

## Why should we write in english?

The Board of Directors of the MedUNAB Journal of Medicine has come, unanimously, to the conclusion that publishing articles, in this Magazine, written in a different language, other than the traditional Spanish -specifically in English- is an excellent and proper idea, taking in consideration that this language has become, since a long time ago, a universal tongue and presently, science is spoken and written in English.

Almost every epoch in history has been dominated by a determined group of people (speaking a particular tongue), usually as a form of Empire or as a highly educated Nation with enormous knowledge and a great influence in science or culture. This was the case for the Greeks. Sometimes, there were Empires with a long history, like the Romans or with a short one, like the Macedonians with Alexander the Great. Others lasted a few centuries, like the Spanish. In some instances, they did not subjugate other people, but its trade was so vast and so powerful that they exerted a strong influence amongst them. This was true for the Phoenicians.

In our western Civilization, the first language that was probably spoken, at once, by so many different -ethnically or linguistically- people, was the Phoenician tongue along the Mediterranean coast.<sup>1</sup> Their influence extended from now a days Lebanon to Portugal, covering the entire Mediterranean Basin. Along with their language, they brought their alphabet and a written form of communication was accomplished. For thousands of years the Phoenician Language became the “lingua franca” for many people. Most of the names for sea fare, boats, ships, marinas etc. come from this tongue and are still in use.<sup>1</sup>

Although Alexander the Great’s Empire was short -less than 20 years- its influence lasted for centuries, going, even, into our times: the Greek language, along with the Greek culture, was taken by Alexander’s army and spread throughout the conquered land, remaining in cities like Alexandria or Damascus, throughout centuries. Greek was the language in which all ancient knowledge was written and kept at the famous Alexandrian Library.

Most of the Old Testament was compiled and translated into the Greek Language. The entire New Testament was written in this tongue.<sup>2</sup> Later the Bible was translated into

Latin -in the IV Century- by Saint Jerome (This book is known as “The Vulgate”).<sup>3</sup>

No man of science could ignore the Greek. This is due to the fact of the enormous, impressive and everlasting contribution, achieved by the Greeks, in all branches of culture, like Literature, Religion, Philosophy, Medicine, Architecture or Mathematics, etc.

In Medicine, -etimologically speaking- the vast majority of names we use today, are Greek in origin, e.g.: Orthopedia (Orthos: Right and Paideia, child.<sup>4</sup> Earlier Orthos Paideia meant, “Training of children”),<sup>4</sup> is one of so many.

By the time of Christ, Latin was the obligated tongue for most of Europe, the north of Africa and the entire Middle East. The reason for this was the Roman Empire. Now, the Mediterranean Sea changed its name and became the “Mare nostrum”.<sup>5</sup> The influence of this tongue was so powerfully everlasting for more that two thousand years, even after the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. It remained forever, melting into the Romance Languages. The Roman law was so advanced that present day western countries, in one way or another, have adopted parts or entire concepts of the Roman law, even in the Anglo Americans legislations. Hundreds of words, phrases or concepts are all in Latin. For example we say, “Lex dura est sed Lex” (The Law is tough but it’s the Law)<sup>6</sup> or the “quid pro quod” (the common kickback practice of our politicians).<sup>6</sup>

At the Arlington National Cemetery there is an inscription that reads: “Pulcrum et Decorum est pro Patria mori” (It is wonderful and decorous to die for the Country)<sup>6</sup>

Until the XVIII Century, Medicine was taught in Latin throughout Europe and the Americas. The thesis needed to become a Doctor in Medicine was written in this language. Now a days a doctor in England or in the United States writes his entire prescription (except the name of the medicine) in Latin and it is translated into English by a Pharmacist: p.r.n (pro re nata, meaning: “if it’s necessary”),<sup>6</sup> p.o. (per os: “by mouth”),<sup>6</sup> a.c (ante cibum: “before meals”),<sup>5</sup> p.c. (post cibum: “after meals”)<sup>6</sup> or b.i.d (bis in diem: 2 times a day),<sup>6</sup> are some of the few examples.

Latin is still the official language for the Roman Catholic Church. The pontifical Bullae are written and promulgated in Latin with the official translation into vernacular languages. Until the II Vatican Council, in the 60's, Mass was, exclusively, prayed in Latin.

At the turn of the first millennium, Europe was immersed deeply into the Dark Ages. Still, there was a light illuminating the Continent from the Iberian Peninsula and this was the Arabian civilization along with its language. A great number of Muslim Physicians were busy writing medical textbooks in Arabic. One of the ten greatest books, ever, in Medicine -the Avicenna's Cannon- was written in this language.<sup>7</sup> This Medical Treatise was the official textbook for more than eight centuries. Most of the Greek writings were, first, translated into the Arabic language, before they were divulged in Latin.<sup>7</sup>

By the time the Middle Ages were coming to its end, and the splendor of the Renaissance was beginning to shine, many Italian-speaking cities in the Mediterranean Basin (like Genoa, Naples or Venice or rich cities inland, like Florence), began to exert their influence on every trade and commerce. On the other hand, the Castilian and the Aragonese Kingdoms at the Iberian Peninsula began to emerge as economic powers. The melting of Italian, Castilian and Aragonese Languages formed the "Lingua Franca" which was spoken along all Ports and Cities of the entire Mediterranean Coast. When America was discovered, this was the language spoken -but no written- by Columbus and his men. The Admiral wrote his voyages accounts in Spanish.<sup>8</sup>

