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Economies of Signs in Writing for Academic Publication: The Case of English Medium “National” Journals

Theresa Lillis

The centrality of publishing in academic journals to academic knowledge work globally is largely taken as a given. Publishing is a defining aspect of scholars’ labour in the academic world, tied to both current and possible future material conditions in which they/we work: this is evidenced most obviously by scholars’ accounts (in everyday conversation and published studies, e.g. Canagarajah, *Geopolitics*; Flowerdew; Lillis and Curry, *Academic*), and the existence of scholarly evaluation systems which, whilst varying in codification practices around the world, are ubiquitous— influencing salaries, opportunities for securing jobs, “tenure” or continuity of employment and research grants, as well as often being tied to opportunities to do certain kinds of academic teaching, e.g. supervision of postgraduate study. However, whilst writing for publication is largely taken as a given, the specific workings, meanings and consequences of this activity at national and transnational levels tend to remain invisible. A key premise of this paper is that, as scholars, we may know a great deal about the world and politics of academic knowledge production at the level of our immediate lived experience, yet what we know are in fact only fragments from our specific positioning (geopolitical, geolinguistic) in the world. The partiality of knowledge at an ontological level is well rehearsed, particularly in postmodern, postcolonial and feminist literature and debate. But I’m concerned here with the ideological and material impact of this partiality in relation to our ongoing contribution to, and thus production of, the academic world we inhabit. “Our,” here, refers in particular to Anglophone centre scholars, who often seem unaware of the privileged

jac 32.3–4 (2012)



position we hold arising from, not least, the current global status of English as the medium of scholarly exchange.

There is a lot of work to be done to build a more comprehensive picture of the workings of academic knowledge production, evaluation and circulation. The aim of this paper is to focus on one part of this knowledge making activity, the production of English medium “national” journals in local contexts where English is not the official or widely used medium of communication yet where English, in a global context, is increasingly viewed as the “academic lingua franca.” The aim is to begin to explore this practice, to consider where such journals can be located within the dominant global academic economy and in so doing seek to throw into relief the nature of knowledge making practices more generally. The paper therefore speaks to debates about the global status of English in academic text production as well as the nature and value of academic publishing as a key part of academic labour (Slaughter and Rhoades; Horner).

I will begin by briefly describing the longitudinal study from which this focus emerged and the specific data and focus of this paper. I then discuss key notions framing the discussion—centres/peripheries and economies of signs—before moving on to case studies of four English medium “national” journals in the field of psychology located in four southern and central European national contexts: Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal. The case studies are intended as important in their own right—as providing readers with descriptive information about particular journals, their histories and goals—and also as illustrating the dominant and contested economies of signs (Blommaert, *Discourse*) shaping academic knowledge production.

Academic Writing for Publication in a Global Context

This paper grows out of a longitudinal study setting out to explore the impact of the growing dominance of English as the global medium of published academic writing on the lives and practices of multilingual scholars working and living in non-Anglophone contexts, and on knowledge-making practices more generally (see Lillis and Curry, *Academic*,



and Lillis and Curry, “Professional Academic Writing in a Global Context”). The study focuses on four national contexts—Hungary, Slovakia, Spain, and Portugal—and on the disciplines of education and psychology. The longitudinal study is a text-oriented ethnography that involves a range of methods of data collection and analysis, such as observations, interviews, and collections of written texts and correspondence between authors and others (Curry and Lillis, “Multilingual”; Lillis and Curry, “Professional”; Lillis, “Ethnography”; Lillis and Curry, *Academic*). Under the overarching ethnographic epistemological approach of the wider study, a further empirical dataset was generated, which is a corpus of 1.5 million words, comprising 240 published research articles written by non-Anglophone and Anglophone centre psychologists. The purpose of this corpus is to facilitate analysis of textual practices in distinct contexts of English-medium text production (Lillis et al., “Geolinguistics”; Hewings et al.).

Amongst the many issues raised in the longitudinal study is the way in which multilingual scholars are negotiating complex interests and demands, not least by writing for a number of communities in a number of languages. Decisions about where to publish and why are based not only (or sometimes even primarily) on disciplinary or paradigmatic conversations to which scholars wish to contribute but on a number of interconnected factors such as the geographical location of the journal, the linguistic medium of the journal, the status of the journal in both codified and informal systems of rankings, and the extent to which a journal is viewed as a way of supporting local knowledge-making practices (e.g., providing papers for local postgraduate students and research teams). This last point has direct relevance to the rationale behind the participation of scholars in local/national journals, which are often seen as necessary intellectual infrastructure for developing and harnessing local knowledge and local knowledge making.¹ And in this orientation towards publishing in local/national journals as a means of growing local knowledge building capacity, scholars invest considerable labour as both active participants of the journal (as editor, editorial board member, etc.) and as contributing authors. The following brief profile of one scholar is an illustration of this work.



