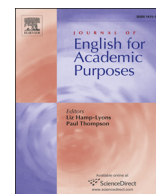


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Writing for publication in linguistics: Exploring niches of multilingual publishing among German linguists



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ABSTRACT

The trend towards Englishization has affected virtually all academic disciplines in various parts of the world. However, some sociocultural and disciplinary contexts are still under-researched, as for instance the supposed ‘niches’ of multilingual publishing within the humanities, especially in those countries whose national languages used to play an important role in international research communication. This paper therefore investigates the publication practices of scholars working at a German university in the field of linguistics. This discipline presents an interesting case for multilingual publishing as it is inherently plurilingual discipline, dealing with different languages as its object of investigation. To gain an insider’s view, interviews with linguists specializing in English, German, or Romance languages were conducted and analyzed qualitatively. It was found that the language use in publications is mainly affected by three factors, the *target audience*, the *object of research*, and the linguists’ self-assessed *language competence*. While these factors unanimously point into one direction, English, among the English specialists, they produce conflicts for others, especially within the German department. Proposals are therefore made to ease publishing in an academic L2 and simultaneously preserve the multilingualism of the language-sensitive disciplines within academia.

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1. Introduction

English has been identified as today’s *academic lingua franca*, helping bridge language barriers and thus facilitating the dialog within academia. While a common lingua franca is undeniably useful and efficient from a pragmatic point of view, its omnipresence has also triggered fears among speakers of other mother tongues. For instance, the growing dominance of English has led to heated debates in Germany, for German used to occupy an important role on the international stage in several scientific disciplines in the first part of the 20th century (Hamel, 2007, pp. 55–56; Ammon, 2006, p. 2). Nevertheless, ‘publish in English or perish’ seems to be the current norm across a wide range of disciplines (see e.g. Gnutzmann, 2008b, p. 84), though to a lesser extent in the humanities and social sciences (hereafter HSS).

In response to the increasing ‘Englishization’ (Swales, 2004, p. 52) of academia, the interest in multilingual publishing as a topic of research has grown, as is evidenced by a number of recent studies (see e.g. the special issue edited by Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2014). They look at multilingual publishing opportunities and realities in a variety of settings. However, some sociocultural and disciplinary contexts are still under-researched, as for instance the supposed ‘niches’ of multilingual publishing within the

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HSS (Weinrich, 1986, p. 186). This paper therefore explores the current status and potential future role of multilingual publishing in a subfield of the HSS, i.e. linguistics, through an interview study of German L1 scholars working at a German university.

2. Previous research and current research interest

A review of prior research reveals that the degree of Englishization differs according to (1) sociocultural context, (2) discipline, and (3) individual. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 will therefore outline the sociocultural and disciplinary context in which the present study can be situated, and Section 2.3 will account for the role of individual scholars in academia.

2.1. Sociocultural context

To participate in the international research arena, many scholars for whom English is an additional language (EAL) feel the pressure to publish in English (e.g. Lillis & Curry, 2006, p. 4) instead of disseminating their research in their mother tongue or a local language. As a consequence, conflicts or tensions between publishing in English and choosing another language for publication may arise, as was demonstrated in a number of studies (see e.g. Carli & Ammon, 2007; Flowerdew, 2013; Uzuner, 2008).

The attitudes and practices of multilingual scholars around the globe have therefore emerged as an important research topic in the past decades (Ferguson, 2007, p. 26). The first study of this kind was probably St. John (1987), who focused on the publishing experiences of 30 Spanish academics writing in English. In subsequent investigations, the debate around English for research publication purposes (ERPP) has been approached from numerous perspectives. If we zoom in on the European context, we note that several studies have been conducted in Scandinavia (e.g. Berg, Hult, & King, 2001; Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Ljosland, 2007; Gunnarsson, 2000, in Olsson & Sheridan, 2012, p. 35), in the eastern parts of Europe (e.g. Curry & Lillis, 2004; Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Lillis & Curry, 2010) and in southern European settings (e.g. Ferguson, Pérez-Llantada, & Plo, 2011; Fernández Polo & Cal Varela, 2009; Pérez-Llantada, 2007; 2012; Pérez-Llantada, Plo, & Ferguson, 2011). Altogether, these studies indicate a North-South cline across Europe, with English being more widely spread and used in the northern than in the southern parts of Europe (Ferguson, 2007, p. 10; Kuteeva, 2011, p. 5).

