

**For the democracy of the systems of evaluating academic production:  
convergences of Latin-American & European scholars**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to analyze some trends and challenges Latin-American scholars face towards academic assessment. I propose that the IAMCR be the channel by which communication scholars from all regions of the world influence policies of scientific production.

**Introductory note**

The contribution of Latin-American scholars to media and communication studies has been very significant. However, the dialogue and exchange with scholars from the North are not usually in terms of equality but of hierarchy. Why? Southern scholars communities do not actively participate in the definition of the models and systems designed for measuring and assessing academic production. Although there are specific methodologies and instruments operating at both local and regional contexts, the academic production of Southern scholars is subjected to the rules defined in other latitudes of the world –in latitudes where different social problems and different scientific conditions for research exist.

The effects of this phenomenon are evident in at least two scenarios: the construction of the object of study and its influence on the research agenda.

In this logic –the logic of the market-, that tends to legitimate a few theories, methods and problems, competitiveness over cooperation tend to be the rule of our production and organization (Ortiz, 2009).

Therefore, this paper is motivated by the desire to highlight some of the effects of this process in the scientific communities that, as we will see, are conditioned by their relationship with the English language.

### **The structural problems**

We have to admit there is an unequal structure of production and dissemination of knowledge in the international scientific system. This is the effect of various processes, both external and internal to our field.

The external process is connected to two main aspects. First, it is connected to the dominance of neoliberal capitalism in the criteria of qualifying scientific knowledge (Fuentes, 1997). Second, to the dominance of natural sciences in the definition of rules that assess academic production in all fields, including the social sciences. The idea of a researcher in its laboratory, publishing one paper and being multi-cited, has become a universal pattern to define “quality” in academic work. This system erodes the value and possibilities of other forms of dissemination of knowledge –including books.

The internal process is related to the domination of the social sciences powers (USA and Europe) over communities of the South, such as Latin America. The Argentine sociologist Fernanda Beigel calls this phenomena “academic dependence” (2010).

Here are some of the expressions of this dominance:

1. The publishing system. This system has established universal publishing standards that define quality in terms of what is good in the Anglo-Saxon world. This system goes beyond to establish basic rules for a qualified paper. Since English is the only valid language to publish, according to this system, for the non Anglo-Saxon researchers this requirement affects their identity and creation processes, what in Divina Frau-Meigs’ perspective, “transforms us into research entrepreneurs (*publish or perish*) instead of creators and innovators” (2009). One central effect of this is that the knowledge produced in languages other than English has a “reduced impact and a poor international circulation, as well as a low place in the hierarchic academic system” (Beigel, 2010). One example is the Social Science Citation Index, a data base not only

limited by its restriction to scientific production in English, but also by the criteria to build the instrument which, according to Fernanda Beigel, indicates mainly publications from the US as “high impact” journals.

2. Linked to that effect is the manipulation of scientific recognition by publishers, usually located in the North (Beigel, 2010).

3. Another implication of the dominance is the change in institutional assessments, today mainly influenced by external entities to Universities. According to Beigel (2010), in the 1960s, public agencies and private foundations started competing for cultural and ideological influence in Latin America, and other regions of the South – such as Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, Organization of American States (OAS), and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-, looking for economic progress. Latin American States response was to allow these organizations to define the criteria to assess academic production.

4. A further expression of the dominance is the influence of global entities, such as UNESCO, in the definition of the research agendas. It directly affects the objects of study, theories and methods and, in consequence, the funding that universities, organizations and governments assign to it. The inconvenience is that there are many problems in the Southern regions that, not qualifying as a priority, become invisible and, therefore, their solution are proven difficult.

In spite of those conditions, Latin American scholars have built their own strong identity, evident on Jesús-Martin Barbero, Rosa María Alfaro, Rossanna Reguillo, Antonio Pasquali and Néstor García Canclini’s perspectives. However, the work of these researchers are mainly published in Spanish, and remain invisible.

So the central problem here is the supremacy of English in the international academic system, which limits the possibilities of dissemination of knowledge in other languages.

### **The problem of English**

Brazilian anthropologist Renato Ortiz writes in *The Supremacy of the English Language in the Social Sciences* that “globalisation conjugates in English”. In the realm of science this is paradoxical as, on the one hand, the value and practical purpose of English for our work is very important. It is the language that allows us non-Anglo-Saxons to

communicate not only with British and American researchers, but also with other European (Portuguese, French) or Asian researchers and so on, to reach agreements to improve the quality of life of societies. On the other hand, the predominance of the English language does not contribute to the collective sense of our work. Instead, it divides it by establishing a hierarchy. Such effects are expressed at the thought and the action outline levels, which can be resumed in one major implication: The influence of Anglo-Saxon scientific communities on the construction of the object of study, i.e. on the theoretical and methodological definitions used for research. When we translate in English, in Divina Frau-Meigs' words, the essence of a notion gets lost; translation may lose concepts.

According to her,

"The example of concepts relates directly to identity and through it to a person's individual rights, especially dignity. Such is the case of style, which is even more annoying than that of ideas. Most researchers spend their entire life perfecting their phrases, chiselling away at a paragraph for hours and days, adding a nuance that feels just right. The most famous among us tend to be the ones who have the perfect balance between ideas and style. And it can all disappear in translation since translators tend to dispel ambiguity and clarify notions so that readers don't think that the translation is faulty" (2009).

For what has been explained here, we know that both publishing and being quoted in English is highly valued, but sometimes it is detrimental to ideas. I remember the sad confession made by an European researcher made at the ECREA Conference held in Barcelona in November 2008. He pointed out that his interest in working with Latin American researchers and universities had been detrimental to his productivity, as publications in Spanish were not recognized in evaluations in his country.

Thus, the usefulness of English in the context of globalization is an indisputable fact. It is a useful communication tool but its prevalence has also created a language hierarchy and, in the words of Renato Ortiz (2009), the consequent intellectual segregation has created inequities among us.

We have historically lived the risk, the constant threat of the establishment of a hegemonic model representing the world that legitimates theories, methods and problems. That model is widely known: the market. In this context, scientists do not escape its domination; it is the one that rules society and us as a part of it. It governs our logic of production and participation. Thus, demands for competition prevailing over those of cooperation have invaded the scientific field, and there exists, therefore, a latent threat that collective scientific action will be undermined (Vega, 2009).

I understand that researchers all over the world are subjected to these systems, so I ask at this point: What can we do, as a community?

Since I think this is a problem closely related to the human rights, we have to focus our attention on the development of creative forms of cooperation. Here my proposals:

1. Continuous promotion of the representation of all regions in consultancy bodies of IAMCR attending organizations such as the UNESCO to influence the research agenda- and publishers –to promote work with proved quality in other languages than English.
2. I broadly suggest that the IACMR be the channel by which all communication researchers of the world influence policies of scientific production. At this point, I think we need a representation on global entities, such as OECD, to influence the criteria on academic assessment.
3. Support for activities that grant prominence to regional communication research, in coordination with regional associations. I propose ALAIC and ECREA lead the building of research networks to stimulate collective production of knowledge, with visibility in the international scientific system.
4. Stimulation of research and publication of regional analyses seeking participation of regional publishing houses.
5. Another proposal has to do with the use of Open Access, as well as other alternative databases.

I want to close my essay quoting Renato Ortiz, “It would be ideal to speak all the languages in which the social sciences are expressed. We would then possess not a universality of spirit, but a library at the service of a greater wealth of knowledge”.

Thus, I sum up the utopian ideal of this paper with the aim of “recovering specificities by making languages relevant, as they are the expression of our worldviews”.

Salud.

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