Géza is an associate professor working in a medium-sized department. He is in his mid fifties and has been working as an academic for almost 30 years. Like most academics in post-communist countries, he has additional jobs. Beyond his one full-time academic post, he works regularly for nongovernmental and governmental organizations (training and service in the areas of communication, decision-making processes, organizational and project development), and teaches in another institution (partly for free) as well as being a regular commentator on national radio.

Géza has a considerable number of publications in one of his home languages as well as a growing number in English. His publications reflect his theoretical and applied interests. He writes for numerous different journals both nationally and transnationally.

He has been an active participant in a local national journal published in the medium of English for some 10 years. As a scholar-editorial board member, he considers the journal to be an important way of presenting and sharing research and theory from the local national context with scholars from around the world. He has been involved in many different and difficult moments for the journal, from practical issues surrounding the translating and editing of papers in time to meet publishing deadlines, to discussion about its long time viability, to decisions about its theoretical orientation, to debates about funding and publishers. He is committed to the journal whilst often indicating that its location in the academic world is not straightforward, a key challenge being how to make it attractive to potential contributing scholars from outside the national context.

As a scholar author he has complex feelings about contributing papers to the journal, not least because it is not considered as high status as other journals, which are either published in the UK or US, or which have high “impact factors.” In order for the journal to survive he knows that he and his colleagues must submit papers. At times feels obliged to write and submit a paper to this journal to help keep it going; at other times he feels enthusiastic about the intellectual opportunities that the journal provides.²

Of the 50 scholars involved in the study, half of them were/are involved in an active capacity—as editor, editorial board member, reviewer of a local national journal. Some of these are English-medium national journals,



and some are local national journals in local/national languages. The main point I wish to make here is that in many cases scholars' work as contributing authors—their decisions about where to publish and why—is not separate from their work to build and sustain journals. And both are bound up with the politics of location, involving questions about who gets (or chooses) to publish where, why and with what consequences.

Why Focus on English Medium National (EMN) Journals?

The phenomenon of academic journals published in English in contexts where English is not the official or widely used medium of communication has been noted for some time in the natural sciences (Gibbs, Swales) and is increasingly evident in the social sciences and humanities (Lillis and Curry, *Academic*). At the same time, the dominance of the discourse of “English as the language of scientific communication” is increasingly normalised in popular, scholarly and commercial media. As a brief illustration of the first, it's salutary to note that there were 753,000,000 hits for “English is the language of science” on Google, September 12, 2011. With regard to more scholarly discussions, there is considerable interest and commentary on ELF and E(A)LF (English as an academic lingua franca), which, whilst of course engaging more empirically with the description and tracking of this phenomenon, tends to limit its critical edge to problematising “native” as norm in terms of the nature of English as a resource and how it is negotiated in interaction (Jenkins, Seidlhofer).³ Commercial discourse normalizing English as the language of science, and one that most closely connects with my focus—the medium of journals—is evident in statements made by Thomson Reuters. Thomson Reuters, a multinational company that gathers, filters (notably through its indexes) and sells information to be used by other companies, industries and universities, states as follows:

English is the universal language of science at this time in history. It is for this reason that Thomson Reuters focuses on journals that publish full text in English or at very least, their bibliographic information in English. There are many journals covered in *Web of Science* that publish only their bibliographic information in English



with full text in another language. However, going forward, it is clear that the journals most important to the international research community will publish full text in English. This is especially true in the natural sciences. In addition, all journals must have cited references in the Roman alphabet. (thomsonreuters.com)

The indexes produced by Thomson Reuters—the most influential being the ISI and SSCI—are heavily skewed not only towards English-medium journal publications but to English-medium Anglophone centre journals, predominantly from the US and the UK. For example, and to take a key disciplinary area covered in the EMN journals discussed in this paper, of the 423 English-medium psychology journals listed in the SSCI, 394 are from US- and UK-based publishing contexts. Thus, “English” is a powerful sign within the global economy of (academic) signs but it is not free floating or universal (as is implied in “lingua franca” scholarly and commercial discourses); rather, as will be illustrated in the case studies, its specific value is firmly anchored to specific material sites and practices.

Key Notions: Centres, Peripheries, Economies of Signs

There are several core notions that I think are useful for both describing and theorising the place of EMN journals within academic knowledge production practices, which I outline here.

Centres, Peripheries and Centering Institutions

“Centre”/“periphery” are used to indicate the differing material conditions and dependency relations between regions of the world, usually framed in terms of First and Third Worlds or West-as-centre in contrast to postcolonial periphery (for discussion of these and other notions developed in World Systems [WS] theory, see Wallerstein). Canagarajah offers a useful summary of this position, including the way in which such control or dominance by the centre extends beyond economic control:

Communication, entertainment, transport, industry and technology are diverse other channels that make the periphery dependent on the center. The material advantage the centre enjoys enables it to function as the nucleus in these other domains too. (Canagarajah, *Geopolitics* 48)



