

Research Article**LANGUAGE IS NOT A BARRIER TO WIN A NOBEL PRIZE****Mussie Tewelde¹, Lilly Fernandes², Gujju Chenna Reddy³**¹University of Jyväskylä, Finland² College of Business & Social Sciences³Department of English, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, A.P, IndiaCorresponding Author: **Mussie Tewelde**

Abstract

Across the world, the Nobel Prize is synonymous for excellence wherein it felicitates the achievements of individuals for any outstanding contribution they make to any domain. Some might believe that having a stellar knowledge about English or any other extensively used language, is one of the foremost requirements for potential Nobel contenders to convey their pathbreaking ideas and research in an effective manner. Such belief has resulted in concerns pertaining to the possible exclusion of non-English speaking scholars and researchers from gaining the recognition they deserve. The purpose of this paper is to clarify this thought process where it is believed that language acts as barrier for winning the Nobel Prize. In order to achieve this objective, this paper intends to extensively carry out secondary research to understand whether language does indeed act as a barrier or whether language has no bearings on winning the Nobel Prize. This paper examines previous winners, their backgrounds, and the language they have used to communicate their winning ideas or contributions.

Furthermore, this paper will also investigate the growing trend of multilingualism within modern Nobel laureates, facilitated through developments within technologies in translations and acknowledging the existence of linguistic diversity in academia. Such a shift has the scope to nurture collaboration among scientists belonging to diverse linguistic backgrounds, and to encourage a highly inclusive global scientific community

On the basis of this paper, the author stresses upon the significance of supporting and acknowledging multilingualism within academia, as it enables knowledge exchange and nurtures a highly diverse and inclusive scientific landscape. The author also emphasizes that language must not be considered as a barrier for gaining accolades via the Nobel Prize, rather it needs to be accredited as an instrument that enriches global scientific discourse, while empowering global researchers to scale new heights in pursuance of knowledge that enhances society eventually.

Keywords: Nobel Prize, Language, Linguistics, Multilingualism.

1. Introduction

The Nobel prize has been acknowledged as the world's notable honour that recognizes scientific and/or cultural progress for initiatives associated with physics, chemistry, physiology, medicine, economics, peace, and also literature (Jin et al., 2021). In October each year, individuals who have carried out valuable work that focuses on the betterment of human society on the whole, in the areas above mentioned are selected to be bestowed with the prize, which is

awarded to the chosen individuals on 10th of December, which marks the birth anniversary of the founder of the award, Alfred Nobel.

The origins of the prize can be traced back to Alfred Nobel, who has been credited with inventing dynamite. Following his disappointment with the potential for destruction and death that might emerge with the use of his invention, Nobel was in favour of instituting an award that would commemorate those individuals, who in future, would work towards the betterment of society. In order to implement his idea, he bequeathed his entire fortune of Swedish Krona SEK 32 million that facilitated the development of an institution (the Nobel Foundation) that would focus on administering this prize (Nobel, 1901). The very first award function was held in 1901 at the Royal Conservatory of Stockholm, Sweden. Every year, the awards are handed out by the Royal Academy of Sciences of Sweden, Swedish Academy, Norwegian Nobel Committee, and Karolinska Institute, to people, as well as to organizations that have made outstanding contributions in the areas above mentioned (Nobel, 1901).

Scientific communication as such, in terms of the association between science and languages is concerned, is definitely a significant domain of applied linguistics (AL). In fact, science in itself is rendered possible through inter-subjective communication (Momen, 2009). Scientific communication here refers to an array of discourses that intend to transfer knowledge and outcomes of research, executed by processes of communication that fluctuate based on who plays the role of a sender (the scientist / researcher), and who is the audience (Tardy, 2004). Any modifications in these kinds of processes would largely adhere to social elements of a demographic, economic, and political nature which in turn might have consequences on the languages that compete with one another within the domain of scientific communication (Márquez & Porras, 2020). In the present globalization era, scientific communication emerges as good domain of observation of the competition that occurs of most languages as compared to English. The present modifications in scientific communications are associated not just with selecting the language that will be used but also with the type of texts, the objective of communication, and the style of the topic (DeJesus et al., 2019). This implies that language has a significant role to play in scientific communication.

However, there have been arguments Washbourne (2016) where it is posited that language acts as a barrier which impedes the possibility of an individual to win the Nobel prize. This paper intends to explore whether language acts as a barrier or not .

