

Journals and Monographs: an Italian Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

When, some months ago, Prof. Dekeyser invited me to talk about the tendency to abandon Italian, as well as other European languages, in favour of the English language in the scientific periodicals sector, he obliged me to gather information on a sector different to the one in which I normally work. Indeed, since its beginnings, more than forty years ago, the *raison d'être* of Casalini Libri, the promotion and diffusion of Italian publications to libraries throughout the world, has always privileged the humanities, social sciences, history and art which reflect the prevalent character of Italian publishing.

In order to have a sufficiently reliable picture of the situation, we have contacted a sample group of publishers of scholarly scientific periodicals of various types, obtaining information on the quantity of journals published, the languages used, possible total or partial changes in the choice of language over time, and the utilisation, present or future, of electronic resources. Subdividing the contacted publishers into 4 groups in order to illustrate certain lines of conduct indicates the results of this enquiry [1]. A separate section will then be dedicated to the developments in electronic publishing, with particular regard to the choice of language. The 4 groups are:

1. Academies
2. Small specialised scientific publishers
3. Large specialised scientific publishers
4. University Presses

ACADEMIES

We contacted eighteen Italian academies, which, for the most part, publish annuals or periodicals, in the areas of science, and the humanities, that summarise texts and studies carried out during the preceding year of activity. For the sake of illustration, we present here the publishing programme of two 'sample' academies:

Istituto Lombardo dell'Accademia di Scienze e Lettere:

- Periodicals: 8
- Scientific and humanistic studies

- Texts in European languages, mostly in English and Italian
- Abstracts in English for Italian texts;
Abstracts in Italian for texts in other European languages
- Predominance of English language in scientific publications
- Also articles in non-European languages (e.g. Arabic) with facing English text
- On-line periodicals in preparation

Accademia Nazionale di Lettere, Scienze e Arti di Modena

- Annuals: 4
- Scientific and humanistic studies
- Texts in English and Italian
- Abstracts in English for all texts (also Italian)
- Until 1900 publications also in French and German, now only in English and Italian
- No on-line periodicals, none projected

Considerations

- The Italian academies tend to publish journals with articles in the original language (providing they have a common alphabet).
- This general trend probably has its origins in a certain ‘traditional’ method of disseminating culture, a method dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth century – the period in which most of the academies began publishing. This tendency is obviously accentuated in texts of humanistic character. However, that procedure, adequate for the times in which it originated, begins to be insufficient for a capillary diffusion of contemporary culture. The majority of Italian humanistic scholars still publish in Italian (at a national level, obviously), while those in other European countries already choose English, undermining or ‘modernising’ the tradition. However, this process is not yet in an advanced phase in the humanistic field in that it has been slowed down by a certain immobility and a certain coalescence/consolidation of study methods and approach to the subject.
- Very different is the situation in the scientific field. With the continuous arrival of new technologies, the approach to the subjects is necessarily in continual evolution and consequently discoveries/innovations and methodologies can become obsolete in a short period of time. With these premises the use of an ‘official’ language without doubt facilitates the immediacy of communication. A large group of non-Anglophone scholars (including the Italians) in fact publish in English for a greater visibility and diffusion of their studies and, above all, for the timeliness of the information (thus exempt from the need for eventual translation). Above all, where publications in the scientific sphere are concerned, the extent to which the English language facilitates the use and integration into the text of technical terminologies and abbreviations, which are established and consolidated in English on a worldwide level, is obvious. For this reason some academies are beginning to

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introduce an abstract in English for each article in their periodical publications, regardless of the language of the article itself. The intent to render the contents of texts immediately accessible by using a common language that, for evident simplicity and diffusion is English is therefore clear.

- On the other hand, the Italian academies do not yet seem to be interested in the use of electronic resources. In the sample of academies we have assessed, only one is projecting the publication on-line of proceedings, in parallel with the printed edition. This academy numbers among its annual journals two publications which are totally scientific, for which, for obvious reasons, publication is of a more urgent nature. For this reason the academy is considering the possibility of introducing an electronic format as well.
- This brief analysis confirms that also in Italy scientific periodicals by academies circulate mainly in the English language and are also accessible on-line.

SMALL SPECIALISED SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHERS

We contacted twelve publishers of medium to low print runs and evaluated their work. We show below details of a sample of these:

- Tecniche Nuove
- A variety of periodicals, mostly general interest
- In some cases two editions (in Italian and other languages)
- Texts generally in Italian
- No periodicals on-line

Folini

- Medical journals
- All texts in English
- Some periodicals on-line
- Il Pensiero Scientifico
- Scholarly medical journals
- Texts in English and Italian
- Early periodicals previously only in Italian, now also in English
- Some periodicals on-line

