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José Israel Herrera

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PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE

Knowledge Has No Single Center: Open Science, Multilingualism, and Bibliodiversity in Scholarly Communication

José Israel Herrera

Universidad Autónoma de Campeche, Campeche, Mexico

ORCID: [0000-0001-6961-8958](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6961-8958) | Email: jiherrer@uacam.mx

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Abstract

Scholarly communication is undergoing a significant transformation driven by digital publishing, open access, and the increasing internationalization of research. Nevertheless, making publications freely available does not by itself guarantee an equitable system of knowledge production. Economic barriers associated with publication fees, the dominance of English as the principal language of scientific communication, the concentration of scholarly publishing, and the limited visibility of journals outside major indexing systems continue to shape who can participate in global academic dialogue. This perspective article examines open access, multilingualism, and bibliodiversity as interconnected dimensions of a more inclusive scholarly communication system. It argues that openness should be understood not only as unrestricted access to published outputs but also as the possibility for researchers from different regions, linguistic communities, disciplines, and institutional contexts to participate in producing and circulating knowledge. Independent and Diamond Open Access journals may contribute to such decentralization when they combine rigorous peer review, transparent editorial practices, multilingual accessibility, and internationally interoperable standards. Rather than replacing one dominant center with another, a more equitable scholarly ecosystem should recognize multiple sites of knowledge production and strengthen the connections among them.

Keywords: open science; open access; multilingualism; bibliodiversity; scholarly communication; Global South

Resumen

La comunicación académica está experimentando una transformación significativa impulsada por la publicación digital, el acceso abierto y la creciente internacionalización de la investigación. Sin embargo, hacer que las publicaciones estén disponibles gratuitamente no garantiza por sí mismo un sistema equitativo de producción del conocimiento. Las barreras económicas asociadas con los costos de publicación, el predominio del inglés como principal lengua de comunicación científica, la concentración de la publicación académica y la limitada visibilidad de las revistas que se encuentran fuera de los principales sistemas de indexación continúan determinando quiénes pueden participar en el diálogo académico global.

Este artículo de perspectiva examina el acceso abierto, el multilingüismo y la bibliodiversidad como dimensiones interrelacionadas de un sistema de comunicación académica más inclusivo. Se sostiene que la apertura debe entenderse no solo como el acceso irrestricto a los resultados publicados, sino también como la posibilidad de que investigadores de diferentes regiones, comunidades lingüísticas, disciplinas y contextos institucionales participen en la producción y circulación del conocimiento.

Las revistas independientes y aquellas que operan bajo el modelo de Acceso Abierto Diamante pueden contribuir a esta descentralización cuando combinan una revisión por pares rigurosa, prácticas editoriales transparentes, accesibilidad multilingüe y estándares internacionalmente interoperables. En lugar de sustituir un centro dominante por otro, un ecosistema académico más equitativo debería reconocer la existencia de múltiples espacios de producción del conocimiento y fortalecer las conexiones entre ellos.

Palabras clave: ciencia abierta; acceso abierto; multilingüismo; bibliodiversidad; comunicación académica; Sur Global.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary landscape of scholarly communication is characterized by an apparent paradox. Never before has scientific knowledge been technically capable of circulating so rapidly and across such extensive geographical boundaries. Digital platforms, institutional repositories, open-source publishing software, and open-access initiatives have considerably expanded the possibilities for disseminating research. Open science itself has been described as a transformation based on transparency, accessibility, collaboration, and connectivity throughout the research process (Vicente-Saez & Martinez-Fuentes, 2018).

Yet technical openness does not automatically produce epistemic equality. Access to an article and participation in the systems that produce, evaluate, publish, and legitimize scholarly knowledge are different questions. An academic ecosystem may provide free access to readers while simultaneously imposing financial, linguistic, geographical, or institutional barriers on authors.

This distinction is important because scholarly communication is not merely a mechanism for distributing information. It is also an infrastructure through which research acquires recognition, becomes connected to other knowledge, influences public debate, and contributes to the careers of researchers and institutions.

