



Decolonizing journals in management and organizations? Epistemological colonial encounters and the double translation

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journals.sagepub.com/home/mlq**Amon Barros**  and **Rafael Alcadipani** 

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Abstract

Increasingly, academics worldwide need publishing in international journals. Various events and articles aim at teaching others how to write, and they spread ideas and skills to help newcomers. However, we tend to neglect the specificities of periphery-based academics, engaging with “international” journals. Drawing from our experience as academics from Brazil, we argue that publishing in top-academic journals in management and organization studies demands more than knowing a language and goes beyond style. Periphery-based academics willing to publish in “international” journals engage in a colonial encounter. They need to develop their ability to perform a double-translation, writing ideas in another language and for another audience. Besides, they need to deal with financial costs that are often invisible to others. We claim that decolonizing international journals is challenging and must be an ongoing process, of which some steps we highlight here.

Keywords

Academic journals, academic publication, decolonization, global south

Publishing is a challenge to all academics (MOS; Butler and Spoelstra, 2012, 2020; Day, 2011). Increasingly, academics from various countries are pushed into communicating their research in high-impact “international” “top journals” written in English (Alcadipani, 2017a; Boussebaa and Brown, 2017). Articles, books, and workshops advise on developing manuscripts or engaging with specific journals. They analyze the dynamics of writing and what is an excellent scholarly contribution. Often, those articles are written by editors or senior academics, mainly employed in Anglo-Saxon academic institutions, sharing their craftsmanship to audiences worldwide (e.g. Ashford, 2013; Baer and Shaw, 2017; Clark et al., 2006; Corley and Gioia, 2011; Patriotta, 2017; van de Ven, 1989; Wright et al., 2020). However, they tend to neglect the idiosyncratic challenges periphery-based scholars face when trying to publish in Anglo-Saxon journals. Also, they sometimes

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perpetuate the “publishing-machine academic” (Harley, 2019), while the neoliberal university keeps pushing its targets (Jones et al., 2020; McCann et al., 2020), which contributes to academics experiencing “imposter syndrome” (Bothello and Roulet, 2019).

The pressures are higher for academics who are underprivileged, racialized, recognized as “other” or just do not have English as their primary language, even when they are based in central countries. Entering “global academia,” especially coming from the peripheries, forces an accommodation to new knowledge, ideas, modes of writing and expression—particularly if you come from the margins, as standpoint theory has already shown (Harding, 1992). Coloniality is interwoven with race, gender, sexuality, and class (Lugones, 2010; Quijano, 2007). Therefore, instead of resorting to Global South to designate the academics distant from the center, we use periphery and border concepts, coming from dependency theory (Kvangraven, 2021) and decolonial literature (Grosfoguel, 2009; Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). We use Global North to encompass developed economies (Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea), although singularities exist everywhere.

Yearly, periphery-based academics join early careers and PhD students from the Global North who are entering the field and learning how to play the publication game (Bristow et al., 2017; Butler, 2018; Butler and Spoelstra, 2020; Prasad, 2013; Ratle et al., 2020). By periphery-based academics, we refer to the characteristics that establish additional challenges to academics, for instance, class, fluency in languages, gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity (Johansson and Jones, 2019; Johansson and Śliwa, 2016; Śliwa and Johansson, 2015). These conditions intersect and are contextual.

Drawing from our experience as Brazilian academics, we argue that publishing in top-MOS academic journals demands more than mastering language and style. Academics closer to the margins and willing or pushed to publish in “international” journals engage in a colonial encounter. They also need to perform a double-translation, writing ideas in another language and for another audience. All this is not cost-free, and writing is entangled with thinking. Periphery-based academics need to adapt both, facing objective and subjective costs. Getting a paper accepted is not a mere question of mastering words. We reflexively expose a silenced identity (Cutcher et al., 2020) of being an academic outside the Global North’s borders. However, our experience is mediated by our relative privilege as management academics and participation in the critical management studies (CMS) community.

