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Englishization and the politics of knowledge production in management studies

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Abstract

Concerns have been voiced in recent years about the widespread use of US-dominated journal rankings in business schools. Such practice is seen to have the effect of spreading globally a US-style scholarly monoculture and reconstituting different forms of scholarship as “inferior”. In this paper, we explore the ways in which the English language is implicated in these processes. Drawing on language-sensitive studies of academic work and our own experiences as non-native speakers of English, we argue that the use of US-dominated rankings is not just hierarchizing and homogenizing the global field of management but also contributing to its *Englishization*. This, in turn, we contend, furthers the homogenization of the field while also producing significant language-based inequalities and inducing demanding, quasi-colonial forms of identity work by those being Englishized.

Introduction

In recent years, a growing segment of the management studies community has expressed concerns about the rising significance of journal rankings in business schools (Tourish & Willmott, 2015). One major concern is that such rankings are biased towards American journals. For example, as of 2018, 31 out of the 33 journals identified by the UK's Chartered Association of Business Schools as "world elite" are US-controlled and edited. The use of such rankings is seen to be establishing US research as the centre and reconstituting the rest as marginal and inferior, while spreading globally a US-style scholarly monoculture and hence potentially stifling intellectual innovation (Grey, 2010; Willmott, 2011). Looking at it from the perspective of the non-Western world, Murphy and Zhu (2012) go further by arguing that this trend also represents an extension of Western (neo)colonial domination into the terrain of management studies. In short, the use of US-dominated journal rankings is seen to be producing unwelcome processes of hierarchization and homogenization in the global field of management studies.

Less explored in this debate are the ways in which the English language is implicated in the observed processes. English is the unquestioned language of internationally-ranked journals yet, while the dominance of rankings by US journals is considered a problem requiring scholarly intervention, the use of English promoted (implicitly) by such rankings is left largely undiscussed. Of course, one may hold the view that English *is* the language of global academe and thus of little relevance to the discussion, but our own experience as academics shows otherwise. Moreover, a number of recent language-sensitive management studies of academia reveal how levels of competence in English are uneven across countries and that the act of writing and publishing in English is a source of anxiety and tension within and between local academic communities (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Horn, 2017; Meriläinen,

Tienari, Thomas & Davies, 2008; Pudelko & Tenzer, 2018; Sliwa & Johansson, 2015; Steyaert & Janssens, 2013; Tietze & Dick, 2013). It follows that the question of English requires more attention in the debate about the politics of journal rankings and management knowledge production.

In this paper, we aim to encourage dialogue to this end. We contend that such dialogue is important because not all academics within the field of management studies are native speakers of English and indeed some, if not the majority, have relatively limited competence in the language. Dialogue on the matter is also required because writing is a core activity in academic work and a key determinant of our scholarly identities. As Cloutier (2016: 69) puts it, “[o]ur identities and reputations as academics are largely formed on the basis of what and how we write.” For many, the use of English requires writing in a different language and this in effect calls for a change in identity (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017). As such, the politics of journal rankings and knowledge production are to some extent language politics and language politics are in effect identity politics. For this reason, we contend that the debate on the effects of US-dominated journal rankings ought to also consider how the English language is implicated in their use and effects.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the following section, we elaborate on the observed problems of hierarchization and homogenization. We then link these issues to the question of English and put forward the argument that the use of US-dominated rankings not only has homogenizing and hierarchizing effects but also contributes to the *Englishization* of the global field of management research. This process, in turn, furthers the homogenization of the field of management, while also producing language-based inequalities in knowledge production and inducing demanding, quasi-colonial forms of identity work by those being

Englishized. We conclude with some reflections on how the debate might be taken forward and on how the unwelcome effects of Englishization might be addressed. Our analysis is based on a synthesis of earlier research combined with our own observations as non-native speakers of English caught in the very processes we seek to encourage dialogue on.