2. Literature review

Historical Analysis of Nobel Laureates and their Linguistic Backgrounds

Individuals belonging from diverse academic domains are known to communicate in unique styles. The writings as posted by 25 most largely followed economists and scientists on Twitter was compared by Della Giusta et al (2021). The findings revealed that a largely formal style with exclusive pronouns was utilized by economists, as compared to scientists who were known to use more inclusive pronouns. Corpus-based analyses of academic writings also revealed that stylistics and lexical traits like specific terminology, use of vocabulary, and stylistic aspects, were unique among economics and other domains (Goldschmidt & Szmrecsanyi, 2007). There is an extensive volume of research that revealed a robust interlink between gender Pânișoară et al (2015) and language style, academic performance (Gunawan et al., 2019), leadership personality traits (Solaja et al., 2016), social hierarchies, narrative effects, interpersonal skills, and romantic liaisons. Nonetheless, there is no clarity on the factors that contribute to variations in communication style utilized by scientists or scholars of diverse academic disciplines. There is a scope that the style of communication is shaped through academic training. The variation in styles of communication could be a projection of the fact that individuals possessing varied personality attributes tend to thrive in varied academic domains (Vedel et al., 2015). There is also the possibility that various kinds of theoretical notions or

abstract concepts could only be communicated through a specific language. Therefore, analysis of communication language utilized by researchers and scientists in their informal and formal discourses have the scope to offer an insight into production and communication of ideas and knowledge are shaped through language.

Of late, the language of communication that Nobel laureates use has been gaining much attention. For instance, the speeches delivered by Nobel laureates in science during formal Nobel banquets was quantitatively analyzed by Bucchi et al (2019), and it was found that speeches delivered by Nobel laureates were largely technical, lecture-oriented and less ceremonial in nature, over a period between 1901 to 2018. Exalting science as a profession emerged as foremost content within such speeches, particularly among Nobel laureates in Chemistry. At the same time, 25 Nobel lectures in natural science were analyzed by Condit (2018). The findings indicated that such laureates were inclined to consider fellow scientists within their own domains as their expected audience, irrespective of the academic background of the actual audience. Though such studies could indicate how the Nobel laureates' minds work, it is assumed that most of such public speeches during formal events were read out from scripts that were pre-prepared and are not as spontaneous as written texts.

A study was conducted by Ma et al (2012), who investigated the language of publication of Physics Nobel laureates prior to them receiving the coveted prize. Their analysis of data from 1901 to 1929 revealed that out of 21 laureates during the said period, 16 of them were immigrants to English speaking countries. The key languages used by laureates ranged from English, German and French. A majority of the German scientists collectively wrote 439 out of 455 papers in German, wherein only 16 papers (3.5%) were written in English. Scientists from the United States and England wrote 90% and 95% of their papers respectively in English, with only a handful of papers written in German

3. Case studies

The first Nobel prize for literature was awarded to Rene Francois Armand Prudhomme, popularly known as Sully Prudhomme, in 1901. Though the prolific author published his literary works in his native language French, he was yet bestowed with the Nobel for his entire body of poetic work and also for being a pioneer within the genre of philosophical poems (Alter & Marshall, 2021). Noted German author and prominent politician Theodor Mommsen received the Nobel prize for literature in the year 1902 for his commendable contributions to historical research and his major work 'A History of Rome', which is deemed as a classic in the domain of Roman history (Mommsen, 2023). The Nobel prize particularly acknowledged the contributions he made to German literature through his historical literary works.

Similarly, in 1903, the Nobel prize for literature was awarded to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Bjørnson was an author from Norway who prominently wrote in his native Norwegian language which led him to be recognized for his remarkable contributions to literature in Norway and the impact it had on political and cultural development of Norway (Doshi, 2018). As a writer, Bjørnson was quite versatile who dabbled in novels, poetry, and also plays. He had a key role to play in terms of shaping the literary environment of Norway during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries.

José Echegaray y Eizaguirre was a leading Spanish writer and playwright who substantially contributed to Spanish literature with the use of Spanish language within his literature. As a prolific writer, he was renowned for his influential and innovative approach to theatre and drama (Fleming, 1966). For his contributions to Spanish literature, Eizaguirre was awarded the Nobel prize in literature in 1904, considering the contributions he made to Spanish drama. Eizaguirre was notable for his works which blended artistic quality with social themes, and his writings had a key role to play in changing the direction of Spanish literature and theatre in his time. His capability to merge convention with innovation and to capture the soul of

intricate themes through his literature was an instrumental factor in his persistent legacy in the literary domain (Fleming, 1966).

