Multilingualism in SSH journals: pending issues and future challenges

Delfim Leão, 23 November 2021

Thank you very much. *Bonjour à tout le monde.* Thank you very much for having invited me, and having giving me the opportunity to participate in this meeting, and as far as I could see from participating it has been extremely interesting and I hope that my contribution won't be too disappointing to you. So I will try to share my screen, I hope it works. Can you see it? Thank you very much.

So, my proposal has to do with the work we have been doing with the OPERAS consortium and particularly with the OPERAS P project and the TRIPLE project, because in both of them, the question dealing with multilingualism in social science and humanities has been an important issue for us. So the questions I would like to address have to do with the results that we got from the work that we have been doing, mainly during the past two years, respecting this subject, and in fact it has just been published, the white paper that we produced, this year, which complements one which we produced three years ago in 2018.

So I will start with a global presentation of what we have done and an important part of this work that is being developed on multilingualism is connected with a special interest group. I mean, the OPERAS consortium has several special interest groups and one of multilingualism has collaborated with these two projects.

So just a quick overview. We had a crowdfunding campaign, curiously, in several languages, this is also a way of testing, the way we use multilingualism in this context. One of the future projects, I will speak a little bit about this, is to develop a new translation service connected with OPERAS and especially to enhance and facilitate publication in several languages. Of course, during this time, we had the opportunity to have scholarly debate, to monitor practices and stimulate discussion around this and on this topic and some of the results will be presented here. Also, we are worried about the boosting, the endowment of national languages and the future, for the next years we will be deeply committed to the idea of developing or implementing the national nodes at OPERAS, and of course national or local languages will be important in this process, so

not using English as the communication language but also using our own mother languages or tongues.

Then also an important thing that was done in fact was being presented right now, yesterday, today and tomorrow, as a main input from the TRIPLE project, is the GoTRIPLE discovery platform. One of things that characterizes it is that it is a fully multilingual discovery platform, which means that we can make research in 8 different languages, I mean those languages with which we started, and of course we used English as the common language, but of course we can use as well, and make research, using simply terms, in other languages, like Italian, Polish, Portuguese, the 8 languages that are being used in it.

And of course we also made several workshops in this period, in order to make some contribution to the idea of multilingualism and bibliodiversity. So multilingualism is an aspect or an expression of bibliodiversity, of diversity that we would like to keep in scholarly communication and that's why it is so important for us, and especially in the area of social science and humanities.

In what respect the main findings: we started this process three years ago with a literature review, so we reviewed the publications that dealt with multilingualism and problems dealing with this, and we were able to define a categorisation of the corpus and the structure of four different categories that were used in this review.

The research relevance, which is important, the language we use is not of course, it may affect the research relevance of what we do, as has in fact has been said as well and stated very well by Björn in the previous presentation. The content curation, of course should be keep only using one language or would be a national language important for the content curation. The reputation, which of course is clearly related to the research relevance. And then what we would like to propose is a balanced multilingualism is scholarly communication. Of course this allows us to keep using English as a communication language as of course we are doing now, but being able as well to keep national languages as fully scientific languages.

You have here the details of the publication that resulted from this review and of course you have the data there and the information.

Now in what respect the literature review, the research relevance. Of course, English is extremely important for us to have common patterns and so on and be able to use them, but it was also very clear from the literature review that multilingualism in fact can make a very important contribution in order to promote inclusiveness and equity among researchers, and if you use only one, English, that for many of us, or perhaps most of us, is a foreign language, we won't feel completely or entirely integrated and equitable in having access to the communications, colleague communication.

The same can be said about content curation. Of course especially in the areas of humanities and social sciences, in which there is a lot of information that is presented or primary sources that are in national languages, if we use only English metadata to describe them, it will be not as efficient as it could be by using as well the language in which, the national language in which they were produced. So for content curation, it would be important to keep this multilingualism as something crucial and very sensitive for the work we'd like to do.

Then in what respect reputation? Reputation is clearly a key question in all this, because why should we publish in English? We do this because we want to have more visibility, more impact in what we do, and of course this will affect the reputation of a researcher, of an institution and the way it is ranked, in several rankings that are being done.

But it is also fact that the there's a lot of what is being published either in monographs or in journals, in local languages, and it is also a fact, that even when they are indexed for example in Scopus and Web of Science, just to mention the two most used indexes, it is also a fact that, even if they are not highly ranked in the sense of having a great impact and so on, they deal with realities that no other journal may deal with, for example when you have a journal that deals with something that could be considered to be local and so on, but if this journal does not do this, and probably in the local language as well, no other will do it. So of course we all like to publish in an international journal or something of a certain discipline, which is completely correct, but not to forget that there is a lot of other things that won't be able to be treated and should be differently, and precisely in promoting as well this idea of local languages.

So how can we combine those different things and those different perspectives? By promoting a kind of balanced multilingualism in scholarly communication, when we can use as well local languages, we can of course use English as lingua franca to reach a wider audience but also to be able to translate not only into English from our own language but also into other languages as well. It depends on the way the scientific community is aggregated, the interests we have according to disciplines, so there are other ways of increasing visibility of work by using a strategy that is based on multilingualism.

So in what respect literature review: these were the most important aspects, then we made a complementary survey which was open for several weeks last year, and then of course we wanted to deepen the understanding of those questions. And what we saw is that there is a strong openness among researchers, translators and publishers, these were the people we would like to involve in the survey and it's interesting to say as well that researchers may as well be translators themselves, this happens a lot in humanities mainly, in social science as well, and may also act as publishers, mainly as academic publishers. So sometimes we have the three profiles converging in the same person, sometimes only two, and at times of course only the research profile. But they were extremely receptive to viewing the idea of the amplification of knowledge that can be provided by multilingualism and by promoting interculturality and equity as was already said.