Hierarchization and homogenization

What purpose does writing in the field of management serve? There are likely to be many different answers to this question but it has become clear in recent years that journal rankings have changed the way we approach writing. Whereas in the past what seems to have mattered most was writing aimed at producing quality scholarship, today writing as a means of publishing in the most highly-ranked journals has become an end in itself and indeed a veritable obsession in some quarters (Harley, 2018). Willmott (2011) describes this situation as one of “fetishism”, with the fetish here being the journal quality list. For the scholar, as Willmott (2011) puts it, “the fantasy object is the top journal ‘hit’ whose attainment affirms an imagined scholarly virtuosity.” It is no surprise that some believe scholarship is turning into “roisearch” (ROI research), where producing publications for journals that “count” in assessment exercises and rankings is the main purpose of writing and indeed sole criterion of academic success (Alvesson, 2012). In this context, writing thus assumes a new *raison d’être*: to publish in the fetishized journals.

To this end, we become focused on honing our skills in the art of “gamesmanship” (Macdonald & Kam, 2007). We develop collaborations with publishing in “top” journals in mind and indeed sometimes instrumentally add “big names” to our papers to maximise our chances. We attend workshops aimed explicitly at publishing in these select journals and we invite scholars associated with such journals to come and talk about their expectations. We

invest extraordinary amounts of time in crafting the “right” papers, often at the cost of holding back the progress of research. In so doing, we also risk producing relatively formulaic texts (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). The process of writing and publishing thus gradually becomes a game and, moreover, one at which only the “skewed few” (Macdonald & Kam, 2011) can succeed. The route to assimilation is a demanding, risky, and tortuous one.

In this context, scholarship suffers, not only because form and gaming become more important than substance and scholarship, but also because scholarly diversity becomes an oddity in an expanding sea of “normality.” The most highly ranked journals, as Harley (2018) explains, “typically publish papers which have two key characteristics: a focus on theory [...] and a focus on quantitative work which employs increasingly complex statistical techniques.” This focus inevitably tends to discourage methodological pluralism, with the “exemplary” journals in effect prioritizing quantitative-positivist methods over qualitative-interpretive ones (Cassell, 2016). The significance of this issue is such that recent years have seen regular calls by “top” journals for more qualitative research. This is encouraging, but the problem goes beyond issues of methodology into matters of theory. Research adopting theoretical perspectives and onto-epistemologies different from those generally found in “top” journals is rarely promoted and published in such outlets¹. Papers deviating from the norm are often axed down at the door and those texts that do get sent out for external review are watered down in multiple rounds of revision, becoming “faint shadows” of the original submission (Özkazanc-Pan, 2012: 210). Unorthodox writers are thus either rejected or disciplined into making their texts comply with expectations, and evaluations of quality become self-fulfilling prophecies (Tourish & Willmott, 2015).

Those of us who choose to ignore the game or fail to invest sufficiently in it risk downgrading. Journal-list fetishism effectively ensures this. As Willmott (2011: 430) puts it: “When it takes hold, scholarly work that many of us would consider first-rate in terms of its originality, significance and/or rigor is devalued simply because it appears in a lesser ranked journal.” In this way, the game serves to reproduce and strengthen the hierarchy established by journal rankings. At the international level, the game also means we gradually become (more or less) active agents in the (re)production of core-periphery hierarchies. Mapping the global field of management studies, Üsdiken (2010, 2014) shows how it comprises a US-based primary centre (the “headquarters” of the most highly ranked journals) and a UK-based secondary centre (where contender journals are developed). Outside these Anglophone centres, others are relegated to semi-peripheries and peripheries. Semi-peripheries comprise continental Northern and Western Europe as well as Canada and Oceania, while other parts of the world make up the peripheries. In targeting “top” journals, we in effect become (wittingly or not) complicit in sustaining a global hierarchy that naturalizes the superiority and dominance of US scholarship and journalsⁱⁱ.

