

The spirit of the times

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Editorial

Hurrah for positive Science!
long live for positive demonstration!
"Son of myself"
Walt Whitman

Das Ciencias (Das Ciencias, Meu Deus
Das Ciencias)
"Lisbon revisited"
Fernando Pessoa

It seems that far more than 47 years have passed since Eugene Garfield, creator of the *Science Citation Index*, wrote an article in 1967 posing the question: "English as international language of Science?"¹

The English language has become the international language of science simply by being the only language of science, leaving all other languages, including those in which scientific prestige has been achieved, as mere dialects for local or familiar use, but inexistent in the wider world of science.²

Of the ten most important psychiatry journals published in English, eight originate in the United States and the remaining two in England. Likewise, the most highly accredited research centers are in these two countries, and in the last assessment of the ten most prestigious universities, eight were again in the USA and two were in England.

If this list is extended to the 100 best universities, a German language Swiss University appears in 15th place, breaking the exclusivity of English speaking schools.

The USA invests twice as much of its Gross Domestic Product into universities as the United Kingdom, which raises the question: how much is invested in Latin America?

Important psychiatry magazines from Europe, Asia, and Africa are published in English and not in the local language.

Many other publications have made the powerful move of changing their names into English, presumably with the hope that such a move may raise their prestige. Examples are the well-known Italian magazine *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale*, now *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, the Brazilian *Revista de Psiquiatria do Rio Grande do Sul*, now called *Trends in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, the Spanish *Revista Europea de Psiquiatria*, now the *European Journal of Psychiatry*, and the German *Archiv fur Psychiatrie und Nerven-*

krankheiten which changed its name to *European Archives for Psychiatry*.

Nylenna³ demonstrated that just by being written in English, a text enjoys more prestige than if it were in any other language.

International Psychiatry Congresses have English as their only official language, as we saw last year with the meetings of the European Psychiatry Society held in Nice, and this year in Munich, meaning that attendees hailing from the two most important psychiatric traditions in Europe; French and German, had to communicate between themselves in the new lingua franca of a small minority of participants.^{4,5}

A simple internet search on the requirements to take a Postgraduate in Psychiatry in Latin America shows that up and down the continent, one minimum requirement that all schools have in common is an understanding of written English, no other language is mentioned.

Research undertaken in various countries shows that the majority of non-English speaking psychiatrists admit they do not have sufficient English to read written works or understand conferences, let alone to participate in discussions in the language. This is the case both in Latin America and the rest of the world – even in "first world" countries such as Germany, Japan, Spain, and South Korea.⁶⁻¹⁰

Even so, the conferences of the American Psychiatry Association are attended by more psychiatrists of other nationalities than those who are going to their own national or regional conferences; as in our case, those from the Latin American Psychiatry Association.^{11,12}

Psychiatrists from the USA and the UK clearly demonstrate their disinterest in all research produced in another language or simply beyond their borders.^{13,14}

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However, Latin American universities value their researchers according to the articles they publish in high-impact publications, and we all know which those are: the North American or British ones.

It could be said that in the case of sciences, and Psychiatry in particular, the "zeitgeist" of the romantic Germans is represented in the spirit of today by the absolute domination of US Psychiatry and the hegemony of English over all other languages, and that ultimately, our only choice is to passively accept the situation, adapting ourselves as best we can.

In this scenario, we psychiatrists on the periphery must conform to being mere spectators who, non-critically, with admiration and rapture, observe what is produced in those countries and published as a matter of course in the only language in which it is apparently possible to do science.

However, we know that:

- In these same journals, it is not only the scientific value of pieces that is judged, but also the elegance of the English,¹⁵ which is an important barrier to authors who are not native speakers of the language. This is reflected in the scarcity of articles originating from countries in the rest of the world, which includes (of course) Latin America.¹⁶⁻¹⁹
- In these journals, preference is logically given to works related to important pathologies or subjects which are of most interest in first world countries - they are not much motivated by the "pathology of poverty".²⁰

The tendency to publish works with statistics that show significant differences, excluding those that do not, has been extensively demonstrated. This has led German authors to publish research articles that demonstrate significant differences in English language journals, and ones that do not in German ones.²¹

This distorts the results of investigations by introducing a bias in the selection of the samples included, which can be (and is) used to assess any drug in a manipulative manner.

