European psychology publication platform: issues and perspectives

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Abstract

This paper presents a brief summary of the Survey on European Psychology Publication Issues and the Berlin workshop. Six issues of main concern are discussed: (1) Language, (2) review process, (3) manuscript handling, (4) impact (visibility), (5) permission barriers (accessibility) and (6) price barriers (cost). These issues are the concerns of non-native English speaking Europeans as they experienced in their home countries. As a solution, a possible conceptualization of a European open access publication platform for psychology is presented. Giving more visibility to scientific work, disseminating information easy and more broadly and with new features not found in existing journals an open access platform may be the right direction. Concrete plans for the future on organizational, technical and funding issues are addressed.

Key words: psychology; scientific communication; information dissemination; journals; open access; online publishing; language; funding

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1. Introduction

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section presents a brief summary of the results from the survey mentioned previously (Uhl, chpt. 2) and the main issues raised by the participants of the Berlin workshop. From the considerations expressed, six categories emerged: (1) Language, (2) review process, (3) manuscript handling, (4) impact (visibility), (5) permission barriers (accessibility) and (6) price barriers (cost). These issues reflect concerns and experiences with international publishers in psychology from the viewpoint of European non-native English speakers. Since results from the survey are also integrated, this part stands on an empirical, though non-representative ground. In the second section, an action plan on how to address these issues in the framework of the development of a European open access publication platform for psychology is presented. The plan will address organizational, technical and funding issues.

2. Six main issues

2.1 Language

Physiographically Europe is the northwestern peninsula of Eurasia. From east to west, it extends from the Ural Mountains in Russia to Portugal, from north to south from Iceland to Greece. Politically, the Council of Europe has 47 member states with 822 million citizens (497 million in the 27 states of the European Union). The linguistic patterns of European countries are complex - shaped by history, geographical factors and the mobility of people. For example, currently (taken in the year 2008) the European Union has 23 official languages and 60 indigenous regional or minority language communities (according to the European Commission for Multilingualism[2]).

Language skills are unevenly distributed both over the geographical area of Europe and over socio-demographic groups. German is the most widely spoken *mother tongue* in the European Union (18%) followed by English and Italian with a 13% share. English remains the most widely-spoken *foreign language* throughout Europe. 38% of EU citizens state that they have sufficient skills in English to have a *conversation* (Eurobarometer 243, self-evaluation). However, the Eurobarometer survey makes no statement on writing skills. It can easily be assumed that writing proficiency is less common, especially when it comes to academic writing. Basically all participants of the workshop stated that it is a difficult and time consuming task to write comprehensive English articles in the style demanded by international journals.

Authors generally prefer to read and write in their mother tongue. Non-native English speakers report several problems with writing in English: Language proficiency (syntax, grammar, idiomatic phrases), differences between spoken and written English, adaptation of the expected editorial style and insufficient capability of expressing one's thoughts; thus, originality and creativity suffer. The latter has severe consequences for the quality of papers. Even with the help of professional translators, it is not always said that the writers' thought will be exactly communicated as the author intended. And of course, traditional writing

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[2] http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/languages-of-europe/index_en.htm

styles of some countries are so different that the translation alone does not solve the problem. In contrast, native speakers incur less cost for writing an article (time spent, cost of professional translator) and have an advantage in expressing their ideas. The language issue was especially stressed by speakers from Bulgaria, France, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Russia.

2.2 The review process

Although the vast majority of participants agreed that peer review is an essential component of quality control, various issues regarding fairness, bias and timeliness were reported. Smaller countries have fewer journals where authors can summit their work and some even summit to journals that are non-psychology because of the lack of journals in the field. The availability of experts for peer review is also an issue. In international journals, the rejection rate and amount of revision requests is seen as unproportionally high for European non-native speakers of English. In addition, reports of colleagues from southern and eastern European countries point out cultural differences between their communication and writing style and the requirements of psychology journals dominated by the "anglo-saxon style". These differences might even affect the rigorous standards of scientific discourse. In this context it was pointed out that more than 50% of the "gatekeepers" to scientific journals are US researchers, which is out of proportion with respect to the distribution of psychologists in the world (Carbon, chpt. 6).

At a more general level, the dissatisfaction with the criteria used for acceptance or rejection and the dissatisfaction with the number of revision requests was reported. An average six to nine months lag between submission and notification of acceptance or rejection is regarded as too long.