With this also come real risks of homogenization on a global scale. US-dominated rankings and associated institutional processes together with the game we play in effect serve to reproduce and strengthen the scholarly logic promoted by US journals (Tourish & Willmott, 2015; Willmott, 2011). In being pressured to target such journals, we are led to follow the conventions they promote, thereby encouraging us to converge onto the US scholarly model. In this way, the global system of management knowledge production is gradually standardized along US lines, and indeed entire business schools are restructured to that end (see Table 1 below for an example from a non-Anglophone country). This inevitably endangers scholarly diversity and potentially also stifles intellectual innovation (Grey, 2010;

Willmott, 2011; see e.g. Harley, 2015, with specific reference to the field of HRM). It may also endanger social relevance as we become more interested in hitting the “right” journals than in thinking about local societal problems (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013; Murphy & Zhu, 2012).

---Insert Table 1 about here---

Consider, for instance, management research informed by critical theory and poststructuralist thinking. Over the last few decades, such work has helped approach academic writing in new ways, and encouraged a keen interest in issues of representation, in the fluidity of meaning, and in the questioning of “truths” and the pursuit of “objective” knowledge. Scholars such as Czarniawska (1995), Kostera (1997) and Townley (1994) paved the way for challenging rigid conventions of academic writing in the field of management studies. They offered critique of the separation of the subject (writer) and object (reader) and helped us shed new light on the knowledge we claim to generate. Fast forward some twenty years and we find a growing number of contributions echoing earlier concerns over how we as academics are persuaded, if not forced, to write in particular ways as institutional pressures increasingly push us towards US-style scholarship and publishing (see e.g. Gabriel, 2010; Grey, 2010; Grey & Sinclair, 2006; Macdonald & Kam, 2007, 2011). The space for alternative ways of writing indeed appears to be shrinking in management studies.

Of course, the global spread of US-oriented monoculture does not go without a degree of resistance and reverse influence (see e.g. contributions in Siebert, 2017), but pressures to conform are strong (Grey, 2010; Tourish & Willmott, 2015; Willmott, 2011). This appears to be especially the case in the “peripheries” of the field. Here, scholars appear to be mimicking

the US scholarly model (Bell, Kothiyal & Willmott, 2017) or are simply excluded from the “global” system and, when included, mostly used as a source of data with which to test and extend management theories developed in the West (Murphy & Zhu, 2012). In the primary (US) centre, the discussion about writing continues to focus on how to make academic texts more “rigorous” and also more “relevant” to practitioners (Gulati, 2007). One notable exception is the *Journal of Management Inquiry* where different forms of academic writing are actively discussed (see e.g. Ashforth, 2005; Cloutier, 2016; Dane, 2011; Helin, 2015; Macdonald, 2015; Meier & Wegener, 2017; Thomas et al, 2009). As writers, we are encouraged to avoid formulaic writing find inspiration and knowledge to write differently (Helin, 2015: 15). Despite these efforts, global homogenization is nevertheless a real risk.

In sum, the above discussion points to serious concerns about tendencies towards hierarchization and homogenization along US lines. We agree that these require discussion and scrutiny. What we wish to do in the rest of the paper is to explore the role of the English language in the observed problems, an area that has thus far been overlooked or not given explicit attention. Indeed, by not directly reflecting on the role of English, the discussion about the politics of knowledge production may be accused of (unwittingly) contributing to the normalization of English as *the* language of management studies and potentially (re)producing some of the very problems it takes issue with. We believe the matter calls for reflection.

Englishization

Critically exploring the effects of US-dominated journal rankings requires seeing English (as a global language) as a *process*, whereby business schools around the world are promoting its use, directly or indirectly, as a means to an end – hence the notion of “Englishization”

advanced by Boussebaa and Brown (2017). Even in proud European nations with a strong tradition of generating academic knowledge in their own languages (e.g., France and Germany) rankings and performance management systems are changing and scholars are nudged if not coerced to publish in “top” journals and, by implication, to embrace the English language in writing and publishing. Thus, English is being normalized as *the* language of “top” quality scholarship, a process intimately bound up with the disciplinary practices associated with the knowledge production game described above.

