

# P is for Problem, Publish, and Psychology: Multilingual Scholars and the Challenges of Publishing in English

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## [About this series](#)

*More than 80% of the world’s population lives in countries other than the United States, Canada, and Europe, which dominate psychological science nonetheless. This new **Observer** series, an extension of the “[Psychological Science Needs the Entire Globe](#)” series that launched in 2021, is a small step toward closing that gap. Authors across the globe—in Africa, South America, South and Southeast Asia, and other regions that have long been underrepresented in the research community—share unique and personal perspectives on the issues affecting their work and careers. In providing these on-the-ground narratives, we hope to illuminate concrete challenges and opportunities alike involving this truly global science.*

Early in our academic careers, we knew little about our options for publishing, but we were intimate with the pressure to publish. In our university, publishing in a reputable, peer-reviewed journal was a requirement for tenure. We both published in local journals—Danielle in the English-language journal [Philippine Journal of Psychology](#) of the Psychological Association of the Philippines, and Michelle in

the Filipino-language monograph series [Binhi](#) of the Pambansang Samahan sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino (National Organization for Filipino Psychology). The choice to publish in these local journals was based on invitations from more senior colleagues affiliated with them. Local journals are known in the literature as peripheral scholarly journals, as they are seldom indexed in international databases (Salager-Meyer, 2014). They often struggle to come out with issues in a timely manner owing to difficulties getting a sufficient number of quality submissions through the rigorous (and often time-consuming) double-blind peer-review process. Our first publications, when they came out, were mutually beneficial—they contributed to our individual career goals as well as to well-regarded local journals that provided access to all for free and did not charge authors any publication fees.

More recently, we have felt the pressure of publishing internationally. Our university, in its quest for improved international rankings, has been offering rewards for international publications by its faculty, staff, and students; faculty promotions and other reward systems award higher points to publications that appear in international, indexed journals, which are typically English-language publications. Looking at our (not too long) list of peer-reviewed publications in journals and books, it is apparent that we have both published more in English than in Filipino.



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Diliman

For context, there are more than 100 local languages used actively in everyday life in the Philippines. However, owing to an education system that was established by Americans as part of their colonization

of the Philippines in the early to mid-20th century, the academic lingua franca remains English (for an overview of Philippine language policy, see Dekker & Young, 2005), with a few disciplines, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, deeply invested in promoting the use of Filipino (the national language) in the academe (Enriquez & Protacio-Marcelino, 1984). For the Filipino academic, therefore, there are more avenues for publishing in English (locally and internationally) than in the local languages. Filipino academics may also be more adept at writing for an academic audience in English than in any of the local languages by virtue of their training and exposure. For academics whose mother tongue is not Filipino (or Tagalog, from which its grammar and vocabulary are derived), writing (and speaking) in Filipino can be much more challenging than writing in English.

A colonial history explains not only this imbalance in academic training but (to some extent) the high regard for international publications over local ones, as seen in the reward systems being implemented. International journals, even those of questionable quality, may be afforded greater prestige than local ones with rigorous review processes. As already pointed out by [Silan and colleagues](#) in this *Observer series*, colonialism undergirds much of how psychology is done today; specifically, the inequalities it has produced continue to shape what questions are asked, who gets to do research on it, and whether or not it gets disseminated to the larger academic community.



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However, psychology is not monolithic. Despite the continued dominance of WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) psychology, [particularly U.S.-based psychology](#), and the limited resources and many challenges researchers in non-WEIRD societies face, there has been much effort applied toward changing how psychology is understood and carried out. In the arena of dissemination via publication, there are those who make a commitment to publish in the local language to challenge and eventually change the existing system—for example, to contribute to developing the Filipino academic's vocabulary and facility with academic Filipino; to strengthen local, open-access journals that publish in the local languages; and to prioritize disseminating research findings to the local audience for whom they're most relevant, rather than a global one.

## Mental calculations and gymnastics

We understand that our context—a multilingual country that regularly uses English for academic endeavors—is somewhat unusual, yet we attempt to outline here some of the publication considerations relevant for others whose first language is not English yet who may feel motivated to publish in English. Hopefully, this sparks conversation among academics all around the world, leading to reflection on both personal and institutional goals and to fairer, more systematic representation of diverse psychologies in the traditional outlets of academic work. We invite our fellow researchers to consider the following:

***Who is our audience?*** In choosing which language to publish their paper in, researchers must think about who will consume it (Curry & Lillis, 2004). Using the local language can make our work more readily accessible to local researchers, policymakers, and advocates who might be able to use our findings; however, it can also preclude us from participating in larger, more global conversations that have an impact on how psychology is done in the local context. There is evidence, after all, that because they tend to publish more in their local language, multilingual scholars in the humanities and social sciences have less international visibility than their colleagues from the natural sciences (Kim, 2018; Mu & Zhang, 2018). On the other hand, using English can mean participating in this larger conversation as a small, marginalized voice (one among many) and at the risk of local concepts being poorly translated, poorly understood, and even incorrectly taken up by others. There is value in having our work become relevant in both contexts. Is it, then, a matter of having researchers publish in their local languages *and* in English?

***How can we better support local research and publication cultures?*** Psychology researchers outside of WEIRD societies face many obstacles to doing research, as already outlined [previously](#). The choice to publish in the local language can reflect an individual's desire to make a political stance against colonialism, to support local academic and professional organizations that produce journals in the local language, and, as said earlier, to ensure that locally produced and highly contextualized knowledge is more easily accessible to others who share the same language, context, and concerns (Curry & Lillis, 2022). However, publishing in English may create dialogue that leads to opportunities for support, solidarity, and the sharing of resources with like-minded others from WEIRD and non-WEIRD countries. Can we expect local research and publication cultures to flourish without such dialogues?



