

Overcoming anglophone squint

The idea of launching an international journal of *Urban Morphology* was initially discussed by the nascent ISUF community in the mid- 1990s. The intention was that it should be truly international, providing a vehicle of communication for researchers and practitioners worldwide, irrespective of nationality or native language. That the journal should be published in English was never seriously questioned. Only a small minority of countries represented in ISUF were then, and are today, predominantly English speaking, but English was, and still is, by far the most widely spoken language among members, albeit as a second language for many. It had from the outset been accepted as the lingua franca of ISUF conferences, though it has frequently been the first language of only a minority of conference participants. It followed naturally that the journal should be in English, and in this respect *Urban Morphology* is in keeping with a number of ‘international’ social science journals either founded in recent decades or founded much earlier as national journals in anglophone countries but more recently adopting the mantle ‘international’. However, the problems of social science journals that purport to be international but publish exclusively in English, though in some respects fairly selfevident, merit greater attention than they have hitherto received. *Urban Morphology* shares some of these problems but, partly because of its distinctive origins, is addressing them in its own way.

One of the most obvious problems that *Urban Morphology* shares with many other international journals in the English language is a rather practical one. For most of those for whom English is not their first language, writing an article in English is a major undertaking, even if they are accustomed to speaking and reading English. Nor is a professional translation likely to be a complete solution, unless by someone with specialized knowledge of the subject matter. And the cost of this may be hard to justify when there is no guarantee that the article will ultimately be accepted for publication. Thus the difficulty of obtaining a good translation would on its own seem to be a significant deterrent to the submission of articles from non-anglophone parts of the world. To this must be added in many cases the difficulty of satisfying referees from different cultural areas, perhaps accustomed to different styles of writing and different ways of structuring articles.

It is not difficult to see, in the light of these problems alone, how non-anglophone authors might feel under pressure to adopt anglophone norms if they wished to publish in an international journal or, alternatively, might decide to publish largely in the literature in their own language and suffer the limited circulation of their work that would be a likely consequence. Within human geography there has been discussion in recent years of problems for non-anglophone authors emanating from the fact that purportedly ‘international’ journals are not only almost exclusively in English but carry few articles by authors based in non-anglophone countries.¹ Furthermore, such ‘international’ journals contain few references to the work of authors from outside the English-speaking world. This anglophone squint – the shutting out or, much more often, ignorance of non-anglophone perspectives, ideas and findings – is a major obstacle to the international exchange and integration of ideas.²

The overcoming of this problem was one of the prime purposes of *Urban Morphology* when it was founded. But there are no easy solutions. For the editors and editorial board members to possess between them a working knowledge of the main languages is clearly important, but the advantages of having native English speakers editing a journal published in English are hard to gainsay, particularly when the work of clarifying the English of nonanglophone authors is so important. Access to potential referees who, between them, have first-hand knowledge of the literature in the main languages is vital. However, it is practicable to cope editorially with articles submitted in only a very few languages and in practice nearly all articles submitted to *Urban Morphology* are in English. Inevitably, therefore, some referees are receiving articles to referee that are not in their first language. Fortunately ISUF has members in many countries whose reading ability in English as a second language is good. Nevertheless, finding referees who can combine that ability with expertise in the subject matter of a particular article is not always straightforward.

How successful *Urban Morphology* has been so far in communicating work undertaken in the various language areas is a matter of opinion, and contributions on this subject to the journal’s ‘viewpoints’ section would be welcome. From 1997, when publication of *Urban Morphology* began, to 2004, 65 per cent of the authors of published articles were affiliated to institutions in non-anglophone countries. This is actually a somewhat higher percentage than would be expected based on the percentage of ISUF members who were located in non-anglophone countries in mid- 2004 (54 per cent). It would seem therefore that so far non-anglophones are at least as attracted as

anglophones by the prospect of publishing an article in the journal. Furthermore, the proportion of submitted articles that were accepted, 1997-2004, was similar for anglophone and non-anglophone authors (a little under one-half).

These statistics notwithstanding, it is vital that those responsible for the journal remain committed to achieving coverage of research and practice in all parts of the world. It would be easy to fall into line with so many purportedly 'international' journals and actually be largely a mouthpiece for researchers in English-speaking countries, particularly the USA and the UK. Fortunately a multinational perspective was fundamental to the founding of ISUF. Long may it be demonstrated in *Urban Morphology*!

Notes

1. See, for example, Aalbers, M. B. (2004) 'Creative destruction through the Anglo- American hegemony: a non-Anglo-American view on publications, referees and language', *Area* 36, 319-22; Garcia-Ramon, M.-D. (2003) 'Globalization and international geography: the questions of languages and scholarly traditions', *Progress in Human Geography* 27, 1-5.
2. Whitehand, J. W. R. (2005) 'The problem of anglophone squint', *Area* 37, forthcoming.

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