The Implications of Name Variations Among Spanish Cardiologists

To the Editor:

A recent study published in the Revista Española de Cardiología showed important variation and lack of standardization in the names of Spanish cardiologists. This may have negative consequences for the diffusion of research results and the recognition of scientific authorship. Several reasons account for this variation in the way an author signs; these include all those agents involved in the process of publication and diffusion of scientific studies: authors, publishers, and bibliographic databases.

The lack of uniformity in the way an author signs may begin with the authors themselves, as they do not always use a unique name. For instance, they may sometimes use just 1 of their 2 surnames and at other times use both surnames. Additionally, the publishers and the editorial committees of journals may introduce their own policies concerning naming, such as abbreviating names by using just the initial of the first names of the authors. However, most journals use no standardized measure and respect the signatures as sent by the authors. Finally, the bibliographic databases contribute to this variation, as they usually have their own norms for indexation. The 2 databases IME (Índice Médico Español – Spanish Medical Index) and MEDLINE respect the Spanish language system of names and use the first surname as the entry and keep the second surname if given. The SCI (Science Citation Index) database, on the other hand, has traditionally failed to respect our system, and imposed Anglo-Saxon language structures. This database uses our second surname as the only surname indexable, and this surname, therefore, appears as the first element in an entry, with all other names and surnames being reduced to initials. Aware of this situation, some authors have

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name and Full Surnames of Some Authors</th>
<th>Variants Identified in Revista Española de Cardiología</th>
<th>Variants Identified in Science Citation Index</th>
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<td>Manuel Pablo Anguita Sánchez</td>
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<td>Zamorano-Gómez, JL</td>
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chosen to hyphenate their 2 surnames, in order for both
surnames to be indexed in the right order.

Concerning the study in question,7 the authors recovered
a total of 3619 different authors who had had publications
in the Revista Española de Cardiología between 2000
and 2005. These 3619 apparently different authors
decreased to 2927 after carrying out a normalization by
verifying the names of all these authors in the actual
journal. Thus, 692 (19.1%) were in fact variants of an
already considered author. Table 1 shows a few examples
of these variants.

The consequences arising from this phenomenon are
easy to see: failure to recover information according to
author in bibliographic searches; waste of time checking
out and including possible variants of the same authors;
false attributions of scientific authorship, both too many
and too few; and variations in scientific productivity and
calculation of references and in the indicators derived
from the references.3 Those performing bibliometric
studies attempt to overcome or minimize this type of
error by consulting different sources, including the index
of authors that appears at the end of each volume,
yearbook or directory of persons,4,5 as well as comparing
the first names of their authors, not just for questions of
authors adopt a unique name and that the journals use
normalization, but also in order to be able to undertake
studies according to sex, as per the recommendations of
the ETAN report.7 And finally, the databases should avoid
duplication of the effort being undertaken by the SCI which,
but not for questions of
normalization, but also in order to be able to undertake
studies according to sex, as per the recommendations of
the ETAN report.7 And finally, the databases should avoid
converting names to the Anglo-Saxon model and respect
the denominations of their native surnames. With respect
to this last recommendation, special mention must be
made of the effort being undertaken by the SCI which,
since 2007, has begun to include first names in their
bibliographic registries and respect the patronymic
surnames of the authors.

Rafael Aleixandre-Benavent,
Gregorio González-Alcaide,
Adolfo Alonso-Arroyo,
and Juan C. Valderrama-Zurián

Instituto de Historia de la Ciencia y Documentación
López Piñero, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones
Científicas-Universidad de Valencia, Facultad de
Medicina, Universidad de Valencia, Valencia, Spain

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Union: promoting excellence though mainstreaming gender equality.