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## Toward a Sociolinguistics of Scientific Production

**Abstract** Worldwide, academic values and practices are currently undergoing a process of profound transformation, driven by new forms of global competitiveness, as well as new notions of accountability, productivity, and knowledge dissemination. This chapter introduces this issue and explicates its sociolinguistic relevance. It then introduces the question of language choice in publishing in Swedish academia. It reviews scholarly literature related to this topic and highlights the structure–agency opposition that runs throughout this type of work. Secondly, the chapter presents Bourdieu’s stance on language choice. Bourdieu’s position demands that attention is paid to the values circulating in different disciplinary fields. In this light, the chapter discusses disciplinary variations in publishing language practices and accounts for these differences in terms of Bourdieu’s sociology of science.

**Keywords** Language choice · Structure–agency · Disciplines · Publish or perish · Accountability and productivity · Competitiveness

There is ample literature to suggest that university life is currently undergoing a profound makeover globally that is changing longstanding academic values and practices. In short, what we are witnessing is a process whereby a general drift toward globalizing knowledge is gaining the upper hand, which intersects with new research political techniques as an impetus for managing academic work (e.g., Currie and Vidovich 2009; Kauppi and Erkkilä 2011; Kennedy 2015; Naidoo 2003). To be sure, in the realm of science, globalizing processes *as such* are not new; what is new, however, 'is the growth of international networks, funding initiatives, publishing and ranking systems' (Holm et al. 2015, 114). According to critics (e.g., Readings 1996; Rider et al. 2013), these transformations are supplanting the core values of the Humboldt university as we know it, that is, as linked to the autonomous pursuit of truth (Krull 2005). In its place, the advent of a new managerial regime arises, enforced under the banner of a quality culture, followed by the imposition of league tables reminiscent of the world of sports (e.g., Tight 2000). The driving force behind this development is an increased competitiveness between states and their universities; their demands for increased accountability and productivity come with pivotal effects on the stakes and strategies of those who take part in the research game across the contemporary globe—that is, researchers—since they are obligated to align their practices to the ideational and managerial visions of those who dictate the terms in the university field at large (Lucas 2006).

Intrinsically linked to this process is the increasing importance attached to publications as the key form of symbolic capital in the fields of science (e.g., Putnam 2009), hence the phrase 'publish or perish' as an imperative of the scholarly enterprise of this day and age. However, concerns linked to publishing, in general, are being increasingly magnified by the drift toward globalizing knowledge and of publishing for transnational marketplaces, as indicated by Lee and Lee's (2013) thought-provoking article titled 'Publish (in international indexed journals) or perish.' While this fact reflects the crude realities of most dwellers of academia globally, the issue is a particularly sensitive one among scholars of the non-Anglophone world. This is so because it follows from contemporary transformations in academia that more importance is also attached to English, which is the language that

currently predominates in the marketplace, toward which scholars, willingly or unwillingly, are ever more gearing their publishing practices (e.g., Coulmas 2007; Lillis and Curry 2010). This issue will be exemplified using the case of Swedish academia.

## Language Choice in Swedish Academia

In Sweden, the balance of power between Swedish and English in Swedish academic life is a well-known topic of ongoing concern—both of scholarly and language political discourse (e.g., Kuteeva 2015 for an overview). Several mappings have shown that currently—and increasingly so—English serves as the chief language of scientific publishing across most disciplines (e.g., Gunnarsson 2001; Gunnarsson and Öhman 1997; Melander 2004; Salö 2010). From the perspective of language planning and policy, this is a problematic development, and, accordingly, Sweden has signed the legally noncommittal *Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy* (2006). Among other things, this document makes a plea for so-called *parallel language use* as a way of promoting the use of Swedish (and other Scandinavian languages) along with English in the presentation of scientific results.

In the Swedish debate, the question of variation in language use in publishing practices has traditionally been cast as a matter of ‘language choice.’ McGrath (2014) argues that policy documents at various levels tend to depict choices as falling upon the individual, thus nourishing a view in which researchers across Swedish academia are portrayed as ‘deciding’ to publish in English, and in so doing, are ‘choosing’ to abandon Swedish (see also Kuteeva 2015, 271; Petersen and Shaw 2002, 371). While this may be so, several Swedish studies on these matters have instead highlighted structural constraints to publishing, for instance, in relation to the force of bibliometric valorization (e.g., Salö 2010) or in the context of ‘diglossia’—that is, macrosocial propensities against which measures should be taken to increase the qualification value of publishing in Swedish (e.g., Gunnarsson 2001). This question, thus, feeds into a well-known debate on structure–agency as a baseline for conceptualizing choice epistemologically (e.g., Paton 2007). In the context of language choice in publishing, it seems clear

that commentators take a different stance on this point. Accordingly, accounts range between understanding choices as externally imposed and power-laden, ‘exposed to Anglo-American “imperialism”’ (Gunnarsson 2001, 306), and the more liberal vision in which choices are seen as ‘pragmatically determined’ (McGrath 2014, 15).

