How Balanced Is Multilingualism in Scholarly Journals? A Global Analysis Using the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) Database[1]

Abstract: The concept of balanced *multilingualism* aims to establish "instruments for documenting and measuring the use of language for all the different purposes in research, thereby providing the basis for the monitoring of further globalization of research in a more responsible direction" (Sivertsen, 2018, p. 2). However, an analysis of the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ), the largest database of fully open access journals produced in 130 countries, does not show balanced multilingualism in the global landscape. The DOAJ promotes linguistic diversity by indexing journals in 80 languages, including dialectal variations, indigenous languages, and languages spoken by less than 50,000 speakers (eg, Aragonese). In this article, we present the main trends related to the languages in which journals publish their full-text contributions to respond to this unbalanced landscape. We conducted a descriptive analysis of the 17,564 journals listed in the DOAJ (July 2023). Our findings show that 65% (11,331) of the journals listed publish only in one language, and 35% (6,234) publish in two, three, and up to 16 languages. Our research also shows that 50% of the multilingual journals are based in Asia, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

1. Introduction

The use of English as a global language for scientific publication brings together several non-minor issues: the need for the global reach of research as a consequence of the widespread use of the Internet and digital tools for the written communication of science and the internationalization of academic institutions. This context reveals both new collaborative practices from the participation of researchers in international projects to the pressure of global impact of scientific work (Balula & Leão, 2019; Kulczycki et al., 2020). This *de facto use* of English has consequences that not only affect the communicative strategies that academics have to deploy in their research practices,

1. Please note that, unless otherwise stated, this article has been translated from Spanish into English using a combination of automated translation and human, editorial correction.

but, ultimately, it ends up granting a place of superiority to one language over others. In the words of Eamon Costello:

> . . . the pre-eminence of English hence appears to be edging out other languages in an increasing trend. It is assembling an unassailable claim to be the language of legitimation, the language of science and scholarship—the language of knowledge and ultimately, of truth. (2020, p. 3)[2]

This statement can be verified in the numbers derived from the work of Neylon and Kramer (2022), where, using persistent identifiers (DOI - digital object identifier) from CrossRef, they assigned 122 million academic texts their languages of publication, thus concluding that English continues to be the dominant language of scientific communication globally and in all disciplines, although Spanish, Portuguese and Indonesian demonstrate a growth during the 2020–2022 biennium.[3]

In this article, we use the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) database[4] as an object of exploration and analysis to reflect and problematize the monolingualism and multilingualism strategies of the 17,564 journals indexed there up to April 9, 2022 while seeking to answer the following questions:

> How balanced and distributed is multilingualism in open access academic journals?
> What are the languages most used by open access journals to communicate knowledge?
> What is the geographical distribution of multilingual journals?
> What can DOAJ data contribute to the discussion about asymmetries in the production and multilingual circulation of knowledge?

We are aware that multilingualism is a complex phenomenon and here we only address it in the context of scientific publication based on various premises. The first one is that of *balanced multilingualism* (Sivertsen, 2018), a concept that recognizes the importance of fully encouraging and sustaining linguistic diversity in academic communication in order to foster greater balance between the demands of international excellence—which requires English as a language of scientific communication—and the local relevance of the research—which is generally expressed in the official languages of each country. The second premise is that of *epistemic diversity* as the possibility of developing diverse and

2. Translation by the authors.
3. Portuguese went from around 7,000 results captured in 2000 to more than 150,000 in 2021, reflecting the rise of Brazil as a research power and, most likely, the effectiveness of SciELO as a dissemination platform during that period. Likewise, the Indonesian language shows massive growth, likely reflecting in part better coverage of CrossRef metadata during this period along with the massive growth of editorial efforts in Indonesia (Neylon & Kramer, 2022).
4. The *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) website is accessible from https://doaj.org/.

rich epistemic apparatuses that could help in the construction of knowledge as a distributed, socially legitimized and situated phenomenon (Harding, 2015; Gobbo & Russo, 2020; Fiormonte & del Rio Riande, 2022). The latter also takes up the notion of epistemic injustice developed by Fricker (2007). In summary, we consider that the creation of epistemic diversity must also be supported by the use of a language as an instrument of construction, communication, circulation and legitimation of knowledge.