This article is organized as follows. First, we review the discussion on academic coloniality in MOS. Then, we present some challenges an academic from outside the borders of the Global North faces, emphasizing the need for a double-translation amid the colonial encounter. Finally, we explore ideas that could narrow this gap and contribute to making academia look more global.

The *lingua franca* and the neo-colonial Anglo-Saxon journals

MOS is organized in a fragmented manner. Disciplinary, linguistic, national, and cultural frontiers separate relatively autonomous academic groups. Concomitantly, the Anglo-Saxon academia claims to be international but mainly ignores others’ communities, remaining parochial (March, 2005). The US cultural values frame research and the field that has developed, ignoring and silencing non-aligned contexts, models, analyses, and values (Cooke and Kumar, 2020; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Islam, 2012; Srinivas, 2013). Even European non-native English-speaking academics feel marginalized (Meyer and Boxenbaum, 2010).

Several attempts to bring knowledge and theories from the peripheries have been made (e.g. Alamgir and Banerjee, 2019; Alcadipani et al., 2012; Ibarra-Colado, 2008; Westwood et al., 2014). MOS was also exposed to the postcolonial (Mir and Mir, 2009, 2013; Prasad, 2003, 2012).

However, peripheral voices are still unusual in the field (Murphy and Zhu, 2012; Seremani and Clegg, 2015).

Postcolonial studies are less significant in management than in other areas (Westwood and Jack, 2007). MOS places knowledge produced in the center as a superior moment of capitalism, which others would later follow (Jack et al., 2011). The Anglo-Saxon dominance reinforces scholarly monoculture and marginalizes other traditions (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019). Thus, MOS can be ethnocentric and Anglo-Saxon dominance is rarely challenged (Gantman et al., 2015; Jack et al., 2011; Prasad, 2012).

English is the *lingua franca* of the “international” academia, including business and MOS (Glatz, 2018; Steyaert and Janssens, 2013). However, research is multilingual, even if international publication is monolingual (Tietze, 2018; Tietze and Dick, 2013). The English language dominance gives an impression of commonality and favors the anglophone experience and knowledge (March, 2005). Lacking English language skills hinders prospects of being a “global” scholar (Pudelko and Tenzer, 2019). For instance, it normalizes and conforms identity work, aligning local selves with international competitiveness imperatives (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017). It also generates feelings of vulnerability for non-native English speakers who feel stigmatized (Horn, 2017). In addition, it deters foreign scholars’ possibilities of being an academic and determines the amount of symbolic capital necessary to achieve success (Śliwa and Johansson, 2015).

The English language is part of an ideological complex of Anglo-Saxon hegemony (Tietze and Dick, 2013). It corroborates a one-way flow of knowledge from the Global North to the peripheries (Alcadipani and Rosa, 2011), forcing researchers to speak English if they want to be heard (Rosa and Alves, 2011). “International” journals shape academic communities worldwide, and leading journals claiming to be “global” are dominated by Euro-American scholars (Murphy and Zhu, 2012) and their methodologies (Bell et al., 2017). Even critical journals use English as their only language without clear editorship policies on language or translation (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013). This implies homogenizing the field while enacting language-based inequalities and stimulating quasi-colonial forms of identity work (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019).

The ongoing pressure to increase alignment with US journals creates central and peripheral publications (Üsdiken, 2014). Non-English peer-reviewed publications are deemed irrelevant. The relationship gradually becomes one of hegemony over other ways of thinking, other languages, and other parts of the world (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Little research is conducted outside Europe (a center) even in more pluralistic European journals (Meriläinen et al., 2008). British authors are disproportionately present in European journals and their editorial boards. Latin America, Africa, and Asia are sub-represented as editors or authors (Meyer and Boxenbaum, 2010). Consequently, what happens when periphery-based academics try or need to publish in “international” journals in MOS?

The colonial encounter and a double translation

Universities and knowledge production “produce truth and colonize the understanding of the world” (Ibarra-Colado, 2008: 932). Epistemic coloniality is the institutionalized scientific knowledge that integrates peripheral elites into the dominant Anglo-Euro-Centric modernity (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). The colonial encounter, the meeting between the colonizer and the colonized, is a widespread cross-cultural process. It has significant effects on the economy and the political organization of societies, and the groups’ cultural identities (Stein, 2005). The colonial encounter meant creating a different society, changing already existing cultures in a process evolving through negotiation, but also war and even genocide (Loomba, 2015).

