Editors' Gloss: The Problem with Monolingualism in Academic Knowledge Production

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Despite the fact that there are ~7,000 known, living languages in use around the world, academic research is communicated primarily in English (Neylon and Kramer 2022). Reflecting on research conducted by Daphne van Weijen (2012), science communicator Adam Huttner-Koros (2015) writes, "English is now so prevalent [in research] that in some non-English speaking countries, like Germany, France, and Spain, English-language academic papers outnumber publications in the country's own language several times over. In the Netherlands, one of the more extreme examples, this ratio is an astonishing 40 to 1." What, then, are the implications of having a lingua franca for research? Shouldn't a lingua franca make it easier to learn from each other, to build on each other's ideas if everyone is reading and writing in the same language? As Huttner-Kronos and Sean Perera (2016) point out, "communicating science in English promotes . . . norms of describing and defining the natural world that are intrinsic to the English language, and ideologies that are conversant to its native speakers." Language is, in so many ways, world shaping; language can define one's experience through naming, metaphor, reflection, representation. Communicating all research in one single language means that language shapes the research too. Language shapes what is possible to express, contextualize, or reveal. If research is primarily communicated in English, that research is bound by English-language contexts and worldviews. Furthermore, among the contexts influenced by language are equally dominant publishing models and structures. Through language dominance, such a hegemonic system promotes epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). Moreover, privileging the English language in scholarly communication marginalizes and disadvantages researchers who are not first-language English speakers, or not English-language speakers at all, both reinscribing a colonial framework for knowledge production and limiting diverse academic research development. Pragmatically, the use of English as a de facto lingua franca impacts even the time required to carry out foundational research activities such as article reading (Amano et al. 2023). Even a multilingual setting where, for instance, English, French, and Spanish coexist still reifies imperial orderings of the world.

Increasing monolingualism in academic knowledge production certainly affects individual authors and readers whose first or most comfortable language is not English. But there are impacts on a broader, more systemic level as well. In 2020, a workshop titled Disrupting Digital Monolingualism panned out of the academic ecosystem to consider how pervasive language homogeneity is across online spaces and digital tools. Drawing on the work of Anasuya Sengupta of the *Whose Knowledge?* campaign, the workshop's resulting report demonstrates that less than 10% of the world's languages are represented online, in published material. Moreover, users from just 10 languages represent over 75% of total users on the internet, worldwide, with most users operating in either English or Mandarin Chinese (Spence 2021, 9). This is a clear example of language dominance and language bias. Such language dominance in digital spaces is especially concerning when one considers how central the internet and digital tools have become in our contemporary world. The *Disrupting Digital Monolingualism* report quotes Mandana Seyfeddinipur (Endangered Languages Archive), where she argues that language diversification in the online world is "our political responsibility (to ensure linguistic justice), our ethical responsibility (to provide diversity support), a historical/humanitarian responsibility and an academic responsibility (to guarantee information integrity and reproducibility)" (Spence 2021, 10–11). In order to combat digital monolingualism, and the loss of culture and marginalization it provokes, workshop participants pointed to the critical need for language revitalization, equitable global digitization, automatic translation, and multilingual research publishing and sharing.

The participants of the Disrupting Digital Monolingualism workshop are far from the only voices speaking out about this issue. Scholars dedicated to science communication have been closely engaged in the matter (Harding 2015; Amano, González-Varo, and Sutherland 2016; Sivertsen 2018), as have critical geography scholars, as surveyed by Anssi Paasi (2015). In 2019, a group of signatories announced the Helsinki Initiative in Multilingualism, a commitment to, among other activities, "promote language diversity in research assessment, evaluation, and funding systems" (Helsinki Initiative 2019). Moreover, there has been a recent surge in digital humanities scholarship—a field in which we, the co-editors of this special issue, have been closely involved—about the necessity to foster more multilingual approaches. One of the co-editors, Élika Ortega (2019), argues in earlier work that the purposeful facilitation of *zones of contact* between practitioners from different regions who work in different languages would support a more diverse ecology of knowledges for digital humanities as a field, critical for its ongoing sustenance and evolution. Thea Pitman and Claire Taylor (2017) propose in a *Digital Humanities Quarterly* article that an interdisciplinary approach that brings together modern languages and digital humanities would benefit and enrich both disciplines. These conversations are becoming so widespread and urgent that a Multilingual Digital Humanities group formed, which describes itself as "a loosely-organized

