

Culture and Trauma Brief

v1 n3 April 2006

Translation of English Materials to Spanish

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network promotes culturally competent trauma treatments and practices for children and adolescents exposed to trauma, and disseminates its findings through factsheets, culture and trauma briefs, and reports.

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Introduction

The purpose of any translation is to accurately capture the meaning of the original text, using language that is appropriate for, and easily understood by, the target population. In order to achieve this purpose the translation needs to aim at creating the cultural equivalent of the original text. Translations often focus on translating the text literally instead of focusing on capturing the connotative or implied meaning of the material. It is important to note that translations often fail to capture the connotative meaning of the original text, producing translations that are awkward and insensitive to the needs of the target audience. Most importantly, a literal translation fails to convey the intended information and may even confuse the participants, affecting the quality of care. In the case of data collection instruments, literal translations increase the possibility of obtaining inaccurate information that can lead to mis-diagnoses and false assumptions about the target population. The purpose of this brief is to offer some recommendations for translating materials from English to Spanish in order to develop Spanish resources that are culturally competent and capture valid and reliable information.

Diversity of Hispanic Groups and their Language Needs

Translation of materials from English to Spanish can be particularly challenging due to the diversity of Hispanic ethnic groups living in the United States. Hispanics, the largest minority in the United States, are a diverse population formed by people with different historical, economic, socio-political experiences and levels of acculturation to mainstream culture. Although all Hispanic populations share a common language, there exist variations of written and spoken Spanish among different Hispanic subgroups living in the United States. Some of these variations are *regional*, i.e., different words and phrases are used by different Spanish-speaking countries. However, there are also language variations influenced by the mixture of Spanish and English. The use of mixing Spanish and English phrases or words and anglicizing words, sometimes referred to as *Spanglish* or *Tex-Mex*, is common among Hispanics in the U.S. who, influenced by the language that surrounds them, have organically developed their own form of communication. Therefore, when translating materials from English to Spanish it is important that translations demonstrate sensitivity to all of the language needs of the targeted Hispanic population.

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Recommendations

These are some of the recommendations and practical guidelines to follow when translating materials from English into Spanish. These recommendations are not exhaustive, nor are they listed in any particular order. The intent of this list is to provide recommendations that account for the type of material to be translated, as well as the resources available to the organization.

Develop the attitude that the final draft will be continuously revised to meet the evolving cultural and linguistic needs of the target population.

- 1) **Know your target population's language needs.** Know their cultural values and their specific historical and cultural backgrounds, level of acculturation, and local language usage. Identify these characteristics for every Hispanic group represented in your target population.
- 2) **Select a qualified translator.** Hire a translator who has knowledge and experience in serving children and families who have experienced traumatic stress. It is preferable that the translator is a *Coordinate Bilingual* (learned languages in different cultures and at different times) rather than a *Compound Bilingual* (learned both languages at the same time) or a *Subordinate Bilingual* (interprets one language through dominant language). Coordinate Bilinguals will be able to more effectively convey the cultural meaning of the text, while a Compound Bilingual or Subordinate Bilingual may translate the text from the perspective of one culture.
- 3) **Obtain consumer feedback.** Test the translated text with members of the target population to see if the cultural meaning has been captured and to evaluate the level of comprehension. Collect feedback and make changes in collaboration with the translator to meet cultural needs and retain validity.
- 4) **Develop a Translation Advisory Committee (TAC).** Recruit members of your staff and/or volunteers with knowledge and experience related to the content of the text and who are representative of the target population in terms of language, culture and language proficiency. Include members of the major Hispanic groups represented in the U.S. (Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban). Ideally, the membership of the TAC should reflect every Hispanic group represented in the target population. The role of the TAC is to review the translated drafts, in collaboration with the translator, and make modifications before they are tested with the target population. If the materials under review are data collection instruments, the TAC should also provide recommendations for the training of staff in use of the materials, including necessary cultural modifications. The translator and TAC should also determine levels of proficiency required in using the instruments. Ideally, each staff member would tape an interview to be reviewed by the TAC.
- 5) **Utilize continuous Quality Improvement.** Integrate consumer and TAC feedback in order to continue to make revisions until the needs of the target population are met. Develop the attitude that the final draft will be continuously revised to meet the evolving cultural and linguistic needs of the target population. Schedule yearly revisions.