***What does it cost us to publish in English?*** For many of us, editing and publishing fees can be prohibitive, as they are often taken out of small research funds (when such funds exist at all). The task of writing a scientific article in English as one's second language has been shown to be a psychological burden (Hanauer et al., 2019). Some countries have responded to non-native English speakers' difficulties with publishing in English by awarding coauthorship to language editors who did not otherwise contribute to the study (Patience et al., 2019). But this practice, if rampant, can reduce the credibility of the credit system that recognizes work by contributing researchers. Additionally, there exist poor-quality open-access English-language journals that charge lower publishing fees to entice submissions (and payments, of course) from researchers who then fail to benefit from a rigorous peer-review and editing process. This means that although their work gets published (maybe even quickly) and becomes freely accessible for a more affordable fee, the paper might later be found to be lacking, leaving it largely ignored. In other words, the cost of publishing in English goes beyond the monetary; unintended consequences to the unrelenting pressure to publish internationally further undermine the research and publication culture in many societies. How can we mitigate or even eliminate these costs?

***How important is the prestige that is attached to international journals with high impact factors?*** A journal's impact factor has come to serve as a proxy for the quality of the papers published therein. Many universities have reward systems (e.g., tenure, renewal, awards) that consider these impact factors, so that individual goals become tied to institutional goals for competitiveness. Individuals attached to such institutions are more motivated to publish in journals with higher impact factors. However, these journals tend to be in English, as English-language articles are more likely to be read and cited than articles in other languages (Di Bitetti & Ferreras, 2017). Impact factor, as a proxy for quality or relevance, is thus skewed toward the English language (Liu, 2017). Are there alternatives to determining the quality and impact of a researcher's output?

## **Some steps for moving forward**

There are no easy or clear answers to the questions posed above. Priorities, available support, and opportunities can change significantly over time—for instance, a call for a special issue lands in one's inbox, one's contract with the university is about to end, international colleagues want to collaborate, funding applications are finally approved and the funds are to be disbursed (eventually; in the meantime, you shell out your own money to get things started). The decision to publish in one language or the other depends on the individual and the situation they find themselves in. However, we would like to draw attention to practical changes at the level of our organizations and institutions that could help improve the likelihood that scholars are not disadvantaged because of the language they decide to publish in.

***Strengthen local and regional publications.*** Local and regional journals, whether in English or in the local languages, are an important arena for researchers to disseminate their findings to a keenly interested audience. Although a sizable number of local and regional journals do publish in non-English languages, resources and support remain uneven, with such publications being primarily in European, East Asian, or Arabic languages (Curry & Ellis, 2022). In less affluent countries, local and regional journals may struggle to produce issues regularly and on time, and thus have problems getting indexed. This both reflects and exacerbates lower submission rates, especially from well-established researchers who are more likely to submit elsewhere, even when the local journals follow the standards of scientific journals (Salager-Meyer, 2014). Universities often fund local publications and those in local

languages—while simultaneously setting them up for failure through their reward systems.

This recommendation contributes to local and regional knowledge development and institution building—necessary foundations for an inclusive, global psychology.

***Encourage publications to use both English and local languages.*** This can be accomplished in different ways. English-language journals can aim to publish translations of selected papers from reputable, peer-reviewed, non-English-language journals. Dedicating space to translations allows relevant knowledge published in a non-English language to be read and utilized by others unfamiliar with the original language. Of course, discussion is necessary about how journals might select such articles for publication—in particular, whether an article’s established relevance (i.e., it was published some time ago and has been cited by others) or potential relevance (i.e., it is more recent and brings something new to the table) is more important. A related strategy for articles that were not originally written in English but were rewritten in English, submitted, and peer-reviewed is publishing the original version (revised following reviewers’ comments) alongside the accepted English version (see Sunol & Saturno, 2008). Another practice is bilingual publication, in which all articles submitted and reviewed in the local language undergo translation so that an English-language version of the final, approved article is also made available (Morley & Kerans, 2013).

This collection of strategies supports both local knowledge development and the objective of achieving a truly more global psychology.

***Support English-language editing and translation services at the institutional level.*** The APS journals [recommend considering hiring the services of professional editing companies](#); this is a service not all researchers have funds for. Institutions that put a premium on international publications in English-language journals can help their teaching and research staff by providing this service. Complementary to this, institutions can also deliver classes or workshops on academic writing in English to help boost the writing skills and confidence of researchers. Even when researchers have a good grasp of spoken and written English, academic writing in English following the linguistic conventions of one’s discipline, [using inclusive and bias-free language](#), and navigating the review process (which includes writing in response to reviewers’ comments) are separate skills that can be improved with better training and support (Mu & Zhang, 2018).

This recommendation acknowledges inequalities in resources and supports the greater participation of non-English scholars in regional or global dialogues that are carried out in English.

We close with a reminder that the majority of the world is multilingual. Psychological knowledge needs to better reflect this fact in the concepts and theories it explores and the languages it uses to collect data and disseminate knowledge. Others have identified the continued pressure to publish in English as damaging to science (Curry and Lillis, 2022); there are ample ideas and examples we can learn from to improve dialogue among scholars globally to help create a more inclusive, relevant, and responsive psychological science.

***Feedback on this article? Email [apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org](mailto:apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org) or login to comment.***

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