Most importantly, in terms of fairness, the turning down of papers that deal specifically with European aspects has been reported. For instance, while European researchers and students often are confronted with the American educational (terms such as K-12), governmental (state or city institutions) or jurisdictional system (i.e.procedures for juvenile court), papers on equivalent European peculiarities are often rejected.

2.3 Manuscript handling

The issue of how manuscripts are handled refers to a general dissatisfaction with the traditional publication process. The timespan for reviewing, decision making and publication is regarded as too long. Typically, time lags between 6 and 18 months are reported (see Carbon, chpt. 6; Frey, chpt. 13; Zografova, chpt. 7). However, the upper end can even be longer: "Some authors mentioned a time delay of almost two years from submission to publication in some foreign journals" (Parada, chpt. 4). This is a big problem for young researchers. Given the fast pace of science and the time young academics can spend at a particular place of work, they are most likely doing something else by the time feedback arrives and kudos can be gained. Established researchers might still work at the same institution, but their interests might have shifted to other areas. As a matter of fact, this issue is even more complicated since the time between publication and reception has to be added.

A special case of reception is the abstracting and indexing services (e.g. PsycINFO or PSYNDEX for psychology). Approximately another 6 – 12 month have to be added until published material is listed in the databases.

2.4 Impact and visibility

Why do authors publish? In an ideal world, one might say, for the advancement of science and the particular field (psychology). Scholarly communication per se, the widespread sharing of knowledge and the acceleration of research are the driving forces. In a less ideal world, other factors also play a role: Economics (authors have to make a living) and vanity (authors want to advance their careers and become famous). In science, the economic and career factors are intertwined, because (although publications usually are not paid for) they are related to hiring and tenure decisions, to salaries and promotion. The publication record is vital for the evaluation, as well as, the funding of researchers and programs.

Given these points of departure, authors should have a fair chance of achieving a high impact and good visibility, i.e. become widely read, used, and cited. As reported in paragraph three above, American gatekeepers may tend to handicap the dissemination of European research work, especially when it comes to a local context (e.g., some aspects of French research in social psychology are specific to a French context).

In addition, yet another problem is reported: The "impact factor" which is widely used for assessment requires indexing in an expensive proprietary database (ISI Web of Science). However, European journals are under-represented in ISI (e.g., only one Czech journal), especially when they use local languages. This issue has raised some of the strongest concern. "As the impact factor is calculated with reference to the ISI databases the level of visibility for French research in psychology is underestimated" (Arnould, chpt. 3); "[the impact factor] does not necessarily reflect expertise or innovation (Parada, chpt. 4); "calculation and assignments of ISI Web Of Science impact factors are made by one single commercial company (Thomson Scientific Inc.) and should therefore be used with caution" (Carbon, chpt. 6); Bulgarian publications use the cyrillic alphabet and can't be included in the international system for measuring the impact factor (Zografova, chpt. 7); "Cypriot psychologists appear concerned that it is not easy for a local journal to achieve the necessary audience [for a high impact factor]" (Karekla, chpt. 10); "All the psychology journals existing in Lithuania do not have an impact factor" (Pakalniskiene, chpt. 11); "if [national journals] do report an impact factor, it is in general considerably lower than the impact factors of leading international journals" (Frey & Herzberg, chpt. 13). Summing up all these concerns one could say that non-native English speaking European researchers are navigating between Scylla and Charybdis: Either spend extra time and effort and publish in a high impact factor English journal or publish locally and lack reception. The solution might require a heroic deed equal to Odysseus: Create a European multilingual publication platform for psychology that either achieves high ISI impact factors or develops an independent but widely accepted high reputation.

2.5 Permission barriers (accessibility)

Two issues are reported regarding the availability of research literature which are mainly related to the so called *toll-access* model of publishing (this is where the subscriber pays to read the publication) as opposed to the *open-access* model (this is where the authors pay to have their work published), but not entirely. Even if the subscription cost can be covered, administrative and technical problems remain.

Administrative problems are the simplicity and speed of access, e.g. location dependent access to electronic material or the long duration of delivery of paper copies (shipping time). In some countries the amount of copies are very limited to the point that some journals are not to be found in bookstores of major cities and electronic accessibility is only at its infancy where the subscribers have to check themselves for the newest edition and are not notified (Glaveanu, chpt. 5). On the technical side, artificial barriers superimposed on the information itself may hinder access (e.g. digital rights management technologies). Access thus becomes constrained in space, time and technical resources.