Vevey Europe

- Periodicals on chemistry
- All texts in English
- Some periodicals on-line

Considerations

- Small publishers of scientific journals follow a well-defined practice with regard to the choice of language for a publication. The English language is, if not yet definitively preferred, certainly preferable.
- The use of the English language has the basic advantage of a greater chance of diffusion and of exportation abroad. In this sense the tendency of journals, which originated in Italian to “Europeanise”, if not to “globalise” through English, is obvious above all in the STM field.
- The driving force behind this fact is both cultural and commercial, creating convenience for those who write and those who publish; it is in fact clear that the first impetus for the emerging change comes from the authors who ask and prefer to publish in English. From the cultural point of view, visibility and affirmation of clearly defined scientific identities at a national, and above all, international level is fundamental. The recourse to English is a consequence of this need. From the commercial point of view, on the other hand, the publishers work to consolidate their own publications abroad as points of reference in their sector, thus favouring the implementation and participation of foreign scholars and, consequently, the globalisation of the language.
- Electronic scientific publishing is without doubt a separate matter. If the tendency of the small publishers to flank on-line publications with paper editions is clear, the increase of journals which are on-line only, and which guarantee immediacy incomparable to that of normal paper editions, is equally evident. With regard to on-line journals, the trend is clearly consistent with general globalisation and therefore the English language dominates.

LARGE SPECIALISED SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHERS

Fifteen large publishers were contacted. Below we show details of a sample of four of these:

Masson

- Medical journals
- Texts in English and Italian
- Increasing number of Italian titles now produced in English
- No periodicals on-line

CIC Edizioni Internazionali

- Scholarly medical journals
- Texts mostly in Italian

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- Generally Italian content but with English title
- All periodicals will be in English soon

Minerva Medica

- Scholarly medical journals
- Texts mostly in English
- Some multilingual periodicals are now only in English
- Many periodicals on-line

Edizioni Universitarie Romane

- Periodicals on science
- All texts in Italian, with English abstracts and key-words
- Some journals also on-line

Considerations

- The large scientific publishers follow the general trend.
- The discriminating fact seems to be the contents of the publications: if in general there is an attempt to better promote scholarly studies by publishing them in English, the scholarly and “unique” content itself constitutes an element which safeguards the original language of the writer inasmuch as it carries with it that particular type of sensibility and approach to culture which is historically different from country to country. There are, in fact, intermediate solutions, such as the presence of an abstract or of key-words in English (on-line) for texts in Italian: an expedient which guarantees, if nothing else, a good level of searchability on the Internet, but also the survival of the original language.
- For the most part, the conservative line has university roots, while in scholarly publishing with wider coverage the need to internationalise emerges, and not without consequences. The most significant inconvenience, which we come up against in the current cultural context, is without doubt, the impoverishment of communication and the loss of the specificity of each language in favour of a simpler availability of texts.
- In this sense, on-line resources seem to be decisive: either to concede definitive supremacy to the language of the Internet, or as starting point for a cultural and linguistic exchange, perhaps more tiring but certainly more representative of each cultural reality.

UNIVERSITY PRESSES

Given the relatively small number of University Presses active in Italy, we have analysed the publishing programmes of four of the major presses:

Vita e Pensiero

- Periodicals on science and humanities
- Journals mostly in English, with abstracts and key-words
- ToC on-line

Egea

- Journals on economics
- Texts in English, or in both English and Italian
- All abstracts in English
- No periodicals on-line

Firenze University Press (FUP)

- Scientific and humanistic periodicals
- Some completely in English, some completely in Italian
- Periodicals mostly on-line

LUISS University Press

- New publishing reality
- University press and publisher
- Scholarly periodicals
- 3 periodicals in hard copy only
- 2 periodicals on-line only
- On-line content will be in English only

Considerations

- In Italy the tradition of the university press does not exist, other than in certain exceptional cases such as Vita e Pensiero (for the Università Cattolica in Milan) and Egea (for the Università Bocconi in Milan) and a few more
- The universities produce a considerable quantity of material, which is currently spread over various publishers. Certain cases are now emerging, however, such as the LUISS, which is both university press and publisher of external contributions, and which is also investing in the electronic format. With these characteristics the

LUISS represents an example of evolution of the Anglo-Saxon model of university press, an important step towards the diffusion of this new model in Italy.

- In general the university presses publish their periodicals in English. Almost all the exceptions to this relate to studies and research of local character.
- The electronic format is not yet predominant but, without doubt, the future is on-line (as for example, FUP)

ON-LINE RESOURCES

The question of on-line resources was not the main concern of our research, but is by all means a key factor in scholarly Italian publishing. There is no doubt that e-journals are an expanding reality, although its affirmation is relatively slow in coming about and the process of digitalisation of texts still seems to be in an initial phase. It is in fact important to stress that in this sense two typologies of periodicals exist: journals which are on-line only and printed journals to which, in the last few years, a digital version has been added. From the data we have collected, the number of Italian journals, which are on-line only is an absolute minority. This induces us to conclude that users, authors and publishers see an on-line version of texts that were originally in printed form as an option to be considered indeed but still as an accessory, an initiative flanking the printed publication with a view to improving development.

