

Language, Science and Scholarship

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This lecture opens with a review of the rise of English as the world's predominating language of science and scholarship. In so doing, I express some concerns about this ascent of English. I question certain triumphalist accounts of such an 'efficient' solution to global professional communication, and offer evidence of its adverse effects on smaller academic communities. In this current context, Henry Kissinger's dictum that 'one side's total security is the other side's total insecurity' seems particularly apt. I then discuss whether and how more might be done to strengthen weaker academic languages, and argue for more research into their linguistic and rhetorical properties. Attention then moves to how we might assist graduate students, scientists and scholars who are not native speakers of English to cope more effectively with this linguistically-skewed world. Within this, I briefly report on some ongoing work on the increasing acceptance of certain 'informal' elements in English academic style in many fields, and how this trend provides an additional threat to non-native speakers. The lecture ends by returning to the main theme of academic linguistic imperialism.