The relevance of this notion of centre/periphery to academic production at a global level is clearly evident. Scientific (used in the broadest sense here) production remains within the control of a few countries and to a large extent reflects the more powerful economic position of those countries globally. Not surprisingly, the amount of money devoted to General Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) is much less in low and lower-middle income countries than in upper-middle and high-income countries, and this expenditure maps strongly against academic production, measured here in terms of journal article output. In the natural sciences, journal article output stands at 31% for North America and 29% for Europe as compared, for example, with 2.6% for Latin America and 1.16% for Africa. In the social sciences, journal article output (as measured by percentage of articles included in the SSCI) stands at 52.2% for North America and 38% Europe as compared with 1.7% for Latin America and 1.6% for Africa. Globally, research publications are highly concentrated in a few countries and regions, with more than 80% of the world's scientific articles coming from the OECD area. While percentages vary across the natural and social sciences, the overall domination of the same regions remains constant, and the relationship between economic input (capacity) and research output, if not uniform, is clear.⁴

Whilst the material significance of the notions of centre and periphery is clear, relationships around academic publishing are also more complex than any rigid or *a priori* categories may imply. Such complexity with regard to geo-political sites is acknowledged by some theorists adopting a WS approach, such as Sousa Santos, who uses the term “*semi-periférico*” to refer to many countries and regions that cannot easily be classified as either centre or periphery. This is the case with the four contexts illustrated in this paper—Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal—which are “centre” contexts that are also “peripheral.” Most obviously, they are centre contexts if we compare their GDPs with most parts of the world (all four nations are classified as “high income” by the World Bank), but they are more peripheral than other states in Europe at the level of economy and political power. In the context of the focus on publishing here, we also need to layer on the question of language to discussions of centers and peripheries. In a global context where English, as a semiotic resource and as a *networked resource*—that is as a resource attached to other key



resources such as centre academics and centre-based networks (Lillis and Curry, “English”)—constitutes considerable cultural capital, these four sites can again be considered peripheral. In brief, they can be described as (semi) peripheral in terms of economic and political power and in terms of access to and control over this key semiotic resource.

A further way of acknowledging the centre/periphery relationships as materially real but avoiding *a priori* or rigid understandings is to anchor them to descriptions and explorations of actual processes and practices, and here the notion of *centering institutions* proves useful (Silverstein; Blommaert, *Discourse*). *Centering institutions* are institutions at all levels of society, nationally and transnationally, which tend to be highly centripetal in nature. The nation state is an obvious centering institution, regulating as it does all manner of social, political and economic activity. In my focus here on academic activity and publishing, centering institutions include more immediate centres, such as departments, faculties or universities which regulate (more weakly or more strongly) what counts as scholarly work and, in particular, the value of different kinds of scholarly publishing (text type, specific category of journal, etc.). There are also more distant yet powerful centering institutions, notably Thomson Reuters, which are increasingly becoming closer to our lived realities because of the way in which their filtering and evaluation systems are being taken up around the world by more immediate centering institutions, e.g. universities and national research bodies. Exploring how institutions direct scholars’ activities and likewise how scholars orient to such institutions is an important way of understanding the nature of academic production.

A key point about centering institutions—real and, here, part of our scholarly imaginary—is that they are strongly centripetal, working towards normativity.⁵ A relevant example of such normativity with regard to writing for publication is the way in which in Europe the position of English is constantly affirmed and reaffirmed by policy at nation-state level in order, supposedly, to implement the European-based Bologna agreement, even though there is nothing in the Bologna agreement, per se, that requires this (for interesting discussion in relation to Norway, see Ljosland). And this reaffirmation with regard to English at national and transnational levels cannot be separated from the growing global influence of commer-



cial enterprises such as Thomson Reuters (apparently, at least, a more distant centering institution), with its clear privileging of English. This strongly normative stance towards what counts as the language of science (English) feeds into institutional practices with more immediate and visible impact on academic production, as illustrated in the national research assessment exercise in Portugal, which since 2008 has been carried out in English only (Lillis and Curry, “Academic” 56–58).

Recognising and paying attention to such centering institutions is useful in exploring the phenomenon of EMN journals whose very existence can in some ways be seen as an effect of a centripetal (economic and political) pull towards the Anglophone centre. However, the notion of polycentricity is also important here, to signal a) the way in which there are many (rather than one) centres/systems and b) that there are evident challenges to dominant or centripetal pulls and orientations. Thus practices at the level of some local centering institutions may be congruent with centripetal practices from centering institutions at other scale levels (as in the example mentioned above of a state adopting policies which give higher value to English than local national languages), but some may represent a challenge to this centripetal pull, for example, through decisions to contribute to, establish or fund a local national journal in local national language(s) or a multilingual journal operating outside of dominant evaluating systems.⁶ The tension between centripetal and centrifugal pulls is illustrated in the case studies below.

The Academic Marketplace and Economies of Signs

Signs at every level of communication from the micro use of a particular diacritic to the meso use of a genre to the more macro-level of “language” have social meaning and social value. In the context of globalisation, value is not necessarily fixed but rather may vary according to specific contexts, indicating that different economies of signs are in operation. For example, a Tanzanian variety of English may index non-standard (inferior) language and peripheral identity to an Anglophone “centre” audience and context, but in Tanzania may index prestige and world knowledge (discussed in Blommært, *Discourse* 223).

