

Arabic Translations in Spain

Elena Jaime Jimenéz

Arabic<>Spanish translation and interpretation in Spain occurs in a similar context to English<>Spanish translation and interpretation in the USA. Thus, just as English<>Spanish translation is linked to immigration into the United States, Spanish<>Arabic translation in Spain is linked to immigration into Spain. Whereas most immigrants in the USA come from Latin America (mainly Mexico), **Moroccans** represent the largest percentage of immigrants in Spain.

Most of the Spanish<>Arabic translation and interpretation that takes place in Spain is legal in nature: interpretation for court, police stations and in the headquarters of the **Spanish Civil Guard** (military-status police force). They typically involve illegal or legal immigrants from Morocco. Interpretation is commonly needed for public services such as hospitals, schools, social services, and centers for illegal underage immigrants.

Written translations involve documents such as birth and marriage certificates or certificates of non-impediment (a type of certificate issued by a city office stating that there is no impediment to a person receiving a marriage license.) In order to become a certified translator (in Spain, also called a "sworn translator") translators must pass rigorous public exams given by the **Spanish Foreign Ministry** (similar to the U.S. Department of State). A certified translator is thus credentialed by the Foreign Ministry and the official seal so states.

However, Arabic interpreting and translating still face challenges in Spain. Arabic interpreting, for example, hasn't fully developed yet as a profession: not enough research has been undertaken in the field, nor has it received institutional or social recognition and prestige. Moreover, no specific qualification is required to interpret for public services. Therefore, volunteering is common, as well as temporary work for public services and non-governmental organizations. It is also believed that any bilingual person who speaks two languages can do the job, a misconception linked to the aforementioned lack of professional development, lack of institutional and social recognition, as well as low salaries.

One of the greatest problems facing Arabic translators in Spain is the transcription of Arabic names into Spanish. This issue may appear a minor one but is significant since it causes serious difficulties and misunderstandings. There is no unified system of transcription, and Moroccan immigrants often face legal obstacles because their names appear in different forms in different legal documents.

As a result of French colonization, Moroccans typically follow the French system when it comes to transcribing their names into the Roman alphabet. Consequently, the French system is increasingly used in Spain. The main point translators must consider is homogeneity, whatever transcription system is used. Small things can be done to prevent subsequent complications, such as asking to see the person's official ID, so that the name can be transcribed exactly as it appears on that or a similar document.

Challenges in interpreting arise from the diglossia in the Arabic-speaking world in general and Morocco in particular. **Modern standard Arabic**, learned at school, is used in formal writing and television (this is also the Arabic that students learn), but the spoken dialects are different. Particularly, Moroccan Arabic is very distinct from standard Arabic, since it has also been influenced by French and Berber, the language of the native Moroccans from before the Arabic-Islamic conquest. Thus, the interpreter faces a dilemma. Court is a formal setting, and one would think that the high linguistic register required by the situation should be used in order to be faithful and accurate. However, uneducated Moroccans don't necessarily understand standard Arabic (illiteracy rates among immigrants must be taken into account) and not all educated Moroccans have a good command of it. What's more, many will speak **Berber**. Some Berbers for political and ideological reasons don't want to speak Arabic at all, so in these cases, a Berber interpreter is required.

Given the current immigration patterns in Spain, there is a growing demand for Arabic interpretation and translation. Fortunately, academic interest in these fields is increasing, so we are beginning to see more qualified Arabic translators and interpreters.

The global war against terrorism has also had an important influence on Arabic translation and interpretation. The **March 11, 2004** terrorist attack in a Madrid train station was a milestone. During the police investigations and prosecutions which followed, many problems with Arabic translation were unveiled. Security forces didn't have enough translators. Phone conversations by suspects speaking in Moroccan dialect couldn't even be translated because the police didn't have any translator qualified to do so. Among prisoners accused of terrorism, some recorded conversations were held in various Arabic dialects, and no one could be found who was fully prepared to accurately translate these different dialects.