2. English, a *lingua unica* for scientific publication

As Philipson (1992) already reflected on well in his day, after the Second World War the idea of a neutral language for science and diplomacy was part of the debate between the winners of the language battle. In this way, English was arbitrarily positioned as the *de facto option* considered more efficient and global than another language and,[5] therefore, in many contexts, it came to be considered a *lingua franca* (Cogo, 2020). However, it is evident that it is a simple fallacy to think that English was, is or could be today a *lingua franca*, much less even for scientific publication, since at no time was an agreement, verbal or tacit, established between institutions or people to consider it as such (Ostler et al., 2005).[6]

The problem of uncritical adoption of a *lingua franca* in academic publishing has been widely discussed (Amano et al., 2016; Balula & Leão, 2021; Fiormonte, 2021; Gobbo & Russo, 2020; MoChridhe, 2019; Canagarajah, 2020; Siversten, 2018; Soler, 2021). More specifically, various critical studies point out the disadvantages of the phenomenon of *Englishification* of academic publishing globally, with special emphasis on the social sciences and humanities (Balula & Leão, 2019; Fiormonte, 2021; Kulczycki et al., 2020). These works warn that we are not making use of any *lingua franca*, but rather we are only appealing to communication in a *lingua unica,* which especially harms actors who do not usually use English to communicate regularly, from the authors and editors of publications to the readers themselves. In particular, we highlight the recent study by Amano et al. (2023), with more than 900 participating researchers from the area of environmental sciences, where the financial and time costs invested by non-native authors to publish in English were calculated. This study showed that even one of the priority activities for writing and publishing, which is reading articles, can take non-native people almost twice as long (91%) as it does for native speakers. In the

5. The dispute between German and French as the language of scientific publication before the First World War is well known (Gordin, 2015).

6. The fact that, as Gobbo and Russo (2020) maintain, "advocates of English-only policy typically put forward instrumentalist arguments; for instance, English is already the de facto vehicular language of science since the end of the Second World War" [translation by the authors], only underlines that the character of frankness has been given by the aforementioned socio-historical circumstances and not by an agreement between parties.

case of writing, it can take them 50% more time than native speakers, and the disadvantages also include greater financial and time investment in copyediting manuscripts (Amano et al., 2023; Rodríguez Medina, 2019). Finally, a crucial piece of information is the article rejection rate, which is higher among non-native speakers, often due to reasons related to language proficiency.

These results coincide with the observation of Gobbo and Russo (2020), who suggest a term to name this phenomenon: the *Non-Native English Tax,* that is, those resources that non-native people pay in terms of money and time when preparing their manuscripts so that they are considered sufficiently adequate by academic journals, mainly those published in countries with a high level of English language proficiency. This phenomenon has also been referred to in the context of open access to publications as a *hidden paywall*, which inhibits the participation of authors from the Global South (MoChridhe, 2019).

The barriers shown in these studies are an example of what MoChridhe (2019) and Soler (2021) call *linguistic injustice*, or those asymmetries that arise when some group of speakers has advantages over others simply by having the linguistic repertoire linked to citizenship acquired by birth (Shachar, 2009, cited by Gobbo & Russo, 2020). Paraphrasing Rodríguez Medina (2019), what ends up happening in this context of linguistic injustice is that the *loci* of enunciation in scientific publication are hierarchized. This is why, as we said above, various biases are frequently observed in peer review, and in publication in general, related to the level of language proficiency on the part of the academic authors. Some of these biases have to do with reviewers' and editors' perception of the level of language proficiency or, more particularly, how closely a manuscript is written to *native English* as a sign of good quality (Lujano Vilchis et al., 2023; Politzer-Ahles et al., 2020). In conclusion, under these biased parameters, native authors will always have a greater advantage, and, given that the majority of the world's population does not speak English, the requirement for a level of proficiency in this language only reinforces the global asymmetries in the circulation of knowledge. The focus on language proficiency even emphasizes discrimination in academic publishing, which, as expected, mostly affects academics from the Global South.

