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SPECIAL ISSUE:

AMERICAN STUDIES AND THE DILEMMAS OF MULTILINGUALISM



DEBATE ON THE MULTILINGUALITY OF *RIAS*

During the startup phase of RIAS in the summer of last year, an intense e-mail discussion took place among the members of IASA's executive board about which language(s) should be used in the journal. Many interesting and provocative suggestions were made, but in spite of this the issue of the multilinguality of RIAS has remained largely unresolved. The conflict between the need to be representative towards the Americas as a whole, and, on the other, the desire to internationalize the field of American Studies, thus demanding what Eugène Jolas would have called a 'super-tongue for intercontinental expression', continues to generate debate. And perhaps rightly so, since the tension between local representation and international communication constitutes one of the issues that have infused the IASA enterprise from the start. Practical concerns, about the economic implications of publishing academic journals in (how many?) different languages, are also a factor in these equations; the costs of translations, along with the complications created by multilingualism for markets and reception, have often been an inhibiting force in the minds of scholarly publishers. It is for this reason that we have decided to share some excerpts from that interesting and timely interchange on the executive list serve with the wider IASA community. It is our hope that these excerpts will generate further contributions to the ongoing discussion on language diversity in American Studies—in whatever language seems most appropriate for the occasion.

Manuel Broncano (Universidad de León)

'Coming from Spain, I definitely support publishing contributions in Spanish: after all, there are a number of journals that publish both in English and in Spanish. However, doing so may pose some technical difficulties that may require including some Spanish-speaking colleagues in the editorial board. As for Portuguese, I think it deserves the same treatment, for it is the language of millions of Americans.'

Theo D'haen (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)

'On Dutch no-one has yet pronounced; understandably so, as there are undoubtedly only few of you that master the language in question, even though it is the official language of at least three American countries or federations of states ... The Dutch feature prominently in the history of the Americas, all of the Americas ... So, should we offhand rule out Dutch as a "working language" for *RIAS*?'

Cyraina Johnson-Roullier (University of Notre Dame)

'So far, the discussion has been centered only on major languages in the hemisphere. But these languages are also usually the languages of imperialism and colonization, and as such they all can represent problematic histories of hegemony and oppression, despite their uneasy relationship to the hegemony of English. So to be true to the hemispheric emphasis of the project, I want also to raise the question of what

should be done with regard to native and minority languages, as these are part of the hemisphere as well. I'm not necessarily suggesting that there should also be translations into languages like Nahuatl or Quecha, but perhaps some kind of accommodation or recognition of the existence and significance of other such languages should be made, or some kind of regular notice offered that at least makes clear that the journal is aware of the existence of such languages, even though it doesn't publish anything specifically in these languages'.

Helmbrecht Breinig (Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

'I see IASA as an organization that not only takes both Americas as its subject matter but also sees the Americas in their global contexts, including the scholarly one. Thus, I would not limit the range of possible languages to those spoken or written in the Americas, although, undoubtedly, there will be a tendency to publish either in English or Spanish. If there is a good article on inter-American issues written in Japanese, why not publish it in Japanese and in an English translation?'

Jane Desmond (University of Iowa)

'While the Americas as a hemispheric entity is one of the main foci of our organization, it is not the location of all our membership, nor is it the focus of the scholarly work of all our members. Therefore we should be careful to give the same writing and publishing opportunities to scholars from anywhere who are most comfortable writing academically in a language other than English. Certainly for many of our members in Japan and China this may be the case. Since however English is the one language that most of us do have in common, at least as a reading competency, I would suggest that whatever we publish in whatever original language include as well an abstract in English. And, conversely, for those who choose to submit in English, perhaps thinking that it might yield a wider readership worldwide, I would also offer the opportunity to include an abstract in at least one other language if so desired, and not just the majority languages of the Americas. For example, colleagues in Turkey may choose to submit a piece in English but want their Turkish colleagues as well to be able to find the abstract of their ideas in Turkish on the web'.

Tatsushi Narita (Nagoya City University)

'Certainly, major languages of the Americas should play a pivotal role. But the problem we confront in the last analysis should be: in what sense is our organization international? Since the term internationalization historically means placing under international control, we may unconsciously tend to go in the direction of supervising our academic area from a monolithic Western point of view. However, this is exactly a tendency from which we have to endeavor to refrain ourselves. If we decide on the Western languages as IASA's virtual official languages, then I propose that we first define this explicitly in our bylaw. *RIAS* should also be an important organ in evincing IASA's own unique internationalism as to a variety of topics, including venues where we hold our World Congresses. For this reason, we should be fully prepared to create a historical moment of mutually equal two-way interactions between East and West in the true sense of the phrase long before any of the intrinsically national Americanist organizations attempt to do so. During these recent months



I participated in international conferences held in India, China, and Korea and feel that the time is ripe for Americanists in the Western hemisphere visiting India, China, and Japan to witness how flourishing American Studies is in Asia’.

Giorgio Mariani (Università di Roma 1, ‘La Sapienza’)

‘The idea of publishing what is after all a scholarly journal that is addressed only to scholars (unless we have something different in mind) in a variety of languages so as to remind people that we acknowledge the importance of all these languages in the Americas strikes me as a kind of academic populism ... It is one thing to have a journal that IS AWARE of the multilinguality of the Americas and will make of that multilinguality an object of study, and it’s a totally different story to have a journal with articles in Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and French, written for people who—as academics—are all quite capable of reading them in English ... If it were up to me I would limit the languages of the journal to these two [English and Spanish]—my understanding is that people with a professional interest in the field of Hemispheric American Studies know these languages, and they are sufficient to keep a global conversation going. This, obviously, does not mean that other languages are not important. If I do work on the Japanese literature of Hawaii, I obviously must know that language well, but to the extent that I want to share what I write about it with a potentially large readership, I must write it in a widely spoken language, even though the fine points I make will be understandable (and contestable) only by what will probably be a quite small group of specialists’.

Anders Olsson (Mittuniversitetet Sweden)

‘If Latin were still the lingua franca of academic discourse, it would have been the language in which to publish *RIAS*, because there would be no connection to countries and earthly powers. On the other hand, it would not have been a language spoken on the continents which are the objects of hemispheric American Studies. Nor would it have been a language for common discourse for other than Western participants, thus not representing the “international” in American Studies. ... more than one language should be used to make the point of multilinguality in *RIAS* and provide access to discourse; a minimum inclusion would be English and Spanish, but at the same time two is not “multi”, and the inclusion of the two would mean making an ideological statement. More languages would be needed, but it is difficult to draw the line, perhaps the four languages of the Ottawa conference [English, Spanish, French, Portuguese] and some more, among them Chinese and Japanese, to provide access and inclusion ... In initial practice, *RIAS* could start off with only one or two languages—more languages to be added later, to get the thing going. On the other hand, if the point is multilinguality, such a start would miss that point’.