The inclusion of reports of randomised trials published in languages other than English in systematic reviews

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Authors' objectives
We set out to assemble a large dataset of language restricted and language inclusive systematic reviews, including both conventional medicinal (CM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) interventions. We also assessed the quality of these different types of systematic reviews and their associated RCTs and compared the quality of systematic reviews investigating a CM intervention with those reviews examining CAM interventions. We also examined whether language restrictions compared with language inclusions exaggerate the estimates of an interventions effectiveness. Finally we evaluated whether language restrictions of conventional interventions are similar to those for CAM interventions, and whether these results are influenced by other issues, including statistical heterogeneity and publication bias, in the systematic review process.

Authors' conclusions
With the exception of CAM systematic reviews, the quality of recently published systematic reviews is less than optimal. Language inclusive/LOE systematic reviews appear to be a marker for a better quality systematic review. Language restrictions do not appear to bias the estimates of a conventional intervention's effectiveness. However, there is substantial bias in the results of a CAM systematic review if LOE reports are excluded from it.

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