3. The DOAJ as a corpus for the study of multilingualism in academic publishing

The *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) is a global directory that, since 2003, indexes open access journals of any discipline, regardless of the language of publication. This independent, non-profit organization has also established itself as a list of journals that adhere to quality criteria established by academic associations and scientific

societies such as the *Committee on Publication Ethics* (COPE), the *Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association* (OASPA) and the *World Association of Medical Editors* (WAME). The DOAJ list of indexing criteria is currently considered by various initiatives, such as Plan S, as a standard for publishing and to ensure that open access journals are reliable. These criteria include basic aspects such as having a website where the journal makes its full-text content accessible in the publication language(s) that the editorial team decides. If the site is available in several languages, the information provided to users must be the same in all of them (DOAJ, 2022).

One of the objectives of this directory is to increase the visibility and reputation of scholarly journals around the world and, in so doing, to contribute to combating inequities in the global distribution of knowledge. Following that mission, DOAJ is a global community, with operational team members, ambassadors, and volunteers living in 45 countries around the world and speaking 36 different languages (DOAJ, 2023b). Notably, editors, ambassadors, and volunteers are grouped by the languages they are fluent in, ensuring that the review of indexing requests is fair and accurate. Since local publishing cultures are intimately linked to linguistic practices such as the regional use of certain terms or the translation of content, the diversity of the DOAJ team makes it possible to provide the community with a reliable list that reflects the multilingualism of the publishing ecosystem.

DOAJ promotes linguistic diversity by indexing journals in 80 languages, including dialectal variations, indigenous languages and languages spoken by fewer than 50,000 speakers (e.g., Aragonese). The directory uses standardized lists of currencies and languages and countries according to ISO 639–2. As a signatory to the *Helsinki Initiative* (Helsinki Initiative, 2019), DOAJ strives to ensure the indexing of more journals in languages other than English. For this reason, the directory has established different cooperation agreements with projects and consortia in different regions for the promotion of linguistic diversity. For example, in Latin America, the working agreements with Redalyc, Scielo and Latindex, which have been ongoing since 2020, stand out, as well as the financial and dissemination support of two Colombian public universities, the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Other examples include the collaboration with the Canadian organization Érudit for the promotion of publishing in French and the Ambassadors program, which seeks to make open access publishing in the Global South more visible and thus promote linguistic diversity.

To date, more than 20,000 peer-reviewed open access journals are indexed in the directory.[7] As Figure 1 indicates, of this large set, almost half, some 9,873 journals, are

7. The data of all journals are open and searchable via API and downloadable in spreadsheet format. Thus, the DOAJ is also a freely searchable database, an issue that favors research work related to data mining on open journal publishing on a global scale.

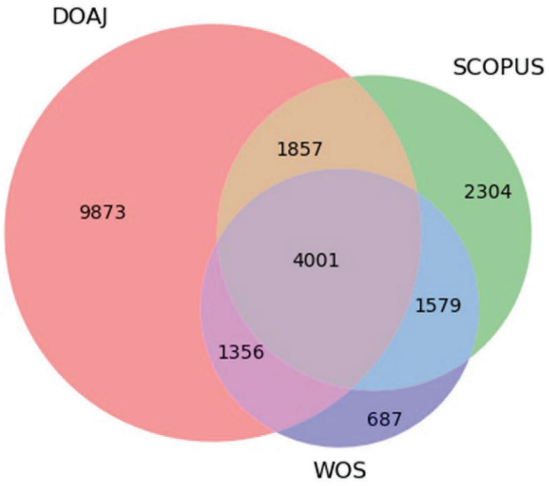

Figure 1. Venn diagram showing the overlap of journals between DOAJ, Web of Science and SCOPUS, showing that DOAJ has indexed some 9,873 journals that are not in Scopus or Web of Science. Source: https://blog.doaj.org/2023/07/06/doaj-is-confirmed-as-a-unique-platform-for-many-open-access-journals-and-a-key-index-for-african-journals/

not in Scopus or *Web of Science* (DOAJ, 2023a). Added to this is the fact that most of these 9,873 journals belong to areas underrepresented in these two databases, especially regions such as Africa and Latin America.

