

EDITORIAL

A name for *Biología Tropical*

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In the world of scientific publication, the names of authors and journals have a greater importance than is usually believed. For example, the authors whose names begin with the last letters of the alphabet have a smaller possibility of signing papers as first authors, possibly because some research teams place names in alphabetical order, and not in an order that reflects the real contribution of each author (Chambers *et al.* 2002). The titles of articles, *i.e.* their names, also affect significantly the probability that a paper will be read and cited (Atkin 2002).

Similarly, journal names affect their success and it has been reported that names in English increase journal citation. This finding lead to a name change in some classical journals, for example, the *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie*, a journal that is very well-known because it published the pioneering works of Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz. Since 1986 the *Zeitschrift* uses the English name *Ethology*.

With this type of information in mind, we recently consulted *Revista's* readers and authors if they would welcome a change in the journal's name. In 1999, a similar survey was made about how the journal should be cited, because it has a Spanish title and an English subtitle: 61% chose the traditional Spanish name and 39% said they would prefer to cite the English subtitle (Monge-Nájera 1999).

The journal's name was a key subject in 1952, when its creation was planned, and several names were considered, including *Acta de Biología Tropical* (Act of Tropical Biology)

and *Anales de Biología Tropical* (Annals of Tropical Biology). Nevertheless, the word *Revista* (journal) was selected, perhaps for aesthetic reasons. *Biología* (Biology) was chosen because it would not restrict unnecessarily the topics and because it was the common factor to all science branches that the journal includes, in agreement with the faculties that the University of Costa Rica, where the journal was created, had in 1953: Pharmacy, Dentistry, Sciences and Agronomy. *Tropical* was added because the reports to be published would deal on this important region (De Girolami 1988).

In 1994 (volume 42, issue 1-2) we added an English subtitle to the Spanish name: *The International Journal of Tropical Biology and Conservation*. Two years later the Editorial Board decided to eliminate the initial "The" and the shortened subtitle appeared for the first time in 1997, in vol. 44(3)/45(1).

The use of an English subtitle received favorable comments from the authors, mainly along the line that finally it would be easy, for librarians and biologists in countries where Spanish is not spoken, to know what the journal was about. The importance of this international approach is more easily understood when it is considered that less than 2 percent of scientists speak Spanish, that only about 0,5% of biological publications worldwide are in this language (Monge-Nájera and Nielsen in preparation) and that the printed journal circulates in more than 40 countries where Spanish is not spoken (for the electronic version, the number increases to about 200 countries and territories). An unexpected effect of adding the

English subtitle was an increase in the journal's citation index in the years following the addition.

Nevertheless, in the 2003 survey (Monge-Nájera *et al.* 2003), authors and readers again chose to maintain the traditional or the bilingual name (Fig. 1).

Several possible causes could explain the decision of conserving the traditional name. One is subjective: many of us have known the *Revista de Biología Tropical* since our student years and have become used to the name. Even English speaking authors usually refer to the journal as "the *Revista*".

Another possible cause is that authors and readers ignore the advantages that their papers receive when they appear in a journal with an English name, particularly the increase in number of times that it is cited and the immediate perception of the journal as an international publication. Overall, the support for the Spanish name fell significantly between surveys. For that reason, as we did in the 1999 editorial, this time we can only conclude that, for the moment, the journal will retain its bilingual name.

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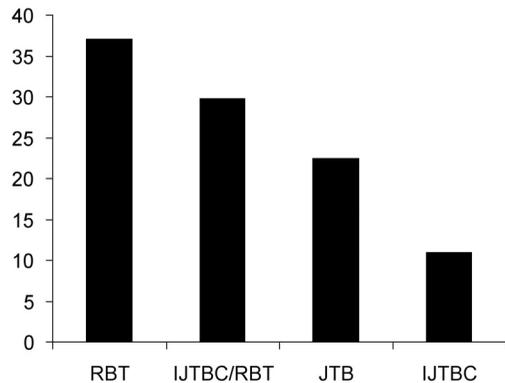


Fig. 1. Proportion (%) of survey answers in favor of using, as official journal name and for citation, the names *Revista de Biología Tropical* (RBT), *International Journal of Tropical Biology and Conservation/Revista de Biología Tropical* (IJTBC/RBT), *Journal of Tropical Biology* (JTB) and *International Journal of Tropical Biology and Conservation* (IJTBC) (sample: 152 biologists).

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