In MOS, the encounter is more subtle. Usually, violence is symbolic, but physical violence, such as sexual harassment, does happen. These contacts have similarities with other hierarchized interactions, like gendered and racialized relations (Bourabain, 2020), and must be understood intersectionally (Holvino, 2010). Periphery-based academics in the Global North suffer prejudices and racialized comments while researching (Alcadipani et al., 2015; Oliveira, 2018). Discussions on publishing usually ignore those aspects as if people went to writing disembodied and with the same experiences. “Global” MOS knowledge is mainstreamed in the United States and Europe, and its networks of power are difficult to access (Ibarra-Colado, 2008: 993).

Academics also perform a double-translation. They translate words into English and interpret a new writing style, including the expectations around what should be in a manuscript. The first half of the double translation is interpreting words into English. English fluency is usually obtained by living in an English-speaking country and taking expensive language courses, a privilege few people experience. Alternatively, academics translate articles into English. The quality varies. Less professional and more affordable services may have language inaccuracies that would be unacceptable by most journals. Some publishers offer translation and proofreading services, costing around US\$1000 for a full manuscript of about 8000 words. Each round of review demands another payment. In addition, translation involves negotiating meaning between contexts (Wilmot and Tietze, 2020) amid epistemic and stylistic tensions.

Meanwhile, a government-funded PhD scholarship to study in Brazil is about US\$430 per month, and an Assistant Professor in a Brazilian public university receives around US\$1600 monthly. Outside the Global North, a few institutions fund research-related expenses. Even if one can write directly in English, having a manuscript proofread by an editor with expertise in MOS can range from US\$450 to US\$900.

The second half of the double-translation is a change in style and how to produce knowledge. For instance, Argentinean academics tend to be parochial, lacking the social capital to participate in the “international” publication game (Gantman and Parker, 2006). Brazil has well-structured local academia with journals published in Portuguese. Most local academics have been socialized to publish in local MOS journals without experience abroad and with little fluency in English. Brazilian periodicals’ styles differ significantly from “international” journals in MOS. For an academic socialized in the Brazilian academia to submit a successful manuscript to an “international” journal, they should cover the translation costs and understand the different writing styles that also vary between periodicals. However, how can this be done?

Academics from the periphery need to engage with academics from the Global North to learn new logics and acquire the skills and social capital necessary to join the field (Śliwa and Johansson, 2015). Interactions make understanding the way of reasoning of journal reviewers and editors easier. For instance, when doing a PhD or presenting a seminar in the Global North, an academic can receive feedback from scholars engaged in the editorial process of “international” journals. Consequentially, the manuscript can have inputs from people who know the “tricks of the trade.” The work of the peripheral academic becomes known by gatekeepers, and they can start networks. Academics attending seminars and conferences in the periphery rarely interact or find many scholars playing critical roles in the editorial processes (Murphy and Zhu, 2012).

Furthermore, participating in conferences in the Global North is costly, and Brazilian students can rarely afford to go to conferences, especially with little financial support. Academics from peripheries face other challenges to participate in “international” arenas. For instance, the 2018 travel ban issued by US President Donald Trump highlighted the contradiction between the Academy of Management’s cosmopolitan façade and its US roots (Bell and de Gama, 2019). Some academics report humiliating situations by immigration authorities when traveling or applying for visas for academic visits in the Global North. In addition, although online events should gain more

space after the COVID-19 crisis, those encounters allow less informal exchanges than in-person meetings (e.g. Fulcher et al., 2020).

While interacting with scholars from the Global North, academics from peripheries will deal with at least two academic types. First, gatekeepers may allow access to journals because of personal knowledge or mastering of techniques. They may help to develop a paper and lend social capital to foster its publication. Second, colleagues who engage in non-hierarchized relationships where both sides may learn about the task and understand the difficulties of the process. Time is instrumental for these relationships.