In the case of academic publishing, English is a prestigious sign, but like “English” in the world more generally (illustrated in the Tanzanian example



above) it is not one sign but multiple, both in terms of what is produced—its varied forms and functions reflected not least in its use by some 1.5 billion people around the world—and in terms of what and how it is evaluated. And there is clearly a dominant economy of signs at work that is evident at different levels of production practices. At the more micro-text level, reviewers' comments clearly illustrate the differential value attached to particular types or what can be more accurately referred to as clusters of "English," e.g. signalled in evaluations such as "non-native" and sometimes stated explicitly and sometimes not (Lillis and Curry, *Academic*; Tardy and Matsuda). At a more macro level, particular textual objects or, in market terms, academic products are more highly valued than others—"international" more than "national" journals, English-medium journals over other languages (generally), Anglophone English-medium centre journals over English-medium periphery journals.

Economies of signs involve both symbolic and material or exchange value, a point long since made by Bourdieu. The case studies below illustrate how these two dimensions are closely related but are not entirely congruous. In some instances the symbolic value of journals is linked to Enlightenment or internationalist ideals centering on use value—in this context the use (fullness) of academic work to scholars around the world—and in others the symbolic value is more closely aligned with the market or exchange value of the current academic marketplace. Both dimensions are clearly in play.⁷

Focus on English Medium National Journals

This section focuses on four English medium "national" journals from four distinct national contexts: Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal. My aim here is to make visible this particular phenomenon of academic text production by offering situated accounts of key aspects of the practices of such journals whilst seeking to ensure anonymity. Anonymity is important: most journal boards and their publishers are quite secretive about information surrounding their journals. Making public here any specific challenges and problems particular journals face may present a



threat to a journal's status or jeopardise specific negotiations about their status in which they may be currently involved. I have organised my representation in three key ways: 1) a brief description of each journal which seeks to be factually descriptive and is drawn from editors' accounts, publically available documentary data and in some instances observation of practices; 2) a representation of four editors' perspectives drawn from formal interviews in three cases and formal interviews and extensive participant observations with one journal; 3) a statistical summary of the contributing authors based on an analysis of the journals' archives. In this last section, the letters A, B, C and D are used to refer to the journals. It is important to note that for the purposes of anonymity, the accounts and labelling in the first section are purposely not aligned with the data and discussions in the subsequent two sections.

A Profile of Four EMN Journals

EMN Journal 1

This is a journal established 1998 and located in Spain. It is based and funded primarily by one university, the host institution and, in part, also by a locally based professional organisation. The journal appears in many indexes including the ClinPSYCH, CSA social science collection, PsychINFO and DICE. The disciplinary coverage is general psychology, and it has an explicit empirical focus with a clear mission statement that it will not accept theoretical contributions. This general disciplinary orientation is maintained although it is not viewed as unproblematic, and there are ongoing discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of orienting the journal towards a more specialist focus. An advantage of making the journal more narrowly specialist is that this would map onto what is perceived to be the interest of many authors to publish within subfield specialisms. At the same time, if the journal were to adopt a particular subfield specialism as its overarching orientation, it would exclude many local scholars from submitting to the journal, including scholars from the university where it is based. In terms of the disciplinary space this journal occupies in Spain, there is one journal that can be considered to occupy similar ground, a journal published in Spanish that has been in existence for some 50 years.



Authors can submit papers in Spanish, Portuguese, Russian or English, even though all papers are finally published in English. Reviews are carried out in the languages in which papers are submitted, and if papers are accepted for publication, they are then translated into English. If authors are members of the same university where the journal is based, translation costs are borne by the journal; otherwise, authors have to bear the costs of translation or translate papers themselves. An exception is made in the case of Brazilian or Russian scholars because it is acknowledged that the translation costs are far too high for scholars working in those contexts. For example, the translation cost for one paper amounts to the monthly salary of a Russian scholar.

EMN Journal 2

This is an interdisciplinary social sciences journal established and located in Slovakia. The journal has been in existence since 1990 but has been through three main stages in terms of disciplinary focus and overarching goal. In stage one, the disciplinary focus was wide ranging, but there was a particular emphasis on work focusing on Slovak culture, society and history. Stage two involved a change in editorship and the development of a specific epistemological orientation towards the wide ranging content and interest—that of an explicit inter/transdisciplinary orientation to key issues and topics in human sciences, including work drawing on disciplinary areas such as philosophy, psychology, politics, and linguistics. Stage three, the current stage, sees the journal continuing with its explicit transdisciplinary focus. In terms of location and publishing, it continues to be located in a Slovak academic institution, but, whilst during stages one and two it was published by a local academic publishing company, stage three involved accepting a contract with a multinational publishing company.

The journal is published in English and accepts papers in English and Slovak or Czech. A translator has been involved in the journal for some twenty years and works on both translating papers into English and also proofreading and correcting papers submitted in English by authors who are “non-native” users of English. Reviews are carried out sometimes in the language(s) in which they are submitted and sometimes using translation.