There was an urgent necessity for qualified translators and interpreters then, and certainly the need and demand for qualified Spanish < > Arabic translators and interpreters in Spain continues to be very real. Current events and immigration trends have sharpened the intensity of this need while underlining the importance of translator and interpreter training and qualifications. Spain's response has been much the same as that of the United States: to raise awareness of both the demand and the need for qualified interpreters.

In response to the attack of March 11, 2004 the **Spanish Ministry of the Interior** increased the number of staff Arabic translators and interpreters. As a result, by the end of 2004, thirty-six new Arabic translators were hired. Shortly afterward, another thirty new positions were created. By 2005, seventy new translators were working for organizations whose goal is to deal with terrorist affairs under the aegis of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior. Some of those translators work in prisons, which are governed by the Ministry of the Interior. Others work for the police and Civil Guard, also branches of the Ministry of the Interior.

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Responding to Subpoenas

Carla Mathers

[This article, slightly modified in this version, was originally written for ASL interpreters. While certain points particular to the deaf community are touched upon, generally the information content is applicable to interpreters of any language.]

Introduction

A number of issues face the interpreter who receives a subpoena to testify in court about a prior interpreted assignment. Foremost, there is the concern for confidentiality of interpreting assignments, and the knowledge that the interpreter who is asked to divulge assignment-related information is being commanded to breach this important ethical tenet. Most interpreters are not seasoned witnesses and the thought of testifying in any case is disconcerting. The following discussion should allay some of the concerns and provide a roadmap for an interpreter who receives a subpoena.

Why interpreters are subpoenaed

Interpreters who receive subpoenas to testify need to keep in mind a number of important legal principles in responding to the subpoena. First, attorneys have valid evidentiary reasons for calling the interpreter to testify about an assignment. It is important to understand the basis for these reasons. Attorneys are required to call interpreters to testify as a preliminary foundational step to call to the stand the other participants in the conversation. In order for any witness (except an expert witness) to testify at trial, the witness must have personal knowledge of the events about which they will testify. It would not be fair to the parties to let witnesses speculate about what might have happened or about what they were told had happened without actually having seen and witnessed the event itself.

In an interpreted situation, neither the deaf nor the non-deaf party has personal knowledge of what the other person said except as repeated through the interpreter. Courts have generally solved this dilemma by having interpreters testify about their skills, education, and qualifications. The interpreter must be able to testify that he or she interpreted the assignment accurately. Once that is done, the other witnesses can testify about what happened at the interpreted event.

For example, suppose a deaf person goes to a financial planner for advice. The deaf person later sues the financial planner for giving bad advice. In order for each of them to testify at trial, the interpreter must first be called to lay the foundation for the interpretation, or in other words, to authenticate it. The interpreter must state that s/he is qualified to interpret and interpreted accurately between the financial planner and the deaf client. Following this step, the court assumes that the deaf person and the financial planner actually accurately received each other's communication, then the deaf person can testify to one side of the story and the financial planner can testify to the other. In that setting, the concern that the interpreter is conveying content-related information learned in confidence is reduced.

The personal knowledge rule is a staple of evidentiary law and many times attorneys will list every person present at a situation as a potential witness in order to protect themselves and make sure that all the evidence comes in at trial. Interpreters who are served with a subpoena should call the attorney and ask why they have been subpoenaed. If the interpreter's testimony is simply to authenticate, then the interpreter can prepare for the proceeding knowing that the scope of the examination will be his or her qualifications, experience, and skill.

What to do when subpoenaed

It is natural for the interpreter to be concerned about confidentiality since the ability to maintain client confidences is the bridge to the community we serve. Trust plays a vital part in the deaf community's willingness to permit a third party to be present in what can be an extremely private matter, and an interpreter should not violate that trust. At the same time, interpreters must be circumspect in recognizing the legal system's need for the interpreter to testify to a prior interpreted communication.

Ensure that the subpoena is valid

The **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf** (RID) and the **National Association of the Deaf** (NAD) are developing ethical guidelines to protect an interpreter from a grievance based upon a breach of confidentiality as long as the interpreter is complying with a valid subpoena or other statutory reporting requirement, such as state abuse and neglect statutes. Interpreters who volunteer or seek out opportunities to testify are acting outside the scope of their ethical role. Interpreters should only testify if and when summoned pursuant to valid court process.