In this sense, US-dominated journal rankings and the game associated with it are not just hierarchizing and homogenizing the global field but also, we argue, contributing to its Englishization. English is gradually becoming the working language for all those who aspire to the heights of the system or indeed those who simply strive to survive within its borders. In the process, other languages are pushed out, with new generations of non-Anglophone scholars being trained in English and finding themselves working in this language, not just to publish in “top” journals but to do academic work in the first place. English is in effect becoming a “global” norm, with local languages relegated to just that: “local” tongues to be sometimes used in addition to the “global” language, not as alternatives to it. In this way, non-Anglophone academic identities are also gradually re-made as Anglophone ones (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017).

As Ibarra-Colado (2006: 471) puts it, with specific reference to management studies in Latin America, “to be allowed in you must deny your own identity: to belong in ‘the international community’, you must speak the Centre’s language, use its concepts, discuss its agendas.” However, the process goes far beyond using English and its associated work identity for interaction with the centre, for instance, at international conferences or in journal review

processes. The trend towards “top” journals also means that, increasingly, English must be used *locally* as local workplaces are restructured in line with the US-oriented monoculture and as indigenous tongues are gradually displaced to give way to English as the primary, if not only, language of writing and publishing (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017). Indeed, increasingly, early-career scholars are intellectually born and grown as Anglo-academics via English-language PhD-programmes and other means aimed at making them Anglophone academics (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Lund & Tienari, 2018).

For those in transition and trying to adjust to the rapid changes around them, taking part in the game demands extraordinary linguistic efforts, although some cross-national variation persists in how local language proficiency affects academic career making in non-Anglophone contexts (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2018). Meeting expectations is by no means straightforward given the difficulty of learning a second language, let alone using it to write and publish academic work, which typically requires very high levels of linguistic competence. As Horn (2017: 3) puts it, “[s]cholars who wish to be taken seriously must develop an Anglophone fluency, and this at an exceptionally high level.” Of course, few of us are able to develop such fluency in practice. Non-native speakers thus find themselves taking part in a game whose language and conventions ultimately do not work to their advantage (see e.g. Meriläinen et al, 2008; Sliwa & Johansson, 2015).

This linguistic lack inevitably comes to mean a relative lack of scholarly competence, or rather a sense of not being (linguistically) fully competent to perform key scholarly tasks such as writing and publishing. Thus, it leads to a state of relative academic inferiority in the “global” monoculture. The task of writing clearly, let alone elegantly, is always a challenge. As the social psychologist Michael Billig suggests in his critique of contemporary academic

writing, non-native speakers of English “have a hard enough job to write clearly in a second or third language without having to aspire to write with aesthetic elegance in that language” (Billig, 2013: 9). Writing in English can also slow down the writing process (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2018) and complicate communication with journal editors and reviewers (Cho, 2004), thereby also causing difficulties in terms of productivity and reducing chances of having work accepted by editors and reviewers. As such, one may argue that non-native speakers are – to varying degrees depending on one’s biography – intellectually “disabled” in performing the expected Anglophone academic habitus.

On the surface, Englishization appears to usefully create a shared language and, through this, facilitate the journey towards “top” journals, yet, paradoxically, it also further contributes to hierarchization in the global field, keeping those in the peripheries and semi-peripheries (and, to an extent, also non-natives in the centre and semi-centre) firmly in their place, at least in the short- to medium-term. At the same time, the process also creates new language-based hierarchies within local-national scholarly communities (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; see also Ibarra-Colado, 2006). It divides such communities into “Englishized elites” and those who remain, willingly or not, “local” in their language and academic work (Lund & Tienari, 2018). In this sense, the Englishized elites benefit considerably from the US-oriented monoculture, but they are not totally immune to the linguistic burden. Despite exceptional personal investments in learning English and performing scholarly tasks in it, a degree of struggle always remains. We must work in a language that we do not fully master no matter how much effort we put into it; extra efforts are always required to reach the levels fluency, subtlety, and precision that come more naturally to native speakers.

