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Publishing policy: toward counterbalancing the inequalities in academia

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Abstract: This article touches upon the problem of inequalities in academia resulting from neoliberal capitalism and existing publishing policy and discusses its possible consequences. Building on the author's own experiences as a researcher working on linguistic minorities and as an academic administrator, it explores how power relations work in parts of the scientific world situated on the peripheries of the Western "centre" – via the neoliberal economy, access to funding and international recognition. Publishing in high-status, English-language journals requires "non-centre" academics to adopt Western conventions of publishing, including in the style of reasoning, the structure of the text, and preferring references from the Anglo-American academic tradition. Only by complying can such researchers secure a place in academia and further their careers. However difficult it may be, the author argues, the hegemony of Western-model knowledge construction may only be questioned from inside, by the "centre" academics.

Keywords: centre; knowledge construction; peripheries; power relations; publishing policy

Access to knowledge and to knowledge construction is not democratic. Rather, such access depends on the background we have, the prosperity we live in, the languages we speak – to name just a few factors. Moreover, academic knowledge is also a huge business, based on neoliberal rules, which gives power to those who control it. This control is exercised through the demands of academic-centre journals that authors publish in English and in a particular convention, as well as through the requirements set for the advancement of academic careers, "meritocratic" credentials such as language certificates, internationally funded grants and "excellence" prices or recognitions. It further ensures the dominance of the "centre", understood as the West, with its Anglo-American tradition of academic communities.

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This text is based on my own personal experiences, yet what I experience as an individual is undoubtedly shared by numerous colleagues in different countries, and so I believe it may serve to highlight a global pattern and discuss its consequences. My first role in academia is that of a researcher working on linguistic minorities in Europe and language revitalization processes. I am a scholar who comes from and works in Poland, a country aspiring to be associated with the West but instead finding itself on its margins. Although my first language, and the only one in which I truly feel fluent and creative, is Polish, to be able to communicate outside of Poland and carry out my research I have learned, to varying extents, some "peripheral languages", such as Sorbian and Kashubian, as well as a few "central languages", including French and German. As I was born before the fall of the Iron Curtain, it was not until high school that I started to learn English. Nevertheless, I observe that most of the texts I have published during the last few years are in English, the "hyper-central language" that is at the apex of the pyramid of the global language system (de Swaan 2001). Such a shift, from Polish into English, exerts an important influence on me, my research, my readings, and the texts I write.

In my work, I investigate power relations and how they affect the language and identity choices of those who speak or learn minority languages in Europe. I analyse language ideologies and discourses and how they impact on peoples' practices and attitudes towards minority languages. Only recently, when I began aspiring to became a researcher who belongs to the centre, did I start to understand that my own publishing trajectory could be analysed with the very same tools I use for studying language minorities in Europe. This is something I realized thanks to the second, administrative role I took on a year ago, as a Deputy Director for Scientific Affairs of the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences (ISS PAS). As one of the people responsible at my Institute for its ranking in the Polish and international scientific world, I have to negotiate issues of publishing policy – between researchers at the institute, who have developed their own individual publishing strategies, and the regulations ordained by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which are based on market-driven neoliberal practices and mechanisms, and oriented towards what is called the "centre" of scientific life (Canagarajah 2002a). Yet, both the geographical location of my institute and the research area studied by Slavists situate us on the periphery of the "centre", in the East rather than in the West. The conflict between where our work resonates, and where we are expected to publish it to become a part of the centre, has significant consequences for our research, its form, visibility, as well as for how our output gets ranked.

Although the topic I am referring to in this essay has already been touched upon by many researchers dealing with multilingualism, inequalities and

hegemony in academia (Canagarajah 2002b; Lillis and Curry 2010; Piller 2016), I am convinced that it is crucial for it to be continually addressed and readdressed. I get the impression that studies and texts about inequalities in academia and its consequences are accepted by the "central" academic community because this is the right way to look at the relations of power, yet such research is rarely actionable and publications do not generally provoke any further, more practical actions aimed at overcoming those inequalities. Rather, the existing studies and measures remain limited to educating non-central researchers on what they can do to get closer to the centre. Hence, they are aimed at reproducing the existing relations of power in academia and at reinforcing the leading position of the central institutions as guardians of the world's knowledge construction.

Such gatekeeping is exercised, among other mechanisms, through the language (English) and the internal regulations of the journals ranked as high-status. The dominant discourse, whereby English as a lingua franca is considered indispensable for academics to communicate with one other, including through written texts (though it is relevant to ask: is this definitely still the case today, when automatic translation programs are becoming more and more efficient?) and to collaborate globally (although the language actually used among researchers in fact depends on the area of collaboration and the researchers on the team), makes people perceive the multiplicity of languages as an obstacle. In reality, this discourse is itself a tool to sustain the dominance of Anglo-American academia (Piller and Cho 2013). Due to space limitations, in this article I will skip over the inequalities among researchers in terms of access to English language and English-based written norms (through family, community, education, the financial resources needed by non-natives to invest in their texts so they can be published in English) and will instead concentrate on the mechanisms of power involved in publishing strategies.

