

Scientific journals in the Humanities: preserve national and go international¹

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Based on the editorial practice in the Croatian linguistic journal *Suvremena lingvistika* (*Contemporary linguistics*), the paper discusses the relationship between the national and the international in scientific publishing in the Humanities. Since the Humanities are significantly oriented towards nationally founded research, publishing practice within the Humanities is in some aspects considerably different from the practice in the so-called hard sciences. This paper showcases some examples of editorial initiatives in the journal *Suvremena lingvistika* that have been undertaken to preserve the national and to go international. The paper strongly supports the need for preserving diversity in publication cultures in the Humanities.

Keywords: *Suvremena lingvistika* (*Contemporary linguistics*), diversity in publication cultures, Philology, Humanities, Croatian language

During the period of my editorial work from 2005 to 2015 in the Croatian linguistic journal *Suvremena lingvistika* (*Contemporary linguistics*), one of the leading Croatian linguistic journals (<http://suvlin.ffzg.hr>), I have realized that editing a linguistic journal within a small scientific community brings many challenges. In this article I'll point out some of the most fundamental issues of science editing in the Humanities that I have encountered as editor.

What makes the Humanities different from other disciplines, mostly the so-called "hard sciences", is their orientation towards national disciplines. Although it has been strongly emphasized that national scientific orientation is inherent and specific for the Humanities, some other disciplines such as geology, maritime sciences, and even in some cases medicine and others, also have nationally oriented research that comprises nationally relevant topics. When discussing issues related to nationally focused research, the Humanities can be considered as a model of how research infrastructures are or should be organized and what the implications are of such research policy for scientific publishing. Moreover, the Humanities can be presented as a model for other disciplines on how to reconcile the need towards preserving national scientific interests and how to become more visible internationally. Research within the Humanities is often structured around topics that represent a fundamental scientific national interest. Such topics are central for the national scientific community since they convey nationally relevant and indispensable knowledge that has a significant impact to the common knowledge of the entire community. Thus, research related to national languages, dialects, literature, art, archaeology, history, etc are of immeasurable value for the progress of national knowledge and national culture and identity.

Taking into consideration these values of the Humanities within the broader scientific world and the entire community, it is evident that scientific journals within the Humanities,

especially within small scientific communities, have several goals to achieve that are not always easy to harmonise. First, a scientific journal within the Humanities has a commitment towards the national scientific community. It has an obligation to preserve and to develop, as it has been mentioned, a nationally relevant knowledge. It could be argued that scientific journals in the Humanities, especially in the small scientific communities, have a commitment and obligation to *preserve national scientific identity*. By national scientific identity I consider research areas that represent core knowledge of a certain nation or society. Such a commitment also includes the preservation and the development of the national language as a scientific language. In a highly instructive article entitled *The Future of Publications in the Humanities: Possible Impacts in Research Assessments* published in a very valuable book that gives a systematic overview for understanding the paradigm of scientific publication in the Humanities (*New Publication Cultures in the Humanities: Exploring the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Péter Dávidházi, Amsterdam University Press, 2014), Professor Milena Žic Fuchs points out different European initiatives that have been undertaken within the Social Sciences and Humanities domain to preserve language diversity in scientific communication. In her article, Professor Žic Fuchs has highlighted several times that language diversity is inherent to the Humanities and has to be taken into consideration in developing assessment mechanisms in the Humanities. Neglecting national language as a scientific language leads towards regression of scientific terminology for certain disciplines.

As the editor of a linguistic journal that has been for decades one of the most prominent Croatian linguistic journals, indexed in leading linguistic databases and distributed to university and national libraries from Japan to the USA², I was fully conscious of the task that I had to face. From its beginnings *Suvremena lingvistika* has been published in Croatian as well as in several other European languages like English, German, French, Italian and Russian. Many remarkable and highly relevant research contributions have been published in *Suvremena lingvistika* in the Croatian language. In a publishing era in which English has become a predominant scientific language to the point that some 'big' European languages like French and German have been pushed aside, the journal *Suvremena lingvistika* has never considered the option to dismiss publishing contributions in Croatian. However, it has been more than evident that some of the aforementioned research could have gained more international visibility if it had been published in English foremost or in other European languages accepted in the journal. In the meantime, *Suvremena lingvistika* has become an open access journal with its own website, and it is visible through several main repositories and archives for scientific journals such as DOAJ, CEEOL and the HRČAK. Since the mechanisms for gaining international visibility

have changed from the early 1990s, for example introducing digitalisation and launching scientific repositories, the editors have had the obligation not only to preserve national science and contribute to its development, thus taking care of national scientific identity, but to make national science internationally more visible.