Because this is an important requirement, the interpreter must first ensure that the subpoena was validly issued. Each jurisdiction has complicated rules regarding the process for delivering subpoenas. For example, in civil cases in the District of Columbia, a subpoena may be served by any person who is not a party and is of age. Service of a subpoena upon a person named therein shall be made by delivering a copy thereof to such person and, if the person's attendance is commanded, by tendering to that person the fees for one day's attendance and the mileage allowed by law. "When the subpoena is issued on behalf of the United States or the District of Columbia or an officer or agency thereof, fees and mileage need not be tendered." [Superior Court Rules of Civil Procedure 45 (2001 Ed.)].

There are usually other rules governing the requirements of a valid subpoena. Most jurisdictions also provide a mechanism for the person subpoenaed to lodge an objection, called a *motion to quash*. The motion can usually be filed for a number of reasons, not only that the subpoena was invalidly served. If the process is not followed precisely, the interpreter can object that he or she was not served properly and does not have to comply. If there is any question about the validity of a subpoena, it is wise to discuss the requirements of the particular jurisdiction with a local litigation attorney. In any event, the interpreter should insist upon proper service in order to protect herself from later ethical challenge that she complied with an invalid subpoena.

Preparing to testify

Once satisfied that the subpoena is valid, there are several steps the interpreter can take to prepare to testify. First the interpreter should call the attorney to determine if the testimony is needed in order to authenticate, or if the attorney seeks the testimony for some other reason.

Sometimes the attorney actually needs an expert witness instead of an authenticating witness. For example, if the attorney wants the interpreter to testify that the deaf person either did or did not understand the event, this may be difficult for the interpreter to do. The interpreter may not feel comfortable in giving what is essentially an expert opinion on cognition and comprehensibility. It is appropriate to state that the interpreter is not qualified to give that kind of an opinion.

Sometimes, particularly in criminal cases, the attorney wants the interpreter to give an opinion on someone else's prior interpretation. Unless the interpreter is qualified to give a linguistic opinion, this request is inappropriate. The interpreter should discuss what a linguistic opinion involves and suggest properly qualified linguists for the attorney to contact. Finally, sometimes the interpreter is subpoenaed because the court or the parties think that is the proper way to hire an interpreter and the order compels the interpreter to actually interpret the legal proceeding. In these cases, the interpreter should be prepared to educate the attorneys that the proper method for obtaining interpreting services is through some kind of administrative contract. In any event, in order to decide on the best course of action, the interpreter must call the issuing party to determine the purpose for the subpoena. If the interpreter is issued a valid subpoena for an improper purpose, the interpreter should either contact a local attorney to discuss the matter, or comply with the subpoena and state the objections from the stand.

Practical steps for preparation

If the attorney does want the testimony in order to authenticate the interpretation, then the interpreter should review his or her calendar of the assignment and any notes taken during the assignment to refresh his or her recollection about the events. The subpoena may also require that the interpreter bring any such notes or records to court. If the subpoena does not require production of notes or records, it is best to leave them at home and rely upon memory when testifying, particularly if there are extraneous matters in the notes not solely related to the specific assignment. Because the examination will focus on the interpreter's experience, education and skills, it is a good idea to print out and bring copies of a recent résumé. Each party and the court should be provided with a copy. It may be helpful as well to bring copies of the interpreter's continuing education transcripts documenting recent education as well. The interpreter should review basic information about the RID or NAD testing system in order to explain certification and the process by which it was obtained. It is also a good idea to review the mission statement of the RID and NAD in order to be able to explain, if asked, the purpose of the national organizations. Interpreters should know a working definition of the process of interpretation and transliteration and be prepared to explain it in a manner that a lay person can easily understand. In other words, avoid jargon, acronyms and other in-group terminology. Finally, the interpreter can and should obtain copies of any other relevant literature, practice papers, or brochures from the RID that may have relevance in the particular matter.