Related to the accessibility issue is the problem of locating articles. As mentioned above, European work is underrepresented in search aids like renown international databases, or researchers do not have access to such databases at all (subscription too expensive). Access to international publications and databases is especially problematic in Eastern European countries where funding is scarce.

2.6 Price barriers (cost)

The cost issue has sparked the so called open-access movement. "Prices of many journals have spiraled out of control and libraries have had no choice but to cancel subscriptions, defer new subscriptions, and cut into their book budgets" (SPARC, 2004). Contributing factors to the so-called *serials crisis* are the publish or perish philosophy, the explosion in the number of academic subfields, and the increasing domination of scholarly communication by commercial publishers. According to the American Association of Research Libraries (ARL), their serial expenditures have risen by 321% from 1986 to 2006 (Kyrillidou & Young, 2008), while the average cost of living has only risen by 84% (Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Scientific journals more and more become an unendurable weight for the budget of universities and of research institutes. In Europe, the high cost of international journals is usually paid for by the taxpayers (universities and research institutes are mostly publicly funded). Especially in Eastern Europe there is little money for non-national journals. At an increasing rate, scholars have to use personal funds to buy certain journals.

Thus, open access is seen as a possible solution to the serials crisis, at least from the point of view of the reader. Respondents of the survey and the workshop participants argued strongly in favor of open access (Uhl, chpt. 2). But open access does not only overcome the price barrier, it also improves visibility and impact. In psychology, the percentage gain in citations for open access articles (self-archiving by their authors) compared to toll access counterparts in the same issue of the same journal is more than one hundred (Harnad and Brody, 2004). Mental health professionals are roughly twice as likely to read a relevant

article if it is freely available (Hardisty, 2008). In a paper from the context of medicine, developing countries and non-researchers are seen as additional beneficiaries of open access: "Open-access journals, unlike subscription journals, have the potential to reach a broad audience and not just the traditional readers of medical journals (those wealthy enough to afford access). We have a tremendous opportunity to disseminate research to a diverse readership in developed and developing countries, from clinicians and clinical researchers to health policy makers, teachers, students, non-governmental organizations and patients" (Yamey et al., 2007). Krampen (chpt. 1) generalizes this rationale in line with funding bodies like the US National Institutes of Health: "research is a public good", therefore access to the European publication platform for psychology should be free.

3. A European Open Access Publication Platform for Psychology (EPPP): Key features

Summing up the results of the survey and the issues reported at the workshop, a European open access publication platform for psychology can be envisioned which improves the dissemination of European psychology and which overcomes the problems reported. In addition, novel features like open access and open review can improve visibility and transparency. We explicitly refer to a *platform* and not to one or more new journals, because a variety of publishing needs should be supported and it should be possible to relate objects stored on the platform to each other (e.g., texts and data).

In terms of contents, the platform
– should be open to all areas of psychology (broad scope);
– should cover scholarly as well as professional topics;
– should encompass different types of publications (research articles, practice guidelines, monographs, primary data, etc.);
– should be multilingual; contributions should be made available in one or more languages, but should at least have English metadata (title, keywords and abstract);
– should contain peer reviewed material with new forms of possible refereeing (e.g. open review, pre-refereeing commentary)
– could contain living articles (articles which continue to grow as authors add to them);
– could support commentaries, annotations and tagging;
– should be available free of charge (open access).

In terms of (technical) features, the platform should
– provide metadata (keywords, classification) for each object;
– support harvesting (metadata and full-text);
– link articles to data;
– support citation interlinking;
– provide evaluative measures (citations, download counts);
– support the disambiguation of author names.

4. Action plan

Now, how can such a platform be created? Who warrants its sustainability? In the survey, people were asked to indicate interest in an active role. Among these, representatives from a wide variety of European countries (not only EU) were invited to the workshop. At the workshop, the following issues were presented with an explicit call for further participation (follow-up workshop) in developing the platform.

Administrative, technical, and financial issues; find editors, reviewers, authors as well as technical and administrative staff.

4.1 Administrative issues

Administrative issues deal with setting policies and guidelines, establishing workflows, recruiting personnel and securing financing. Tasks are: establishing editorial guidelines, selecting reviewers, soliciting manuscript submissions, determining policies concerning the acceptance and rejection of submissions, quality control, copy-editing, proofreading, marketing, and contracting.