Since *Suvremena lingvistika*, as its name indicates, publishes papers dealing mostly with general linguistic topics that, even when focused on Croatian, have relevance for the broader linguistic community, one of the main editorial decisions was to attract papers in English, but also to preserve Croatian as a scientific language and to play an important role in the development of the Croatian contemporary linguistic terminology³. Therefore there were more articles, even from Croatian linguists, published in English. It was especially a very beneficial decision for young Croatian linguists who saw it as an opportunity to quickly publish findings from their PhD theses in English and thus to make their research more visible to both national and international audiences. An increase in articles published in English attracted more papers from foreign linguists which automatically enhanced the international visibility and relevance of the journal. Several thematic issues have been published exclusively in English, to which many outstanding linguists were invited to contribute. For each thematic volume an expert with an international reputation in the field was invited as co-editor in order to warrant the quality of the volume. It was also an opportunity for the journal to attract prominent linguists from abroad (invitation signed by the co-editor was an assurance) and to put forward the international peer-review process, which, in addition to enhancing objectivity and the quality of the journal, also played an important role in enhancing international visibility. Potential authors were acquainted with the fact that the edited volume would be in English, and most of them gladly accepted the invitation.

The decision about thematic issues was based upon the idea that Croatian linguistic research and areas that have been developed systematically in Croatian linguistics for decades have to be internationally contextualized. In that way the relevance and the impact of the Croatian linguistic community in mainstream science would be brought forward, especially in some of the linguistic fields. As I have pointed out, it was embraced as an excellent idea by foreign linguists as well as by Croatian linguists, mostly young scientists. For Croatian linguists it was an opportunity to embed their research into a relevant international context. Thus, national science has become integrated into the mainstream science and one of the basic goals of every scientific journal, especially in the Humanities, has been achieved. Nationally relevant topics have become internationally contextualized, thus internationally relevant and visible.

Still, our further goal to preserve Croatian as a scientific language needed an optimal model in order to be fully achieved. Parallel to enhancing international visibility, we insisted on preserving Croatian as a scientific language that plays a significant role in building national scientific identity. We were conscious of some side effects of that

decision: 1) a smaller number of authors and readers, 2) low international visibility of such articles and 3) low, if any, impact in the international scientific community. Authors often asked for advice about the language of the manuscript, young researchers mostly, but some experienced authors as well. On the one hand, some Croatian linguists insisted on writing their papers in Croatian, because their research was predominantly nationally oriented and the target audience was the Croatian linguistic community. Sometimes our mutual decision was to accept a paper written in Croatian because of its high relevance for Croatian linguistics and Croatian philology in general. On the other hand, one of the important editorial decisions was to encourage publishing of so-called review papers in Croatian. Such reviews mostly present a new or a less known theoretical framework in Croatian linguistics that has to be described in a clear and systematic manner with a strong accent on scientific concepts and terms that are used in such a framework. A series of excellent review papers has been published in the last decade, mostly by young scientists with a freshly obtained PhD degree. In linguistics and in philology in general, introductory chapters are equivalent to a review paper. Their goal is to give a systematic and in-depth overview and analysis of a certain theoretical framework. Young researchers saw it as an opportunity to present their knowledge in a linguistic field in which they have become experts. In such papers terminology was developed under great scrutiny, which made the review papers highly valuable. Insisting on publishing review papers turned out to be a good decision for many reasons: 1) Croatian has been preserved as a scientific language, 2) linguistic terminology, especially of newly developed linguistic disciplines, has been introduced and systematized, 3) young researchers had the opportunity to publish large and important parts of their PhD theses, and 4) such articles gained a significant impact and visibility within the Croatian linguistic community because of clearly systematized knowledge. They are very often used by BA, MA and PhD students of various disciplines for obtaining basic knowledge of a certain linguistic theory.