In my forthcoming book concerning language practices in an Upper Sorbian school, I analysed why German-speaking students do not accept having Sorbian spoken in their presence, and how the Sorbs internalize this as a kind of "rule of politeness". I discussed the kind of attitude known as a "linguistic subordination norm" (Lippi-Green 1997), which treats the language varieties of subordinated groups as linguistic deficits rather than as "neutral" linguistic differences. I argued that, in such a way of thinking, the minority language is not equal as a code to the dominant language, which, in turn, is perceived as a neutral and appropriate language of communication. When such notions are applied to the study of minority language communities, the analysis is often based on a certain moral appeal on the part of the researchers – the argument that minority languages contribute to the linguistic diversity of the world, hence they deserve to be maintained, protected and revitalized. As researchers and sociolinguists dealing with endangered

languages, we know what factors negatively influence languages' vitality, and we are aware that the gradual restriction of their domains of use, including in higher education and science, leads to their decline. We support immersion education in minority languages and we can cite different arguments as to how this positively influences children's development and social inclusion. We also try to deconstruct the neoliberal economic mechanisms which put pressure on minority-language speakers to shift languages. Yet paradoxically, when it comes to the language of our research articles and the outlets where our research findings are published, we automatically devalue non-English-language articles published in "non-centre" journals. As a consequence, non-centre, often multilingual, scholars are under growing pressure to publish in English (Lillis et al. 2010a). To get published, non-Western scholars largely have to jettison their own intellectual background, stick to the Anglo-American "conversations of the disciplines" (Bazerman 1988) and avoid non-English language references, as is commonly demanded by reviewers and by publishers alike (Lillis et al. 2010b). Hence, to get published in centre journals, authors are asked to change their perspective and to ignore the research tradition of their cultural circle. The mechanism of the relation of power between the dominant and minority language communities, often described by researchers, becomes normalized when it comes to academia and protecting the interests of the privileged centre group.

The requirement imposed on academics to publish in English and in the "centre" journals results from academia being subordinated to neoliberal economic rules. As academics, we are under constant political-economy pressure linked to neoliberal practices and the mercantilization of knowledge. Therefore, we have to avoid the temptation to judge those who strive to fit in with the rules of Western academia, just as we should not judge minority-language speakers who abandon their languages or community members who prefer to learn English rather than their ancestral language. If we want to be recognized as researchers, have job opportunities, get permanent positions, and ensure our career development, we have to abide by the rules established by the centre. If we publish in non-English languages and non-centre journals, we become deprived not only of international cooperation but also of the resources needed to carry out research at all. To secure funding, both local and international, researchers have to prove they are worth investing money in, in other words, that they have the capacity to contribute to the development of Western knowledge through the production of articles in centre journals. This mechanism has been described by Canagarajah (2002a: 39), who observed that "[t]hrough the elite groups in the periphery, the center dominates these communities. This is a very effective form of hegemony as the center doesn't have to impose its values and power directly but through a group of natives who act as its agents". Authorities, politicians, and decision-makers in non-Western countries, such as

Poland, are eager to play this role, through such means as the rules for evaluating knowledge production and for financing academic centres. In line with these rules, in the neoliberal academic regimentation system, I myself am obliged to demand that researchers working at ISS PAS publish in centre journals, or rather to discourage them from publishing in local, national and non-centre journals, even if we all know their texts would be more influential and widely discussed if published there.

However, holding academics from "peripheries" responsible for changing this system, expecting them to oppose the existing publishing practices and liberate themselves from the neoliberal policy of knowledge production, is a misunderstanding. Even if some of us revolt and return to publishing in other languages and in non-centre journals, the only thing we might achieve is becoming further marginalized or, at worst, eliminated from the academic system. Our act of resistance would not even be noticed by the "centre". Even if it were, it would most probably be explained by the same charge we hear every time we publish in our languages and non-centre journals: that apparently our research findings and analysis were not good enough to be published in "reputable" English-language journals. Such an explanation is easily accepted by local decision-makers, and by those we depend on financially and institutionally. As a consequence, our institutions would be deprived of funds, and our places would be quickly taken by those who take greater pains to protect their careers and adopt the neoliberal rules of practicing science.

If at all, the system can be modified only from the inside. Yet, for the "centre" such change is not viable, either economically or from the point of view of power relations. For this reason, this role can be played either by renowned "centre" academics whose position on the "academic market" is well enough established so they can take a risk, or by those academics who have advanced from the "peripheries" to the "centre" and are now occupying decision-making positions (although I realize that they are the ones who have the most to lose). On the practical level of an academic journal, such decisions may involve considering greater openness to "peripheral" article themes and to styles different than Anglo-American. Non-centre researchers can be invited to contribute to special issues. In such cases, an important role would also be played by the reviewers. It would be important to find individuals who understand non- Anglo-American publishing styles and are interested in non-Western research and knowledge construction and references. Finally, however difficult this may be, authors who do not write in English could be allowed to submit a first version of their article in their language, and only if it is conditionally accepted for publishing would they be asked to provide an English translation.

In this way, at first on a small scale – of one or a few journals – the hegemony of the "centre" would at least be called into question. This impulse may of course easily get ignored by academia at large and drown in the sea of academic journal and paper production. However, it could also end up being acknowledged by other editorial boards and ultimately lead to sustainable change in the policy of publishing.

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