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The Ins and Cuts of Language Translation and Interpretation of Program Resources

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Cover Page Footnote

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The Ins and Outs of Language Translation and Interpretation of Program Resources

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Abstract. In an increasingly diverse country, creating Extension resources available in a variety of languages and formats is important for supporting learning by Limited English Proficient audiences and extending these impacts throughout the entire community. Learn tips from educational professionals who have created print and electronic resources in ten different languages to better support a diversity of stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, 21.5% of the population speak a language other than English at home, and 8.2% speak English less than well (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Minnesota reflects this language diversity; the most common non-English languages spoken in Minnesota include Spanish, Cushite-Beja-Somali, and Hmong (Minnesota Compass, 2021). In fact, Minnesota is home to the country's largest populations of Somali-Americans, Hmong-Americans, and Karen-Americans and the country's second-largest population of Tibetan-Americans (IIM, 2017). The Latinx population has also substantially increased in Minnesota (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2018).

Growing cultural diversity in society emphasizes the need for Extension resources in languages other than English. Materials and topics perceived as important must be available and culturally relevant for distinct audiences (Wyman et al., 2011). If Extension overlooks stakeholder diversity, non-English speakers may view Extension programs as "inaccessible due to language and cultural barriers" (Waterman & Laramee, 2018). Creating accessible materials has a significant impact on non-English speakers' adoption of important safety procedures (Rajagopal et al., 2019; Rajagopal, 2013). While there has been considerable focus on the need for resources in other languages, there is a lack of detail about how to produce appropriately translated (written) and interpreted (spoken) materials.

Two programs in the University of Minnesota Extension Department of Agricultural and Natural Resources Systems have made efforts to create program materials in other languages. The first program is the Urban Pest Management program, which improves pest prevention and control specifications for household pests, particularly bed bugs and cockroaches. This program has created print and electronic resources in ten different languages (Figure 1). Shindelar and Kells (2017) provides more information about the outcomes of this work. The second program is the On-Farm GAPs Education program, which focuses on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), primarily for small- to medium-scale fruit and vegetable growers including many immigrant and minority farmers. This program has produced program resources in Hmong and Spanish (Figure 2). Based on these experiences, here are some steps and considerations for creating your own resources for audiences with limited English proficiency.

STEPS FOR TRANSLATING AND/OR INTERPRETING RESOURCES

STEP 1: BEFORE TRANSLATING, CONNECT WITH COMMUNITIES TO IDENTIFY THEIR NEEDS

Before you consider creating program materials in another language, start to develop ongoing relationships with the communities to best determine their needs. Determine the goals of the materials (such as behavior change or knowledge gain) and how they will be shared and used. Rather than hiring independent translators (or interpreters), it may be better to invest funds to hire people from the community who speak the language.

STEP 2: MAKE SURE THAT CREATING MATERIALS IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE IS THE BEST OPTION

Ask if creating materials in another language is the best option. Community leaders can help determine which materials would be most helpful in other languages and which resource formats would be most utilized. The answer might not be traditional outreach mechanisms (e.g., factsheets) but rather innovative materials like radio ads, short videos, or community events. For some content and languages, it may be better to create resources with more photos/images or voiceless videos. Remember, some communities rely more on spoken words than written words.

Don't just translate things for translation's sake or because it was committed in a grant project. Confirm a need for the materials in that format to ensure maximum accessibility and effectiveness.

STEP 3: PREPARE THE DOCUMENT OR PRESENTATION

Ensure that your resource is ready for translation/interpretation. A Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score (Kincaid et al., 1975) from 3rd – 6th grade improves accessibility, which is critical for subsequent translations. Simplify technical or regulatory language that may not translate well. Ensure that website platforms and other apps support alternative language fonts and formatting and avoid jokes or colloquial references that may not be understood in other cultural contexts.

STEP 4: WORK WITH A PROFESSIONAL

Work with established and credentialed firms. Translation/interpretation is a skill that requires training; simply speaking the language doesn't imply appropriate skills for translation or interpretation. Current online translation programs are very inaccurate.

To ensure accuracy, pay a second translator to back translate the work or verify all translations with community members as a part of the process. Some words do not exist in other languages, so translators/interpreters may need to work with community members to find the best way to convey the information. This process adds time for additional review and finalization but ensures that the translations make sense to stakeholders.

Be careful that you hire someone who is proficient in the written and verbal communication skills that fit the audience's needs. There can be many different dialects in a language and regional differences in vocabulary. Accents can also convey different educational levels or experiences. If the content is technical in nature, ensure that they (i.e., the translator or interpreter) are familiar with those terms or can provide a suitable description to convey the appropriate meaning. Often, community leadership can identify speakers who are proficient and well-regarded as translators and interpreters to the community.

Never assume that you can ask a colleague or community member to conduct the work on top of their other duties unless they are hired to do so.

CONSIDERATIONS SPECIFIC TO INTERPRETING AUDITORY RESOURCES

BEST PRACTICE FOR EVENT INTERPRETATION

Interpretation during live events can happen in one of two ways. Consecutive interpreting happens when the presenter speaks a few sentences at a time but pauses in between to enable the interpreter to repeat the presented material. Simultaneous interpretation occurs when the speaker and interpreter speak at the same time (Abaraca & Allen, 2019). Consecutive interpretation may double event time, so plan accordingly. Simultaneous interpretation with headsets is preferable, since it doesn't take any longer and allows the audiences to listen in their preferred language. However, presentations exceeding 30 minutes may require more than one interpreter, as real-time translation can be taxing.