In a first work of analysis of the languages of the journals indexed in the DOAJ, del Rio Riande (2020) showed that the *multilingual zones* of global scientific publication were in the so-called *peripheral zones of* the geopolitical centers of scientific publication and that,[8] in contrast, the publishing centers with the greatest amount of resources for scientific publication showed a deliberate use of English as the *only language*. Although that work was exploratory in nature and did not delve into the precise numbers for each country or region, two years later, we reviewed the 17,564 journals included in the DOAJ

8. The concept of a *peripheral zone* is not without problems. As proposed by del Rio Riande (2020) and Lujano Vilchis et al. (2022), in this paper we follow the idea of a *peripheral zone* in scientific publication and language already deployed in Beigel and Salatino (2015): "A language and a style of writing became associated, little by little, with the standard of measurement of the quality of American scientific knowledge. And these evaluation criteria were 'universalized' on the basis of the citation indexes, the hierarchization of journals in English and the impact factor established by the *Institute for Scientific Information* . . .. Around ISI-WoS, a sort of primitive accumulation of scientific prestige was forged that benefited certain geographical areas, language groups and disciplines, while at the same time widening the distance with 'peripheral' areas increasingly devoid of 'international' recognition". In Isasi and del Rio Riande (2022), they study how this scenario of inequalities impacts on the use of citations of English-speaking authors by Spanish-speaking authors in the field of digital humanities.

up to April 2022, and found that 67% published only in English, 65% were monolingual, and only 35% published in two or more languages (Lujano Vilchis et al., 2022). This research supported the data of del Rio Riande (2020) and showed, in turn, that 50% of multilingual journals are published in Eastern Europe, Asia or Latin America, with some exceptions such as Spain. The numbers below follow the theoretical framework and the methodology of these works and seek to improve the analysis of the results.

4.1 Methodology

To carry out the work presented here, on April 9, 2022, we downloaded the exportable version of the journal metadata in CSV (*public data dump*) format from the directory's website, which at that time contained 17,564 journals. The file includes basic information on each of the indexed journals, as well as data on copyright policies and content licensing, funding model and peer review and governance, among others. Specifically, we used information on the language(s) in which the journal accepts manuscripts, as well as the country of publication of each. At the date we extracted the data, DOAJ listed journals from 129 countries.

We performed a descriptive analysis of the 17,564 journals using Microsoft Excel version 16.81. For language classification, we used those listed in the directory. We considered as multilingual all journals that publish in more than one language. It is important to clarify how DOAJ collects data on the languages of publication in journals. When the publisher submits a journal they fill out the application form, they must provide the name of the main language in which manuscripts are received. The editor selects the language(s) of their journal from a list of 80; if one is not on the list, they can request its inclusion through the directory helpdesk. It is also worth mentioning that the main language that can be selected by the editor is not necessarily the one most commonly used to publish the full text of articles (Bosman et al., 2021). However, when DOAJ editors evaluate requests for indexing, they make sure that the journal has published at least one article in the languages they declare. By doing so, the directory ensures greater accuracy of the information available in the database. In fact, it is worth mentioning that, as part of our responsibilities as DOAJ ambassadors in Latin America, we ourselves have collaborated in reviewing indexing forms for journals from this and other regions of the world.

