

Charleston Conference 2020, 04 November

Panel “Lively Discussion”,

with Anthony Watkinson (CIBER Research), Jie Xu (Wuhan University) and Margo Bargheer

Thank you for having me at the Charleston Conference 2020. My name is Margo Bargheer. I am in charge of the department for electronic publishing at Göttingen University library, a rather large university for German standards. This means, I am from the German-speaking language area. German is ranked among the 20 most spoken languages of the world, in four German-speaking countries and in 14 other countries as a minority language, such as the Deutschamerikaner for instance in Germantown, a town with a specific meaning for American history.

Until World War II German ranked among the most important science language. In certain fields such as chemistry, physics or philosophy it was the leading language. We know the reasons why this predominant role of German ceased to exist. Yet, due to the size of the language area the vast majority of teaching at German universities is done in German. This is despite the fact that the publishing for the specialised peer-to-peer communication is overproportionally bent towards the English language. For instance there are more native Spanish speakers in the world than English speakers. Yet, the main Lingua Franca in science and its infrastructures is English. And the fact that a widely accepted Lingua Franca for science exist, is convenient and necessary. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to convene hear and have a discussion among ourselves.

But:

- English as the Lingua Franca in scientific communication favours the large commercial players in the field. The oligopolists require English as the predominant language for their business case. They can't be blamed for that, after all they are operating on the stock market and have an obligation to seek profits for their shareholders.
- Not challenging English as the dominating language narrows the scientific discourse as a lot of research stays outside of the usual discovery channels, without even being noticed
- We run the danger of running out of words and terms. If biology f.e. is only taught and published in English, a smaller language area such as Danish might lose the ability to verbalise biological concepts in their own language, meaning that biology teachers in schools might get into difficulties to explain children such concepts. This is an example for the transfer of science into society, into public. We need local and national languages to make sure such a transfer takes place. Not all scientific advice is as easy to verbalise like the COVID19 prevention “wash your hands”. In Malayalam that would be “Basuh tangan andah”.

So, what can we do, as librarians, as those maintaining the scientific infrastructures?

- We can acknowledge that the support for multilingualism doesn't only serve folkloristic needs to safeguard cultural traits. If you decide to subscribe to more Spanish-language journals, you not only support those readers and authors, but you make sure that the research done in these language areas becomes visible. [a lot of research on Zika virus f.e. is published only in Portuguese language]. So it's about WHOM we support and WHAT we support.

- Check in on our blind spots. We all take our language familiarities and preferences for granted, that's normal But we can always check, whom and what we exclude with our normal ways of doing things.
- And those of you coming from a non-Anglophone country: try to foster scholar-led and library publishing. Those are publishing channels that can offer alternatives and help to emancipate from the domination of the "international publishers".

If we don't challenge the status quo we run into the risk of what Vandana Shiva described as the monoculture of the minds. The large players dominating our scientific communication rely on such a stream-lined monoculture. But a monoculture of the mind is not beneficial for scientific communication. Our way to do science should rest on bibliodiversity.



In 2018

- 27,000 journals included in the Web of Science -most of which publish in English.
- 9,000 peer-reviewed scholarly journals are being published in other languages, with French (3,500), German (2,700), Spanish (2,300) and Chinese (1400) contributing the highest numbers.

(Fostering Bibliodiversity in Scholarly Communications)
Kathleen Shearer



"The disqualification of local or national languages in academic publishing is the most important - and often forgotten - factor that prevents societies from using and taking advantage of research done where they live."

#InAllLanguages

Coronavirus and Local Languages: How do you say, "wash your hands"?

COVID-19 doesn't care what language you speak.

All of us are at risk. But millions of people who speak lesser-known languages don't have a *single* resource on COVID-19 yet. The information gap is enormous - and lives are at stake.



<https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/health>

Links

Workshop on Multilingualism

https://zenodo.org/communities/oaspa2020_workshopmultilingualism

Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism

<https://www.helsinki-initiative.org/>

OPERAS Working Group on Multilingualism

<https://operas.hypotheses.org/aboutoperas/working-groups/multilingualism-wg>