international network of scholars using digital humanities tools and methods on languages other than English [who] work in many environments, including academia, libraries, museums, and beyond, but share the goal of raising the visibility of scholarship in and about many languages" (Multilingual Digital Humanities, n.d.), and Lorella Viola and Paul Spence curate much of this work in an edited collection released in 2024 titled *Multilingual Digital Humanities*. Increasingly, there is an understanding that a monolingual discipline is both exclusionary and artificially delimits the potential for new and innovative knowledge production, a feeling that reverberates in the wider humanities publishing context.

Multilingualism as an Editorial Praxis

We set out to edit this special issue with an aim to collect and curate a set of reflections that illuminated the current state of multilingual publishing and demonstrated the actionable advances in multilingual projects. We also wanted to push forward our own editorial praxis and that of the journal. Yet querying the stakes of monolingualism in scholarly communications and attempting to counter its sticky habits and self-perpetuating models are much more challenging than initially appeared.

As we have learned by working on this special issue, multilingual publishing is pragmatically challenging. Outreach to publicize a Call for Proposals (CfP) is often limited by established networks that may not come into contact during the life cycle of the journal issue. *JEP*'s network and outreach, as a journal supported by the University of Michigan, and with previous editors from the United States and the United Kingdom, is, as we have to acknowledge, firmly situated in an Anglophone context, historically and presently. Likely prompted by the limitations of our own CfP, which was released only in English with an invitation for responses in multiple languages and for translations, scholars who study publishing in a variety of languages and contexts primarily chose to write in English with one exception (and one additional translation). We deduce that there are various reasons for this English language dominance. As Johannes Sibeko and Mmasibidi Setaka outline in their article in this special issue, authors can be wary of limited audience reach, as well as available editorial labor (including peer review), when publishing in a lower-resourced language. Christos Mais outlines in his article that authors are aware of how the fetishization of metrics in the academic world favors publication in English-language indexed journals. Moreover, as Bettina Schnell demonstrates in her study of plurilingual fields such as translation and interpretation studies, scholars' perception of relevance and prestige can often hinge on English-language publishing. In retrospect, however, we also believe that publishing our CfP in English only may have signaled to authors that they should respond with articles in

English too. Translating the CfP into the languages *JEP* is able to support might have yielded different results.

Yet translation, though possible, can be costly and labor intensive and can lengthen the production process of individual articles and issues as a whole; there is only so much capacity for activities such as copyediting and proof setting in multiple languages. Viola and Spence (2024, 3) grapple with a similar tension in the introduction to their recent (English-language) collection, *Multilingual Digital Humanities*: "We are aware of the contradiction of proposing a book in English to counteract the predominant bias towards English. We argue, however, that this book will in fact disrupt [digital humanities (DH)] monolingualism by raising the visibility of DH theory and practice in and about languages other than English and by providing other-than-English perspectives in this English-centric DH landscape."

Despite seeking to counter the hegemonic system well sedimented in scholarly communication, at times it has felt like the system reifies its colonial epistemes through its infrastructures and ideologies. Even if we did not succeed in curating a fully multilingual offering, editing this special issue is a first step toward our own awareness of the linguistic bias in our publishing practices. It has also provoked us to consider how to counteract academic linguistic bias and to explore with the University of Michigan Publishing team how we can adjust and enhance editorial workflows to support multilingualism within *JEP*. As such, we take inspiration from Roopika Risam's call in her article in this special issue for journal editors to reflect on their own role to "facilitate linguistic diversity and equity in scholarly communications."

In preparing the call for papers for this special issue of *JEP*, we asked a similar question to our prospective authors: *How do we integrate and practice the value of multilingualism into a more equitable and epistemically just scholarly communication and publishing system?* This query provides a preliminary theoretical lens through which this issue may be perceived. It is also a question that we will continue to ask ourselves long after this special issue is published.

