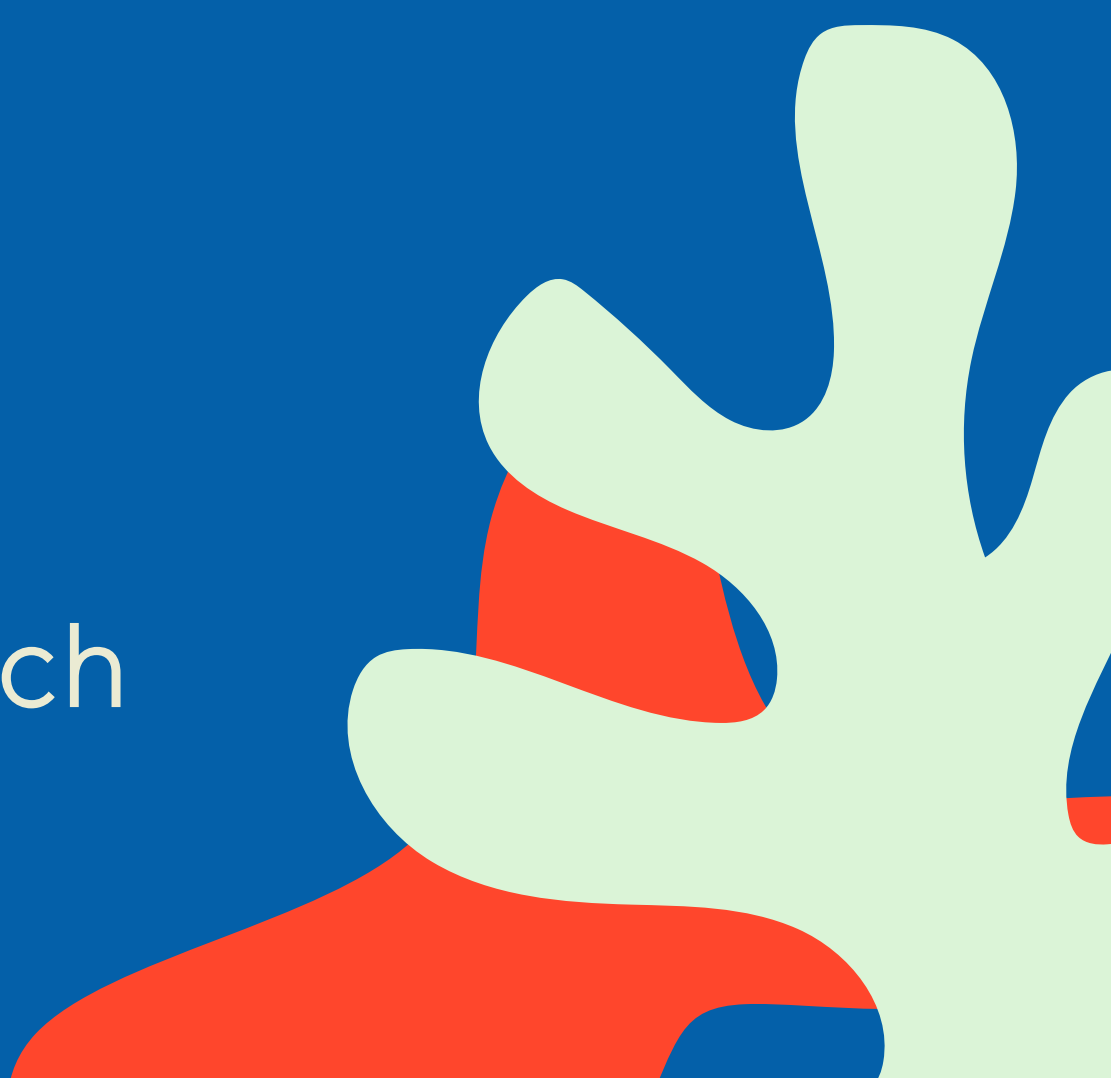


National Scholarly Journals and the Challenge of Internationalization

Research
note

OCTOBER 2023



**“WE OFTEN THINK INTELLECTUAL LIFE IS SPONTANEOUSLY INTERNATIONAL. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.”
PIERRE BOURDIEU (2002)**

Over the last few years, the internationalization of national scholarly journals has become an important objective in scientific policy-making as well as a key part of the journal evaluation system. It was touted at the international level as a way to promote the globalization and the streamlining of scientific activity.

However, it seems evident that this internationalization was promoted before it could really be put into practice, notably for journals covering social sciences and the humanities (SSH). Compared to the fields of the natural sciences and medicine which have long been dominated by English, SSH disciplines, and some more than others, are known for their strong indexicality, that is to say, their highly localized nature.