In addition to producing inequalities within and between national systems of knowledge production, Englishization further contributes to the problem of homogenization discussed above. It does so not only in terms of linguistic homogenization (i.e., only using English to write and publish) but also in terms of academic identity. Institutional systems and practices supporting the normalization of English in different locales work to regulate the identities of non-natives, disciplining them into accommodating in their scholarly practice the social identity associated with being an English-speaking scholar (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017). This, in turn, likely leads to a loss of local knowledge – of linguistic knowledge (i.e. no longer using local languages to write and publish) but also of epistemic knowledge (Ibarra-Collado, 2006). This comes to the fore when the problematics of academic writing are considered, for example, in terms of meaning making and identity.

Here, we see language as being important in how meanings are construed and how particular forms of meaning making are naturalized. This is evident when texts are translated from other languages into English, and vice versa: “translation (and decontextualization) of language-in-use into [...] English is achieved at the expense of a loss of meaning” (Thomas et al, 2009: 318). For example, unlike in English, some languages do not distinguish between gendered pronouns “he” and “she” or make a distinction between the words “sex” and “gender.” Translating texts from these languages into English, or vice versa, inevitably changes these texts. Original meanings are inadvertently lost (and new meanings are created in English) when gender-neutral figures of speech are made intelligible for English-speaking audiences. Producing text in English thus becomes very much about translation and a process in which local meanings are changed (Steyaert & Janssens, 2013; Tietze, 2017).

However, the problem of translation is only the tip of the iceberg. Englishization also serves to render Anglo-American understandings of the world self-evident and, by implication, reduce other knowledges to deviations from the norm (see e.g. Alasuutari, 2004; Descarries, 2003; Meriläinen et al, 2008; Thomas et al, 2009). Particular forms of meaning making arising in and from Anglophone contexts are naturalized, while others are marginalized and silenced. Knowledge from Anglophone contexts and produced in English come to be seen as universal, while knowledge from elsewhere and in other languages is relegated to the particular, culturally specific and, inevitably, inferior (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Use of Anglophone literature as the main – and often only – reference point reinforces this dynamic. All this may be seen as part of the wider phenomenon of “linguistic imperialism” described by language policy scholar Robert Phillipson (Phillipson, 1992; 2009). Boussebaa and Brown (2017: 24) settle for “quasi-voluntary imperialism” in that Englishization is self-imposed by local elites, albeit in the context of wider geopolitical power relations.

Given these dynamics, it is not surprising that in everyday academic life Englishization does not proceed smoothly. It leads to feelings of vulnerability and frustration among many non-native speakers (Horn, 2017) and, unsurprisingly, it is also “contested, complained about and appropriated in the creative identity work of those subject to it” (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017: 7). Nevertheless, such resistance by no means prevents Englishization from following its course. Journal rankings and related institutional processes ensure its progress. The lure of “top” journals is difficult to question and resist as institutional systems ensure that we move in the “right” direction in our work (Bell et al., 2018; Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Kallio et al, 2016; Lund & Tienari, 2018). This is evident, for instance, in the accreditations that universities pursue to achieve legitimacy and climb national and international league tables (see Table 1 above). It is evident in related evaluation criteria and, ultimately, in the

experience of individuals who are forced or seduced into writing for “top” journals but also self-driven to be successful academics and to join the “global” (Anglophone) elite.

In this context, writing and publishing become a demanding form of identity work, not only in terms of being good scholars but also in terms of being competent Anglophone scholars. We are led to pretend we are no different from native speakers in our scholarly (writing) competence and, in so doing, routinely downplay and deny the embodied, sensuous, emotional, social, and identity-related aspects of our writing (Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018). We are encouraged to fit in, linguistically, but we know we are never fully able to do so. As the global field of management studies takes form within a hierarchical world system, we find our identities not only being regulated by organizations (i.e. universities) but also subject to wider geopolitical power relations (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017).