4.2 Results

DOAJ offers a simple, clean, selected and open approach to open data on multilingualism in scholarly publishing. However, an analysis of the directory does not show

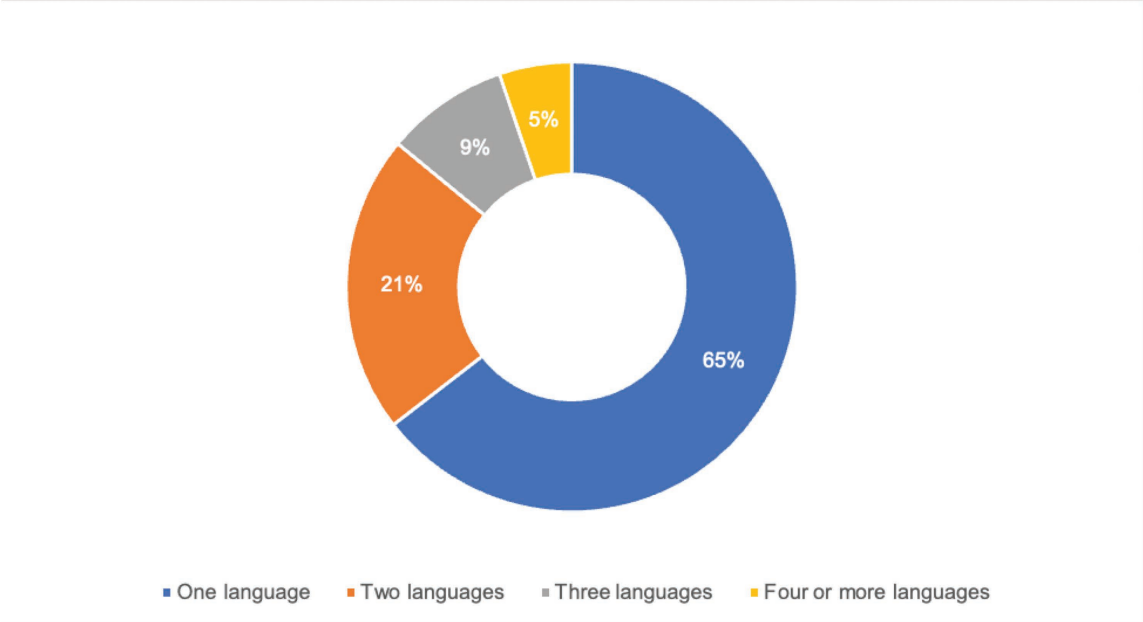

Figure 2. Journals in DOAJ by number of languages of publication. Source: Own elaboration