If there are difficulties for journals, which are available in the two versions, different problems emerge above all in journals in electronic form only. In spite of offering new methods of communication between authors and readers and incrementing the process of diffusion of the published material, e-format still has limitations such as non-transportability, difficulty in reading from the screen, impossibility to make notes or underlinings *in loco* and, not least, the credibility of the publication. This final problem is sociological rather than technical: the reputation of the researcher increases in relation to the influence of the periodical in which he publishes the results of his work. Consequently the impact factor is the fundamental criterion in choosing the journal to which to send articles.

OUR EXPERIENCE

In spite of these difficulties there is a growing interest also among Italian publishers for the presentation on-line of their printed texts. For some years we have been convinced of the great importance of the electronic format and have therefore created a section, which is exclusively dedicated to the realisation of a digital platform for quality Italian publishing. Our long-standing relationship with Italian publishers initially led us to favour the humanities and social sciences but in recent times we are extending our work to scientific publishing as well.

Casalini Libri Digital Division

The Casalini Libri Digital Division is a system for the publication and management of texts (monographs and journals) in electronic format. Formulated with the aim of creating a portal of contents as a service for publishers and libraries, the Digital Division site primarily serves as a search function with immediate access to the information and the possibility of targeted use of the contents. The Mercurio@ search engine, realised by Casalini Libri, in fact allows full-text search within each document of the archive and the visualisation of the concordances found in the text with highlighting of the terms found, directly in the preview, on-line. The goal is to create additional access, certainly not to bring e-form and paper in competition.

Osservatorio sull'editoria elettronica italiana

The purpose of this section of the Casalini Libri Digital Division is to up-date all those who are interested in the state of Italian electronic publishing. The Osservatorio is divided into three sections: academic publishing (monitoring not only the sites of the Italian universities but also previewing/examining what the universities, cultural foundations and all academic institutions make available on the Internet); commercial publishing (examining the sites of those publishers who see the Internet as an ideal showcase); electronic journals (navigating the websites of the journals published on-line). The procedure is similar in all three cases: it starts with a list and proceeds through the analysis of the individual sites.

Considerations

- From the analysis of the data collected through the work on the Osservatorio, which is both database and research tool, we see to what extent the development of electronic publishing can represent a turning point in cultural communication, both as a technological factor and also as diffusion of the culture itself.
- If Italian publishing were able to overcome the lack of standardisation of its resources and plan future developments of the electronic platform, other possibilities would probably emerge: if on the one hand English is the “official” language of the Internet, on the other the targeted use of electronic resources could constitute the beginnings of a reawakening of local linguistic realities. Digital publishing is the means of safeguarding a richness and variety of contents, which embrace both the subjects themselves (even the most specialistic), and the use of languages other than English.

CONCLUSIONS

However little we may like it, history shows us that a dominant language has always existed for scholarly communications. Leaving aside the period of classical Antiquity, how could European scholars and intellectuals have communicated throughout the Middle Ages had it not been for Latin, even though by then a dead language? And how, in the Settecento and much of the Ottocento, could French have been abandoned as the principal language? Obviously I refer not to the multiplicity first of Latin then of French derivatives in European languages but to the integral use of a common language of communication at a scholarly level.

The first impetus for the change to English comes from non-Anglophone scholars who wish to publish in English for a major visibility and diffusion of their studies. The point, which seems to me essential and discriminative is the distinction between the effective and unquestionable need for practicality in communication at a high scientific level and an unwarrantable diffusion of the English language in contexts and fields of knowledge which do not justify its use. I refer - excluding the literary sphere, within which any language must tenaciously maintain its own identity and tradition - to all other fields of criticism and non-fictional literature. Obviously the unquestioned value of the language that has now become the language of exchange between people of different countries and cultures still holds, while safeguarding the wealth and diversity of specific arguments in the single languages. One way of solving this problem could be the development and targeted use of information technology.

I would like to conclude this speech remembering the words of Italo Calvino in 1985, when the actual technological development was perhaps not even imaginable by most people. The Italian writer was invited to hold a series of lectures at Harvard University on those values, which were particularly dear to him in the perspective of the new Millennium. In the introduction to these *Six memos for the next millennium* published posthumously, Calvino writes:

“The millennium about to end has seen the birth and development of the modern languages of the West, and of the literatures that have explored the expressive, cognitive, and imaginative possibilities of these languages. It also has been the millennium of the book, in that it has seen the object we call a book take on the form now familiar to us. Perhaps it is a sign of our millennium’s end that we frequently wonder what will happen to literature and books in the so-called post-industrial era of technology. I don’t much feel like indulging in this sort of speculation.”

Certainly the response of electronic publishing to the ever more variegated international publishing panorama answers the five values most dear to the illustrious writer in an extraordinarily appropriate way: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, multiplicity (and consistency).

NOTES

1. The division between the large and small publishers of scientific periodicals has as its aim to illustrate separately the trends of the large and small printing runs in order, eventually, to individuate the different policies.

REFERENCES

Calvino, Italo, *Six memos for the next millennium*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Casalini Libri. <http://www.casalini.it/>

Casalini Libri Digital Division. <http://digital.casalini.it/indexING.html>

Mercurio[@] <http://digital.casalini.it/mercurio.html>