The journal appears in a number of indexes, including *Philosopher's Index*, *Sociological Abstracts*, *Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts*, and *The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*.

EMN Journal 3

This is a journal established in 2003, located in Hungary and published by a Hungarian institution. There are two key stages to date in the history of the journal at the level of editorship and disciplinary orientation. Stage one, from 2003 to 2006, involved a Hungarian editor who was a scholar based in the same academic institution where the journal is located and a disciplinary orientation that explicitly sought to combine biological and cultural approaches to psychology. Stage two, from 2007 to date, has involved a change in editorship and a shift in disciplinary orientation away from the social across disciplinary framing towards a biological approach only. The journal in stage two is associated with a European scholarly association. Two Hungarian members of the previous board continue to be actively involved with the journal, one being one of the two sub-editors. The journal continues to be published by the same Hungarian institution and has its main website on this institution's pages.

EMN Journal 4

This journal was established in 2003 and is based in a Portuguese academic institution. Its disciplinary orientation is broad—social sciences—seeking to include work from across the social sciences but also with a view to developing a transdisciplinary orientation. The journal is published in English with submissions mostly made in English but sometimes with submissions in Portuguese or French. The editorial consultant is described as a “native speaker” of English and is bilingual in Portuguese, as well as having a high level of knowledge of French. The editorial consultant proofreads most of the articles—including those submitted in English—and translates some papers from Portuguese into English and on some occasions from French into English.

Reviews are carried out mainly in the language in which they are submitted. The journal appears in many indexes, including *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)*, *Academic Search Elite*,



Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Complete, and CSA Worldwide Political Science.

Editors' Perspectives

Probably the most obvious question to consider is: why publish a journal in English in a context where English is not the (or one of the) state languages or the language of official or everyday communication? All four editors gave as one key reason that English is the *de facto* language of scientific communication (science here used in its broadest sense to cover all areas of academic knowledge making):

We all know that English is the language of communication all over the world in scientific terms.

Most of the faculty think that English is the scientific language of today and it is useless to publish a journal like this in local language. . . . I agree.

Using English rather than the local national language was viewed as the means by which local knowledge could be communicated with the rest of the world, with comments made in particular about the difficulties faced by scholars using “small languages” (those spoken by a small population globally). This goal of sharing locally generated knowledge is explicitly stated in some journal mission statements; for example, in one instance a journal is referred to as “a gateway for the international community” to local research. Where not stated in the journal, it was clearly articulated by three of the four editors.

[The journal] was directed to the presentation of [local national] Social Science and Humanities in English for our readers, the scientific communities abroad.

The goal was

To present our works for the international community of scholars [and] to let others, foreign scholars know what we are producing here.



In some instances, explicit mention is made in journal-related documents about the “inaccessibility” to “foreign” scholars of work previously published in local/national contexts and mention made of the problems caused by lack of translation. An EMN journal therefore hopes to remedy that situation by producing work in English. In some instances, the impulse to establish an EMN journal and thus be in a position to share research and knowledge was linked to a specific moment in a country’s history.

At the beginning [the aim was] that this journal should serve to present our post- communist social science to our colleagues.

Whilst some comments by editors (and mission statements) signal a uni-directionality in terms of knowledge communication—“us” making available to “them”—with terms such as *show*, *present*, *showcase* and *sell* used, other comments at different stages in different journals’ histories signal aspirations of bi/multiple directionality with words such as *engage with*, *open to*, and *invite*. And here English is seen as the most useful way of ensuring that multi-directionality can occur; all four editors expressed the view that potential authors from outside the specific national context would not be willing to publish in “our journals” if the local national language were used, not only because of issues around their productions of papers for submission (translating from another language into English) but in terms of the potential readership of these papers. This is a specific point from authors’ perspectives—whether local or non-local, the assumption is that their papers are more likely to be read if they are in English. It is also a key issue for the journals; if the journal’s readership increases, it is anticipated that citations will increase and thus lead to a higher impact factor being calculated for the journal.⁸

Hovering in the background of discussions about the reasons for publishing an EMN journal is an issue raised by all the editors, and this is the difficulty scholars face in securing publication in Anglophone centre journals—variously referred to as “English language journals,” “UK and US journals,” “publishing in England and America” or “in foreign journals.” Sometimes the location of the research question and focus is seen as a barrier that is a particular challenge for social, rather than natural, scientists:



Social sciences are special. If you talk about molecules or other things, it's the same in China. If you talk about societies, it's not evident that for instance, you are from the UK you will be very interested in the history of the trains in Portugal in the 19th century—It's not so easy to have it published in, for instance in UK Journals, because of that specificity of the point of your research.

And, given the difficulties, editors point to the opportunities that an EMN journal therefore offers to some scholars:

It's difficult to get published in England and America so establishing the journal provides opportunities for scholar to publish in English . . . representing therefore a “small breakthrough.”

