

The hegemonic use of English in academia: some critical thoughts about advantages and disadvantages.

Hans-Jörg Schlierer/Johannes Brinkmann

UPR M&I, November 2017

Starting points

- EBEN AC (June 2017): ad-hoc survey about “language proficiency and self-confidence when using English”
- EBEN AC (June 2017): Socratic dialogue session about “language discrimination” with 12 researchers.
- EMR policy: Accept papers in ‘local’ language + translation into English after acceptance.

Aim: Since the positive functions of English as an enabler of communication are unquestionable and widely accepted, we target the unreflexive use for academic writing and mainly focus on potential negative functions, such as handicaps for non-native users of English and language discrimination risks, and on missed opportunities of multilingualism.

ELF: potential positive functions	ELF: potential negative functions
Inclusion of EFL basic or more proficiency senders, contents, and users	Exclusion of senders, contents, and receivers without EFL basic proficiency
EFL users on the same level compete on equal footing	EFL users risk discrimination by language proficiency, among themselves and even more towards native users
Translations from other languages to English make contents and their authors accessible to a wider audience, sooner or later	Uncritical belief in ELF (esp when furthering inability/ unwillingness to learn other foreign languages) excludes/discriminates authors and contents in other languages
Limited expression of thoughts and cultural subtleties in EFL/ELF is better than nothing	Limited expression of thoughts and cultural subtleties in EFL/ELF becomes typically superficial and less authentic
Access to cultural contents, esp genuine Anglophone cultural contents, is better than no access	Because of limited attention, easier access to Anglophone cultural contents can further cultural/ideological hegemony
Reduced dependency on translators and interpreters (to and from EFL/ELF) as gatekeepers	Reduced 3 rd language proficiency increases dependency on translators and interpreters (to and from these languages) as gatekeepers
Reading texts in English, in your own field of expertise and if you take your time, is for most users easier than performing other skills.	Discrimination of non-native non-perfect written English (e.g. in academic contexts) is more frequent and more serious in situations such as academic evaluations



Starting points

- High pressure to publish...in English!
- FNEGE list: 435 journals published in English, only 46 in French (~10.6%), but no 1* or 1 star journal in French. Similar on emlyon-list: no A+ or A journal in other language than English.
- BUT: English as a lingua franca in oral communication (academic conferences etc.) with accepted variations and deviations; ELF for written communication (mainly publication) only in “standard” English!

1. question: which English?



Which English for knowledge production and dissemination?

- What is the norm? (British E., US-American E. ...?)
- Who establishes this norm?
- Gate keeping function of Editorial boards?
Fact is: large majority of Assoc. Editors/Editorial Board members are North-Americans and/or Natives (even BEER: from 25 Board members, 19 are NS with 8 US-Americans).

Nota: Natives are out-numbered by non-natives in Academia. How sensitive are non-Anglophone reviewers to language related aspects?...



Which English for knowledge production and dissemination?

- Recommendation: proof-reading/editing by “native speaker”
- Hidden ideology:
 - English as a stable semiotic resource
 - “natives” engage with texts and writing in a monolithic way
- Observation:
 - “natives” also have to learn academic English and academic writing (see offer of such seminars in universities)
 - Every scientific community has its own “slang”
 - Influence of disciplinary knowledge and background



Knowledge production in English

- Critical aspects:
 - Initial data in other language than English;
 - Research team with different linguistic background;
 - Coding and/or analytical tools in other languages than English;
 - Sources and references in other languages than English.
- Is translation the solution?...

Observation: Literacy brokers

- *Language professionals*: translators, proof readers, copy editors...
- *Academic professionals*: disciplinary experts as co-authors, journal reviewers, editors...



Knowledge production in English

- Other critical aspects:
 - Geographical periphery
 - Limited/no access to networks
 - Limited/no use of English as working language
 - “weird” concepts and approaches
 - Englishization (Americanization??) is bound up with processes of normalization (Bousseba & Brown 2017, Organization Studies)



EFL self-confidence (survey)

Q	Low (very poor, poor, fair)	Medium (good)	High (Very Good)	N= 96 EFL-users
... reading	3%	28%	68%	100%
... writing	18%	56%	26%	100%
... listening	19%	41%	40%	100%
... speaking (w/ manuscript)	11%	45%	43%	100%
... speaking (free presentation)	26%	46%	27%	100%



Our findings so far...

- How important ... to publish work in English language journals, even at the expense of... **83%** much more, 10% more important
- Self-assessed EFL proficiency varies more by working than by native language
- EFL users use native user editing often/always (53%), or at least occasionally (39%), or native users as co-authors as discrimination risk management
- There are many reflected and thought-provoking verbatim answers to open questions about positive & negative experience with using academic English, orally and in writing



Our findings so far...

- The material suggests that the opportunities of multilingualism are clearly underexploited
- “If it is not published in English it doesn’t exist or at least doesn’t count” risks to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Multilingual authors report that they have less and less time (and motivation?) to stay up-to-date in the non-English literature within their field of expertise



Three promising frameworks for further reflection

	Inequality	Power	Actor-System-dialectic
Reality	Unequal language proficiency and cultural competency	Power of judges and gatekeepers	Interdependency of individual members and the community
Degeneration	Discrimination of non-insiders/ EFL users	Power hidden or non-transparent, illegitimate, abused	Alienation; participation on the system’s terms
Ideal	Justice as fairness, multilingualism and fair use of ELF	Absent, transparent & legitimate power, at least language-wise	Exploitation of one another’s potential, multilingualism included
Promising theory	Stratification/ imperialism theories	Various power theories (Foucault...)	Structuration theory (Giddens)



Instead of a conclusion...

- How do we deal with the “language topic” at EML and within our UPR?
- Should we, could we initiate some action?



Literature review: Our favourite sources

- Academic writing/publication pressure:
 - Curry, M.J. and Lillis, T. (2004). Multilingual scholars and the imperative to publish in English: Negotiating interests, demands, and rewards, *TESOL Quarterly*
 - Lillis, T. and Curry, M.J. (2010). Academic writing in a global context, Routledge
 - Flowerdew, J. (2013). The non-Anglophone scholar on the periphery of scholarly publication, *AILA Review*
- Multilingualism & translation:
 - Müller, M. (2007). What's in a word? Problematizing translation between languages, *Area*
 - Steyart, C and Janssens, M. (2013), Multilingual scholarship and the paradox of translation and language in management and organization studies, *Organization*



Literature review: Our favourite sources

- Hegemony/Imperialism and implicit consequences:
 - Boussebaa, M. and Brown, A.D. (2017). Englishization, identity regulation and imperialism, *Organization Studies*
 - Fairclough, N. (1996). Language and power, Longman
 - Flowerdew, J. (2001). Attitudes of journal editors to nonnative speaker contributions, *TESOL Quarterly*
 - Tietze, S. and Dick, P. (2013). The victorious English language: Hegemonic practices in the management academy, *Journal of Management Inquiry*