Moreover, periphery-based academics may be “instrumentalized” by academics from the Global North. They provide “cool” data without being encouraged to develop theorizations, especially for mainstream research. Some colonial encounters in MOS may reproduce the logic of the periphery as an “exotic” place where data can be found. In these situations, the academic within Global North borders act as a “paper broker” instead of engaging in an equal academic relationship. Striking an international tone using “exotic” data allow publishing in “international” journals. For academics from the peripheries, the process involves learning a language, a style, hierarchized relationships, and material costs. Alternative ways of understanding a phenomenon do not emerge, and other epistemologies are silenced.

Epistemic colonialism and decolonizing MOS: a conundrum

“International” journal publication is an elite game, even for people from the Global North, who can feel like interlopers (Johansson and Jones, 2019). In unequal societies that is even truer, and scholars from the peripheries can face epistemic violence when attempting to publish in “international” journals (Khan and Naguib, 2019). Manuscripts’ revision may involve “silencing, subjugating, diluting and distorting Global South voices and the variegated epistemic resources from which these voices are marshaled as they make the passage from the Global South to MOS journals in the Global North” (Khan and Naguib, 2019: 3). It can be particularly problematic under positivistic conventions (Khan and Naguib, 2019), who have little respect for other epistemes (Muzanenhamo and Chowdhury, 2021).

The process of double-translation also means a shift from place to alter reasoning and writing. Place shapes how we theorize the world, writing, and the way we are read (Mignolo, 2002). Relevant problems and frameworks are defined by the Global North (Mignolo, 2000). Scholars from the periphery abdicate part of their meaning (Spivak, 1988), and often fracture their epistemological beliefs. Counter-hegemonic knowledge demands carry an awareness of its position as marginal discourses.

Hierarchized relations put academics from the peripheries in a precarious position. Global North Scholarship sustains part of its authority, maintaining others in check (Kothiyal et al., 2018). Within these geopolitics of knowledge production in MOS (Wanderley and Barros, 2019), peripheral academics tend to reproduce mimicry versions of the Global North even locally (Bell et al., 2017; Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Some return to their countries to teach the “natives” how to do “proper” academic work (Abreu-Pederzini and Suárez-Barraza, 2020; Ibarra-Colado, 2008).

Imported rankings and impact measurements are used to qualify journals delegitimizing local content published in Brazilian journals since they do not appear or are poorly rated by systems that are part of a profitable business. Not all periphery-based academics or living beyond the borders of the Global North want to reproduce “advanced” knowledge or move countries. Some do not want to play the international publication game (Butler and Spoelstra, 2020; Prasad, 2013). Nevertheless, the conundrum remains: how to develop knowledge that grants access to high tables and remains

meaningful to local contexts when manuscripts are framed under an unfamiliar logic and written in a foreign language?

International networks often invite peripheral researchers once the investigation is already designed (Feld and Kreimer, 2019). In addition, at least in Brazil, local regulators reinforce the centrality of publications in English and internationalization toward the Global North, often with a one-size-fits-all rule for sciences. And management is a social science. Although presented as a monolithic speech, MOS has hybrid origins (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006), when it engaged in battles for political hegemony (Kelley et al., 2006), silencing alternative knowledge (Wanderley and Barros, 2020). Mainstream theories sanitize their past, but decolonial epistemology goes against the grain, putting the non-canonical at the center to understand the world (Grosfoguel, 2006), and caring for it (Misoczky, 2011). The postcolonial approach in MOS highlights the hybridism of the encounter between the Global North and its other (Alcadipani, 2017b; Frenkel, 2005; Prasad, 2012).