In one instance, the establishment of an EMN journal was perceived by the editor to function as a way of supporting local scholars not only to publish in English but as a supportive vehicle (as some support was available for translation and editing) for learning and using academic English and thus as a first step towards securing publication in “international” journals.

The difficulties and challenges faced by editors in producing the journals were many, with all pointing to the considerable work involved: *slave labour, very hard work*. A key challenge was around producing the English-medium texts:

For me [it's difficult] to find people qualified to edit, review, proofread, material for this journal because it is very difficult to find someone who is a native English speaker, who is qualified in this area.

I am perfectly aware that some of the papers are not satisfactory in terms of the style, of the English style translations but it's the best translation we have been able to get.

Finding people to either translate or to read and revise English texts presented considerable difficulties, involving editors chasing people who could help close to deadlines for production. Whilst the ideal reader/language reviewer was considered to be someone who was an expert in the relevant field and also a “native speaker” of English, editors sometimes



involved less experienced academics or students. All editors referred to “native” English as the benchmark against which they judged the quality of their English-medium texts, with the question of varieties of/with English being mentioned only in the context of “UK” English or “American” English. Other key challenges mentioned were finding reviewers for papers, particularly reviewers with both the expertise in the area of study and in the relevant language. The challenge of ensuring that journal board members were actively involved in sustaining the journal was also emphasised.

All four editors felt that their efforts in producing and sustaining journals were worthwhile, with the greatest challenge (apart from managing to establish and sustain a journal with usually limited resources) being how to increase the active involvement of scholars from outside the local context as contributing authors, as editorial board members and reviewers. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction expressed was where there was a strong sense of the journal opening up and forging new inter/trans-disciplinary spaces.

Contributing Authors Over an 8–10 Year Period

A stated goal of the journals is to provide a space for local national scholarship in the medium of English so that work can be communicated around the world. At the same time, a key goal for all four journals is to become an “international” journal or, as one editor stated, “a standard” international journal, which involved a number of aspects including increasing contributions from scholars from around the world, increasing editorial board members from non-local sites and, in terms of goal, inclusion in a high status index, with SCI/SSCI the most commonly mentioned.

In order to consider whether goals in terms of contributing authors were being met, an analysis of the contributing authors of all papers (excluding editorials and book reviews) to the four journals was carried out. The following figures are drawn from an analysis of the four journals over their life history—this includes all issues during the existence of the journals.⁹ A total of 968 articles was logged, with authors classified as local and non-local on the basis of institutional affiliation.

Table 1: Location of Authors

Local national affiliation	1189	56%
UK	241	11%
US	134	6.5%
Brazil	98	5%
Russia	70	3.5%
Portugal	48	2%
Canada	47	2%
Germany	27	1.5%
Netherlands	24	1%
Mexico	23	1%
Czech Republic	22	1%
Italy	17	1%
Argentina	13	0.5%
Japan	12	0.5%
Chile	11	0.5%
Cuba	11	0.5%
Finland	10	0.5%

(No. of contributing authors: 2133. Table includes localities where numbers of authors amount to 10 or more.) *Note: % to .5 given.

Other national localities of contributing authors are as follows: Armenia 1, Australia 3, Austria 9, Bangladesh 2, Belgium 4, Bulgaria 1, Colombia 7, Costa Rica 2, Cyprus 1, Denmark 1, Egypt 1, El Salvador 2, France 6, Greece 2, Hungary 5, India 2, Iran 9, Ireland 3, Israel 2, Korea 1, New Zealand 6, Nigeria 8, Norway 4, Peru 2, Poland 9, Slovenia 2, Spain 9, Sweden 9, Switzerland 8, Turkey 9, Ukraine 1, Uruguay 2, Venezuela 3.

Table 2: Local and Non-local Authorship of EMN Journal Articles

No. of articles involving local authors	538*	52.2%
No. of papers involving non-local authors	493*	47.8%
Papers individually authored	432	44.6%
<i>Local</i>	202	46.8%
<i>Non Local</i>	230	53.2%
Papers co-authored	536	55.4%
<i>Local-local</i>	273	50.9%
<i>Local-Non Local</i>	60	11.2%
<i>Non Local-Non Local</i>	203	37.9%

(No. of articles: 968.) *Note: These numbers add up to more than the number of papers because some papers are counted twice if they include a local and a non-local author.

Table 3: Percentage of Local Authorship

	First 5 Years	Most Recent 5 Years
A*	91.67%	31.52%
B	68.91%	75.26%
C	87.71%	64.83%
D	13.96%	2.55%

(No. of local versus non-local contributing authors to a paper during the first and most recent five years of each journal. *Note: A, B, C, and D do not align with journals 1, 2, 3, 4.

