An extensive literature

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In his paper on the increasing usage of English as the world's lingua franca of science (*ET*72 [18:4], Oct 02), Hikomaro Sano asserts that "only a few papers have been published (cf. Sano, 1996) to demonstrate the trend in a quantitative manner." As many readers would probably realise, quantitative work on this this topic goes back at least twenty years (e.g. Baldauf and Jernudd, 1983; Tsunoda 1983) to a time before it was relatively easy to do bibliometric analysis via on-line queries.

Nevertheless, Sano's detailed look at chemistry and his explicit provision of the on-line search strategies are an interesting addition to the literature and may encourage others to think about this question in their respective disciplines (see Ammon, 2001 for a summary of the most recent thinking on this topic).

However, as Baldauf (2001: 146) indicates, we need to be aware that this type of analysis is not without its problems since "...the move toward English language dominance reflects the dominance of English language users' contributions to the system and their need for highly relevant information for themselves. While databases are often treated as if they were representative of the world's scientific literature, they are not, nor with their present limitations are they likely to be. Since large well-known databases [like CA] must be selective for practical reasons, database selectivity is a problem that all scientists must face."

For example, a proportion of the Australian literature published in English is not referenced in any overseas database – especially if the journal is viewed as being of only local interest. The problem is greater for work published in languages other than English, and even when articles are included, it often takes longer for these articles to be abstracted for inclusion.

There is also evidence that articles written in languages other than English (LOTEs) are probably cited less frequently than comparable articles in English (Baldauf, 1986). Finally, there is a tacit assumption in some quarters, that if it is not published in English, it is probably not meant for an international audience.

The fact that English is increasingly the dominant language of science raises at least two issues that English speakers need to consider (see Baldauf 2001 for other implications).

First, although the proportion of articles in English is growing as participation in science grows, the actual number of articles in LOTEs is still very large. English speakers need to be careful not to marginalise this literature even further, especially as some of it may be important to their work.

Second, those of us fortunate enough to be fluent in English (by birth or dint of effort) should consider ways we can assist our LOTE colleagues to participate in the increasingly English-speaking world of science.

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