The central argument of this article is therefore simple: open knowledge requires more than open documents. A genuinely inclusive scholarly communication system must consider at least three interconnected dimensions: economic accessibility, linguistic diversity, and bibliodiversity.

2. Open Access and the Problem of Participation

The open-access movement has substantially altered scholarly publishing. Its academic and social benefits include the potential expansion of readership, reuse, visibility, and access to scientific literature beyond institutions able to afford subscription costs (Tennant et al., 2016).

However, some open-access models have shifted publication costs from readers to authors through article processing charges (APCs). Such mechanisms solve one type of exclusion while potentially producing another.

Smith et al. (2021), analyzing more than 37,000 articles within Elsevier's Mirror Journal system, found that the geographical diversity of authors in open-access articles was lower than in comparable non-open-access publications. Particularly significant was the absence of lead authors from low-income countries among the open-access Mirror Journals included in their analysis. Their findings support the argument that APCs may function as barriers for researchers from less-resourced academic systems.

The issue should not be reduced to a simple opposition between commercial and non-commercial publishing. High-quality scholarly communication requires infrastructure, editorial labor, preservation systems, metadata management, peer-review administration, and technological resources. These activities entail real costs.

The critical question is instead how these costs are distributed and whether the resulting model conditions scholarly participation on the author's ability to pay.

Diamond Open Access offers one possible response. In this model, neither readers nor authors are charged for access or publication. Recent research has also shown that independent publishers are comparatively important contributors to open-access and Diamond publishing, particularly outside the publishing structures most visible in selective international databases (van Bellen et al., 2025).

A no-APC model cannot by itself eliminate inequalities in scholarly communication. Nevertheless, it removes one particularly direct mechanism through which economic resources can determine access to publication.

3. Language as an Academic Border

Financial barriers are only one dimension of inequality. Language constitutes another.

English currently functions as the principal lingua franca of international science. This provides obvious benefits: researchers from different countries require shared linguistic channels through which findings can be communicated and discussed. At the same time, the predominance of English creates asymmetric costs.

Scientific knowledge continues to be produced in numerous languages. Amano et al. (2016), for example, examined more than 75,000 documents related to biodiversity conservation and found that a substantial proportion of the relevant literature was published in languages other than English. Ignoring this scholarship may therefore produce systematic gaps in global knowledge synthesis.

The inequality also operates in the opposite direction. Researchers whose first language is not English frequently face additional demands when attempting to participate in international publishing.

Ramírez-Castañeda (2020), studying researchers in biological sciences in Colombia, documented additional economic, temporal, and professional burdens associated with preparing scientific publications in English. The study also identified relationships between English proficiency and socioeconomic background, illustrating how linguistic inequality may reinforce other structural disparities.

A larger international study involving 908 researchers subsequently demonstrated that non-native English-speaking scholars face additional burdens across multiple academic activities, including reading papers, writing manuscripts, preparing presentations, publishing research, and communicating findings internationally (Amano et al., 2023).

The solution is not necessarily to abandon English as a common scientific language. Instead, scholarly communication can become more linguistically inclusive through multilingual abstracts, metadata in multiple languages, translation, multilingual publishing policies, and greater recognition of literature produced outside English-speaking academic systems.

Multilingualism should therefore not be understood as an obstacle to internationalization. Properly implemented, it can be one of its instruments.

4. Bibliodiversity and the Visibility of Knowledge

A third dimension concerns the structure of scholarly publishing itself.

Much of what researchers perceive as the global academic literature is mediated through selective databases and indexing systems. These infrastructures are extraordinarily useful, but they do not contain the entirety of scholarly production. Consequently, what is visible through dominant databases should not automatically be equated with everything that exists.

Van Bellen et al. (2025) compared scholarly publishing patterns using Web of Science and the more inclusive Dimensions database. Their analysis showed substantially greater diversity among publishers and journals when broader indexing coverage was considered. The study also found particularly significant contributions by smaller and independent publishers in the social sciences, arts, humanities, and in many countries outside the traditional centers of commercial academic publishing.

This is where the concept of bibliodiversity becomes especially relevant.

