



The language of (“Analytic”) Philosophy¹

A Linguagem da Filosofia (“Analítica”)

Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra

PhD in Philosophy, professor at Oriel College, Oxford, United Kingdom, e-mail: gonzalo.rp21@gmail.com

Abstract

This note argues that research in Analytical Philosophy broadly conceived should be published exclusively in English. Reasons are given for this and the thesis is defended from eleven objections.

Keywords: Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived. English. Research. Publications. Non-English speaking countries.

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Resumo

Este texto afirma que a pesquisa em Filosofia Analítica, concebida em todas suas vertentes, deve ser publicada exclusivamente em Inglês. Esta tese é argumentada e defendida de onze objeções.

Palavras-chave: *Filosofia Analítica. Inglês. Pesquisa. Publicações. Países não falantes de Inglês.*

It is clear that more philosophy is published in English than any other language at the moment, that this has been so for several decades now, and that the trend is likely to continue. It is also true that more and more philosophers around the world read philosophy in English. Nevertheless it is a fact that many philosophers from non-English speaking countries, including philosophers who read, speak, and write English, persist in publishing original work in their native languages. In particular, what motivates me writing this note is that there are many philosophers producing high quality work in what I shall call Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived publishing such work in languages other than English.

The thesis I shall argue for in this brief note is that original work of research in Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived should nowadays be published exclusively in English. Publishing such work in English is very valuable, but publishing it in languages other than English is of little or no value.

This thesis is not as clear as it should be, since Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived has not been defined. It is clear that the label 'Analytic Philosophy', used to designate a philosophical movement, is now obsolete and very little of contemporary Philosophy would be correctly classified as such. Some might think that a better label for the kind of Philosophy I have in mind would be 'Anglo-American Philosophy', but I think this name is rather inadequate. For some of the early heroes of this

kind of Philosophy, like Frege, were not Anglo-American. Furthermore, nowadays there is a lot of this kind of Philosophy done in countries other than England (or the UK more generally) and the USA and a lot of it is done in languages other than English.

Nevertheless there is a way of characterizing what I am calling Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived. This is the kind of Philosophy that is typically published in journals like *Mind*, *Analysis*, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, *The Philosophical Review*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Noûs*, *Erkenntnis*, *Philosophical Studies*. This gives a reasonable idea of what I mean by Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived – at least it gives a reasonable idea of what I have in mind given the aim of this note².

There are different reasons, I think, why such philosophers continue to publish original research in Analytic Philosophy in their native languages. Sometimes it is because those philosophers, although they read and discuss philosophy published in English, they do not network with those philosophers who publish in English, but network almost exclusively with philosophers from their own countries. Sometimes it is because of lack of confidence or lack of good enough written English. Sometimes, and I suspect this is the most common reason, it is because they think it is valuable to publish such work in their native languages.

Clearly the first two reasons are not valid ones if I am right that publishing original research in Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived in English is valuable – this should be a reason to improve one's English, overcome one's lack of confidence, or start networking with a wider group of philosophers if one thinks this is necessary to publish in English.

What is, then, the value of publishing original research in Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived in English? Although English might not be the most widely spoken language, it might be the most widely read language. And even if it is not the most widely read language, English is the most widely read language among professional philosophers doing

² No doubt different lists of journals would characterize what I have in mind equally reasonably well, but I suppose that any such lists will have to include some of the journals mentioned above.

Analytic Philosophy broadly conceived (from now on I shall refer to it just as *Analytic Philosophy*). Thus publishing in English increases the audience, and it increases the chances of having one's ideas discussed. Thus the author of the article or book will benefit. Furthermore, making an idea available to a bigger community and therefore exposing it to greater discussion benefits Philosophy itself (not just Analytic Philosophy) – for there is little progress in Philosophy if ideas are kept private, or communicated only to small philosophical communities or low-impact communities. Therefore both authors and Philosophy itself will benefit from the increased discussion that publishing in English is likely to bring about.

Here are some objections to my thesis:

Objection 1: Not everyone is in a position to write Philosophy in English as well as they do it in their mother tongues. Therefore, not everyone should publish Philosophy in English.

Reply: The premise of the objection must be correct. But the objection is a *non sequitur*. To publish philosophy in English one must be able to write reasonably well in English. But it is not necessary that one write in English as well as in one's mother tongue. And even if not everyone can write reasonably well in English, this is a skill that any competent philosopher can acquire. Since publishing in English is valuable one should try to acquire this skill if one doesn't already have it.

Objection 2: Publishing original research in Analytic Philosophy only in English will lead to the end of the academic or intellectual use of languages other than English.

Reply: Taken literally this objection has no weight. For since the thesis defended here is simply a thesis about Analytic Philosophy, it is clear that the thesis does not entail that one must not use languages other than English for academic or serious uses. For all I have said it might be that there are other academic disciplines in which the use of English is not desirable. Perhaps the best language to publish original

work on seventeenth century French theatre is French (perhaps not). That it is not is not entailed by thesis of this note. Needless to say, the thesis of this note does not support ceasing to use languages other than English for everyday communication, or poetry, or literature – that would be indefensible. Indeed the thesis defended here does not even entail that languages other than English must not be used to publish academic work in Analytic Philosophy. I shall explain this below.

Objection 3: Philosophy students from non-English speaking countries will obtain no benefits and will suffer most if original research in Analytic Philosophy is written in a language they do not understand.

Reply: Many (most?) students from non-English speaking countries know English already. And those who do not will find an incentive to learn English if philosophical research is published in English. Learning a new language is a good thing, and learning English is, furthermore, a useful thing.