Germany is positioned somewhere in the middle with respect to geographic location and degree of Englishization. While several surveys, as for instance by Ammon (1991; 1998) and Skudlik (1990), demonstrate the growing significance of English in German academia, in-depth studies of individual German scholars are scarce. The PEPG project (“Publish in English or Perish in German”), recently initiated by Gnutzmann (2013), is a promising step to fill this research gap. However, it primarily aims at doing a cross-disciplinary comparison of the practices, challenges and strategies of German L1 scholars (see Gnutzmann & Rabe, 2014), and probably will not provide detailed insight into one specific discipline. Further research in this latter field of inquiry has repeatedly been called for, though (see e.g. Weinrich, 1986, p. 192; Ammon, 2010). In particular, it was pointed out that research should focus on disciplines within the HSS, for reasons resulting from disciplinary differences (Section 2.2).

2.2. Discipline

English seems to be the default language of publications within the natural sciences, whereas its status within the HSS is less obvious and more heavily contested. In total, they appear to be more plurilingual than other sciences, i.e. they show a lower degree of Englishization (e.g. Ammon, 1998, p. 52; 2006, p. 2; Hamel, 2007, pp. 57, 60).

Many factors speak in favor of this state. One relates to the typical nature of knowledge construction in these disciplines (Becher, 1989, in Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012, p. 443): In interpretative and argumentative papers, a high degree of proficiency in the target language is usually required to adequately represent and explain the study's findings (Oksaar, Skudlik, & von Stackelberg, 1989, in Ammon, 1991, p. 231; 1998, p. 88; see the statements by scholars in Olsson & Sheridan, 2012, p. 47, and in Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012, p. 439). Many HSS scholars consequently feel that their argumentation can only be clear and convincing when they write in their L1 (Skudlik, 1990, p. 226), since they place great value on ‘good language’, ‘elegant style’ and ‘nuanced expression’ (Mauranen, in Kuteeva, 2012, p. 291).

Second, topic-related reasons might explain the relatively great share of non-English publications in the HSS (see e.g. Ammon, 1991, pp. 230–231). If the topic of research is closely connected to language, then publications in that language are meaningful and often preferred (Skudlik, 1990, p. 215; see also Funk, 2010, p. 93), as for instance in linguistics and literary studies. Moreover, a link of the subject-matter to the local context appears to mitigate the trend towards English, i.e. when the object of inquiry is of local relevance, local languages seem entirely sufficient for the purpose of research dissemination (Ammon, 1991, p. 231; 1998, p. 88; 2008, p. 36; Petersen & Shaw, 2002, in Huang, 2011, p. 122). Analogously, Gnutzmann (2008b, p. 73) emphasizes that the culture-specific content might trigger the choice of a local language for publication.

Thus, there appear to be some fields in which it is still acceptable to use the L1 or local language. Weinrich (1986, p. 186) referred to them as *niches* of other-language publishing, which, however, still lack exploration (Ammon, 2008, p. 38; 2010). One of these niches are probably language-related subjects (“Philologien”, Weinrich, 1986, p. 191). These disciplines were subsumed under the category ‘language disciplines’ (“Sprachendisziplinen”) in Skudlik's (1990, p. 265) study of German scholars, and might nowadays be understood as one example of the ‘language-sensitive disciplines’ as they were called by Bolton and Kuteeva (2012, p. 444) in the Scandinavian context. Such disciplines might hence occupy an ‘exceptional’ position (“Sonderstellung”, Weinrich, 1986, p. 191) when it comes to the question of language use in publications. As a case in point, linguistics may be considered a niche of multilingual publishing as it is an inherently plurilingual discipline, dealing with different languages as its object of investigation.

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