

Nobody is born a proficient academic writer. Whether you are born speaking just one language, such as Polish or English, or you are born into a bilingual family, writing academically in your native tongue is like learning a new language. Even those who spend years writing and working to get their PhD can struggle with academic writing, especially when their writing is judged against a set of very high standards and competition with people from all over the world. Academics even coined a saying to reflect the situation - publish or perish- to reflect the pressure they find themselves in. They can either publish their research, or to “perish”, which means being left out in career opportunities and advancement. Publishing is central to academic work, and with publishing comes writing.

My project focuses on the challenges that novice Polish scholars in social sciences and humanities (SSH) might be facing when attempting to write for international journals. I focus on novice scholars, specifically those who are working to get their doctoral degrees or those who just graduated. Studying this group is important for the future of SSH academic disciplines, as these scholars will be working at Polish and international universities for decades to come. Currently, not much is known about their English academic writing practices. Research done at the Adam Mickiewicz University, led by Dr. Kulczycki, showed that out of eight European countries that were studied, Polish scholars published the least in English. Only 17% of the research articles published by Polish SSH scholars in 2014 were written in English. This is a crucial problem to research, since most of the very important articles on Polish literature, history, political science and sociological problems have no way of being read by scholars who do not speak Polish. Our scholars in SSH are the largest group who can study cultural artifacts and historical documents, mostly written in Polish, and who can communicate these findings to scholars trying to understand the bigger picture of humanities and social sciences in Europe and around the world.

Scholars who need to write academically in another language can struggle linguistically, trying to express academic concepts in a foreign language. They can also be challenged in understanding what the expectation of an international journal is terms of the structure and content of a good academic article. This could be discouraging to any academic writers. In the case of Polish early-career scholars, there is no information on the nature of their preference to publish in Polish, rather than English. There is also no information on these scholars, especially the ones who are just beginning their careers, feel prepared to take on the challenge of writing for international audiences. My research project would provide the answers to some of these questions, by investigating the linguistic and writing skills of these researchers. Another aspect that is important to understand this gap is the current language skills of SSH. In order to study this aspect, I will collect a large dataset of texts – corpora – and will use software to analyze linguistic patterns to see what the writers are doing well, and what they could get more help with. These datasets will come from Polish academic journals in which Polish SSH scholars already publish in English. Such analysis can provide an answer to the question: are these publications linguistically different from the ones published by scholars in international journals? However, linguistic analysis of texts will be just one part of the study. I will also send a survey with questions about motivation, language proficiency and writing experiences to as many early-career scholars as I can. In addition, I will also conduct in-depth interviews with fifteen early-career scholars to understand the challenge that academic writing poses to them. The results of the study will be used to make recommendations on meeting the needs of the early-career scholars, so they can succeed in their careers and share their research as widely as possible.