

## Tips for Translating Materials

Translation can be defined as the act or process of rendering words or text from one language to another. Interpreters translate spoken language orally while *translators* translate written words. Successful translation of content represents an accurate and clear written document in another language that maintains and communicates the initial intent in a culturally appropriate manner. This is a challenging goal and involves more than asking someone, or using automated translation software to translate word for word. To see a pitfall in word-for-word translation, try the exercise below.

### Maximizing Quality Translations

- Begin with a *final*, well-vetted, plain language English text at an appropriate reading level for the audience
- Consider if the final material is appropriate for translation before investing time and money
  - Some languages are predominately oral rather than written
  - Do a sufficient number of your intended audience read and have reading skills in this language at the level of the translated material?
- Consider how the translated material will be used and distributed
- Consider budget and choosing a vendor (see resource #1)
- Use a certified translator when possible. A translator at minimum should:

#### Exercise

1. Go to Google Translate and type ask to translate.
2. Select English to Traditional Chinese
3. Type in “Cough into your elbow”; you will receive the following translation “肘部咳嗽”
4. Change to translate Traditional Chinese to English
5. Cut and paste your response “肘部咳嗽”.
6. See your back translation.

Play with Google translate by putting in common English phrases or sentences you might want to translate and convert to the language of your choice. Hit the translate back button. It is not difficult to find things that don't translate (some can be quite entertaining).

- Translate into their native language (e.g. a native speaking Somali speaker should translate from English to Somali). Generally, a native English speaker, especially one who does not share the culture, should not translate into the target language.
- Have a high level of language proficiency and analytical capabilities
- Have a deep cultural knowledge in both the source and target languages
- Understand any regional dialects or cultural overtones for the population of interest
- Have training and experience when translating technical material (e.g., the translator should have specific knowledge of medicine when translating medical materials)
- Provide clear instructions and background information to the translator.
  - Specify the design, format, and distribution (e.g. brochure, poster, magnet, social media, radio, exterior bus sign, taxi or rideshare)
  - Hint: the sign of a good translator is someone who analyzes the meaning of an entire message/sentence and asks questions before starting, and is not just translating words.
- Stress the importance of:
  - Translating the meaning (rather than word-for-word)
  - Culturally adjusting any content (e.g. using culturally appropriate foods, or community specific food pyramid, when portraying a food nutritional message)
- Have a quality assurance process, including one or more of the following:
  - Have the translated material reviewed by multiple proofreaders/reviewers. Reviewers should be fluent in the target language and have an understanding of the culture of the intended audience. Ideally, members of the intended audience community should review and provide feedback.
  - Consider back translation or two-way translation. This is a method by which the document is translated back into the original language (e.g., English) by someone unfamiliar with the original content to assess the integrity of the initial translation. This method can be helpful, but experience is necessary since the

back translation rarely will match and there is an important reconciliation process that needs to take place. For more information see resource #2, section 11-b.

- Have a final independent proofreader or editor review the *final* translation.
- Prior to release, ask another translator to carefully review proofread documents, especially when using non-Roman characters (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Russian), or right-to-left languages (e.g. Hebrew, Arabic), which may be corrupted or unintentionally alter the format during the transfer or print process.
- Solicit ongoing feedback from your target community and be open to revising the document as needed (e.g. using a community partner organization or a community advisory board)
- Pictures should be culturally appropriate, reflect the target community and be independently verified with community members that they convey the intended meaning
- Ask for input on layout and all images and graphics (e.g. symbols, shapes or colors that may have different meanings in different cultures that could unintentionally alter the meaning, or offend your intended audience).
- A translator should avoid translating idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, slang or jargon that are not used in the target community; should review meaning of the expressions to translate intended ideas accurately.

## Additional Resources

1. [Toolkit for written translation](#). Minnesota Department of Health.
2. [Guidelines, effective practices, maps, resources manual](#). King County Written Language Translation Process.
3. [Understanding and using the “Toolkit Guidelines for Culturally Appropriate Translation”](#). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
4. [Translation is not enough. Cultural adaptation of health communications materials](#). European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

5. [Translation toolkit.](#) Massachusetts Department of Health. The Office of Public Health Strategy and Communications (OPHSC).
6. [Language, Interpretation and Translation: A clarification and reference checklist in service of health literacy and cultural respect.](#) National Academy of Medicine.
7. [Developing, translating and reviewing Spanish materials-Isntap.](#) Recommended Standards for State and Local Agencies. North Carolina, DHHS, Division of Public Health.
8. [Medical Interpreting Standards of Practice.](#) International Medical Interpreters Association. (for industry but contains helpful tips)
9. [International Medical Interpreters Association Guide on Medical Translation.](#)