This note aims to probe into the social, political, and scientific issues that can be uncovered within the current trends surrounding the internationalization of SSH journals. We will be giving special attention to the context of Canada and Québec, while also considering other countries.

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Internationalization, You Say?

The Position and Role of English

In the realm of scientific publishing, internationalization as a concept has not been systematically defined. Some trends do seem to be becoming more prominent and the most used indicators are the use of English as a language of publication; the institutional affiliation of the evaluators, authors, and editorial board members; and indexing into bibliographical databases, which provide information on how international a journal's readership is. Linked to internationalization, these indicators have also become associated with prestige and even the calibre of a journal¹.

In an international context in which authors show a strong tendency toward submitting English-language articles to national journals, some of these journals have switched to English as a language of publication to maximize their visibility². However, the internationalization of national scholarly journals does not necessarily imply their anglicization. A study conducted by Bocanegra-Valle³ showed, for example, that national Spanish journals tend to provide an English translation of their title to appear more "international," rather than directly switching to English as their actual language of publication. While, like their North American and European peers, Spanish researchers are encouraged to publish in English in national, and international, journals, use of Spanish as a language of publication continues to be valued in the name of protecting the country's scholarly literature. Spanish national journals also associate published articles to English-language metadata (title, abstract, key words), no matter the language of publication.

This practice is also common for French-language journals, although the position and role of English in Canada are influenced by the linguistic dynamic in that country. Here, the anglicization of submitted articles by French-speaking authors does not only imply to turn to English as a *lingua franca*, but also a switch to the other national language⁴. In that case, anglicization is not only a symptom of internationalization, but of a change in Canada's internal linguistic power dynamics.

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¹ Kulczycki, E., Rozkosz, E. A. & Drabek, A. (2019). Internationalization of Polish Journals in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Transformative Role of the Research Evaluation System. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 44(1), 9-38.

² Larivière, V. (2018). Le français, langue seconde? De l'évolution des lieux et langues de publication des chercheurs au Québec, en France et en Allemagne. *Recherches sociographiques*, 59(3), 339-363.

³ Bocanegra-Valle, A. (2019). Building a Reputation in Global Scientific Communication: A SWOT Analysis of Spanish Humanities Journals. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 44(1), 39-66.

⁴ Larivière, V. & Riddles, A. (2021). « Langues de diffusion des connaissances : quelle place reste-t-il pour le français? » *Acfas magazine*, Chroniques "Les mesures de la recherche". <https://www.acfas.ca/publications/magazine/chroniques/mesures-recherche>

What About the Researchers?

Research Evaluation and Internationalization

Like the journals, researchers themselves have adjusted their practices to this new environment, which has led to a substantial increase in the number of manuscripts being submitted in English by authors affiliated with non-English-language institutions. For example, in Québec like in China, researchers have started publishing less and less in their national language and consequently, as early as 2018, Warren and Larivière had found that social sciences were approaching linguistic homogeneity.

In a context where articles written in English benefit from a wider diversity of citation-producing sources, or even simply from a potentially wider pool of readers, both elements from which researchers derive symbolic capital, communicating research results in English is itself a factor in bibliometric performance (Larivière, 2018). Studies have also shown that authors are feeling increasing pressure to publish in English⁵, especially in international journals with high impact factors, an indicator which gives only limited insight into the different functions that scholarly journals perform. It also has limited relevancy for national non-English-language journals and for SSH disciplines^{6,7}. Françoise Salager-Meyer⁸ studied the impacts of this pressure. In “Peripheral Scholarly Journals: From Locality to Globality,” she paints the now well-known picture of the “domestic drain,” a concept which describes the tendency of researchers to avoid publishing their best work in national journals in order to improve their bibliometric performance and the international positioning of the institution to which they are affiliated.

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⁵ Marcoux, R. (2018). Deux solitudes ou One and a half? La langue des articles cités en bibliographie comme illustration des pratiques scientifiques en sciences humaines au Canada et au Québec. *Recherches sociographiques*, 59(3), 435-449.

⁶ Bienvenue, L. (2018). Publier la Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française au temps du numérique et du libre accès. *Recherches sociographiques*, 59(3), 451-460.

⁷ Wouters, P. et al. (2019). Rethink Impact Factors: Find New Ways to Judge a Journal. *Nature*, 569, 621-623.

⁸ Salager-Meyer, F. (2015). Peripheral Scholarly Journals: From Locality to Globality. *Ibérica*, 30, 15-36.

The performative role that bibliometric indicators play in research evaluation was also highlighted by Imbeau and Ouimet⁹ in the contexts of Québec and France. By studying the bibliometric performance of 434 researchers affiliated with the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, the Université de Montréal, the Université Laval, the École nationale d'administration publique and the University of Ottawa, the authors showed that the language of publication affects performance indicators for these researchers: "Those who publish in French publish and get cited less often."

