

Essentials for Medical Interpreters and Translators

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PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

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Essentials for Medical Interpreters

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Introduction

The “National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care” and the recently released “National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care,” establishes that *Medical interpreters must strive to continually further their knowledge and skills*. The ability to interpret accurately and completely is, to a large extent, dependent on how much background knowledge the interpreter has of the content and the context of the communication. In the field of health care interpreting, the areas of knowledge that are most salient include the medical context (e.g. the basic parts and functioning of the body and common disease syndromes and their respective treatments) and the socio-cultural context of the patient populations for whom the interpreter interprets. The more background knowledge the interpreter has, the more likely it is that the meaning of the messages will be fully understood and therefore, the more likely it is that the conversion will be faithful to the original message.

Latino immigrants add a unique flavor to the language of medicine. Communication with the patient and family members is essential to properly triage, assess, and diagnose medical conditions. A clear contextual understanding of the patient’s cultural medical expressions by national origin will complement the medical language.

A good translation is not just the reflection of original ideas into the target language, but the accurate expression of these ideas with refinement and style, conforming to the rules of composition of the recipient language. Unfortunately, an unbalanced emphasis has been given to the ability of rendering the text from one language to the other without considering the form of the second language. This bilingual workshop (English/Spanish) will cover both the language of medicine at the provider’s level and the people’s level for different Latin American countries with emphasis both on fidelity and form.

Learning Objectives

- Identify Mexican, Central American, Caribbean, and South American, and USA medical colloquialism related to the diagnosis, pathology, and treatment of disorders.
- Describe special usage of Latin American Spanish, such as semantic interpretations and euphemisms by country of origin.
- Distinguish between false and true cognates in general and medical applications of the Spanish language in the United States.
- Examine practical interpretation examples related to subject matter expertise and translation techniques.

Español

Colloquial Expressions

Colloquial expressions are words or phrases that are used by Hispanics in certain regions of Latin America, Spain, or the United States. They are also known as regional expressions or conversational speech.

- Breastfeeding = *Amamantar, Lactar*
 - Dar el Pecho (Casi Todo Latinoamérica)
 - Dar la Chiche (América Central)
- Baby Bottle = *Biberón*
 - Mamila (México)
 - Pacha (América Central)
 - Tetero (Venezuela, Colombia)
 - Bibí (Puerto Rico)
- Dizziness = *Mareos*
 - Bolencia (Honduras)
 - Vahídos (Guatemala)
- UTI = *Infección en las Vías Urinarias*
 - Infección en la Orina (Caribe)
 - Mal de Orín (El Salvador, Guatemala)
 - Chistata (Nicaragua)
- Heartburn = *Acidez Estomacal, Acedía*
 - Agruras (México)
 - Embotamiento (Guatemala)
 - Hervederas (Puerto Rico)
- Diarrhea = *Diarrea*
 - Asientos (Guatemala)
 - Churra (Caribe)
- Influenza = *Gripe*
 - Gripa (México)
 - Monga (Puerto Rico)
- Defecate = *Defecar, Excretar*
 - Ensuciar (Caribe)
 - Hacer del cuerpo o del baño (México)
 - Hacer popó o pupú (casi todo Centroamérica)
 - Ir al baño (casi todo Latinoamérica)
 - Pupusear (Nicaragua)

Semantic Interpretations

Semantic interpretations are words or phrases that are widely used in the Spanish-speaking world, but the meanings may change from place to place.

- Bicho = *Bug* (most Hispanic America)
- Cerebro = *Nape* (Central America)
- Chicha = *A drink* (Cuba, Panama, S. A.)
- Chingaste = *Coffee Grounds* (Nicaragua)
- Cintura = *Low Back* (Mexico, Central America)
- Coger = *To grab* (most Hispanic America)
- Constipación = *Chest Congestion* (Mexico); *Nasal Congestion* (Cuba)
- Fregar = *To bother, To tease* (Mexico, C.A.)
- Inflamación = *Swelling* (Mexico, C.A.)
- Pinche = *Stingy* (Central America)
- Pito = *Whistle* (most Hispanic America)

False Cognates

False cognates are words that are similar in their morphology but carry different meanings. These words serve as a common trap for the careless bilingual person.