Bibliodiversity implies more than increasing the number of journals. It concerns the coexistence of different publishing institutions, academic traditions, languages, disciplines, geographical regions, research questions, and forms of scholarly communication.

A publishing ecosystem dominated by a limited number of organizations can achieve extraordinary efficiencies and global visibility. However, scientific knowledge also benefits from decentralized structures capable of responding to local and regional research agendas that may receive limited attention in dominant international circuits.

Independent journals can therefore occupy an important position. Their significance does not derive from being alternatives simply for the sake of being different. Their value depends upon whether they can combine intellectual diversity with scholarly standards: rigorous peer review, transparent editorial policies, research ethics, persistent identifiers, structured metadata, digital preservation, and discoverability.

Decentralization should not mean isolation.

The objective should be to enable knowledge produced in multiple locations to enter meaningful international dialogue.

5. Open Science as an Epistemic Infrastructure

The debate surrounding openness ultimately extends beyond publication formats.

Beiter (2023), examining scholarly access through the framework of the right to science, argues for a global scholarly knowledge commons capable of functioning across borders and addressing inequalities between the Global North and Global South. His analysis emphasizes that meaningful participation in science includes not merely consuming scientific knowledge but participating in the systems through which it is created and circulated.

From this perspective, open science can be understood as an epistemic infrastructure.

Such an infrastructure should permit researchers to connect knowledge across institutions, disciplines, languages, and regions while retaining rigorous mechanisms of scholarly assessment.

Five principles are particularly relevant:

1. access without unnecessary economic barriers;
2. rigorous and transparent peer review;
3. linguistic and geographical inclusion;
4. interoperability through recognized scholarly standards; and
5. visibility for diverse forms and locations of knowledge production.

These principles are mutually reinforcing. Open access without scholarly quality risks weakening trust. Quality standards without meaningful access reproduce exclusion. Internationalization without linguistic diversity may narrow the range of knowledge that becomes visible. Diversity without interoperability may leave valuable research disconnected from global scholarly infrastructures.

The central challenge is consequently not choosing between openness and rigor, or between local relevance and international standards. It is constructing scholarly systems capable of combining them.

6. Knowledge Has No Single Center

The metaphor of a center remains powerful in academic life. Certain universities, journals, databases, publishers, languages, and countries accumulate greater visibility and authority than others. Such concentrations partly reflect legitimate histories of scientific achievement and investment in research infrastructure.

Nevertheless, they should not lead to the assumption that scientifically significant knowledge originates from a limited number of geographical or institutional locations.

Knowledge production is inherently distributed.

Researchers address different environments, populations, legal systems, historical experiences, languages, cultural traditions, ecosystems, and social problems. This diversity is not merely contextual variation around a universal intellectual center. It is one of the mechanisms through which scientific understanding expands.

The objective of scholarly communication should therefore not be to establish a new center that replaces existing ones.

It should be to build better connections among multiple centers of knowledge.

Digital technologies and open publishing provide the infrastructure to make this increasingly possible. The next challenge is institutional: creating editorial systems capable of transforming technical connectivity into genuine scholarly participation.

7. Conclusions

Open science has created unprecedented opportunities for expanding the circulation of scholarly knowledge. Nevertheless, free access alone is insufficient to guarantee an inclusive academic ecosystem.

Publication charges can restrict authorship. Linguistic barriers can determine whose research is visible internationally. Selective databases may obscure a substantial portion of independent scholarly production. These problems operate differently, but they share a common consequence: they influence who can participate in the construction of recognized knowledge.

A more inclusive model therefore requires attention to open access, multilingualism, and bibliodiversity simultaneously.

Independent and Diamond Open Access journals can contribute to this transformation when they combine openness with rigorous editorial standards, international interoperability, ethical review processes, and linguistic and geographical diversity.

The future of scholarly communication need not be organized around the search for a single alternative center.

Knowledge has no single center because knowledge is produced through connections among many places, communities, disciplines, languages, and intellectual traditions. The task of open scholarly communication is to make those connections visible, accessible, and meaningful.

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