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Publication languages in the Arts & Humanities

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Section 5: Research Trends

Publication Languages in the Arts & Humanities

Dr. Daphne van Weijen

In previous issues of **Research Trends**, we noted that English remains the dominant language in Science (1, 2). However, this does not appear to be the case across all subject areas. Researchers who publish their work in other languages tend to do so more frequently in the ‘softer’ sciences, such as the Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Psychology, and Arts & Humanities (2). In this article we focus specifically on the role language plays in the Arts & Humanities and the extent to which researchers from different countries publish in languages other than English.

To answer this question, we first examined the extent to which other languages are used in the Arts & Humanities in general, and then distinguished trends in language use at country level (which countries favor English when publishing in the Humanities and which do not?). In addition we also analyzed different subfields within the Humanities, specifically: Archeology, History, Language and Linguistics, and Philosophy. The analyses are based on Scopus data. For a detailed overview of the coverage of Humanities journals in Scopus, please see Dr. Wim Meester’s contribution on the Arts & Humanities citation indexes in this issue of **Research Trends** (3). Finally it is important to note that Scopus only covers journals that publish articles in other languages if they include titles and abstracts in English.

Publication languages in the Humanities

Over the past five years, roughly 265,000 articles were indexed in the Arts & Humanities, written in 45 languages, but all with English abstracts. Results indicate that English is clearly the dominant language of publication in the Arts & Humanities (77%), although this figure is somewhat lower than the proportion of English language content in Scopus in general (88.4%). This suggests that local languages appear to play a larger role within the Humanities than in other fields (2). Of the 23% of publications that are non-English, French (7%), German (4%), Spanish (4%) and Italian (2.5%) are the languages most frequently used (see **Figure 1**). This finding, which emerges from an analysis of articles, is also confirmed when analyzing the corpus of journals as discussed in Meester’s contribution in this issue of **Research Trends** (3).



Figure 1: Word cloud containing the Languages other than English used in publications in the Arts & Humanities between 2008 and 2012. Source: Scopus data, Word cloud generated using [Wordle](#).

Country	Article count	Language (%)					
		English	French	German	Italian	Spanish	Other
United Kingdom	27400	98.0	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.3
United States	67815	97.3	0.8	0.2	0.1	1.4	0.2
The Netherlands	4985	89.8	1.4	1.3	0.0	0.5	7
Russia	1015	84.5	2.7	1.3	0.0	0.5	11
China	4231	78.2	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.2	20.7
Portugal	942	76.3	4.0	0.7	1.3	4.8	12.8
Germany	9824	66.9	2.1	28.3	0.4	1.2	1.1
Italy	5718	66.0	5.1	1.4	23.3	2.9	1.3
Spain	7975	48.2	3.0	0.5	0.4	45.5	2.4
France	10900	39.4	56.2	1.0	0.6	1.7	1.1
Overall	252443	77.0	7.1	4.2	2.4	4.1	5.2

Table 1: Overview of the percentage of Arts & Humanities papers published in English versus other languages per country (in 2008 – 2012), ordered by percentage of English use from most to least. Source: [Scopus](#).

Country level analysis

The second phase of our study focused on the use of language across different countries in order to see whether the preference for publishing in English was the same across countries. The countries included in the analysis were the same as in an earlier Research Trends piece on the language of scientific communication (2). However, in this case we included the United Kingdom and the United States for comparison purposes. The outcome of the analysis clearly shows that the percentage

of articles written in English varies strongly from country to country (see Table 1). Researchers from The Netherlands and Russia for example, are far more likely to publish their Humanities papers in English than researchers from France or Spain. This is in line with the ratios between English and local language papers in general, which were far lower for France and Spain than for The Netherlands and Russia (2). The interesting question then, is whether this preference holds across specific subfields of the Humanities.

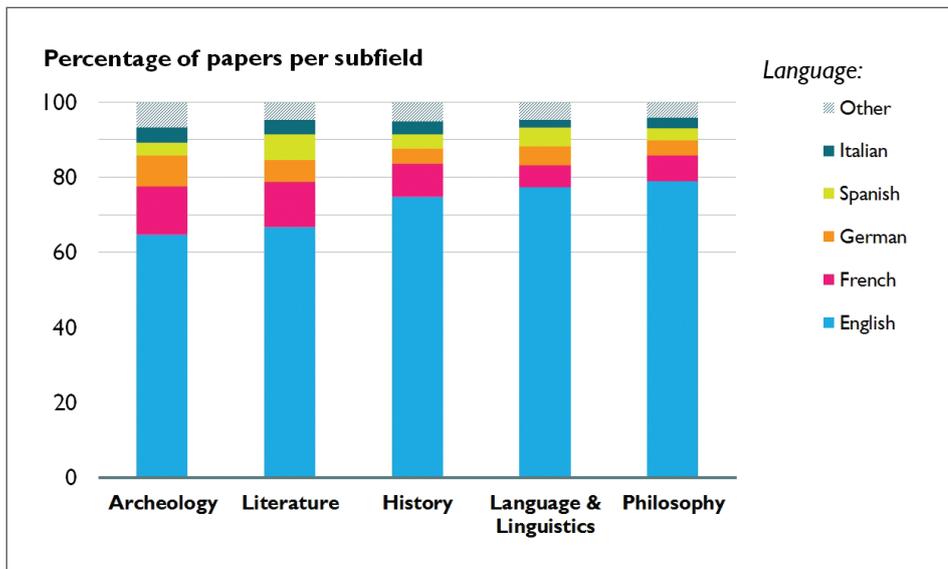


Figure 2: Overview of the percentage of papers published in the top five languages per subfield of the Humanities (in 2008 – 2012), ordered by percentage of English use from least (left) to most (right). Source: [Scopus](#).

References:

1. Research Trends (2008) "English as the international language of science", Research Trends, Issue 6, July 2008.
2. Van Weijen, D. (2012) "The Language of (Future) Scientific Communication", Research Trends, Issue 31, November 2012.
3. Meester, W. (2013) "Towards a comprehensive citation index for the Arts & Humanities", Research Trends, Issue 32, March 2013.

Subfield analysis

In order to examine whether the use of languages other than English is similar across subfields within the Humanities, we chose to compare five subfields: Archaeology, History, Language & Linguistics, Literature, and Philosophy. The main purpose of this analysis was to discover whether or not the percentage of English use in each subfield is the same or different and in which other languages researchers publish besides English. The results of the analysis indicate that English is still the dominant language of publication in the Scopus-covered publication output in each of these subfields, but this varies from 65% in Archeology to 79% in Philosophy. The large percentage of English language publications in Philosophy reflects an Anglo-Saxon orientation of the Scopus-indexed literature in this subject field, possibly due to the fact that it is

uncommon for publishers and authors in Philosophy from non-English speaking countries to add English article titles and abstracts to their publications. Furthermore, the top five languages are consistent for all fields (see Figure 2). In each case French is the second publication language of choice, followed in more or less the same order by German, Spanish and Italian.

Overall, we can conclude that researchers do seem to vary in the extent to which they publish in languages other than English in the Arts & Humanities. Spanish and French researchers in particular appear to hold a preference for publishing in their own language. Furthermore, researchers are somewhat more likely to publish in other languages, particularly French, in the Archeology and Literature subfields.