Contents

The first set of articles in this special issue grapples directly with the (editorial) politics of multilingual publishing and translation. In "Another Workflow Is Possible: Building Trust and Relinquishing Control for Multilingual Digital Publishing Futures," **Roopika Risam** recounts her and Jen Guiliano's experience editing bilingual special issues of *Reviews in Digital Humanities* as a central strategy to realize the journal's goal of creating a welcoming space for minoritized communities. In addition to outlining the changes to production and editorial workflows enacted to facilitate bilingual

publishing, Risam traces the history of multilingual journal publishing back to the 19th century to effectively dislodge the status quo of English as a lingua franca. Importantly, Risam's text has compelled us to examine our own editorial praxis and further reflect on the challenges of multilingual editing. **Rebekka Kiesewetter** considers the internationalization of scholarship in her article, with a focus on transient, multilingual, discursive communities. For Kiesewetter, there is deep value in facilitating a space for linguistic diversity in otherwise more rigid, Anglocentric academic institutions. **Christos Mais** demonstrates in "Publish (in English) or Perish: Greek Academia and the Imposition of English Language" how the Greek state's imposition of publishing in English is integrally connected to Anglophone academic imperialism and a fetishization of metrics. He argues instead for multilingual open access publishing and a local, societally relevant knowledge production that hinges less on individualistic, academic advancement.

Many of the articles in this collection argue for the importance of publishing research from situated language communities and fields of study, including Mais's. **Reema Chowdhary** considers multilingual publishing and scholarship in India in her article. Chowdhary studies the linguistic diversity of India and how such diversity plays out across different forms of academic knowledge production in the country. In "Challenges in Intellectualizing Sesotho for Use in Academic Publications," **Johannes Sibeko** and **Mmasibidi Setaka** discuss the concept of *intellectualization* in regard to the South African language Sesotho. Intellectualization, in this context, refers to the ability to use a language for all purposes, including casual daily conversations and more technical or theoretical academic discussion. As referenced earlier, Sibeko and Setaka ruminate on the many reasons why people do not publish in low-resourced or marginalized languages such as Sesotho, including concerns around a lack of eligible editors or peer reviewers in a specific language; that research published in a marginalized language may not be included in academic databases, thereby reducing discoverability; and that digital humanities or natural language processing tools may not function with a text written in a marginalized language. **Bettina Schnell**'s article "Multilingual Scholarly Publishing: Exploring the Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences of Plurilingual Scholars in Foreign Language Publication" surveys translation and interpretation studies scholars to examine how a field that would seem ideally fitted to multilingual publishing also experiences the imperative to publish in English. Echoing themes explored by Sibeko and Setaka, Schnell's study sheds further light on scholars' motivations to publish in English including the possibility to increase the visibility and impact of their research, the fact that many top-tier journals only accept manuscripts in English, and even a perceived lower prestige of journals publishing in local languages.

The pragmatics of multilingual publishing is explored in a selection of articles that look at specific case studies of books, journals, and platforms and the authors' experiences with and reflections on multilingual publishing and translation. In "Collective

Translation as Forking (分岔)," **Shih-yu Hsu** (徐詩雨), **Winnie Soon** (孫詠怡), **Tzu-Tung Lee** (李紫彤), **Chia-Lin Lee** (李佳霖), and **Geoff Cox** (傑夫考克斯) reflect on their experiences of collaboratively writing and translating a book as if they are forking software. They consider the questions this approach poses in relation to the politics of cultural translation (i.e., appropriation, attribution, and equity). The authors argue that translation as a collective practice of re-use and forking based around queer-feminist, intersectional, and anti-colonial practices can challenge academic translation and publishing conventions. In "¿Qué tan equilibrado está el multilingüismo en la publicación científica? Un análisis global desde la base de datos del Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)/How Balanced Is Multilingualism in Scholarly Journals? A Global Analysis Using the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) Database," **Gimena del Rio Riande** and **Ivonne Lujano Vilchis** utilize Gunnar Sivertsen's notion of "balanced multilingualism" to analyze the DOAJ database.[1] Del Rio Riande and Lujano Vilchis uncover that, despite some increase in Spanish, Portuguese, and Indonesian publishing, the large majority of journals in the DOAJ database remain heavily English-centric. The authors also suggest that multilingual publishing takes place primarily in the periphery of the geopolitical centers of academic publishing, while such centers continue to favor the English language. In "Sustainable Growth of Multilingual Open Publishing Projects: The Case of *Programming Historian*," **Riva Quiroga**, **Anisa Hawes**, **Anna-Maria Sichani**, and **Charlotte Chevrie** sketch the multilingual approach to publishing implemented by the *Programming Historian* suite of digital humanities methods journals. They explain how growing a multilingual publishing infrastructure in line with their values as a project exposed some of the challenges and complexities that arise with professionalization and a move away from relying solely on volunteer labor.