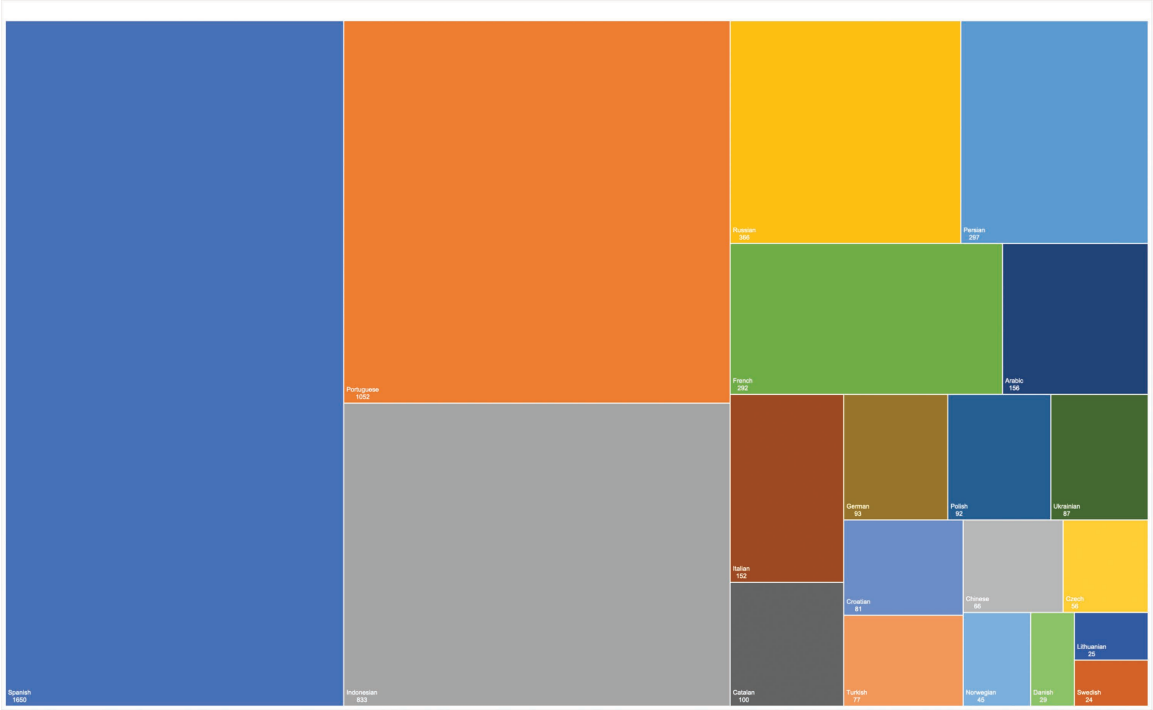

Figure 3. Most frequent languages of publication in DOAJ journals (excluding English). Source: Own elaboration

any balanced multilingualism in the overall scientific publishing landscape. Figure 2 presents the proportion of monolingual and multilingual journals. As can be seen, 65% (11,331) of those listed publish in only one language and 35% (6,234) publish in two or more. The journal with the highest number of languages is *Science in School* (ISSN 1818–0353/1818–0361), published by the European intergovernmental organization *EIROforum*, which publishes articles in up to 29 languages.

Almost all bilingual journals (98%) have English as the language of publication. Only 320 journals report two languages of publication where English is not included, being, in this last group, those that publish in Spanish and Portuguese the most frequent (223), mainly due to the vast production of journals from Ibero-American countries, which represents almost 25% (4,297) of the total number of publications indexed in the DOAJ.

Interestingly, 86% of multilingual journals do not charge article processing charges or APCs. This speaks to the investment of editorial and financial resources that university publishers —mainly responsible for the so-called diamond *journals*— could be allocating to the production of journals aimed at audiences speaking languages other than English. As a study by Bosman et al. (2021) shows, these journals are generally published in countries peripheral to the mainstream centers of academic production. Eastern Europe and Latin America are the regions where these journals are most commonly found (p. 7).

Figure 3 shows the 20 most frequent languages of publication other than English. In congruence with the high proportion of open access journals published in Ibero-American countries, Spanish and Portuguese are the most frequent languages after English, with 1,650 (9%) and 1,052 (5%) journals respectively. They are followed in order of frequency