If the attorney calling the interpreter represents the deaf person, the interpreter may want to prepare a short stipulation for the deaf person to sign indicating that s/he agrees to the fact that the interpreter is going to present testimony. The document is not legally binding. In other words, if the deaf person refused to sign, the interpreter would still be required to testify. However, for peace of mind, a signed statement from the deaf person indicating that they consented to the Interpreter as a witness is a useful tool to have in the file should there be later complications. If the deaf person is adverse to the party issuing the subpoena, it may be more difficult to obtain consent. In fact, it may cause more trouble than it is worth by implying that the interpreter should not be testifying at all. In any event, the interpreter should use his or her professional discretion in exercising this option.

It goes without saying that the interpreter should dress professionally and arrive prior to the time on the subpoena. Generally witnesses are required to remain outside of the courtroom after the case is called and before they take the stand. Once called, the interpreter will take an oath to testify truthfully. It is important to remain calm. When a question is asked, take a moment to consider what the question is asking, and answer only that question. Do not rush; think about the question. Think about the answer, then state it clearly and audibly. What may seem like a very long time to a nervous witness is most likely a fleeting moment to everyone else. Do not volunteer information, if the examiner wants elaboration on a response, they will ask for it.

Though it can be a nerve-wracking experience to testify, it is also, without question, a learning experience. Treat it that way. Courts have such little experience with sign language interpreters that generally they will be learning about the profession and the field through the interpreter's testimony. It will be an opportunity to create a positive learning experience with interpreters for the court. Keep in mind that the testimony may well be setting precedence for their expectations of all sign language interpreters. That is an obligation to take seriously.

Conclusion

Once the interpreter understands the reasons why a subpoena might be issued, anxiety will be lessened and it becomes an easier task to prepare appropriately. Understanding that the bond with the deaf community requires interpreters to guard confidentiality assiduously, the interpreter can first set about to determine the purpose for the subpoena. If the subpoena is valid, there are several ways for the interpreter to prepare for the testimony. Being prepared to testify means the interpreter will have reviewed the assignment, his or her credentials, and the professional aspects of the sign language interpreting field which may be subject to examination. Though it is natural, at first, to be concerned about receiving a subpoena to testify, as a practitioner, the interpreter should prepare for the eventuality and face it professionally as a part of the practice of interpreting.

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Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Alexandria, VA.

Message from the Outgoing Chair

Dear Colleagues,

First, I'd like to thank you for returning me to the board for a final two-year term of office. Big (positive) changes are occurring in my personal life – including a move from New Hampshire to Florida - consuming much of my time, which make me need to cut back a bit. From now on I will be pleased to serve as advisor to my able colleague, Rob Cruz, who has assumed the position of Chair of the NAJIT Board of Directors. I know that NAJIT will continue to make great strides under his leadership.

In the past two years, NAJIT has leapt forward with purpose, mainly due to the institution of our annual strategic planning meetings. While in the past we tended to react to situations, we have now become proactive. We have developed a Case Statement, which sets out our purpose, our overarching goals and the steps we plan to take to achieve them. This document changes on a yearly basis, as some goals are met and new ones are identified.

We have “gone electronic” for many things, both furthering our desire to be a “green” organization and to be fiscally responsible with the association’s funds. By eliminating as much paper as possible, we have saved approximately \$16,000 this year, which goes a long way toward keeping dues and conference fees low. We have seen an increase in membership; we’ve produced an educational module for attorneys working with interpreters—soon to be modified for other stakeholders in the judiciary; we’ve sent letters of support—or dismay—to newspapers around the country regarding interpreter issues; and we had a dynamite conference in Long Beach, which many participants felt was the best they had attended in terms of educational offerings.

I credit these achievements to the dedication and hard work of many individuals. Throughout my tenure as Chair, I’ve been very fortunate to have the support of an outstanding group of people: my fellow board members, our staff at headquarters, and committee chairs together with their hardworking committee members, not to mention past leaders who have been generous with their support and advice.

