

The translation process is poorly understood by those who purchase translations. A common assumption is that “good” translators are able to create the equivalent of any English text. Translators are expected to convert carefully planned health materials developed for an English audience into a different language and still preserve all of the intentions of the source document. But obtaining quality health materials in languages other than English is typically a struggle for health care organizations. An efficient method of scrutinizing the quality of health care translations has yet to be developed. This is also true for the development of evidence-based research that could help guide the work of translators. Current approaches for assessing the quality of translations have limited success and applicability. Researchers and practitioners agree that divergent definitions of quality and a lack of consensus hinder progress in this area. This project applies lessons learned from studying translation errors to the development and testing of a prototype Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) tool.

**Project Objective:** To test a prototype rating tool that will assess the quality of translated health care materials and produce recommendations about how to advance assessment for those that commission translations; specifically health care organizations. Testing will focus on three objectives:

- a. Construction of a rating tool which would produce consistent results across raters
- b. Determine required minimum qualifications for raters to consistently apply the tool
- c. Ensure applicability/usability across frequently spoken languages in the United States

Hablamos Juntos (We Speak Together), funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, helped bring national attention to a long neglected and growing challenge; language barriers in health care. The initiative shed light on this emerging field that developed in response to federal and state mandates and is often characterized by untested solutions. Developing useful Spanish materials was a primary objective for the demonstration sites. Hablamos Juntos II – Language Policy and Practice in Health Care - supports the dissemination of lessons learned from ten demonstrations and the continued development of practical tools to eliminate language barriers through non-English materials for all languages. Dr. Sonia Colina, Director of the Translation Certificate Program and Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of Arizona, heads this project.

Federal law requires health care organizations to translate “vital” documents<sup>1</sup> and to have “culturally and linguistically appropriate materials for limited English proficient patients.”<sup>2</sup> Frequently translated documents are those needed to perform administrative tasks, give patients instructions or help health care organizations comply with legal requirements. Samples of 87 translated documents were collected from health organizations in ten Hablamos Juntos demonstration sites to identify examples of well-translated materials. We found a wide disparity in both translation quality and the need for assessment methods. The sample studied had translation errors relating to features regarding the intended use of the text and with the nuances of the target language: poor grammar, incorrect spelling, and a high number of incorrect words and false cognates (word pairs that look similar but have different meanings). These resulted in problems with informational accuracy and revealed poor translation competency and poor mastery of the target language.

There is a dearth of tools to assess the quality of translations and a need for clear general standards. Practical tools are needed to help health organizations become more proficient in assuring quality health materials are produced for limited English speaking patient populations. The development of a prototype tool is guided by lessons learned from studying translation errors and a review of literature discussing approaches to assessing quality of translations. The prototype tool will combine elements of the current theories of quality assessments and the experience of translators of health materials. This project applies the TQA tool to assess the quality of materials translated into several languages using raters with different backgrounds and skills. The TQA tool testing, design and results will be reported and discussed with a panel of translation experts and health leaders. The goal is to produce recommendations that can advance assessment of translation quality for health care organizations specifically, and for the translation field in a broader sense.

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<sup>1</sup> 68 Federal Registry at 47319

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services–Office of Minority Health (2001) National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care: Final Report, March