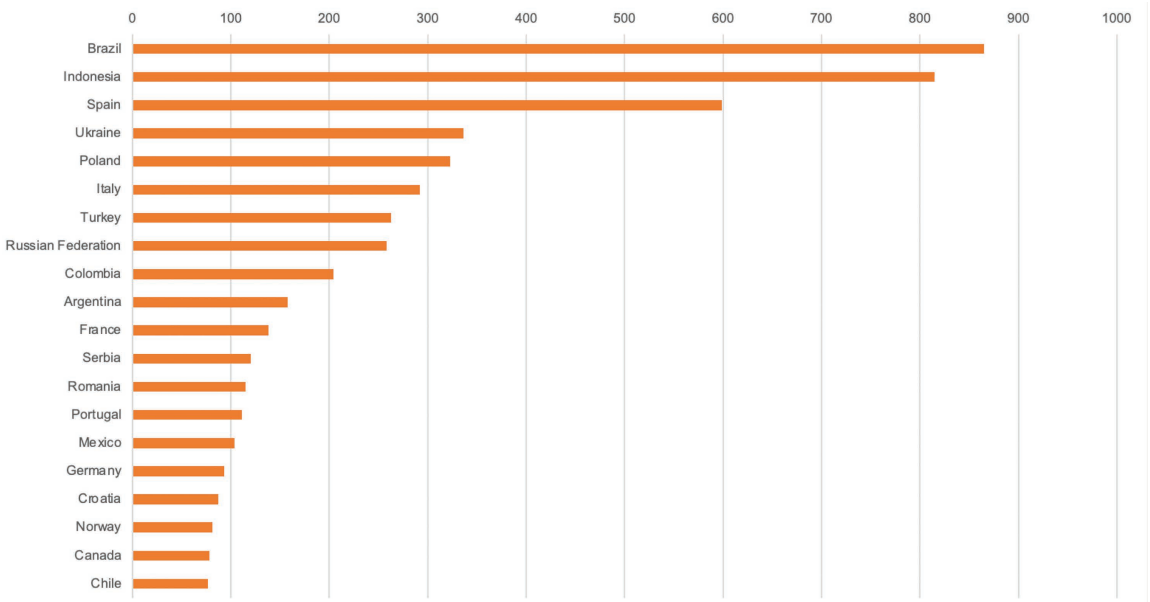

Figure 4. Countries by number of multilingual journals. Source: Own elaboration

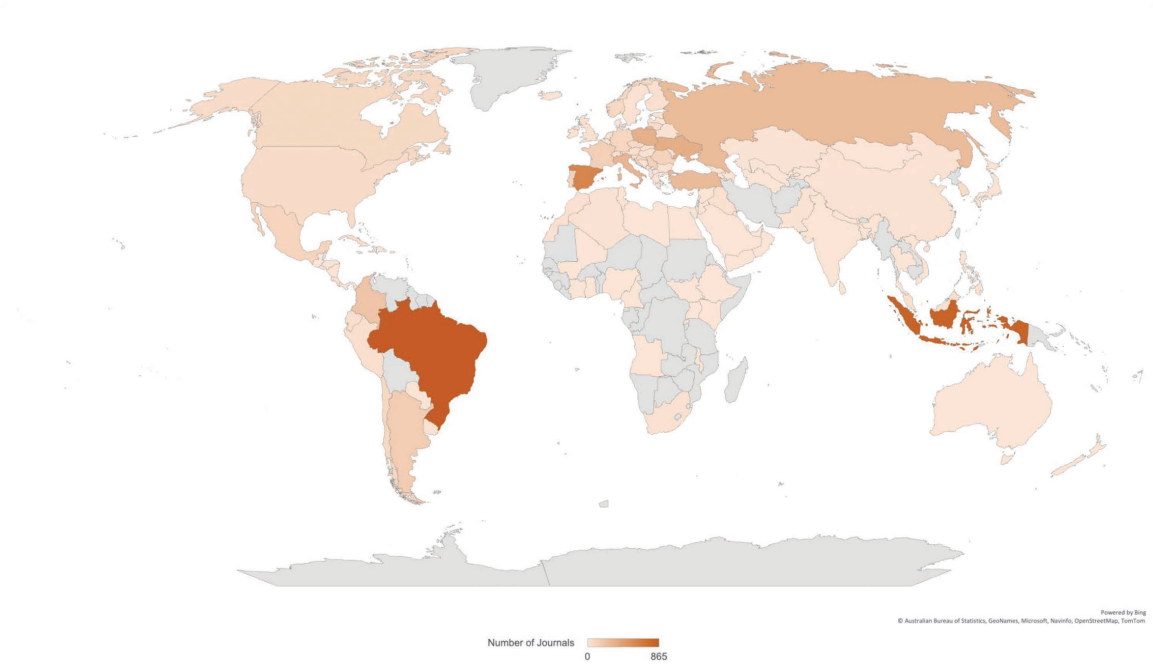

Figure 5. Distribution of multilingual journals present in DOAJ by country. Source: Own elaboration

by Indonesian (833), Russian (366), Persian (297) and French (292). Other languages with more than 100 journals indexed in DOAJ are Arabic, Italian and Catalan.

On the other hand, our research shows that the country with the most multilingual journals is Brazil, followed by Indonesia, Spain and Ukraine, which confirms our assumption that multilingual areas are also those considered peripheral in knowledge production. Figure 4 shows the 20 countries with the most multilingual journals. As can be seen, Latin America, Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe are the regions where most multilingual journals are published.

Finally, Figure 5 shows the distribution of DOAJ multilingual journals around the world on a global map.