General False Cognates

- admission ≠ admisión (= *ingreso*)
- advice ≠ aviso (= *consejo*)
- aggressive ≠ agresivo (= *audaz, dinámico*)
- application ≠ aplicación (= *solicitud*)
- assume ≠ asumir (= *suponer, presumir*)
- degree ≠ grado (= *título*)
- early ≠ temprano (= *precoz*)

- established ≠ establecido (= *definitivo*)
- faculty ≠ facultad (= *docente*)
- forma ≠ form (= *formulario*)
- gentle ≠ gentil (= *suave*)
- introduce ≠ introducir (= *presentar*)
- major ≠ mayor (= *principal*)
- presumptive ≠ presunto (= *provisional*)
- primary ≠ primario (= *principal*)
- try ≠ tratar (= *probar*)

Medical False Cognates

- aerobic ≠ aeróbico (= *aerobio*)
- aggressive ≠ agresivo (= *invasor, activo, intensivo, radical*)
- alert ≠ alerta (= *consciente, despierto*)
- bacterial ≠ *bacterial* (= *bacteriano*)
- breast pump ≠ bomba de pecho (= *sacaleches, tiraleche – México*)
- breath sounds ≠ sonidos respiratorios (= *ruidos respiratorios*)
- diagnosis ≠ *diagnosis* (= *diagnóstico*)
e.g. bedside diagnosis = *diagnóstico clínico*
- discharge ≠ descarga (= *de alta, secreción, flujo*)
- disorder ≠ desorden (= *trastorno*)
- heart murmur ≠ murmullo del corazón (= *soplo del corazón*)
- failure ≠ fallo (= *insuficiencia*)
e.g. kidney failure = *insuficiencia renal*
- insufficiency ≠ insuficiencia (= *carencia*)
e.g. mineral insufficiency = *carencia mineral*
- practice ≠ práctica (= *consultorio*)

- e.g. medical practice = *consultorio médico*
- resuscitation ≠ resucitación ≠ resurrección (= *reanimación*)
e.g. CPR = *RCP*
- referral ≠ *referido* (= *remisión, envío*)
e.g. referred to = *remitido a*
- tender ≠ *tierno* (= *sensible, dolorido, doloroso*)
e.g. tender abdomen = *abdomen doloroso*
- transfer ≠ *transferencia* (= *traslado*)
e.g. he was transferred = *lo trasladaron*

Idiosyncrasies

The influence of culture in language is very evident in the Spanish-speaking world. Sometimes Hispanics use euphemisms to reflect their deference and respect. Occasionally, hyperboles and even antonyms are used to refer to common terms.

- adiós =
- brutal = *outstanding* (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic)
- grande = *old age* (Mexico)
- hasta = *not until* (Mexico, Central America)
- hermoso = *fat* (Central America)
- poco = *many* (Central America, Colombia)
- prestar = *to borrow* (Central America)
- que se acabó = *much, great quantity* (Puerto Rico)
- traer = *to carry* (Central America)

Three Translation Treasures (or “Tribulations”)

Kardia vs. Cardia

Both medical translators and interpreters face a challenge when considering similar adjectives that refer to two different anatomical parts. The “heart” (*kardia* in Greek), naturally, is the center of the Cardiovascular System. However, there is a term that belongs to the Digestive System with almost the same spelling as the Greek name for heart. The “cardia” (*cardias* in Spanish) is the opening between the esophagus and the stomach. Since the “heart” and the “cardia” have the same Greek root, both terms, when used as adjectives, share similar (and sometimes) linguistic expressions. Consider the following examples:

- **cardialgia** (Sp. *cardialgia*)
 - localized pain in the region of the heart also known as heartburn
- **cardiodynia** (Sp. *cardiodinia*)
 - localized pain in the region of the heart also known as heart pain
- **cardiotomy**
 - an incision of the heart (Sp. *cardiotomía*)
 - an incision of the cardia (Sp. *cardiotomía gástrica*)
- **cardioplasty** (Sp. *esofagogastroplastia*)
 - surgical procedure to correct a defect in the cardiac sphincter of the esophagus
- **cardiospasm** (Sp. *cardioespasmo*)
 - failure of the cardiac sphincter to relax so that food can enter the stomach

Anyone for “Any”?