Although these various arguments make it seem that the reconciliation of preserving national scientific identity and developing international visibility was a goal that was easy to achieve, it was a kind of blessing that was inherent to the profile of the journal *Suvremena lingvistika* and the niche that has been found during the decades of its existence. From its beginnings in the early 1960s the journal has been oriented towards new trends in linguistics, being a forum for presenting and discussing new developments in various linguistic fields. The editorial policy has been to encourage theoretically and methodologically founded research that conveys new knowledge in a certain newly developing linguistic discipline. Potential authors were conscious of that requirement and even nationally relevant topics were systematically represented in such a framework. It has to be pointed out that for *Suvremena lingvistika* topics related to Croatian language *per se* have not been in its scope. It focuses on linguistic theories and methodologies that are used to describe various language phenomena.

However, there are several journals in Croatia that are oriented towards topics related exclusively to the Croatian language. An excellent example is *Jezik (Language)*, which publishes articles dealing with very specific topics like the Croatian standard language, grammar, and orthography. The international visibility of such a journal is very low, however it is of significant impact for Croatian philology. It has been very difficult, and at the same time also not that necessary, to achieve enhanced international visibility for this type of journal. Its profile, scope and potential audience are completely different from those pertaining to *Suvremena lingvistika*. *Jezik* is a journal with a significant national impact. One might conclude that *Jezik*, because it is published in Croatian and has low international visibility, is 'less valuable' and thus should be assessed as a journal of poorer quality. The point is that such evaluation would be false. As Professor Žic Fuchs (2014: 166) clearly points out, the Humanities (and the Social Sciences)⁴ are in need of an integrated infrastructure that would finally showcase the richness and diversity found across all disciplines and all languages covered by these domains of research. ERIH (*European Reference Index for the Humanities, ESF*) and later ERIH PLUS have been attempts towards enhancing the visibility of journals within the Humanities⁵, regardless of the language or the scope of the journal, thus preserving diversity in publication cultures within the Humanities.

In the last decade *Suvremena lingvistika* has not tried to join the trap set by "hard sciences" and their assessment mechanisms. Although I have been strongly advised by different sources to "go international by publishing exclusively in English", I have accepted only one part – the most important part – of the advice. *Suvremena lingvistika* did go international by using the benefits of all potential instruments that have been developed in the digital era of scientific publishing, of course within the available financial framework. The scope

of *Suvremena lingvistika* has been strongly founded upon the idea of presenting and contextualizing national research within the international framework. However, *Suvremena lingvistika* has never, nor will it ever (I am firmly convinced of this) forget its role and impact in building national scientific identity in Croatian philology and the Humanities in Croatia in general.

Endnotes

- 1 This article is based on three lectures I held. Two of them were held during the METM08 (Split, Croatia, 2008), *Commitment to national scientific community vs. international visibility* and *Does it really have to be in English?* (a brief overview was published in *Suvremena lingvistika* 66/2008). The third talk, *Journals in the Humanities between national and international*, was given at the conference held on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Croatian scientific journal *Food Technology and Biotechnology* (Zagreb, Croatia, 2012).
- 2 I am primarily referring to the 90's when the editor in chief was Professor Milena Žic Fuchs, who at that time, when it wasn't a common practice in scientific publishing in the Humanities, insisted on making the journal internationally visible by means that were conceivable at the time. These were mostly indexing in relevant data bases, distribution and exchange.
- 3 What I mean here is the development of terminology for new and rapidly developing disciplines that enter into Croatian linguistics.
- 4 Brackets inserted by IR.
- 5 For more details about the development and the role that both databases have had for the Humanities see Žic Fuchs (2014).

Reference

- Žic Fuchs, Milena. The Future of Publications in the Humanities: Possible Impacts in Research Assessments. In: P. Dávidházi (ed). *New Publication Cultures in the Humanities: Exploring the Paradigm Shift*. Amsterdam University Press, 2014: 147-173