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s concept of *mimicry* is useful here. In using this concept, Bhabha (1994) points to how the (neo)colonial relationship leads to a situation in which the “Other” (i.e. the colonized) is assimilated but never fully. This reflects a wish for “a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994: 86). Mimicry thus leads to difference just as it seeks to overcome it. In other words, we as the Englishized are led to adopt the English language and mimic the identity associated with the conventions of a dominant (US-style) scholarship. We are led to become like our “superior” Anglophone peers in how we write and how we seek to publish our writings. As Bhabha argues, however, the colonized can never fully adopt the identity of the colonizer. We remain the “Other” in our similarity, and we know it. With this ambivalence comes disruption, or what Bhabha (1994: 8) calls “an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledge and disciplinary power.” Such recalcitrance of the will (to be fully

the same) means Englishization and associated processes of homogenization are always subject to a degree of ambivalence, resistance, and subversion (cf. Boussebaa, Sinha & Gabriel, 2014).

As non-native English-speaking scholars, then, we simultaneously appropriate and contest the Anglophone game and its language. We conform because we enjoy the game, benefit from it and feel that it works for us, or because we have little choice but to conform or else face exclusion (Lund & Tienari, 2018). However, we also subvert and at times contest and resist it (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017). We do so through complaint, irony, sarcasm or joking. We also do so in and through our writing by producing critiques of the “global” monoculture we are enjoined to embrace. And we sometimes write in our own language for domestic outlets. Writing in a language that is not appreciated by university managers and publishing in outlets that do not count in assessment exercises are banal ways of resisting and retaining our sense of self as independent and freethinking academics (Lund, 2015; Lund & Tienari, 2018).

Conclusion

This essay has sought to insert the issue of Englishization into the debate about the politics of knowledge production in the field of management studies. We have drawn attention to the hierarchizing and homogenizing conditions under which we as management scholars produce knowledge and explored the ways in which English is implicated in such conditions. Specifically, we have argued that the use of US-dominated journal rankings and the publishing game associated with it have the effect of Englishizing the global field of management studies. This process, in turn, further contributes to the field’s homogenization while also producing language-based inequalities within and between local-national academic communities as well as quasi-colonial modes of identity work by those being Englishized.

Our analysis thus points to how the politics of journal rankings and knowledge production are (in a global context) inextricably connected to language politics, and we argue that understanding the former requires attention to the latter.

Of course, to unpack the politics of Englishization is not to deny its practical benefits. The adoption of English facilitates interaction with the academic Anglosphere and its US centre but also international interactions more generally. It enables debate across societal and cultural boundaries and offers a range of new opportunities for networking, collaboration, and publishing (Tietze & Dick, 2013). Our argument is that beyond these obvious practical benefits Englishization is entwined with the “game” discussed above and wider geopolitical power relations, and that this produces unwelcome effects. It is thus important that the conversation about the politics of knowledge production in management studies considers the question of English.

We believe dialogue on this issue is critically important, not least for avoiding the widely held and largely unquestioned view of English as *the* language of management scholarship, and the related limited conception of it as a neutral medium of writing that benefits all academics equally. The use of US-dominated journal rankings (and indeed the ongoing academic debate about it) in effect reproduce (unwittingly) this view. In other words, the “global” field of management assumes conditions of linguistic equivalence, yet in practice not all players have an equal chance to succeed at, or be equally productive and prolific in, writing and publishing. The playing field is not level. This, in turn, means that a relatively small proportion of scholars based in the centre and, to a lesser degree, the secondary centre and, to a still lesser extent, other parts of the world benefit disproportionately from the “global” system.

This reality is rarely, if ever, recognized at the institutional level within the management studies community and the various universities hosting it. Instead, non-native scholars are expected to perform at the same level as natives, and they are typically assessed accordingly. While sometimes questioned and criticized in everyday academic life, the language-based hierarchy is routinely reproduced by our actions as individuals and in our local communities. Perhaps Steyaert and Janssens (2013: 131) are right in reminding us that “there is currently too little agony about and critique of the hegemony of English based on a kind of pragmatism.” This pragmatism, we suspect, is based on individuals’ – including our own – survival instinct and pressures to conform but also on the lure of success and power in our field. Resisting the scholarly identities thus offered is difficult. We suggest that the question of resistance to Englishization (as part of the politics of knowledge production) is an important avenue for future research, particularly from the perspective of academic self-identities across the world.

