just recently included, but still give clear preference to those written in English (Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam 2019, 1006).

Given that a considerable amount of SSH research is published as monographs and/or in local language, the use of these databases to evaluate research and establish the researchers' or the institutions' reputations is necessarily fallacious (Kulczycki *et al.* 2020). Considering that this hurdle precludes the citation analysis of books not written in English, in their study about role of prestigious international versus local/regional publishers in Eastern and Central Europe, Jokić, Mervar and Mateljam (2019, 1006) conclude that in SSH “data sources such as Google Books and Google Scholar are, in comparison with the above-mentioned commercial databases, valuable sources for book bibliometric analysis”. In addition, Kulczycki *et al.* (2020, 2) refer that “neglected or undervalued research is less likely, then, to fulfil its responsibilities toward society, or create localized impacts”. This stands out as an important issue that national publishers should address, especially because publication with rich cross-lingual ontologies and automatic algorithms potentially has a positive impact on the researchers', the institutions' and the publishers' own reputation.

As Luzón (2019, 38) underlines, “universities and funding agencies expect groups to produce research outcomes with social and international impact and to engage in outreach activities”. In this scenario, publication in English language in international journals seems to be deeply linked to indexing and metrics, which are of growing importance for authors (Guns, Eykens and Engels 2019). In fact, most scholars are being strongly advised to focus, essentially, on bibliometrics associated to their publications and, consequently, “publishing in non-hegemonic journals has almost become an activist statement” (Levitt and Crul 2018, 45, cited in Balula and Leão 2019, 4). In this respect, Costello (2020, 3) stresses that “‘foreign’ is uncritically equated with ‘prestige’”, which results in holding researchers' hostage within oligopolistic [English] publishing, and Kulczycki *et al.* (2020, 2) state that “researchers may choose to move away from locally relevant research toward decontextualized approaches of interest to English-language audiences”.

Still regarding the language of publication, Kulczycki *et al.* (2020, 13) argue that “one way of making research results published in English more readily accessible to citizens is to publish the same results in a local language, but in a more popularized format, for instance, via a blog or alternative news source. This practice could, however, be at odds with current regulations concerning self-plagiarism”. In fact, it seems that the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA 2017, 8) considers “re-publishing substantive parts of one's own earlier publications, including translations, without duly acknowledging or citing the original (‘self-plagiarism’)” under the label “research misconduct and other unacceptable practices”. Nevertheless, assuming that multilingual publishing may help local research relevant with the potential added-value of reflecting in bibliometric indicators, Kulczycki *et al.* (2020, 13) argue that “an international discussion is needed to determine more clearly how this type of publication strategy could be seen as beneficial, rather than a violation of research integrity and publication counting”. This approach could result in a win-win balance between international excellence and local significance of research outputs.

## Balanced multilingualism

The concept of *Balanced multilingualism* was assumed for the final analysis category (see 4., Table 1) because of the comprehensive view it offers over the multifaceted dynamics generated by language

use within scholarly communication. Balula and Leão (2019) recall the definition proposed by Sivertsen (2018, 2), which is understood as a dynamic approach, encompassing

all the communication purposes in all different areas of research, and all the languages needed to fulfil these purposes, in a holistic manner without exclusions or priorities. Balanced multilingualism is also to establish instruments for documenting and measuring the use of language for all the different purposes in research, thereby providing the basis for the monitoring of further globalization of research in a more responsible direction.

Authors as Guns, Eykens, and Engels (2019), as well as Kulczycki *et al.* (2020), consider that one of the goals should be finding solutions grounded in sustainable balanced multilingualism, supported by well-designed and robust digital infrastructures for local language publishing. Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude that, even though Englishisation has a key role in facilitating scholarly communication, “the use of English should not be seen as a sole linguistic option, since the need for communicating in a *lingua franca* does not necessarily imply the adoption of a *lingua unica* – being the combination of balanced multilingualism and bibliodiversity foreseen as a much more fertile approach, in cultural, identitarian, and even in economic terms” (Balula and Leão 2019, 8).

In conclusion, balanced multilingualism in scholarly communication seems to pose as a golden breakthrough to embrace information-sharing, collaborative knowledge construction and equity by enabling global interaction with multinational and multidisciplinary research (and researchers); thus, mitigating the hurdles underlying static, poor translations and bridging research worldwide (Balula and Leão 2019, 7).

## Conclusion

This paper presents the results of a literature review on recent studies dealing with multilingualism and scholarly communication, and on the way they affect the area of SSH in particular. The analysis of the selected corpus allowed for the emergence of specific dynamics, which can be translated into a categorisation of factors that affect the language choices made by authors in terms of publishing and communication strategies: research relevance, content curation, scholarly reputation, and finally balanced multilingualism. The first three contribute to identify the reasons behind the growing tendency towards Englishisation, which increasingly puts at risk the importance of other languages as equally valid agents of science and culture (and ultimately their very existence as living languages). This is why it is so important to stimulate expressions of balanced multilingualism, a design for which open access (and open science at large) may constitute an excellent opportunity, by the manner it can give support to bibliodiversity and to new and more embracing forms of scholarly communication.

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