The Nobel prize for literature in 1905 was awarded to Henryk Sienkiewicz, for his notable works in the realm of literature, specifically his historical novels which captured the spirit of his native land, Poland. He was recognized and his contribution to Polish literature was acknowledged by the Nobel prize committee owing to his outstanding merits as an epic writer and showcased his capability to project historical events with a compelling and vivid narrative. The most renowned works by Sienkiewicz, included the epic trilogy 'The Polish Trilogy' or more popularly known as 'The Trilogy', comprised of three novels viz., 'With Fire and Sword' (Ogniem I Mieczem), 'The Deluge' (Potop), and 'Fire in the Steppe' (Pan Wolodyjowski). The said novels all in Polish and later translated to English, were set against the backdrop of the Lithuanian Commonwealth during the 17th century, a turbulent period which was marked by political strife, wars, and cultural disruptions. The trilogy is popular due to its projection of heroic characters, national pride, and a deep-rooted sense of patriotism. The writing style adopted by Sienkiewicz, blends historical precision with a narrative that is highly captivating, rendering his work both entertaining as well as educational. His capability to spin historical figures and events into riveting stories largely contributed to his international acclaim.

Naguib Mahfouz, an Arabic writer was the first author from Egypt to win the coveted Nobel prize for literature in the year 1988. Mahfouz is deemed as one of the very first modern writers in Arabic literature, who investigated themes of existentialism through his literary works. The only Egyptian to win the Nobel, he is accredited with publishing around 35 novels, 350 short stories and several other notable works (Alter & Marshall, 2021). However, the fact of the matter being that all his works were published in his native language Arabic, which was then translated into English. This implies that translation has a major role to play in native writers being awarded the Nobel prize for literature. But it also begs the question that if translated works are being considered, then how can the original work be justified?

4. Discussion:

If we look at the case studies above, it is evident that language does not act as a barrier to being bestowed with a Nobel prize. From the case studies, it is clear that right from the time the Nobel prize was instituted, it has been the native language speakers who have been bestowed with this coveted award. For instance, the very first award for literature was presented to Sully Prudhomme in 1901, for his literary works in French. The very next year in 1902, the Nobel for literature went to German writer Theodor Mommsen. In 1903, the Nobel for literature went to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, for his contributions to Norwegian literature. Similarly, José Echegaray y Eizaguirre, a Spanish writer was the recipient of the Nobel prize for literature in 1904. While the Nobel prize for literature went to Henryk Sienkiewicz for his literary works in his native language Polish. Giosuè Carducci, a prominent Italian writer won the literature Nobel in 1905 and so on. As a matter of fact, the last person to win the Nobel for literature was Annie Ernaux for her works in French. She was conferred with the prestigious award in the year 2022.

Throughout the years, there have been several individuals who have won the Nobel for literature for their works in their native languages other than the English. In fact, if the history of Nobel award for literature is looked into, it can be observed that a large majority of works were written in languages other than English. While English writers have also won this award, with the first Nobel for literature in English was awarded to Rudyard Kipling in 1907 (Handa, 2018). However, the fact remains that most of these native language writers' works had to be translated first, which was instrumental in them receiving the Nobel prize. For instance, the Naguib Mahfouz who won the Nobel for literature in the year 1988, for works that were originally written in Arabic but later were translated into English, entitling them to be awarded the Nobel.

It has been expressed by Washbourne (2016), that translation is very frequently a precondition for the Nobel Prize in literature. In fact, it occurs to such a level that a world class writer's canonization could partially comprise of the canonization of their extant translations. As per one critic, Mo Yan, whose work won the Nobel for literature in 2012, can be attributed to a network of collaborators, a procedure that is true in the case of a large number of writers who work beyond global literary languages. The fact that Yan won the Nobel was a collective effort of collaboration where the author acted as the nodal point within an essential global network of cosmopolitanites, which comprised of publishers, translators, readers, nominators, and the media (Wang, 2014). But still, translation is not a topic that is delved upon, other than in a parenthetical manner, within deliberations of such highly prestigious global prize. The factor of translation in the process of decision-making and the formation of identity of a potential candidate is far from negligible. Writers often find that their fortunes depend on quantity, timing, quality, and the dissemination of their translated works, and maybe even its success. The prize, furthermore, hinges not only on translation, but also its translation into major European languages, particularly but not English exclusively (Washbourne, 2016). This begs the question that if an Eritrean writer such as Ribka Sibhatu, who prominently wrote in Tigrinya, would have been eligible to receive the Nobel for literature based on her extensive literary works.

5. Conclusion

From the review of the literature and the case studies that have been examined, it can be conclusively stated that language certainly does not act as a barrier to win the Nobel prize for literature. The same has been depicted over the years through the many wins by non-English writers and the fact that majority of the literary awardees wrote in their native languages rather than English. Though it is also known that many of the winning authors writing in native languages and winning the prize based on the assessment of their translated works, it must be acknowledged that irrespective of their works being translated, it is the original author who wins the Nobel. Nowhere has it been evidenced or noted that the translator has been awarded rather than the original author. But yes, it is also a fact that sometimes the authenticity tends to be lost during translation as the translated work might not capture the essence of the native language or its finer nuances that connects the reader with the culture of a region such as Eritrea.

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