NAJIT has been a major part of my life since I joined in 1999. It has provided a support group of colleagues across the country to turn to for consultation, conversation, and occasional consolation. I can’t begin to tell you how much this has meant, and will continue to mean, to me. When you become part of the leadership and have the backing of a well-established and respected national organization, you gain instant credibility with courts, attorneys and court administrators.

Finally, I want to offer special thanks to my two favorite Nancys. To Nancy Zarenda, outgoing board member, for her friendship and insightful suggestions and contributions. And to Nancy Festinger, who has given extraordinary service to NAJIT as editor of *Proteus* for the past fifteen years. She is stepping down from that position, and I will be taking it on, beginning with the next issue. So although this is my last message to you as Chair, you’ll be hearing from me in my new role, suggesting, cajoling or even strong-arming you to submit articles and items of interest. I will always do my best to be available to you for consultation, conversation, and even consolation if necessary.

I can’t urge you strongly enough to take advantage of all that NAJIT has to offer by being an active participant in our activities. With gratitude for providing me the opportunity to serve you and our profession,

Rosemary Dann,
Outgoing Chair, Board of Directors



Outgoing Chair, Rosemary Dann, left presents a plaque to retiring board member Nancy Zarenda.

Message from the Incoming Chair

Dear Colleagues,



Writing to you as the newly elected NAJIT Chair is the greatest honor of my professional life. I am humbled by the opportunity to serve you and by the confidence bestowed on me by my fellow directors. A special note of gratitude goes to Rosemary Dann, our outgoing Chair, whose selfless friendship and steadfast support mean more than words can say.

I was fortunate to see many of you at our annual conference. It's always good to be around old friends and to make new ones. Our conference committee and headquarters outdid themselves once again to make the Long Beach conference a resounding success. We are already hard at work planning the 2012 conference in Boston to be even another notch higher!

I'm also extremely fortunate to be leading an organization whose relevance has increased markedly over time. In the last year alone, we have been important partners in the American Bar Association's *Laying the Path Project*, created to establish standards of practice for the use of interpreters in state courts. These standards are to be distributed by the local ABA chapters and are aimed at educating all stakeholders at the local level. Similarly, our bench and bar committee recently completed a project on judiciary interpreting for use in direct education of judges. These "talking points" include hyperlinks to important cases and documents, and will be invaluable to national spokespersons and practitioners as an essential primer and educational tool. The bench and bar committee has also begun to develop modular, automated presentations for members of the judiciary. These presentations will soon be converted into fully-narrated videos available to anyone by download. The first presentation, for attorneys, is complete and soon will be posted on our website along with the "talking

points." The automated version and video should be available in late summer, so keep your eyes on *Cybernews* and the website for details.

NAJIT has also begun a proactive policy in relation to civil rights lawsuits filed on behalf of LEP litigants denied free interpreter services. In some of these cases, we have provided material assistance in the way of expert witnesses and reports to support the plaintiff's position. This will continue to be our policy. We will also take an increasingly more visible position in the national conversation about potential changes to immigration policy and how enforcement will affect the use of interpreters, including a possible resulting shortage.

NAJIT has begun to focus more directly on our legislative agenda. An organization that strives for and promotes strict adherence to Title VI requirements—providing interpreter services, free of charge—has an obligation to join and at times lead the discussion of budgetary considerations at the state and federal levels. Whereas recognition and acceptance of the need for interpretation was the first major hurdle—one by no means cleared—funding will be the next. If we do not help address this challenge, we run the risk of squandering hard-fought gains.

Although NAJIT will always be the driving force behind the continued development and standardization of judiciary interpreting, we must also recognize that the interpreting landscape is changing. An organization that is inflexible in times of change will provide little benefit to members or the profession as a whole. When looking at the different kinds of interpreting (community, conference, judiciary, escort, interpreting for the deaf, etc.), we will be better served to focus on similarities among the disciplines and how commonalities unite us. We should not dismiss any interpretation process because of the differences that exist in venue or technique. Those differences will become more accepted as they are better understood and delineated. The best way to achieve such understanding is by fostering collaboration. To that end, NAJIT, through the membership and conference committees, began a concerted outreach effort to the ASL community of legal interpreters and stakeholders. Through the hard work of many, this conference saw several ASL sessions; and our collaboration and mutual participation in events will be even more robust in the coming year.