Also, the idea of having a collaborative system which is important for us in in the idea we'd like to develop of this translation platform, could mitigate the risk that we face in dealing with the need to translate, for example the consumption of time, the price of translation and the flaws that can be attached to a not very good translation. So by enhancing a collaborative system, this could be in fact prevented and promote as well expertise in certain scientific areas. And so we think, and the survey clearly has shown, that the usage of different languages can in fact enrich and boost international collaboration and visibility of the research that is being done.

So now I pass to the main challenges that, in a certain way, derive from the literature review and the survey that was done.

So the biggest challenge, in a certain way, is to boost a strategy of balanced multilingualism, so, in which we agree that we need a *lingua franca*, this has always been the case in the past. I work with classical philology so I'm used to it because first we used the Ancient Greek, for example the New Testament is written in the Ancient Greek because it was the communicational language, and for more than 1000 years we used Latin for the same purpose. And more recently it's English that we use for this. So we always need a language that works as a *lingua franca*, a language of communication amongst all.

But the use, the advantages of using a *lingua franca* do not imply, it must not be implied, a risk of turning it into a *lingua unica*, this meaning the sole language that can be used that you don't use this language you won't exist as a scholar and so on. And this is the main idea. So how can we find innovative solutions to complement this balanced multilingualism, and saying a *lingua franca* is needed, but a *lingua franca* is not a *lingua unica*, is not the sole language that we can use.

So what we would like to do and test in the OPERAS consortium would be to develop a community-based translation platform. I'm not saying that we'd like to develop for example "e-translation" and machine translation or automatic translation because this demands a lot in terms of resources, human resources and resources of other kinds, and those tools are already available. So what can be our contribution to this? Our best input? And I think that would be to aggregate people, researchers, around areas of expertise and enrolling directly in the process of supporting translation from other colleagues and having their support in the process of making ourselves the translations.

So it would be the collaborative work of researchers, translators and publishers, so to put them together to help them to find the best publisher for example if I want to publish from my own language into a different language and vice versa as well, and by doing this creating conditions for cooperation, sharing tools, experiences, methodologies. So in a certain way what we would like to say is to put the human factor on the work that is being done by the machine and that can and of course would make the difference in the results particularly in the area of social science and humanities.

So the platform should be conceived as a social infrastructure, to federate technical knowledge and scholarly expertise and of course to be tested and improved by a broad users community because it is owned by the community, can be used by it and improved by the community as well.

So to have a different perspective on the workflow, what we want to keep and is important to keep is also diversity also at a linguistic, at a language level. So we can keep both things, the *lingua franca* and the other language working together by this community-based approached, basing it on the ability to federate technical tools and scholarly expertise, and of course by doing this, helping what is considered usually national to become international. This is possible we think and we don't have to give up our own languages in order to reach this reality.

So I move now to some global recommendations, that we would like of course ourselves to take into consideration and be taken as a whole so that we can in a certain way, reach this goal.

Of course an important recommendation has to do with funders and research-performing organisations because if multilingualism is not valued in careers recognition, in the reward systems and the stimulations we have, of course especially a young scholar won't be motivated to publish in a different language other than English because funders and research-performing organisations in the end won't support research that is not in English or won't take it into consideration in their evaluations. So it's extremely important that, they are receptive to the idea of the advantages of using multilingualism. The same is valid to the policy makers in order to perceive and value multilingualism as a strong manifestation of bibliodiversity and particularly in this area of humanities and social sciences because we know we deal with local realities many times, we also deal with issues that have to do with our own culture, our own language and when we try to put all this richness in a different language it's not always easy. Quite often we lose something in the process and we weaken the main arguments, so the ability to keep multilingualism is of course something that is important.

For this we have to work with scholars at large because the idea is to involve scholars in this process of reciprocity, for example if I'm a Portuguese, if a colleague from another country wants to publish in Portuguese, which happens quite often, I could be able to give my support in revising, not only translation, but the content. That is something we could do. To connect the idea of revising, helping the translation with something that has to do with the reviewing process in itself. And of course to put this, or to understand this within a principle of reciprocity – I do this and I can expect this from another colleague, would do the same for a different language. Of course also to work with publishers, publishers that would like to make available works that they have published in a certain language and would like to have it published in a different language in a way to promote the offers they have and the way they work but also the opposite, they would be ready to receive, to publish works that were initially published in a different language. Of course we know that when dealing for example with articles in the journal or a chapter in a book, or a book, this can be understood differently because an article should in principle be entirely innovative research and new research but for example in writing a book you can re-use and re-shape works that have been published elsewhere and of course give them a new context and a new density by putting together and converging works than have been published previously in different languages, in our own languages, in English or other languages and then make the whole in a different language.

Now of course to involve in this the translators who are of course a very important community, translators that are themselves researchers and do not translate as a profession or living, but also the translators that live on making translation. Of course now we can make auto-translation quite easily but when it comes to publish a translation of course we will always need to call translators and have their expertise and their input in doing this.

So those would be globally the recommendations on which we are working and would like to promote in order to of course have this, to put into practice this idea at OPERAS, so bringing the concept to life, we would like to develop the concept in one of our future projects, to which we have called, not definitely, the GOALNet, the Global Open Access Languages Network, and this in a certain way gives a pictorial idea of what we would like to put into practice.

And well, on my part, that will be all. Thank you very much for you attention and of course I will be ready to answer any questions if there are any you would like to ask.