The English word “any” can be used as an adjective, a pronoun, or an adverb. This fact brings confusion to the untrained or inexperienced translator and interpreter. In Spanish the word “any” can be translated in one of the following ways, depending on the context (sometimes is completely omitted in Spanish): *alguien, algún, ningún, alguna, alguno, algo, cualquier, cualquiera, todo, un*. Consider the following specific uses:

any: the adjective

- Are there any questions? *¿Tiene alguna pregunta?*
- Call me if there are any changes? *Llámememe si hay algún/cualquier cambio.*
- Does she have any children? *¿Ella tiene hijos?*
- Let me know if you have any pain? *Avíseme si siente dolor.*
- If any doctor can help you, she can. *Si hay una doctora que la pueda ayudar, es ella.*
- Any amount could be dangerous. *Cualquier cantidad podría ser peligrosa.*
- Any of them can help you. *Cualquiera de ellos lo puede ayudar.*
- Take any brochure you like. *Llévese cualquier folleto.*
- Abstain from any greasy food. *Absténgase de toda comida grasosa.*
- I don't have any self-control. *No tengo ningún control propio.*
- I don't know any Dr. Smith. *Yo no conozco a ninguna Dra. Smith.*

any: the pronoun

- Is any of you familiar with the test? *¿Alguno de ustedes está familiarizado con la prueba?*
- Is there any medication left? *¿Queda algo de la medicina?*
- If any of the meat is contaminated... *Si hay carne contaminada...*
- I did not take any of those pills. *Yo no me tomé ninguna de esas píldoras.*

any: the adverb

- Do you feel any better now? *¿Se siente (algo) mejor ahora?*
- I don't live there any more. *Ya yo no vivo allá.*
- It doesn't seem to have affected you any. *No parece haberlo afectado nada.*

Transitive Passive Verbs

Transitive verbs are verbs that have subjects or objects that receive the action. They are either *active voice* or *passive voice*. *Transitive active* verbs are the verbs in sentences with a direct object. Example: The boy kicked the ball. The subject (the boy) is the doer and the direct object (the ball) is the receiver of the action. ***Transitive passive verbs*** have the subject receiving the action with the doer in a prepositional phrase or omitted in the sentence. Examples: The ball was kicked by the boy. The ball was kicked hard. The verb in the *transitive passive* voice always has *is, am, are, was, were, be, being, or been* as an auxiliary or helping verb.

The use of the transitive passive in Spanish is very seldom. Professional translators and interpreters must master the skill of switching from the transitive passive to the transitive active during the language conversion. *Transitive passive* sentences can be changed to *transitive active* sentences by making the doer in the sentence into the subject and restating the receiver of the action as a direct object. Consider the following example:

- **Example # 1**

The medication was ordered by the doctor. (*transitive passive*)

The doctor ordered the medication. (*transitive active*)

El doctor ordenó la medicina. (*preferred Spanish version*)

- **Example # 2**

The medication was given to the patient by the nurse. (*transitive passive*)

The nurse gave the medication to the patient. (*transitive active*)

La enfermera le dio la medicina al paciente. (*preferred Spanish version*)

If the doer of the action is not stated in the sentence, the Spanish translation should use the personal pronoun “se.” Consider the following example:

The medication was given to the patient. (*the doer is not stated*)

Al paciente se le dio la medicina. (*application of the personal pronoun “se”*)

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