It may be suggested that the most fruitful approach is to opt for a middle ground. As Coulmas (2007, 158) notes, while it can be stated that ‘behind every paper is an individual decision to publish it in one language rather than another,’ there is little reason to believe that ‘decisions are made in the void or that choice is free.’ The foundation of Bourdieu’s practice theory offers some purchase in grappling with these matters, attuned as it is to emphasizing choices as relationally situated between constraints and individual agency. As Bourdieu states, ‘We can always say that individuals make choices as long as we do not forget that individuals do not chose the principles of their choices’ (cited in Wacquant 1989b, 45; also Bourdieu 2000, 149). From a sociological point of view, this dimension of ‘handed-down will’ can be specified as follows:

[H]ow can one fail to see that decision, if decision there is, and the ‘system of preferences’ which underlies it, depend not only on all the previous choices of the decider but also on the conditions in which his ‘choices’ have been made, which includes all the choices of those who have chosen for him, in his place, pre-judging his judgements and so shaping his judgement. (Bourdieu 1990, 49–50)

A key implication of Bourdieu’s line of reasoning is that all scientific choices made by the researcher, including those concerning publishing forum and language, depend on the agent’s location within her professional universe, with the traditions, habits, beliefs, values, and censorships embedded therein (Bourdieu 2003, 283). To a considerable extent, therefore, this position imports with it a vision of language ‘choice’ as pertaining to values and preferences in which subjectivist accounts offer limited explanatory value. Yet, in respect to social action, Bourdieu’s project comprises the intellectual means to circumvent the two pitfalls of either producing a pure internalist account that

overemphasizes individuals' free choices or an externalist account that overemphasizes the constraints of regulating forces. Instead, it allows for an understanding in which publishing practices are seen as a relational outcome that arises from the encounter between socialized and interested researchers, on the one hand, and a range of possibilities available at a given point in time where they dwell, on the other (Bourdieu 1983, 313). By this logic,

[s]ocial agents are not 'particles' that are mechanically pushed about by external forces. They are, rather, bearers of capitals and, depending on the position that they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they tend to act either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution. (Bourdieu, cited in Wacquant 1989a, 8, emphasis removed)

Researchers, then, do not follow rules but pursue strategies (see below Chap. 3). Likewise, from the vantage point opted for here, apprehending language choice as comprising 'choices' about language only appears to be a gross simplification. It should be noted that this insight is not new in the Swedish debate; in fact, even by the late 1990s Hyltenstam was arguing that the use of a given publishing language should be seen as a manifestation of the self-perception of various disciplines.

The extent that dissertations are written in Swedish or in supranational languages at a given point in time should primarily be seen as a reflection of how given branches of science perceive their discursive context, as chiefly national or international. (Hyltenstam 1999, 217, my translation)

## Disciplines, Difference, and Language

The perspective proposed by Hyltenstam above demands us to pay attention to the fact that the scientific field contains smaller universes, each characterized by its own embedded economy of symbolic goods that define the chances of profit more locally (Bourdieu 1985, 196). We know these universes as academic disciplines, which, by Bourdieu's

logic, can be apprehended as fields or subfields (Bourdieu 2004, 64ff). Here, the historically yielded specifics of each disciplinary field intersect with the general forces of the overarching university field, for instance, those concerning research policy. As one among many principles of division, these struggles unfold through language, an issue I will attend to presently.

It is commonplace that different things matter to different disciplines. Disciplines take different objects, pose different questions, and develop different research commitments and procedures in relation to these. Broadly, then, disciplines differ in what Habermas (1987) refers to as their ‘knowledge-interests,’ in other words, their epistemological orientations to knowledge discovery, and, moreover, in their more or less hierarchical ways of structuring knowledge (e.g., Gibbons et al. 1994; Martin 2011). What is more, from an anthropological viewpoint, these differences can be said to engender cultures, which suggests a view of disciplines as being caught up in systems of beliefs and valorization with pivotal effects on the practices (and beliefs) of those who enter into them (e.g., Gerholm and Gerholm 1992; Knorr Cetina 1999). Accordingly, various cultural aspects of disciplines have been foregrounded by envisioning them in terms of ‘tribes and territories’ (Becher and Trowler 2001). Subscribing to a similar view, Geertz (1983) has said that

[i]n the same way that Papuans or Amazonians inhabit the world they imagine, so do high energy physicists or historians of the Mediterranean in the age of Phillip II – or so, at least, an anthropologist imagines. (Geertz 1983, 155)

Over time, differences in interests render fields distinguishable as broad sociohistorical patterns of collective action, often held together by the support of (modern) institutional organization. As Clark has argued, this fact has distinguishable effects in regard to epistemologies, interests, and research agendas, for example, in respect to publishing channels for disseminating the knowledge that they yield.