However, decolonizing the episteme goes beyond hybridization. It builds knowledge that is not a subsumed synthesis, respecting differences while building something new (Lugones, 2010). Therefore, it is critical to overcome essentializing “either Northern ideas vs. Southern inferior or Northern colonial vs. Southern valour” (Hamann et al., 2020: 14). The encounter is unavoidable, especially for those in the periphery. Ignoring the other leads to parochialism and denies complete comprehension of realities. Knowledge should build both-way bridges (Alcadipani et al., 2012; Dal Magro et al., 2020; Westwood et al., 2014). The epistemic shift decolonialism demands affirm that things look different from below (Harding, 2017). And, beyond masks and performance (Dar, 2019), a commitment to decolonizing knowledge demands the normalizing of otherness and the multiplicity it entails. Decolonizing is a way of reading and understanding reality but demands new modes of being and acting upon it (Faria, 2013).

Another option is to offer a “decolonial” approach to “international journals,” especially now that decolonizing efforts are starting to receive their due attention, although institutions often want a softened version. Decolonization involves an ethos that goes beyond compliance or goodwill, making it a challenging and disturbing project. It demands confronting epistemic injustices against Black people (Muzanenhamo and Chowdhury, 2021), and other marginalized subjects and knowledges (Ibarra-Colado, 2006).

A decolonial project “combat or avoid precisely that very universalism by which the European thought of five countries was imposed on the rest of the world, homogenizing, along the way, the world’s universities” (Mignolo, 2016: 177). It is inspired by Third-World liberation theory, Dependency Studies, and other movements (Mandiola, 2010; Mignolo, 2016). A truly decolonial project for a journal would demand publishing in multiple languages, open access, and a less Western-centric view of knowledge (e.g. María and Magda, 2011). Decolonial approaches can inspire interesting insights even in “hard” areas such as accounting (Sauerbronn et al., 2021).

Despite good intentions, this is far from current “international” journals’ practices. They are part of established colonial matrixes of knowledge (Ibarra-Colado, 2006), hosted by influential publishing international houses and the result of elitist practices. The unity surrounding “Western knowledge” obscures plurality. The West and the assumption about a science unbounded by its origins or its authors, destined to be universal, is an ideological construction (Westwood and Jack, 2007), such as the “East” (Said, 1978).

However, more can be done to make academic journals more plural. First, minor language mistakes should be tolerated, and only the final accepted version to be sent to professional proofreading. That would be useful for people speaking and writing non-British and non-North-American English and non-native speakers. Second, making it easier for scholars from peripheries to spend extended periods in institutions in the Global North. For instance, waiving fees for short-term

international visiting students, considering the positive aspects of receiving international scholars. Third, journals could have associate editors reviewing first drafts in languages other than English, which would demand diversifying editorial boards with periphery-based academics. Rarely academics from the peripheries and living beyond the borders occupy positions as editors and associate editors of journals. Finally, establishing partnerships with local associations that could promote meetings and conferences between communities. For instance, the US Academy of Management has counterparts in multiple countries. The European Group of Organization Studies has a Brazilian (*Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Organizacionais*) and Latin American counterparts (*Red Pílares*), and probably many others.

Conclusion

Admittedly, this reflection is possible because the sub-field we are in already allows space for this. We imagine that other ideas would emerge in other sub-fields, where positivistic and objectivistic science silence reflexivity. We are aware of our privileged position. We have engaged in an international setting and are influenced by the international outlook of our school and our experiences. We have friends and colleagues living and working in the Global North. Finally, we recognize that one does not play the (academic) game without being changed by it (Butler and Spoelstra, 2020; Prasad, 2013). Other people in the peripheries, working in underprivileged backgrounds, probably see the recent push to devalue publications in their native languages with even more caution.

The colonial encounter in MOS can (re)colonize academies and academics if the Global North is the only way. If all eyes are on the “international” arenas, who would discuss local questions in the language of the locals? In many places, local scholars establish networks for alternative internationalization, often with a South-South outlook. However, the pressures for being part of the “Global” MOS academia are significant, and resistance is challenging.

Getting a paper published is not only about knowing techniques and crafts. It has hidden dynamics associated with who you are in your career, where you live, work, and who you know and are known by. We developed the concepts of colonial encounter and double translation as two elements framing the relationship between academics from diverse places. Fostering this debate would allow new approaches to establish two-way bridges.

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