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Language mixture, or *Spanglish*, can be unpleasant for language purists, but it is part of the culture of many Hispanic subgroups and it is their language; their effective and only way of communication.

- 6) **Meet the needs of diverse Hispanic groups.** When the translated material will be used with a diverse Hispanic population, ensure that the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of the various ethnic groups are met by using all of the choices available for the same word. For example, if you use the phrase “driving a car” you may use *manejar un carro, coche, máquina o auto*. If the instrument is being used in an interview, the use of parentheses can be helpful since the interviewer can choose the correct word choice in the parentheses for that particular Hispanic group without having to repeat all the choices: *manejar un (carro, coche, auto, máquina)*.
- 7) **Train staff in the use of Tú and Usted.** Have different *Tú* and *Usted* versions of materials. *Usted* (thou) is often used with various Hispanic groups when addressing adults or persons in positions of authority. *Tú* (you) is often used with younger people or between trusted individuals who know each other well.
- 8) **Do not translate on-the-fly.** Do not use on-the-fly translations, i.e. using English materials and spontaneously translating them directly when interviewing the participant. These types of translations are culturally insensitive, may confuse the participant, and may lead to the collection of inaccurate data. Some Hispanic participants may acquiesce and say they have understood the information when asked, when in fact they may have not understood at all. Some Hispanic groups may believe it is impolite to say that they did not understand the information provided.
- 9) **Try to avoid one-way translations.** One-way translations are not very accurate since they depend entirely on the knowledge of one translator who will most likely rely only on her/his knowledge and on dictionaries to accomplish her/his work. If one way- translations are used, have drafts tested through the use of a translation committee and follow the procedures listed above (Recommendation #4).
- 10) **Use two-way translations.** Even though these translations are more costly, they will lead to a more accurate translation since it will go through several versions. A two-way translation is also called a *back-translation*. In a two-way translation, a translator takes the original version of the text in English and translates it into Spanish. Then, a second translator who has no contact with the first translator or knowledge of the original text in English translates the Spanish version back to English. The two English versions are then compared for accuracy, i.e. the original English text compared with the back-translated English text. This process gives plenty of feedback and illuminates those parts of the text that led to inaccurate translation or that posed translation challenges.

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For more details about the information provided in this briefing, contact Luis Flores at Luis@scan-inc.org.

- 11) **Language mixture should be honored.** Be sensitive to the use of code-switching or the use of Anglicized words. Code-switching is often used by Hispanics in the U.S. who often switch words or phrases from both languages. This becomes a way of life for many Hispanics in the U.S. The same is true for anglicized words. Some examples of anglicized words are when Hispanics use *poner para atrás* when meaning, to put something back. This is taken literally from the English, to put something back. In Spanish the correct way is to say *poner en su lugar* or, put something in its place. In conventional Spanish to put something back is awkward and illogical. *Poner para atrás* or *poner pa' trás* is considered incorrect Spanish but it is widely used by Hispanics in the U.S. There are many other anglicized words used by Mexican Americans from the border area such as *quitear* for quitting, *parkear* for parking, or *chutear* for shooting. Language mixture, or *Spanglish*, can be unpleasant for language purists, but it is part of the culture of many Hispanic subgroups and it is their language; their effective and only way of communication. Staff members should honor this cultural characteristic and should be proficient in understanding these variations in language and the implications for informing clients and obtaining accurate information.
- 12) **Use the Decentering Method.** This method is often seen as an extension of the double-translation method. *Decentering* assumes that the language of the original text (e.g. English) and the target language of the translation (e.g. Spanish) are both equally important. This method also assumes that the text developed in the original language is not considered finalized until the translation process to the target language is completed. In this process the instrument in the original language becomes a draft. As the translation process reveals problems with grammatical structures that result in awkward translations, or when concepts in the original language lack a verbal equivalent in the target language, modifications are suggested to the text in the original language.

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