5. Conclusions: Peripheral zones are multilingual zones.

The overall figures provided by the DOAJ on multilingualism in scientific publishing show that multilingual areas are peripheral to the geopolitical centers of scientific publishing and that, on the contrary, the publishing centers with the most economic and academic resources for scientific publishing show a deliberate use of English as the sole *lingua unica.* Figure 6 illustrates this statement.

Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America stand out for the use of multiple languages in scientific publication. Although this choice is, in a way, imposed by the fact that

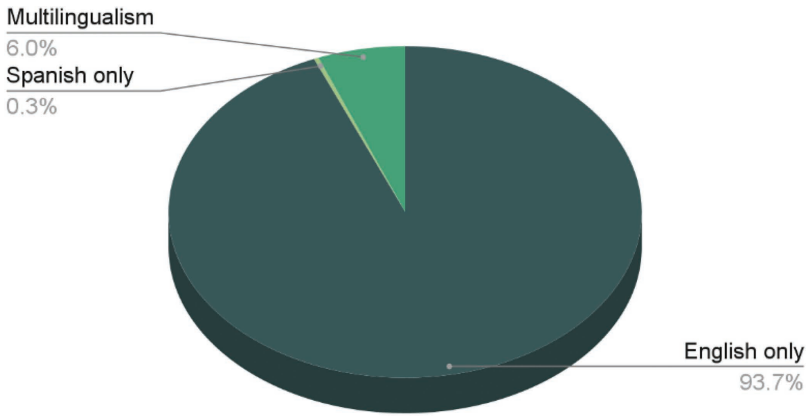

Figure 6. Monolingualism in U.S. journals in the DOAJ. Source: Own elaboration

English is the *de facto* language of the *mainstream* circuit and by the need to be part of this circuit, or of what is usually defined as *global science*, it often implies a titanic effort for many journals, editors and authors from peripheral areas.

Let us take the case of Latin America. In a recent article describing Latin American journals indexed in the main databases of the region, such as Latindex Catalog or Scielo, Beigel et al. (2024) showed that Latin American journals publish in a diversity of languages that varies in terms of disciplines and subregions and that it is far from being a monolingual ecosystem. In addition to the predominance of Spanish and Portuguese, the authors present data on other languages in which science is produced in the region, such as English and French, and some hypotheses on the preference in the use of these languages. Such is the case of the use of English in Puerto Rico because of its geopolitical situation in relation to the United States and in Mexico because of its close relationship with that country. Sustaining this multilingual ecosystem involves the financial and organizational effort of publishers and working groups, which are generally public universities and are composed mostly of volunteers who are involved in all stages of the publication of a manuscript.

We believe that a sound concept for thinking about how we might build and sustain the practice of global scientific publishing is that of the aforementioned *balanced multilingualism* (Sivertsen, 2018). This concept aims to establish instruments for documenting and measuring language use for different research purposes, thus providing the basis for tracking further globalization of research in a more responsible direction (Sivertsen, 2018, p. 2). While we have no arguments to claim that scientific publishing oligopolies could or would want to propose publishing strategies based on balanced multilingualism, one of the goals of the global scientific publishing industry could be supported by digital infrastructures, such as those proposed today by machine translation platforms based on generative artificial intelligence, which would

not imply that scientific publishing should be expressed in a single *lingua unica* (Balula & Leão, 2019, p. 8). Initiatives such as UNESCO's *Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Access to Cyberspace* (2003), the *Helsinki Initiative* (Helsinki Initiative, 2019), or the *Bibliodiversity Manifesto* (Hawthorne & Klein, 2014) have assertively stated the need for a scientific publication that accounts for the *epistemic diversity* of the different fields and academies globally, contributing to the use of language as an instrument of construction, communication, circulation and legitimization of knowledge. However, in this simple analysis from the geopolitics of knowledge, a completely opposite scenario is observed. Perhaps the exploration of collaborative translation and publishing strategies between publishers from different regions and working groups from fields in contact, as well as the responsible application of artificial intelligence developments in the field of machine translation, which are just some of the future challenges for science in the coming years, could contribute to a more balanced and diverse scenario for scientific publishing and reverse this trend.

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