Objection 4: Publishing research in Analytic Philosophy exclusively in English will benefit, in non-English speaking countries, kinds of Philosophy that are not likely to be published exclusively in English, say "Continental" Philosophy. For students from those countries will find such kinds of philosophy more amicable, and so Analytical Philosophy will lose ground in those countries.

Reply: This is a very important objection. But, as far as the thesis of this note goes, lectures will still be done in other languages, classic works will have been translated into other languages, and introductory books, textbooks, and companions will still be published in other languages. These publications should arouse the interest of students in analytic philosophy.

Objection 5: The value and relevance of Analytic Philosophy must be perceived by the wider society. But this will not be perceived if Analytic Philosophy is only published in English.

Reply: But the proposal is only that original research in Analytic Philosophy be done in English. The public relations exercise of Analytic Philosophy can be done in languages other than English – and as I said in reply to the previous objection the proposal does not require that there are no publications of Analytic Philosophy in languages other than English.

Objection 6: Publishing Philosophy in the language of country X contributes to public discussion in country X³. Such contributions will be lost if one publishes only in English.

Reply: My thesis is only about original work of academic research in Analytic Philosophy. Journalists, and even philosophers themselves (who are more reliable than journalists) can still publish in newspapers and other publications for the general public in order to contribute to public discussion in their countries.

Objection 7: Philosophy, even some of the things that go under the name of Analytic Philosophy here, should guide our lives. Thus philosophy should be available to everyone, even those who don't speak English. Or, more generally, Philosophy is valuable, so it should be available to everyone.

Reply: I agree that Philosophy, in general, is valuable and also, which does not follow from it, that it should be available to everyone. I also agree that some bits of Philosophy should serve to guide our lives, and so that part of philosophy should be available to everyone. The proposal here put forward is consistent with works of popularization of Philosophy being published in languages other than English. It is through these works of popularization that Philosophy is made

³ It might be thought that this objection is stronger if its first sentence is formulated thus: Publishing Philosophy in the language of country X in country X contributes to public discussion in country X. I doubt that this makes much of a difference, especially given the online availability of a massive amount of publications these days, and the considerable public impact some online publications seem to have.

available to the wider public, not by publishing arid arguments in academic Philosophy journals in Spanish, Finnish, or Portuguese.

Objection 8: Philosophy is always an expression of a particular culture and a way of life, and they cannot be properly expressed or manifested in a foreign language. Therefore Philosophy should continue to be published in languages other than English.

Reply: Philosophy is not the expression of a culture or way of life – at least not any more than science is, and clearly not in the sense in which such an expression is tied to a particular language. This is true of Philosophy in general and therefore of Analytic Philosophy in particular.

Objection 9: Some thoughts cannot be expressed in English, but they can be expressed in other languages. Therefore it would be a mistake to attempt to publish all original research in Analytic Philosophy in English.

Reply: There might be some non-English words that do not have a literal translation into an English word. In that case a paraphrase can be given. Or the non-English word can be kept as a technical term (as the non-Analytic Philosophy word *Dasein* is sometimes used as a technical term in publications in English). But there will be an explanation in English of the meaning of the technical term. In any case there is no reason to think that there are any concepts, ideas, or thoughts that are expressible in other languages but not in English.

Objection 10: Publishing research in Analytic Philosophy exclusively in English will add to the dominance of English-speaking countries in this area. And the problem with such dominance is that the development of lines of thought in Analytic Philosophy is likely to be influenced by the dominant figures in English-speaking countries. By allowing research to be published in languages other than English one ensures a healthy diversity within Analytic Philosophy.

Reply: There are many things that are not clear in this objection. For instance: (a) that allowing research to be published in languages other than English will ensure philosophical diversity within Analytic Philosophy; (b) that such a diversity will be of the healthy kind; (c) what makes diversity healthy. I doubt that allowing research to be published in languages other than English will *ensure* diversity within Analytic Philosophy. And I doubt that diversity is intrinsically valuable. Furthermore, diversity is not what Analytic Philosophy (broadly conceived) needs: there is a lot of diversity in Analytic Philosophy published in English with respect to themes, methodology, and doctrine – and although it is not clear what makes diversity healthy, it seems difficult to argue that the diversity present in Analytic Philosophy published in English is unhealthy. In any case, if someone has a completely novel approach that has no antecedent, or has come up with a new problem never discussed before, the best thing would be to publish that work in English to make the new approach or problem available to the wider community. This is a more effective way of ensuring diversity.

Objection 11: The thesis of this note is correct but it is unduly restricted to Analytic Philosophy. All research in Philosophy should be published in English, even research belonging to philosophical traditions that are not represented in English. For then they would gain a wider audience. Furthermore, having a unique Philosophy language (English) will make it easier for a fertile interaction between different philosophical traditions.

Reply: I am sympathetic to this objection. But I do not think it succeeds. For it might be that all those who are interested in a certain tradition already read and write in a language other than English and they would not bother having to read something in English. Furthermore, I doubt that easier accessibility to original research in a different philosophical tradition is likely to make that tradition interesting to people working in other traditions. Would analytic philosophers start reading Continental Philosophy if all or most of

it were published in English? I doubt it. But it should be noted that my thesis is that research in Analytic Philosophy should be published exclusively in English, and that this does not entail that there is any philosophical tradition whose original research should not be published (exclusively or not) in English. Thus although, for the reasons given, I still want to restrict my thesis to Analytic Philosophy, I would not oppose the proposal to publish all research in Philosophy in English.

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