

Grey literature on bilingualism in Belgium

Joachim Schöpfel

INIST-CNRS and research groupe "Document Numérique & Usages", France

Abstract

Because of the town Antwerp host of the GL9 conference and because of our own former scientific experience we selected the field of bilingualism for a study on the importance of grey literature in social sciences and humanities. The study is meant to be an additional contribution to comparable scientometric analyses on the distribution of types of publications in different scientific domains.

Bilingualism, the learning and use of two or more languages, is a linguistic, social, educational and psychological reality for many people and most countries. In the heart of Europe, Belgium, a country with two cultural and linguistic populations, with immigration, international business and institutions, is particularly confronted with this reality. Reaction to and part of its multicultural society, Belgium developed since many years a significant interdisciplinary research activity in the field of bilingualism.

The particularity of our study is twofold: First, the research on bilingualism is interdisciplinary, at the crossroad of linguistics, sociology, psychology and educational sciences, each domain presenting its own vectors of publication and communication. Second, while most of the previous studies on the importance of grey literature are citation analyses, our study is based on search results from databases, catalogues, open archives and search engines.

1. On the (relative) importance of grey literature

Grey literature has a role of its own as a means of distributing scientific and technical information, and professionals insist on its importance for two main reasons: research results are often more detailed in reports, doctoral theses and conference proceedings than in journals, they are distributed in these forms up to 12 or even 18 months before being published elsewhere, and some results simply aren't published elsewhere.

But how do researchers use grey literature? One way of evaluating this is to analyze the citations given in their publications. Schöpfel & Farace 2007 provide some empirical evidence based on a synthesis of different scientometric studies (see table 1).

Field	Grey literature citations (in %)
Soil science	14%
Biology	5-13%
Veterinary medicine	6%
Psychiatry (addiction)	1%
Psychology	3%
Engineering Sciences	39-42%
Economics	9-17%
Sociology	7-9%
Education Science	14-19%

Table 1: Part of grey literature in different scientific domains

The relative importance of grey literature is largely dependent on research disciplines and subjects, on methodological approaches, and on sources used. In some fields, especially the life sciences and medical sciences, there has been a traditional preference for conventional distribution media (journals), while in others, such as agriculture, aeronautics and the engineering sciences in general, grey literature resources tend to predominate¹.

A small study of bibliographic references published in four different journals in library and information sciences revealed that grey literature accounts on average around 20% of all sources used. Even so, citations to grey material vary widely between different papers from 0% to 50% and more, depending at least in part on subject areas and methodologies. Most of the non-commercial documents can clearly be identified as unpublished material, doctoral or master theses, proceedings, reports, legal texts, working papers, lecture notes, websites, and even posted messages. But especially for some conference proceedings and other serial resources, the identification of the exact nature of the cited material poses difficulties.