For less than two hundred years the Castilian Language (Spanish) was spoken from Newfoundland (Terranova) down to the Magellan Strait, but mainly in the Caribbean Basin. All trade was done in Spanish. The standard currency was the Spanish golden coins (the "doubloon"), from where the symbol \$ comes from: taking the S for Spanish and \_ for Money.<sup>9</sup> During the Revolutionary War the Spanish Dollar (silver coins) became the antecessor of the future American dollar.<sup>9</sup> At the height of the Empire, (during the reign of Philip the II), Spanish was spoken throughout the world: from the Philippines -named after Phillip- to the Netherlands, going into the Mediterranean Basin. Unfortunately, due mainly to inept Monarchs, this vast Empire (one of the vastest ever), gradually, declined, and the influence of the Castilian language vanished.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to its great achievements in literature, social and political sciences -mainly in the difficult art of diplomacy- the French Language became, from the XVII Century and on, the most important one among diplomats and Ambassadors. Most European Courts spoke in French. Until the beginning of the XX Century all diplomatic correspondence was written in this language.

With the French Revolution, ideas like "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" ("Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood"),<sup>10</sup> and

mainly "Les droits de l'homme" ("Human Rights"),<sup>9</sup> became the yearning for freedom in many Countries, especially in Latin America.

In the XVIII and XIX Centuries, French was the language for Medicine and most of English or German textbooks were translated into French.

The motto scribed at the Royal Crown of the British Monarchs is in French: "mon Roi et mon Droit" ("My King and my Right").<sup>10</sup>

After the Spanish "Armada Invencible" was defeated at the English Channel ("Canal de la Mancha"), England, gradually became a world power and the "Mistress of the Sea" and English turned into a world language.

At the height of the Empire during Queen Victoria's long reign throughout the XIX Century, English was spoken in North American, part of The Caribbean, Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand and the costal cities of China, as well as, in the Middle East, the Polynesian and in innumerable islands.

With the American Independence in 1776, Great Britain lost its "Crown Jewel" and in the next two hundred years, gradually ceded all its territories and possessions (India in the 40's, and its Africa Possessions in the 50's and 60's). However, with some of them, England formed the "commonwealth of Nations".

Great Britain has never lost its primacy in world affairs. And later with the raise of The United States of America (USA) as a world power, English has remained the universal language for the last two hundred years.

Ending the XIX Century the USA went into war with Spain. This event was responsible for this great Country, to consolidate, definitively, as a world power. Spain lost, for good, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the XX Century, the construction of the Panama Canal, but mainly the World War (WW) I and WW II contributed, immensely, for the USA, to become the most powerful Nation, ever existed in man's history.<sup>11</sup> With the economic bonanza came the research producing, by all accounts, spectacular discoveries and unparallel inventions. A great number of Nobel Prize Laureates, for Science, have been Americans.

The most important scientific magazines in the world, such as, Science or Nature, just to mention a few, are written in English. The top Medical Journals (e.g.: JAMA, New England Journal of Medicine, Lancet, Chest, etc.), are all published in English.

Most of the scientific meetings, all over the world, are held in English. Any discovery or breaths taking news are usually broadcasted in this language before any other

tongue. World trade, banking, diplomacy and every aspect of human relations are conducted in English.

The English Language, now a days, is used as their native tongue for more than 500 million people. An estimate of another 500 million people uses it as their second language. This is the case for India, Pakistan, Philippines, etc. Only Chinese Language is spoken by more people.

Finally English was the first Language that was written outside Earth, on the Memorial Plaque laid down by Astronauts at the Moon surface on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1969: “Men from the Planet Earth have come in peace.....” reads the Plaque. Besides it has been the only language ever spoken, on the Moon surface, by a human being, when Neil Armstrong said his famous words: “The Eagle has landed.” Then, when he was stepping down on the ladder, he said: “This is a short step for man but a giant leap for mankind”.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, there is no question about why we ought to write in English. This Language has become, in our times, the “lingua franca” and we must be fluent on it, if we want to keep ourselves abreast in the latest Medical knowledge or in any discipline we may want to enroll.

Finally, this is a warmest invitation to the UNAB family to join us in our effort for a bilingual Medical Journal. This invitation is also extended to everyone in the medical

field, anxious to start writing articles in this beautiful Shakespearean Language.

### **Arnulfo Rodríguez Cornejo, MD, FCCP**

Former Clinical Professor of Medicine at SUNY (USA) and UIS (Colombia); Clinical Professor of Medicine at UNAB, Bucaramanga, Colombia.

E-mail: arnulfor@epm.multi.net.co

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## **Fé de Erratas**

En el artículo “Soluciones empleadas en la terapia de rehidratación oral: estado actual” publicado en MedUNAB 2003; 6(17):80-8, el nombre correcto del segundo autor es Myriam Rodríguez Moncada y no como aparece en el encabezado del artículo publicado.

**Comité Editorial**