

Language, Science and Medicine

Lenguaje, ciencia y medicina

Geovani López-Ortiz*

The history of language has been dynamic, in evolutionary and cultural terms, and is full of events spanning several fields that shaped the way in which humans have orally and written transmitted information for generations, consolidating art and science, as we know them today.

In Medical field there are three language events that defined the way knowledge is transmitted, the first one was the record of Western medical writings with Hippocrates (Centuries v-vi BC.), which ushered the Greek era of language in medicine, and whose influence extended to the 2nd century AD. The second language event was the incorporation of Latin as a scientific language, which became the language par excellence to pass knowledge on different fields, an example were the writings of Vesalius and Harvey, as well as the work of Isaac Newton: *Philosophia naturalis principia mathematica*, published in 1687. Latin's influence on the medical area extended to the 19th century; there are records that in Denmark, medical notes were written in this language until 1853.¹ From the mid-19th century, until the middle of the twentieth century, Latin's influence began disappearing and new languages emerged and had a relative preponderance in transmission knowledge; German, French and English positioned themselves as the possible heirs of Latin, however, the exodus of scientists to the United States that took place during the Second World War, due to German racial policies and the weakening of French academic institutions, English became the main vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge in the medical area, its consolidation was the third language event that marked the way in which the main medical contributions have been made during the 20th and 21st centuries.

In 1967, about 62% of the articles published on PubMed were in English, this number grew steadily over the next fifty years; currently, more than 90% of the scientific



papers produced in the world are written in this language.² Regardless of nationalisms and relevant criticisms regarding the risks of using a single language in the dissemination of knowledge,³ not knowing or ignoring the production of medical writings in English represents a serious barrier to knowledge acquisition which can have an impact on different cognitive level.⁴ This has to be modified due to the ethical and health implications for patients; it is no exaggeration to say, that a physician who does not know the language in which most studies in his area are published will be a physician with serious limitations that can negatively impact health care.

Every scientific publication pursues at least two objectives: to contribute to knowledge improvement and to reach the widest possible audience, the existence of a *lingua franca* makes this latter objective possible; in this regard, it has been established that English articles have greater visualization around the world and are more cited, this can be explained by the widespread use of this language in the different areas of knowledge. In the same way, there is an urgent need for academic and scientific institutions to be aware of this scenario and to strengthen the teaching of this language to students and researchers,

due to the scientific biases implied by their lack of knowledge.⁵

In this context, the *Atención Familiar Journal* has decided to incorporate medical articles in English, with a double purpose: to share the contribution of research carried out in the country with a wider audience and that Family and Primary Care physicians from other parts of the world disseminate the outcome of their research to make it known to the Spanish-speaking community. It is intended that any research written in English in *Atención Familiar Journal* have a Spanish version; in order to go beyond language barriers to the benefit and strengthening of Family Medicine.

References

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