



From the language of science to the languages of the public

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This research investigated how the use of English as the working language in an international science research program, the International Polar Year 2007-2008 (IPY), impacted the dissemination of research results, and how it affected public participation in international education, outreach and communication (EOC) activities related to polar science and global climate. It involved in-depth semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with 56 individuals from 21 countries who had all been involved in EOC activities related to IPY.

The results indicated that issues of language in science go much deeper than the ability to speak or understand a given language. Languages influence what research questions are asked, what results are published, who has access to the information, and how the information is used. This situation is rendered even more complex by the gulf between scientific language and the everyday language of the public. This creates a particular difficulty for people in countries where English is not commonly spoken, or in those that have native languages that are linguistically distant from English. In a world where environmental problems are increasingly global, this is a concern that needs to be taken seriously.