In Québec, the question of language in scientific publishing is not new, and as early as 1983, a survey showed that 70% of Québec-based French-speaking researchers thought that their international notoriety depended on the use of English (Lapointe, 1983, in Warren & Larivière, 2018). Today, in other non-English-speaking contexts, it seems clear that the visibility and credibility of research depend on English¹⁰.

"THIS TREND IS NOT UNRELATED TO THE IMPORTANCE GIVEN TO BIBLIOMETRIC INDICATORS IN RESEARCH EVALUATION, SINCE THE DATA SOURCES USED TO CALCULATE THOSE INDICATORS MAINLY INDEX ENGLISH-LANGUAGE JOURNALS" (LARIVIÈRE, 2018).

For many researchers, however, the choice of language of publication remains a very complex issue. It does not come down solely to practices likely to generate citations, since language is not a neutral container in which ideas exist separately from the words used to express them. Thinking in a language mobilizes the entirety of the cultural and historical baggage that it carries. Hanauer and Englander (2013, in Bocanegra-Valle, 2019) showed that communicating research results in a foreign language creates both dissatisfaction and anxiety.

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⁹ Imbeau, L. & Ouimet, M. (2012). Langue de publication et performance en recherche: publier en français a-t-il un impact sur les performances bibliométriques des chercheurs francophones en science politique ? *Politique et sociétés*, 31(3), 39-65.

¹⁰ Pajić, D., Jevremov, T. & Škorić, M. (2019). Publication and Citation Patterns in the Social Sciences and Humanities: A National Perspective. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 44(1), 67-94.

Undesired Effects and Paradoxes.

Consulting National Journals

The scientific literature has examined the undesirable effects of the internationalization of the humanities and social sciences¹¹. The disinterest that researchers show toward national journals, highlighted by Salager-Meyer (2015), explains the difficulties faced by these journals when trying to attract high-quality manuscripts (Bocanegra-Valle, 2019; Warren & Larivière, 2018; Larivière, 2018). Considering the close relation between national journals and national subject matters, this disinterest also leads to a shift in research toward new subjects, and consequently away from local and national issues. For researchers working in the humanities and social sciences, this can mean alienation from readers from one's own country (Pajić, Jevremov & Škorić, 2019).

On another scale but in a similar perspective, the literature highlights that this loss of connection between national journals and their local community is, however, uncompensated by greater recognition from the international community, something that Pajić, Jevremov and Škorić (2019) have called the "glocalization of the humanities and social sciences."The situation in Québec is paradoxical, as national journals remain more widely read than international ones¹². A study by Vincent Larivière¹³ showed that at the Université de Montréal, national journals disseminated on Érudit are read more often than the journals published by most large-scale commercial publishers and as often as international journals:

Articles published in French-language journals - mostly Québec-based - which are disseminated on the Érudit platform are downloaded on average almost as often as articles published by journals belonging to the Nature Publishing Group. Even more striking, the average number of downloads per journal on Érudit is five times higher than on Elsevier, twelve times higher than on Wiley and 32 times higher than on Springer!

¹¹ Larivière, V. & Warren, J. P. (2019). Introduction: The Dissemination of National Knowledge in an Internationalized Scientific Community. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 44(1), 1-8.

¹² Fortin, A. (2018). Penser au Québec, penser le Québec. De quelques revues de sciences sociales. *Recherches sociographiques*, 59(3), 411-433.

¹³ Larivière, V. (2014). De l'importance des revues de recherche nationales. *Découvrir magazine*. <https://www.acfas.ca/publications/decouvrir/2014/09/l-importance-revues-recherche-nationales>

Nonetheless, while they are underrepresented in the bibliographical databases of large-scale commercial publishers, national Canada- and Québec-based journals generate a lot of interest abroad¹⁴, as shown by download statistics on Érudit. In other words, national journals do attract a substantial readership, both domestic and international. An analysis of a sample of 104 Québec-based journals disseminated on the Érudit platform has shown that two out of every three article views in fact come from outside of Canada.

This paradox requires some deep analysis, as it could help uncover the lever through which the currently-dominant relationship between anglicization, international visibility and high impact factor could be severed. A reevaluation of national journals and a process of internationalization without anglicization are possible. They require the emergence or the strengthening of dissemination vectors that promote other languages and diversified research subjects. They also highlight the need for a reform of research evaluation methods based on bibliometric indicators such as the impact factor, which give disproportionate weight to English-language publications, currently the only ones considered international.

¹⁴ Cameron-Pesant, S. (2018). Usage et diffusion des revues savantes québécoises en sciences sociales et humaines : analyse des téléchargements de la plateforme Érudit. *Recherches sociographiques*, 59(3), 365-384.