Translating and Interpreting Program Resources

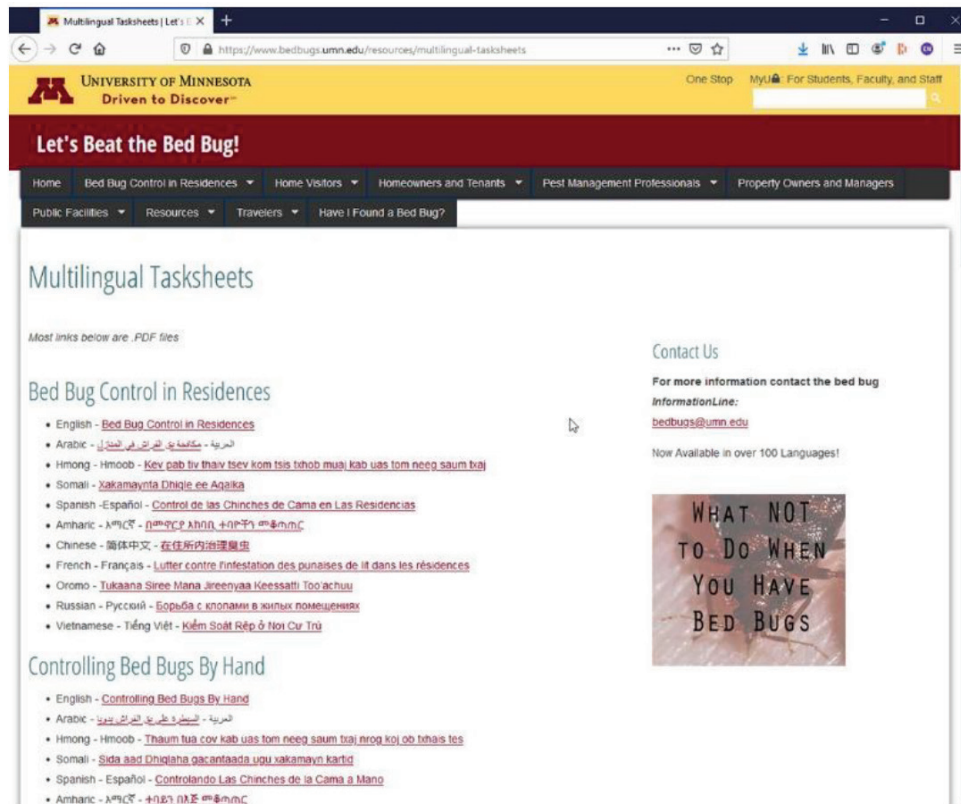


Figure 1. Professionally translated resources in 10 languages made available for distribution by public health personnel and professional home visitors.

Provide the interpreter with the presentation—or a list of key vocabulary terms—in advance so they can pre-determine how they will interpret these words. Speak slowly during the presentation and occasionally check your pace with the interpreters. Offer interpretations during webinars on a secondary audio channel. The online meeting platform Zoom[®] has an interpretation channel that allows users to choose the breakout room with their preferred language. They will only hear the presentation in that language. This technique works best for simultaneous interpretation.

VIDEO PRODUCTION AND SECONDARY LANGUAGES

Have the translator work with the videographer if you plan to replace the original language (i.e., dub) or place the new language on a secondary audio channel. It can take a lot longer to say the same things in another language, so it's important to make sure that the audio and video are synchronized.

Avoid close-ups of people speaking in English if you intend to use secondary audio tracks. Instead, pan out and use more generalized activities, actions, diagrams, or images to convey meaning.

Ensure relevant representation, which may mean partnering with a community organization or hiring community members to obtain necessary video clips.

CONCLUSION

Providing Extension resources in other languages for Limited English Proficient audiences can create access for underrepresented populations, which helps more stakeholders and enables Extension to better fulfill its mission.

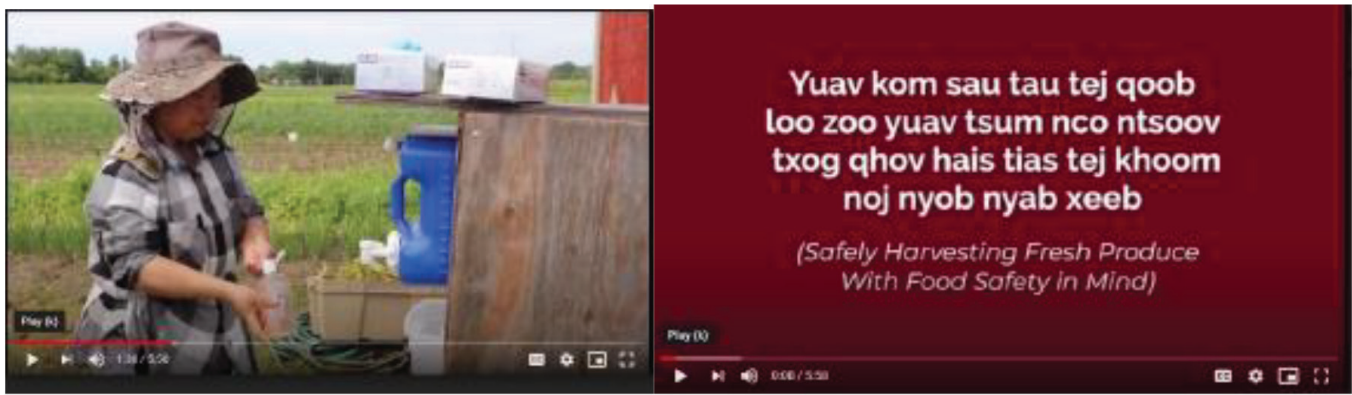


Figure 2. Example of on-farm food safety video in Hmong. Full video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZ_3IQsZnpk&list=PLcXxBuLJhm409Mmej-y8bRzPLbdYKea99&index=4. This video has 106 online views at the time of writing this article, but the actual number of views is higher since the videos have been used for in-person group meetings.

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