In physics, young scholars-to-be publish articles, often jointly authored; in history, they attempt to write books. The one is interested in scientific objectivity; the other in the power of individual interpretation. (Clark 1991, 110)

In a non-Anglophone setting such as Sweden, this does not only pertain to genres and publishing formats, as highlighted in Clark's account above, but moreover intersects with the questions of publishing language. As many studies have shown, there are major disciplinary differences in regard to the prevalence of English in publishing. As a general tendency, English has been shown to dominate for the most part in the scientific publishing practices of fields situated within the natural sciences, medicine, and technology, while the position of Swedish holds fast in the humanities, with the social sciences lingering between these two poles (e.g., Gunnarsson and Öhman 1997; Salö 2010). As noted by Kuteeva and Airey (2014), this pattern of English impact in publishing corresponds to the idea of the 'hierarchical knowledge structure' characteristic of the hard sciences, as opposed to the horizontal knowledge structure of the humanities, characterized by the lesser use of English in publishing (see, e.g., Martin 2011; also Gibbon et al. 1994). Thus, by this reasoning, these authors argue that the knowledge structure characteristic of the natural sciences supports the need for a common language of publishing (Kuteeva and Airey 2014). In addition, this state of affairs intersects with the literature of science (e.g., Hicks 2004), where articles prevail in the hard sciences, whereas monographs are common in the humanities (e.g., Myrdal 2009; cf. also Clark 1991, quote above).

These differences can be discussed across a range of themes, such as external and internal boundaries, epistemological issues, etc. (Beacher and Trowler 2001, 210–211; Gibbons et al. 1994). This is so because the interlinkage between genres, disciplines, and languages does not explain difference per se, but rather manifests other forms of difference in which language variation emerges as a consequence (Salö and Josephson 2014, 284). Exploring this phenomenon in Swedish scholarship, Salö and Josephson (2014) adopt a disciplinary perspective to compare the contemporary publishing patterns of history, computer science, psychology, linguistics, law, and physics. This study points

to a continuum in which the position of Swedish is strong in history and law, with both standing out as 'book disciplines' in the sense that monographs and edited volumes prevail. By contrast, English predominates in physics and computer science, where scholars predominantly publish journal articles and conference proceedings, respectively. In fields characterized by a greater theoretical and methodological unity, such as psychology, scholars are often inclined to publish articles, typically through co-authorship (Sörlin 1994, 225). Accordingly, articles and proceedings dominate in psychology and linguistics, and here, English predominates in publishing (Salö and Josephson 2014). On that point, however, it can be noted that journal articles are also fairly common in history and law, but here the balance between English and Swedish is fairly comparable, with even a slight tendency toward Swedish dominance (*ibid.*). Hence, distributing knowledge in articles does not necessarily entail publishing in English. Subsequently, other forms of difference must be brought to the fore.

For example, disciplines differ in respect to what Sörlin (1994) calls their 'context dependence.' The Swedish-dominated disciplines typically deal with national substance or source material, such as Swedish law or Swedish history (e.g., Salö and Josephson 2014). Correspondingly, fields such as history tend to be oriented toward a 'local disciplinary community' that typically operates through the medium of local languages (Petersen and Shaw 2002). As de Swaan (2004) and others posit, using English is problematic in the humanities because they are more 'strongly bound to language' (p. 140). Typically, scholars of such fields are preoccupied with producing detailed descriptive accounts of distinctive source material devoted to presenting facts that are relatively space-consuming, hence the tradition of reporting findings in book format (Jarrick 2012; Myrdal 2009, 41). By contrast, scholars in many of the hard sciences take objects with no particular foundation in the Swedish context specifically; rather, these objects appear the same irrespective of the geographical location of the researcher. Astrophysics and computer science serve to exemplify this point: there exist, so to speak, no Swedish physics or computer science (Salö and Josephson 2014, 284). Accordingly, such fields typically exhibit more internationally oriented publishing patterns, serving, as they do, international communities



(Myrdal 2009, 39; Petersen and Shaw 2002; Sörlin 1994, 225). In the natural sciences, de Swaan (2004, 141) claims, ‘most of what can be said in English can also be phrased in mathematics and in formal schemes.’

These observations are certainly helpful in attempts to unravel the logics of language choice in publishing practices. Yet, as I seek to highlight in this book, it is pivotal not to lose sight of the fact that they do not point to essential qualities inherent in disciplines. From the outlook opted for here, they are, rather, realizations of historical struggles that have made things appear much more ‘natural’ than they really are (Bourdieu 1991, 23). Fields are man-made, according to the logic outlined in Chap. 3. It follows from this position that the object of our study ‘is not an evolution but a societal phenomenon whose historical shapes and societal driving forces it is our task to unravel’ (Sörlin 1994, 18, my translation). Every contemporary disciplinary field, as we can perceive and examine in the here and now, is the outcome of a ‘more or less overt struggle over the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field’ (Bourdieu 1985, 208). The next chapter furthers this general conception of academic life and the social universes it contains.

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