Citations: overcome the language barrier

The ‘citation stacking’ practised by four Brazilian research journals (Nature 500, 510–511; 2013) may be a misguided attempt to compensate for the recognition problems faced by journals that do not publish in English. It is in the interest of international science for researchers and funding agencies, as well as journals, to overcome such linguistic barriers.

Impact factors depend on the size of citation pools for different languages. This favours Chinese journals published in both Chinese and English, for example, but not Brazilian journals that use Portuguese.

Transparent attempts to counteract this undue influence of language are under way. English-speaking scientists bidding for Chinese research grants, for example, enlist help from Chinese colleagues, with notable success. European nations such as Iceland and the Czech Republic require international and multilingual peer review of their research papers and grant applications - an approach that could also work for Brazilian research journals.

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