Another obvious discrimination is with respect to the language in which the research is written; none of those in other languages have the least chance of being accepted in English language journals and there are not even summaries provided in languages other than English.

The pharmaceutical industry has enormous influence on research, let alone on results, and what is worse, in such sensitive areas as continued medical education.²²⁻³²

Some of the most notable figures in North American academia, whose works are followed devotedly by many Latin Americans, have been embroiled in scandals that have been investigated by the US Senate after being accused of receiving millions of dollars from the pharmaceutical industry.^{33,34}

I should add that I have subsequently seen their names among the primary speakers of the most important Psychiatry Conferences.

In his 1957 book "The Poverty of Historicism", philosopher of science Karl Popper foresaw the possibility that the industry would corrupt the integrity of the sciences.

His suspicions are confirmed almost 60 years later, with the scandalous and offensive existence of the so-called *ghostwriting* industry, producing research and even books paid for by the industry, which subsequently appear as being authored by key figures in psychiatry.³⁵⁻³⁷

The other impact factor of Garfield's *Science Citation Index* was that it went from being purely quantitative to taken as a qualitative index.

The importance attributed to this impact factor is evident in the journals that flaunt their achievements when they receive a positive result from this assessment.

However, there are many reasonable criticisms for taking these results as proof of the quality of the works published rather than a simple quantitative measurement.³⁸⁻⁴²

They impose their ranking come hell or high water, and now, approaching its fifth edition of nearly 1,000 pages, it has become what the noted Spanish psychiatrist Carlos Castilla del Pino and the US researcher Nancy Andreasen called the primary, if not the only, psychiatry text for new generations of psychiatrists.⁴³

All of the above leads us to ask ourselves a few questions:

Should we Spanish speakers, along with the rest of the world, conform to being standard-bearers, anonymous extras, or a clique invited only to applaud and blindly repeat what is presented to us?

How can publications written in Spanish (or any language other than English) compete and have the yearned-for impact factor of the great English language journals?⁴⁴

How can we end this trend indicated by various sources of not citing co-national authors, instead citing only works published in English in the main psychiatric journals, also known as the Matthew effect?

We cannot resign ourselves to this and take on "what they invent", to quote the Rector of Salamanca.

While we cannot deny the current position of English as the primary language of science, we must keep defending the fact that our discipline is plurilingual; the dangers of leaving other languages -in our case, Spanish- unused in scientific activity have been widely exposed by such highly-regarded authors as Hamel, Navarro, and HaBe.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷

By being up to date with publications in these famous journals, but at the same time, being critical and not accept everything written in them as gospel.

Recognizing that English is currently the most important language in science is inevitable, but so too is the fact that in other languages, including Spanish, quality research is being carried out, and on subjects with interests that lie much closer to home.

We must pressurize our governments to invest more in research, and the importance that this has in the development of our societies must be given the recognition it

deserves. In this way, we can avoid our researchers (and indeed, other professionals) having to emigrate in order to carry out their activities in other countries which will then benefit from their experiences.

We must recognize that an important volume of information is published in other languages and never translated into English precisely because of the disregard for work carried out in other countries and languages. This means that multiple cases of "innocent plagiarism" cannot be ruled out.⁴⁵

There are Spanish journals in Spain and Latin America that publish articles in which Héctor Pérez-Rincón describes how "a knowledge, a conceptual richness, and a descriptive finesse can be found that are not always seen in articles in the more famous and widely-quoted *journals*."⁴⁸

It is not a question of chauvinism, but in our Universities and research centers, high-quality work is carried out and published, often on subjects much closer to our daily reality as specialists.

Postgraduate lecturers must encourage candidates to seek information in other languages. In Spanish, not just English, we have seen statistics from other countries where a not inconsiderable percentage of psychiatrists read and understand French. In a survey carried out but not yet published, approximately 30% of Venezuelan psychiatrists read and understand: French, Italian, or Portuguese, although the majority of them have English as their second language of training.¹²

A US colleague once admitted (I suppose with regret) that he was not always American, but said that "All Psychiatry, anywhere in the world, is American Psychiatry", disregarding 200 years of our discipline's history, along with the innumerable and valuable contributions of the rest of the world. Only by pursuing the solutions above will we avoid making his impertinent comment a reality.⁴⁹

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