

## **Barriers to translating information in a multilingual and multicultural workforce**

Susan Feldmann (NIOSH)

Anne Hamilton (NIOSH)

More than 23 million people of Hispanic origin make up the U.S. workforce, and this number is expected to increase 36% by the year 2010 (BLS 2001). Many Hispanics in the workforce are newly arrived immigrants and speak Spanish as a primary language. Federal agencies are required to ensure that their programs and activities are accessible to “limited English proficiency” persons. For these reasons, the Spanish-speaking audience was the first that NIOSH took into account when we began translating documents. In December 2001, the NIOSH Spanish Web site (*NIOSH en EspaZol*) was launched.

Although NIOSH documents were not originally written with the intent of having them translated, we found that the documents that had been well edited and “pared down” were much easier to translate than documents that had not been edited. In addition to translating documents into Spanish, NIOSH staff have occasionally translated correspondence into other languages such as Italian, German, and French. Many principles of good editing and writing easy-to-read material in English overlap with principles for preparing documents for translation into other languages.

This presentation focuses on basic principles that we discovered for facilitating translations:

**(1) stress simplicity of structure, clarity, and good grammar:** For example, keep verbs close to corresponding subjects; put phrases as close as possible to nouns they modify, void long “string” noun modifiers, break up long sentences whenever possible, and use consistent terminology throughout the document.

**(2) avoid metaphors, jargon, etc:** This includes culturally specific allusions references, and “empty” words that do not enhance the meaning of a sentence.

**(3) emphasize the information most critical to the audience:** A writer should not think only of what he or she wants to say, but what he or she want the reader to understand.

In addition to having documents that are as clear and concise as possible in English, we learned other lessons that made our translation project easier. NIOSH began with few resources, so we first translated the most important information for our audience: the “About NIOSH” page and the page describing our Health Hazard Evaluation and 1-800 number telephone services. Since occupational safety and health information is limited, and even more limited in Spanish, we provided links to occupational safety information in Spanish from other organizations. To address the problem of the many acronyms used in government, we translated the full name of institutes or programs and then continued to use the acronym based on the English word. By doing this we avoid having to create a new acronym for each translated language; also, many non-English speakers are already familiar with the English acronyms we used.

Having subject matter experts review the content of the document in the original language is

extremely important. This way, the translator can concentrate on the language rather than the content of the document. Even though many of our documents are translated on contract by native speakers, the quality is reviewed by other native speakers. When documents are translated by nonnative speakers, it is even more important to have documents reviewed and corrected by native speakers. Nonnative speakers, however, can improve their translation abilities by reading material written in the target language and by familiarizing themselves as much as possible with concerns of the intended audience through community activities.

Having a well written, concise document in English saves time and money during translation. “An effective target language document is largely the result of an effective source language document.”

- How to Train Occupational Physicians and General Practitioners to Cooperate at Specific Diseases. *Peter Buijs, MD, MOccH, PhD*, Netherlands. Coauthor: *André Weel, MD, MOccH, PhD*
- Effectiveness of Peer Training for Prevention and Management of Housestaff Bloodborne Pathogen Exposures. *Jonathan Lieske, MD, MPH*, USA. Coauthors: *Robin Wilkening, MD, MPH; Robyn Gershon, DrPH, MHS; Jill Guidera, RN; Clifford Mitchell, MD, MS, MPH*
- An Interactive Training Model and Quality Assurance in a School of Occupational Medicine. *Giorgio Assennato, MD, MPH, ScD*, Italy. Coauthors: *A. Lo Izzo; V. Corrado; L. Bisceglia*

## **Health Solutions in Occupational Health**

### ***Calhoun Room***

#### ***Cabana Level, South***

Moderator: *Michael Silverstein, MD, USA*

- Occupational Safety and Health Regulations in Plain Language. *Michael Silverstein, MD, USA*. Coauthor: *Gail Hughes*
- Work Improvement in Small Enterprises (WISE). *Jose Maria Batino, MBA*, Philippines. Coauthors: *Tsuyoshi Kawakami; Toru Itani*
- Implementation of Health and Safety IT Solutions. *Jeannie K. Hanna, RN, MSN, COHN-S*, USA. Coauthor: *Karin S. Frederick, RN, MBA, COHN-S*
- The Water Supply Management Program. *Thomas C. Timmes, CPT*, USA. Coauthors: *T.E. Richards, PE; J.A. Valcik, PE; K.K. Phull, PE, PhD*

## **Communicating Occupational Safety and Health to Spanish Speaking Workers and their Employers**

### ***Lincoln Room***

#### ***Cabana Level, North***

Moderator: *Marie Haring Sweeney, PhD, USA*

- Communicating the Safety and Health Message to a Multilingual and Multicultural Workforce. *Marie Haring Sweeney, PhD, USA*
- Barriers to Translating Information in a Multilingual and Multicultural Workforce. *Susan Feldmann, BA, USA*. Coauthor: *Anne C. Hamilton*
- Educational Materials for Spanish-Speaking Workers: Getting it "Right." *Marianne P. Brown, MPH, USA*
- Occupational Safety and Health for Spanish Speaking Workers: Training Development and Evaluation. *Suzanne Teran, MPH, USA*
- OSHA's Hispanic Outreach Program. *Bonnie Friedman, BA, USA*

***Note: This session continues to 3:45 pm***

**October 28-30, 2002 • Baltimore, Maryland, USA**

**Best Practices  
in Occupational  
Safety and Health,  
Education,  
Training, and  
Communication:  
Ideas That  
Sizzle**

**6th International Conference  
Scientific Committee on Education and Training in  
Occupational Health, ICOH  
in cooperation with  
The International Communication Network, ICOH**



**NIOSH**