Our claim that English plays an important role in processes of homogenisation and hierarchization within the global field of management studies begs the question of where we should go from here. How might the problem(s) be addressed? This is a difficult question and we have no definitive answers. The problem is rooted in complex, historically constituted global power relations and cannot, therefore, be addressed through a simple set of practical measures. Our hope, from a practical viewpoint, is that our analysis will contribute to raising awareness about the role of English in the politics of knowledge production. In so doing, our contribution might bring the issue to the attention of different power holders and stakeholders within the field of management studies, including journal editors, reviewers, directors of research, directors of doctoral programmes, and university managers more broadly. Our

analysis in effect exhorts all such parties to devote attention and thought to our observations and to formulate responses accordingly.

We are unable to formulate such responses ourselves, not least given the word limit imposed on an essay such as this. This said, a few points can be highlighted at this juncture. First, at minimum, the assumption that “top” journals automatically mean “top” quality scholarship needs relaxing. This is arguably already occurring in some parts of the system where scholars and managers increasingly frequently highlight that “top” quality research gets published in a variety of different outlets. More generally, we should ask that the overemphasis on publications in a restricted set of “top” journals as a mark of excellence is counterbalanced through proactive institutional action. In the UK (secondary centre), business schools and universities more broadly are now evaluated and ranked partly based on the wider economic and social impact of their research output. This may prove useful in countering the obsession with “top” journals and, when applied elsewhere, raise questions about the extent to which publishing solely in English and in distant journals with no links to local communities is meaningful. Another main audience for academic work would thus be highlighted alongside prestigious journals. While assessment of research beyond the academic sphere may improve its public accountability, this leads to new challenges in terms of measurement and evaluation (Khazragui & Hudson, 2015). Nevertheless, we consider this a welcome development and something that decision-makers outside the Anglophone sphere should consider.

Second, the implicit assumption that we all speak and write English equally well also needs relaxing. We believe this needs doing not only by journal editors and reviewers but also those in charge of recruitment and promotion decisions in business schools. Of course, a degree of unfair distribution of power and prestige in academic knowledge production on a global scale

is perhaps unavoidable. The notion of equality is in many ways a pipe dream, going by the history of the world. However, it is not unreasonable to demand and insist on less inequality in management studies and, by implication, in the wider world in which we live. We can no longer assume conditions of equivalence when the playing field is grossly uneven. We cannot possibly ask non-native speakers of English to produce the level of “top” scholarly output which we expect from native counterparts. We would do well to recognize that differences in linguistic competence probably mean that one “top” journal article written by a non-native may in fact equate two papers.

Let us continue to challenge assumptions underpinning the contemporary system that claims to be “global” but is in fact largely the extension of a dominant language and scholarly tradition. It needs making clear here: “The issue is not a matter of being in favour of or against English,” as Steyaert and Janssens (2013: 140) put it. We are not advocating some sort of Anglophobia or anti-Americanism but rather raising questions about the role of English in the politics of global management knowledge production. Who benefits from the use of US-dominated journal rankings and the Englishization induced by it, who is relegated to the periphery and, ultimately, does the global spread of one particular scholarly tradition and language benefit local systems and allow for non-dependent, autonomous local development? Are there any possibilities for change in the hierarchical, increasingly homogeneous, and Englishizing global system of knowledge production?

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ⁱ Boussebaa (2018: 196) notes how the *Journal of International Business Studies*, the top-ranked publishing outlet in the field of international business, "has thus far published only one paper informed by postcolonial theory (Boussebaa et al., 2014) and the other major IB journals do not fare much better." The more generalist "top" management journals are (arguably) somewhat less exclusive but remain nevertheless dominated by particular onto-epistemologies and forms of theorizing.

ⁱⁱ It is important to note that such hierarchy is not static. It is likely to be transformed by the ongoing shift to a more polycentric world economy. Note, for example, the growing importance of China in the global system of academic knowledge production and the growing number of Chinese scholars publishing in "top" journals.