The figures allow us to reach some conclusions about contributing authorship. Overall, the total number of contributing local authors far outweighs the number of contributing authors from other locations by about 3:1. This indicates that the journals' goal of providing a space for local scholarly interest, research and knowledge is indeed being met



(Table 1). At the same time, there are a considerable number of papers involving non-local contributing authors, approximately 47% (Table 1). This indicates that there is engagement with the journals by scholars from outside the local national context. Table 2 suggests that scholars from a wide number of countries are contributing to the journals, but because there tend to be specific patterns of translocal engagement in each journal, the spread looks greater in such total figures than is actually the case for each journal. Thus, for example, we find contributions from Brazil in the Portuguese EMN journal, contributions from Portugal and Mexico to the Spanish EMN journal, Russian to Slovakia and Hungary. Where specific relations between scholars or groups of scholars have been established and facilitated (through provision of translation for example) particular patterns of contributions emerge, e.g., a relatively high number of Russian contributors in a particular journal. Whilst the UK and US contributors are spread across three of the four journals, there is far greater contribution from authors from these localities to one specific journal—the journal that switched to a UK-based editor several years ago: 75% of the UK contributing authors and 49% of the US contributing authors are to this journal. One journal had a tiny proportion of contributions from these localities.

Given the definite shift over time in the goals of three of the four journals—three explicitly signalled a desire to shift away from informing scholars internationally about local national research and scholarship towards inviting and involving scholars from around the world in contributing to the journal—the collation of figures in Table 3 is an attempt to quantify whether any such a shift has taken place. The pattern is mixed with the clearest evidence of a shift in Journal A but also evident in Journal C. There is a shift in the other direction in Journal B towards a greater number of local national authors. Journal D, which shows a markedly lower percentage of contributing local authors overall, shows a distinct decrease in local authors over its history. This significant decrease parallels a change in editorship from a local national editor to a UK- (and US-based) editor.



EMN Journals and Economies of Signs

The very existence of *English* medium national journals reflects the dominant economy of signs within which academic knowledge making is currently configured: English is viewed by academics and corporate interests alike (albeit often for different reasons) as the most valuable language on a number of levels. English is the language through which knowledge is assumed to be most effectively communicated; it is the language that gets attributed higher value in formal and informal evaluation systems; it is also the language that, because of the increased readership it is presumed to facilitate (more people read English than Slovak), will lead to a greater number of citations and thus an increase in a journal's "impact factor." Considerable effort goes into developing and sustaining EMN journals with the hope and aspiration for the contribution to knowledge globally that they might make. Whilst scholars involved in the production of such journals are clearly aware of their weak "exchange value"—their value within the global academic marketplace—they tend to foreground their immediate "use value"—their scholarly value locally and transnationally—whilst also signalling greater potential use value once their exchange value can be realised. Thus whilst currently configured as lower down the scale, the journals are also construed as being "in transition" with the goal of moving from "national" to "international" status through, most obviously, securing inclusion in a high status index. However, and indeed however hard journals try, it does seem that the odds are stacked against making such a transition: application is a complex process, with the criteria never clearly articulated (and indications that compilers are driven by extending global corporate interests) and with journals only being allowed to reapply at certain two-, three- or six-year intervals. In order to stand a chance of being included in such indexes, editors and editorial boards often clearly consider that producing an English-medium journal (rather than, for example, a Portuguese-medium journal) may be the best way forward. Yet there is a real danger that they may get caught up in a hugely labour intensive process of producing journals that few people read. If there are few readers—and concern is expressed about readership—then EMN journals can fulfil neither their intellectual vision nor their strategic goals.



However, this account may be overly pessimistic, and it is important to acknowledge at least one other account of the significance of EMN journals in the context of academic production globally. English is a semiotic resource increasingly used around the globe and available to all to use for whichever purposes they wish. And in the process of use, people are transforming the resource itself and the purposes for which the resource is being used. The production of EMN journals alongside journals in local/national languages can be viewed as providing an additional intellectual resource both in their own terms and as a bridge towards publishing in Anglophone centre journals, should writers so desire. English-medium national journals are not in fact replacing journals produced in other languages—at least not in the social sciences and not in the particular national contexts discussed here—but are existing alongside these. Three of the editors stressed the importance of continuing to publish in local national languages and did so themselves. The journal led by the editor who expressed the most categorical view about the need to publish in English is in fact linked (on its web page) to a sister journal published in the local national language; both journals therefore are presented as compatible resources and sources for local national as well as transnational scholarly exchange. Interestingly, this EMN journal is also the only one of the four discussed currently in the SSCI, thus apparently indicating that it is possible to work both towards and against key centering institutions and their imperatives.

Furthermore, given the strongly normative nature of journals already successful within the academic marketplace, it may be, as was expressed indeed by some editors, that EMN journals can function as a centrifugal force by opening up intellectual spaces that are often not available in either English-medium centre journals or longstanding journals in local languages. There is considerable interest by EMN journals to forge work which builds on transdisciplinary discussion and debate, which stands in contrast to the trend towards ever greater narrow specialisms in high status centre journals. In addition, through their very existence, EMN journals can be viewed as serving to challenge Anglophone centre dominance, bypassing the difficulties of trying to get published “in” the centre and relocating the centre in the periphery in ways which are of most interest and value to local scholars. A key example here is that in



establishing “local” English-medium journals, scholars have greater control when deciding on the forum for their intellectual agenda and inviting and encouraging scholars from other localities to contribute to their journals rather than waiting to be invited or accepted (or rejected) elsewhere.

