

Brief on research and scientific publication in French

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and Research

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The Érudit Consortium (erudit.org)

Founded in 1998 at the initiative of the Presses de l'Université de Montréal to support French-language scholarly journals in their transition to digital, Érudit is an inter-university consortium involving the Université de Montréal, Université Laval and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Érudit's mission is to support open digital publishing and research in the humanities, social sciences and the arts and letters (HSS).

Érudit makes Canada a leader in French-language scientific digital publishing. Recognized by the Canada Foundation for Innovation as a Major Science Initiative since 2014, [Érudit](http://erudit.org) is, with its closest partner, the [Public Knowledge Project](http://pkp.scribbr.com) (PKP), the only digital production, dissemination and research platform dedicated to the humanities and social sciences in Canada. With a wide range of services, from semantic structuring of articles to their indexing in most of the world's active content aggregators, Érudit provides access to 140,000 scientific articles published in more than 150 scholarly journals, 56 of which publish in French only. Thanks to the digitization of the full collection of journal issues, 77% of the articles available on Érudit are written in French. Overall, 63% of the periodicals have immediate open access on the platform, compared to a national average of 45% in 2019.

Érudit's alignment with the open access policies of the major research funding agencies promotes the visibility and discoverability of French-language publications. Indeed, open access to scientific publications, in the form of journal articles, monographs, or textbooks, has a demonstrated multiplier effect in scientific literature on the subject. The download data from Érudit reveal that in the two years following publication, an open access article will receive on average almost twice as many views as an article published with a 12-month moving wall (Cameron-Pesant 2018).

However, as a research support infrastructure, Érudit's ability to assist French-language journals has certain limitations:

- 1) the overall funding available to journals;
- 2) the decline in the number of original manuscripts submitted in French; and
- 3) the value placed on the publication of research in French by academic institutions.

These three challenges deserve our full attention. It is important to note that while the anglicization of research dissemination is a global trend, the Canadian situation remains unique because of the country's linguistic dynamics. As Vincent Larivière and Amanda Riddles point out [TRANSLATION] “[t]he main difference [is] that in [the other] countries—some of which are multilingual—the shift has been to a foreign language, which is much more neutral, and not, as in Canada’s case, to the other national language.” (Larivière and Riddles 2021)

Thus, for Canadian francophone communities, the growing hegemony of English in scholarly publishing is a source of inequality in their own country. It compromises their ability to live, work, study and reflect in their native language. Similarly, this situation prevents them from having access to recent research on the challenges and issues that directly concern them.

Three challenges for publishing in French in Canada

Funding Canadian scholarly journals

Journals publishing in French are supported by two sources of funding in Canada: the Aid to Scholarly Journals program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Scientific journal support program of the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture. These government programs reflect the importance of domestic journals in the Canadian research ecosystem.

However, the data available reveal that these amounts are insufficient, and our studies of the socioeconomic status of Canadian scholarly journals in the humanities and social sciences (Paquin et al. 2015; Larivière et al. 2021) show that even the best-funded journals operate on tight budgets. At the time of writing, the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture has the capacity to fund only 35 of the 60 journals recommended for funding, while the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funds 27 francophone journals out of a total of 123 scholarly journals funded. Lastly, their allocation is decided at the end of competitions that are renewed every three years, which leads to a structural instability that erodes the community.

Obtaining original French manuscripts

In addition to these funding problems, there is an accelerated reduction in the number of original manuscripts submitted in French, even though French is the fifth most spoken language in the world and the third most present language on the Internet. These figures might lead one to believe that publishing in French is an interesting avenue for researchers. However, this is not the case. The overall importance of the English language in all spheres of activity, the internationalization of exchanges in all fields of research, but especially the systemic devaluation of all languages except English in journal ranking systems (Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016), increasingly discourages francophone researchers from publishing in their own language. **This linguistic impoverishment of scholarly publishing is problematic in many ways for francophone research communities in Canada and for Canadian society as a whole.**

First of all, thinking and writing in French ensures the vitality of an intellectual heritage that is constantly renewed by Canada's francophone research communities, which would otherwise be at risk of ossifying and becoming extinct. Second, publications in national and local languages are essential to disseminate knowledge beyond the academic world to students, citizens and policy-makers. Working in languages used in society maximizes the social impact of research and fosters the vitality of linguistic minority communities. In addition, domestic journals play a key role in research on national themes: an HSS article published by a Canadian researcher in a Canadian journal is two to three times more likely to address a Canadian issue than an article by a Canadian researcher published in a foreign journal.

Evaluating research

Unlike some countries that have subjected the evaluation of their researchers to the controversial criteria of the Web of Science, the platform that created the impact factor, Canada has not imposed journal rankings in the evaluation of professors, which allows for less biased evaluation of their work.

However, the emphasis on the impact factor weighs heavily on the research communities, who consider publishing in a so-called international journal more profitable to their careers than publishing in a domestic journal. This is particularly true of young researchers, who must prove their worth to their colleagues. This is compounded by a general lack of literacy in scholarly publishing, which severely limits questioning the validity of the impact factor despite its proven biases and lack of scientific basis.

Concrete requests to contribute to developing the publication of research in French in Canada

In order to restore the prestige of publishing in French and for researchers to see it as a crucial dissemination channel for their work, we propose three concrete measures.

- 1. Increase the support envelope for journals publishing in French; make the funds granted to these journals and to the infrastructure that ensures the discoverability of research in French sustainable in order to stabilize their situation**

In order for publication in French to find its rightful place in Canada and internationally, it is essential that the infrastructure ensuring its production, dissemination and discoverability is competitive with the services offered elsewhere, particularly by the major commercial publishers publishing in English. Currently, even the best-funded journals are operating on tight budgets amid increased pressure on their operations. The Canadian scholarly journals that are funded are also funded by research funds that must be renewed periodically. This creates structural instability that undermines the ability of teams to fully focus on fulfilling their mission and limits their ability to more quickly adopt open access dissemination and transition to open science.

- 2. Conduct a national debate on the measures to be adopted to increase the discoverability of publications in French, particularly on the possibilities and limits of translation, in consultation with the other francophone countries, including France**

English is without question the *lingua franca* of contemporary research. This state of affairs coexists with a very significant improvement in automated translation tools. Since completely legitimate concerns can be expressed about the opportunities created by translation, which cannot replace the possibility of reading and expressing oneself in one's own language, an in-depth analysis of the

subject is needed, which also concerns the funds available for adapting the technological infrastructure for research dissemination. Indeed, the use of translation to support publication in French can be approached in various ways: by creating a fund for journals to translate articles into French that were originally written and submitted in English; by including automated translation tools for articles published in French on dissemination platforms; and by requiring the English translation of metadata associated with articles published in French for optimal referencing in search engines.

3. Revise the criteria for evaluating research and researchers to take into account Canadian realities, in a manner consistent with international initiatives to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in academic activities

Research on research evaluation shows that one of the factors having the biggest influence on the choice of language for the publication of a scientific article is still the method in which researchers are evaluated by the academic institutions that employ them and the funding agencies that fund them.

The journal impact factor remains a measure of quality for the vast majority of universities and researchers despite its acknowledged lack of scientific basis and its proven bias in favour of publications in English and disciplines in the sciences, technology and medicine. This trend has the perverse effect of influencing research topics and diverting them from local or national topics, thereby limiting the social impact of funded research. To counter this vicious cycle, efficient and equitable incentives must be put in place. Indeed, since career advancement and the accumulation of symbolic capital in their field of study is an essential objective for researchers, the sustainability of scholarly publication in French requires proactive public policies that ensure the institutional recognition of Canadian researchers who practise it.

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