

TOWARDS LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN IAMCR

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I confess that when the IAMCR invited me to participate in this plenary meeting about “The languages at IAMCR”, a sudden question came to my mind: How and what should one think about this process within the framework of our association? Should it be done from a scientific or a political perspective?

In grappling with these questions, I came to understand that separating the analysis of the consequences of this process on the development of scientific activity from its political implications is simply not possible. Therefore, my participation in this meeting is motivated by a desire to put in place 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.

This analysis goes hand in hand with a set of proposals tending to the creation of linguistic diversity. I shall refer to these proposals as keys. I understand these keys as the methodological foundation for knowing, thinking, imagining and creating concrete actions that contribute to the democratisation of relationships within the IAMCR and, in the words of Antonio Pasquali, the creation of viable, accurate, particular and pluralistic, fair and equitable communication.

THE NECESSARY DIAGNOSIS

Brazilian anthropologist Renato Ortiz writes in *La Supremacía del Inglés en las Ciencias Sociales* (The Supremacy of the English Language in the Social Sciences) that “globalisation conjugates in English”. I begin my analysis with this quote

because I understand the discussions of this meeting should not escape analysis of the dominance of the English language in the scientific field. In this context, the notion of *power* is imperative for the analysis of a process marked in some ways by hierarchy and domination.

After World War II, English became the cultural language in three main areas: the market, tourism and science. English is the language of globalisation; fields such as Information Society were built in English. It also became the second spoken language in most countries of the World—including Latin America, where learning English is still a privilege. Most cultural products around the world are also expressed 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 with English and American researchers, but also with other European (Portuguese, French) or Asian researchers and so on, and to reach agreements to improve the quality of life for societies. On the other hand, the linguistic 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 thought and action outline levels. In this sense, we can talk about at least three major implications.

The first one is 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.

The second is the influence on the agenda of investigation, which directly affects the objects of study and, consequently, the funding that universities, organisations 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 it may therefore prove difficult to find a solution to them.

The third one lies in the creation of the structures that determine our work—national and regional systems and boards of investigation—and establish the criteria to measure the productivity of researchers, creating a hierarchy of knowledge and erasing specificities. In this sense, we know that both publishing and being quoted in English is highly valued and sometimes this is detrimental to ideas. I remember the sad confession that a European researcher made at the European Communication Conference of ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association), 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 are 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: the consequent intellectual segregation creates 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.

I understand that all of the researchers of the world are subject to these systems so I ask at this point: what can we do as a community? I think the answer lies in the struggle for a broader policy of language or, more specifically, for linguistic diversity at IAMCR. Why? Because this enables us to enrich our conceptions and perspectives of the world. For example, the contributions of Latin American scholars to communication studies have been fundamental at least in two major areas: communication policies and cultural studies—with special emphasis on the convergence between communication and culture.

I mentioned at the beginning that my talk has two purposes. The scientific one has been expressed. The political is manifested by acknowledging languages as a representation of the conditions and needs and, specifically in our field, of scientific paradigms. Thus, if a given language is the expression of a worldview, striving for linguistic diversity will enable us to acknowledge the idiosyncrasy and identity of the concepts and consequently to widen our horizons when thinking of social matters.

What specific measures do I propose to achieve linguistic diversity at the IAMCR? These are some of them:

1. Support for activities that grant prominence to regional communication research, in coordination with regional associations (The Latin American Communication Research Association, the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, the European Communication Research and Education Association).
2. Continued promotion of the representation of all regions in IAMCR coordination bodies: Executive Committee, International Committee, Sections and Work Teams.

3. Continued promotion of the representation of all regions in consultancy bodies of IAMCR attending organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to influence the research agenda.
4. Promotion of international research, not only gathering researchers from around the world but also acknowledging regional issues.
5. Stimulation of research and publication of regional analyses seeking participation of regional publishing houses.
6. Effective expression of ideas in the three official IAMCR languages, publishing all of the Association's papers in English, Spanish and French. To this end, the regional and national organisations require similar structures to those of the IAMCR in terms of Work Teams and Sections for the ruling of abstracts, in their corresponding original languages.
7. Finally, I broadly suggest that the IAMCR be the means by which all communication researchers of the world influence policies of scientific production.

FINAL NOTE

As a scientific community, we the communication researchers of the world aim with our work to contribute to the struggle for democracy in communication systems and strive for political and cultural diversity. In my opinion, promoting such diversity within our association is essential. That is why I celebrate the effort of this meeting.

I want to close my lecture in the same way I started it, 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 morning with the aim of recovering specificities by making languages relevant, as they are the expression of our worldviews.