As indicated in the introduction to this paper, I think that “writing for publication” is, from the perspective of scholars in academia, a classic example of a “familiar near” phenomenon, that is something that because of its familiarity is “known” yet in fact tends to remain largely unknown and invisible precisely because of a (presumed) familiarity.¹⁰ In order to get to know what is involved in writing for publication globally, and thus “make the familiar strange” (Agar), a focus on a specific phenomenon, such as “EMN journals,” is important for at least two, interrelated, reasons. Firstly, as a growing phenomenon globally, it is something that we need to know about: what it is, who participates, and where it is positioned within publication practices more generally. Secondly, it is a practice that often remains invisible to the Anglophone-centre, which means that debates around writing for publication in the Anglophone centre (at informal, institutional, academic levels), are often curiously parochial, ignoring several key facts: 1) most scholars in the world are multilingual and, even in the context of the global dominance of English, are working with, in and through several languages in their academic work; 2) the fact of working through several languages with distinct albeit overlapping academic communities raises important questions about which knowledges get to be circulated where and which scholars (often on the basis of geographical, linguistic and political location) are participating in which conversations; 3) scholars working only through the medium of English are not only failing to access knowledges produced in other languages but failing to acknowledge the obstacles and challenges faced by scholars seeking to sustain knowledge making communities; 4) key commercial centering institutions based in the Anglophone centre have considerable power in influencing knowledge production and circulation practices, including most obviously the linguistic medium, yet whilst powerful tending to hover at the margins of scholarly awareness and debate, often not seen as our concern (we, as scholars wherever we are located, are busy trying to get on with the work of scholarly endeavour—researching, teaching, writing). The ways in



which commercial institutions are packaging and repackaging our work into “products” (as particular categories of journals, as figuring in particular indexes, as having a particular “impact factor”) are often ignored, even though such packaging is highly influential, used as it is for evaluating scholarly work around the world.

A focus on the specific phenomenon of EMN journals brings into sharp relief the nature and workings of the dominant knowledge economy and also illustrates the ways in which some of the key ideological values, including a market model of academic knowledge production, are to some extent being challenged. A goal of this paper has been to explore this particular fragment of the academic knowledge making world in order to understand this world—what scholars are doing, why and under what conditions—to illustrate the need for closer scrutiny of the practices surrounding academic production and to open up debate about what kind of practices we want to be involved in and why. There are deep concerns both in the “centre” and (semi)peripheries about current evaluation systems and the commercial interests governing these,¹¹ but these often seem vaguely articulated: learning more about the way this academic world works is one way of beginning to engage productively with our concerns and to consider ways of acting on them.¹²

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Notes

1. All terminology used to describe the nature of scholarly publication is fraught. A key example is “international,” which, as discussed elsewhere, functions as a powerful “sliding signifier” in the context of academic writing for publication (Lillis and Curry, *Academic*) when used in isolation from or alongside other clusters of wordings, such as “English,” “impact factor,” “SSCI-indexes” and “high quality.” Given that “international”—whatever its precise referential/indexical meaning—in practice has a positive value, the term “national” or “local” usually connotes lesser value, as is evident in the editors’ comments below. In this paper I am using *national* referentially (rather than evaluatively) to signal location in a specific national context, traditions and material conditions but with an awareness of its indexical meaning as lower in value than “international.”

2. This is a modified version of a scholar's profile from that presented in Lillis and Curry (*Academic*), with some details cut (because of limited space) and new details included in order to foreground key aspects of his work relating to his involvement in an academic journal.

3. For (socio)linguistic discussions of the rise of English as academic *lingua franca*, see Graddol and Hyland.

4. These figures are taken from a number of sources including the UNESCO *World Social Science Report* and *Science Report* and discussed in Lillis and Curry, "English."

5. Cf. Blommaert, "This centering almost always involves either perceptions or real processes of homogenisation and uniformisation: orienting towards such a centre involves the (real or perceived) reduction of difference and the creation of recognisably 'normative' meaning" (*Discourse* 75).

6. I would include open access practices here too; see discussion in Lillis and Curry, *Academic* Chapter 7.

7. The development of Bourdieu's work and thinking on the relationship between symbolic and cultural capital on the one hand and material economic capital on the other is richly synthesized by Frédéric Lebaron ("Pierre Bourdieu").

8. As created by Garfield in 1972, the IF was originally defined as the ratio of the number of citations to "source items" (e.g. articles or other types of text) in a particular journal in one year to the number of articles published by that journal in the preceding two years. For an overview of debates around the calculation of impact factor, see Lillis and Curry, *Academic* 16.

9. At the time of writing, five volumes from the early period of one journal's archives were not available.

10. I'm using "familiar near" here—collapsing the notion of "experience-near and experience distant" with the familiar/strange—to signal a core ethnographic principle (see Geertz, "From").

11. For a recent petition circulated to challenge one major publisher, see "The Cost of Knowledge."

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