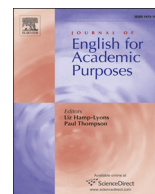




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English for research publication and dissemination in bi-/multiliterate environments: The case of Romanian academics



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Over the past decade, the use of a shared language in research communication has brought about a rich scholarly debate on the advancement of English as the common language for research publication and dissemination. This paper seeks to further the debate by reporting on the research communication practices and attitudes towards the role of English among social sciences scholars in Romania, a Central-Eastern European context that has received little research attention from this perspective. As a pilot empirical study, we examine a local scholarly community (the Bucharest University of Economic Studies) in which different uses are allocated to English, to the local (national) language and to other foreign languages and, therefore, linguistic imperialism is only a partially but not totally convincing explanatory framework. Our findings further reveal ambivalent attitudes. Although almost half of the subjects feel the dominance of English gives an unfair advantage to English native-speaking academics, almost all acknowledge the need for a shared language of research and personally feel more advantaged in their work by the use of English as a shared research language. We contrast the reported attitudes with other bi-/multiliterate research contexts and suggest policy implications at a university level.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, scholarly interest in the choice of language(s) for research communication in bi-/multiliterate academic communities has echoed broader concerns on the discrepancy between European Union policies promoting multilingualism and “the actual practice of European citizens and institutions alike, increasingly converging towards one lingua franca” (Seidlhofer, 2010, p. 356). Interest in the dynamics of research-related activities (namely, reading, writing and speaking for academic knowledge production, publication and dissemination purposes) has been framed—though not exclusively—by the following issues.

Firstly, socioeconomic and research policies have fuelled the advancement of English in what Hamel (2007, p. 67) circumscribes as “the field of production, circulation and diffusion of science”. At present, the number of impact-factor scientific journal articles (overwhelmingly often, English-medium) is an index to measure both the development of knowledge-intensive economies and the degree of international collaboration among countries. World Bank Indicators (2002) reflect the intrinsic relationship between research outcome and economic development worldwide, with the three major economies

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(US, China and Europe) taking the lead in research publication outreach. In Europe, the Green paper report (European Commission, 2007) states that “research institutions, research programme funding and research infrastructures, mobility of researchers, transnational knowledge flows and internationalization of research activities” are progress indicators for measuring competitiveness and growth. At a smaller scale, national and institutional policies putting pressure on scholars to get their research published “for faculty rewards, recruitment, and promotion as well as international evaluation systems” (Englander & Uzuner-Smith, 2013, p. 1) have also primed English-medium publications in non-Anglophone academic communities (e.g. Englander & Uzuner-Smith, 2013 in Turkey and Mexico, Pérez-Llantada, 2012 in Spain, among others), evincing what has been described as the “monolingual onslaught” (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada, & Swales, 2010, p. 647).

Secondly, concerns have been raised of the linguistic disadvantages faced by non-Anglophone academics when they publish and disseminate their research in English beyond their national frontiers. These disadvantages have, in turn, brought to the fore claims on the (un)fair participation of non-native English-speaking scholars in core scientific communities (Ammon, 1990, 2000; Uzuner, 2008). It has been argued that non-native English-speaking scholars may have their manuscripts rejected for publication in English-medium journals for language-related reasons such as paucity of expression, complexity of grammar and syntax, inappropriate handling of the English modality system and of the pragmatics of the texts (see, e.g., Kerans, 2002; Kouřilová, 1998; Pérez-Llantada, 2012). Other voices have partially contested these arguments and maintained that content-related aspects (e.g. need for further explanation, lack of originality) and methodological shortcomings, and not just language, may determine final acceptance/rejection of non-Anglophone scholars’ manuscripts in English-medium journals (Gosden, 2003; Mišák, Marusić, & Marusić, 2005).

Thirdly, research production and dissemination have also been examined in relation to aspects such as ‘Englishisation’ and resistance to it (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999) and ‘ecologies of language’ and ‘ecology of linguistic diversity’ (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2008), aspects also germane to the study reported in this paper. It has been argued that non-Anglophone academics, having witnessed how institutional policies side for English-monolingualism, face the dilemma of publishing either in English, even if they feel linguistically disadvantaged, or in their local languages, or even in both. Drawing on various sorts of evidence (e.g. qualitative data from surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups), studies on scholars’ attitudes have reported ambivalent stances to the use of English as the predominant language for academic and research exchange (Canagarajah, 2002; Carli & Ammon, 2007; Phillipson, 1992). Some academic communities have shifted to English for publication because national research assessment and promotion systems prioritize English-medium publications and/or because in doing so scholars reach an international audience (e.g., Medgyes & Kaplan, 1992; Pérez-Llantada, 2012; Truchot, 2001 for Hungarian, Spanish and French scholars respectively in the natural and physical sciences, social sciences and humanities fields). It has been argued that scholars shift to English for getting noticed and read outside their national boundaries while they keep their local languages for national publications (e.g. Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008 for Polish academics in applied linguistics and foreign language studies, psychology and medicine; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999 with Danish scholars in the humanities, social and natural sciences). A completely different context is that of universities such as those of Finland, Sweden, Norway or Switzerland, in which the “actual patterns of language choice in multilingual settings” (Haberland, 2005, p. 227) clearly reflect the advancement of English for instruction and research purposes to the detriment of the local languages (Fishman, 1970; Gunnarsson, 2000).

These various issues and pieces of evidence lend credence that bi-/multiliterate environments in Europe and elsewhere need to be further investigated. In this paper we examine some aspects of the research knowledge production and dissemination practices of an academic community in a Romanian Higher Education institution and explore attitudes towards the use of English for research purposes.

2. Context and purpose of the study

As shown in the Introduction, attitudes to English for academic knowledge production and dissemination are complex and multi-faceted. They intrinsically relate to the historical, political, sociolinguistic, educational, socioeconomic and institutional realities of each local context. While the former two realities lie outside the scope of this study for reasons of space constraints, the latter realities are sketched out below with a view to contextualising the local environment selected for the study.

Romania’s population (circa 22 million) is remarkably homogenous, with almost 90 percent of ethnic Romanians (Encyclopedia of the Nations²) and, therefore, the mother tongue of the vast majority of the population is Romanian. Similar to other Central-Eastern Europeans (see, e.g. Medgyes & Kaplan, 1992), Romanians have always attached great importance to the learning of foreign languages. The EU report *Key Data on Teaching Languages at Schools in Europe* states that almost all students enrolled in general upper secondary education in Romania learn at least two languages, and English is the top language taught, followed by French, German, Italian and Spanish (EACEA, 2012, p. 62).³ According to the EU report *Europeans and their languages* (Eurobarometer, 2005, pp. 28–32), for 87% of the Romanians, foreign languages are useful for personal and career development, and English first, followed by French and German, are considered the most useful languages for personal and career development.

² <<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Europe/Romania.html>>.

³ <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/143EN.pdf>.

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