In "Dealing with Multilingualism and Non-English Content in Open Repositories: Challenges and Perspectives," **Christophe Dony**, **Iryna Kuchma**, and **Milica Ševkušić** focus on the role of open repositories in facilitating multilingual publishing. Their article reflects on the recommendations in the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR) Task Force on Supporting Multilingualism and non-English Content in Repositories report. The authors argue that open repositories could implement and promote multilingual publishing at scale; however, such an endeavor cannot happen in a vacuum and requires changes in broader digital research infrastructure to be successful. In "Research Assessment Systems and the Effects of Publication Language: Manifestations in the Directory of Open Access Books," **Ronald Snijder** and **Danny Kingsley** examine the English-language bias of research assessment and corporate-owned bibliometric databases (e.g., Scopus and Clarivate), which are reducing multilingualism and bibliodiversity. They argue that, although patterns of exclusion are also visible in a

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1. This article is published in its original version in Spanish and in English translation, by request of the authors.

non-corporate open access environment, open book infrastructures such as the OAPEN Library and the DOAB offer an alternative and can assist with issues of linguistic and participatory equity.

Technical tensions also come to the fore when implementing multilingual publishing, including in production workflows. Co-authors **Quinn Dombrowski**, **Manish Goregaokar**, **Ben Joeng (Yang)**, and **Abeera Kamran** consider how major technological shifts in publishing have impacted multilingual publishing in "Encoding Multilingualism: Technical Affordances of Multilingual Publication from Manuscripts to Unicode and OpenType." They focus especially on the evolution of multilingual computing and encoding standards over time, including Unicode. In "Illegible Multiculturalisms: Making, Digesting, and Translating Empanadas and Doenjang-jjigae within Digital Monolingualism," **Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley** and **Matthew Jungsuk Howard** present a cooking/writing project to further examine these technical tensions. The authors propose the concept of "illegible multiculturalisms" to underscore the dissonance between multiculturalism as a utopia made possible by technology that smooths out the differences it acknowledges and to query the potential found in the partial legibility of experiences outside of the normative ones. Illegibility, for the authors, can ultimately be an empowering position to resist the normativity of digital monolingualism in favor of a plurality of multiculturalisms. **Sarah Tew** and **Melissa Jerome** offer a detailed account of a project's creation in "*Recetas de las Américas*: A Case Study in Hugo Static Site Generator for Bilingual Web Publishing."[2] Their study reveals a set of critical considerations—scholarly, practical, and technical—weighted in specific ways when dealing with more than one language. Tew and Jerome's article joins a growing list of scholarship devoted to the potential of static sites to transform entrenched academic publishing practices.

Finally, in her postscript "Multilingualism in Scholarly Publishing: How Far Can Technology Take Us and What Else Can We Do?" **Lynne Bowker** provides a summative reflection piece on the intersection between emerging technologies and multilingual scholarship. She acknowledges the potential of automated translation to increase multilingualism but argues that the technology is not quite advanced enough yet. Undoubtedly, as this collection reveals, there is still a long road to travel in the quest for a more multilingual scholarly communication system.

Taken together, the pieces in this special issue speak to the varying facets of multilingual scholarship and publishing in the 21st century. As Paasi (2015, 510) astutely summarizes, "*languages* condition the making of scientific knowledge. Indeed, there is an uneven geopolitics of knowledge embedded in communication. Academic fields largely exist through publication forums that are structured asymmetrically in global space." In editing this special issue, we aim to draw attention to the linguistic production of

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2. This article is published in its original version in English and in Spanish translation, by request of the authors.

knowledge in academia and add our voice to the chorus of those calling for a more diverse, multilingual scholarly communication ecosystem.

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