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## GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

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### **English as a Barrier**

Language is part of the culture and the identity of any people, and it is within and through the language that concepts and categories of realities are created in each group or community. The words that make up a language do not represent unbiased descriptions of objects or phenomenon. Therefore, language is characterized by its dynamism and adjustment to social and cultural changes.

But language can also be a barrier to real communication. Although information technology has connected different people from different regions of the world, the linguistic and cultural diversity becomes a complicating factor for scholarly relationships both within and outside the academy. At the International Council of Nurses, English was adopted as its official language from the very beginning. However, the issue of languages was always a very hot and emotional topic. By 1965, French and Spanish were added as working languages. Yet there were still many nurses representing countries where none of these languages were spoken.

Certainly, Spanish and Portuguese speakers have a similar heritage. Feeling that there are still so many unexplored areas on the history of nursing within the Iberian-American world, it was thought that an organization covering countries within this territorial area, united by a common language and a similar Latin heritage would help one another develop as stronger historical scholars. In Lisbon in 2009, a small group of nurses from Spain, Portugal, and Brazil created the Iberian-American Federation for the History of Nursing. In 2011, its bylaws were approved in Spain, and the first board was elected with representatives from Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile. The civil registration of the new entity is in process in Mexico. This organization will help stimulate and strengthen more studies among Latin American nurses.

But how can nurse historians from the Iberian-American Federation, who speak Spanish, and those from the American Association for the History of Nursing, who speak English, talk to each other and share rich research? Certainly, for future generation of nurses and historians, it may be easier as the

Internet and globalization strengthen the place of English as an international language. But this future has not happened yet. For now, both sides will need to be very patient and tolerant toward each other. Many researchers, when presenting their research in an English-language meeting, do feel anxious about their need to speak slowly, their potential to make errors, or that they will not be understood clearly because of their strong accent. We must reassure them. And those presenting their research in English in a Spanish-language meeting should remember that many in their audiences do read English well. This is a time you put text (not pictures) on the PowerPoint presentation.

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