Editorial groups (editors-in-chief and editors) have to be formed which are responsible for contents on the platform, e.g. a specific journal.

In production, staff for layout, typesetting/printing and distributing is required.

4.2 Technical issues

The technical side deals with infrastructure. In order to run the platform, hardware, network connectivity and software is required. The software is supposed to support submission, reviewing, editing, production/dissemination and archiving. In order to support dissemination (distribution), query interfaces for man and machine are required. Figure 1 illustrates the components of peer reviewed electronic scientific publishing. Authors submit articles (online submission system) which then undergo quality control (review management system). In case of acceptance, they are fed into the editorial and production systems (eg. copy editing, addition of metadata, typesetting). Final versions (e.g. file formats XML and/or PDF) are stored in a sustainable long term archive. The distribution system takes care of dissemination, providing query interfaces (GUI for readers, OAI-PMH for machines) and push services.
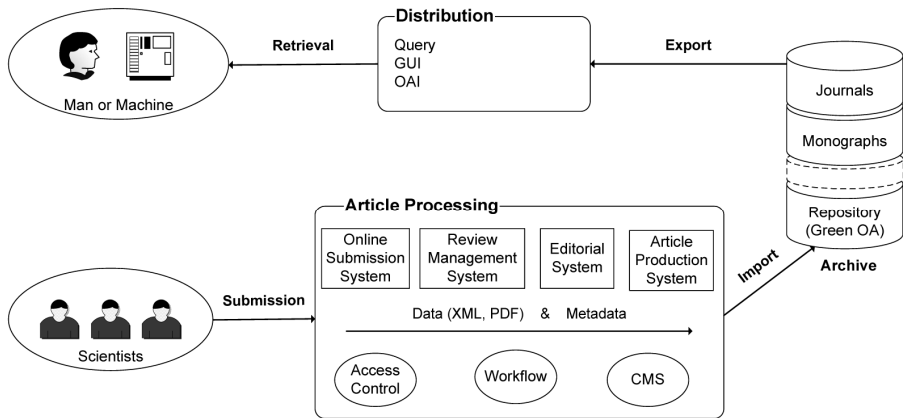
Figure 1:
Components of (electronic) scientific publishing. (XML: eXtensible Markup Language; PDF: Portable Document Format; CMS: Content Management System; OA: Open Access; GUI: Graphical User Interface; OAI-PMH: Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting).

4.3 Financial issues

How can the long-term availability of the platform be secured (sustainability)? Since its contents are made available free of charge (open access), sources other than subscribers have to be found. In open access publishing, various business models are used, often in combination: (1) author pays (eg. *author choice*, APS or *open choice*, Springer; *article-processing charges*, BioMed Central or p*ublication fees*, PLoS). (2) Direct funding by Learned Society. (3) Public funding (grants to researchers or to institutions). (4) Cross-subsidization (eg. by fees for congress).

Which business model is appropriate for a European open access publication platform for psychology? Some of the participants of the workshop represent publicly funded institutions whose mission is the provision of scientific information, for instance the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (INIST), France; the Institute for Psychology Information (ZPID), Germany; and the Institute of Documentary Studies on Science and Technology (CSIC), Spain. It might be possible that part of institutional resources can get directed to EPPP activities. Since the largest costs probably will incur in developing EPPP, start-up grants would be welcome. One task of the working group will be to find funding sources and write grant proposals. In the long run, this kind of voluntary community support will be an essential part of EPPP success. In the short run, a rapid prototype backed by the working group and their institutions should attract attention not only by authors and referees, but also by learned and professional societies, libraries, funding bodies, policy makers and others.

5. Follow-up workshop – Help wanted

The survey and numerous personal communications have shown a demand for swift open access publishing in psychology in Europe. The workshop has shed further light on the publication situation in various European countries and has made the demand more specific. At the end of the workshop, several participants have expressed interest in pursuing further an active role in the foundation of a European publication platform for psychology. They agreed to take part in a follow-up workshop (place to be determined), where responsibilities will be assigned regarding the tasks mentioned above: Establish guidelines (including content solicitation), clarify the workflow, recruit contributors (authors, editors, reviewers), implement the technological infrastructure and find funding sources.

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