Along these lines, the Board of Directors has approved the creation of a health-care interpreting committee as well as a community interpreting committee. Our goal is to provide every benefit that an established organization can give to these two groups of interpreters. We have identified training as a top priority and will begin working with SSTI and some of our organizational members to that end. Time and space are being allocated for sessions directed at these two groups during our 2012 Boston conference.

While funding may be the next obstacle, technology is the next frontier. Advances in technology will begin to enable NAJIT to communicate more efficiently and effectively. Our website has undergone a major transformation and this summer we will be implementing changes to better promote work for our members through our directory. We will continue initiatives to leverage the reach and scope of electronic and social media while trying not to completely abandon print media, of which many members are so fond. These initiatives will be undertaken by the public relations committee in the coming year.

Technology must also be addressed in terms of its impact on our profession. As organizations like ours continue to demand competent interpreting services in more languages and across more remote and rural areas at no cost to the limited-English-speaking population, we must also come to terms with the proper role for technology. NAJIT's input is vital to help set the parameters of when, where and why remote solutions should be used, and when they are clearly counterproductive or unworkable. We must join this debate so that objective guidance can be given to all the stakeholders. Our only interest is to promote the highest level of interpretation services under the best possible conditions for all involved. NAJIT will address remote technology through a position paper this summer.

Additionally, we will redouble our efforts to bring NAJIT's transcription and translation project to completion. Through the work of our reconstituted TT ensemble committee, we will collaborate with our partners to move beyond the Beta version of this much-needed tool.

I am so proud to serve with a Board of Directors that possesses the vision and pragmatism to pursue a progressive and far-reaching agenda. In this message, I've outlined only a few of the important areas of focus for NAJIT in the coming year. Perhaps some of these are in line with your interests and skills. I hope so, and hope you become active in any way you see fit so that we can pursue these objectives together. I am humbled and honored to serve as the Chair of *your* organization.

Cordially,
Rob

Rob Cruz
Chair, NAJIT Board of Directors

Terminology Choices

Reflections on the NAJIT Conference

Dan DeCoursey

A colleague once told an anecdote about an attorney who asked him to interpret a legal phrase into Spanish. When the interpreter did so, the attorney exclaimed, "See! That proves it! Interpreters don't know what they're doing—every time I ask an interpreter to *translate* [sic] that phrase, they say something different." My initial reaction was that the anecdote revealed the complexities of interpretation, but later I wondered if it also hinted at an unfortunate tendency in our profession. Instead of sharing terminology openly, interpreters may become defensive, perhaps even hostile, when hashing over certain terms, as if discussing terminology were akin to bringing up politics or religion at a family reunion. In both cases, the end may be hurt feelings and resigning ourselves not to bring up the topic again.



Attendees at NAJIT's 2011 Annual Conference, Long Beach, California

I was excited to see that the 2011 NAJIT conference in Long Beach, California had much to offer on terminology issues. A few sessions quickly revealed the quagmire that terminology can become. I first went to a presentation by Sandro Tomasi, author of *An English-Spanish Dictionary of Criminal Law and Procedure*. After years of research, he had come to the conclusion that many of the terms interpreters have been taught in U.S. training programs are not used in the legal codes of Spain and Latin America, and therefore, are not exact equivalents and so potentially misleading. His preferred terms come from Spanish-monolingual legal dictionaries from Spain and Argentina. He gave the example of *declaración*, which many use to interpret the term "plea," but which can also mean "statement." Mr. Tomasi pointed out that, in an initial appearance in Latin America, defendants often make a statement to the judge regarding their version of the facts. Therefore, if we employ the word *declaración* when an attorney says to his client, "You'll enter a plea and then we'll set the next court date," a Latin American defendant, might very well believe he is to make a statement to the judge, perhaps even admitting certain elements of the crime. To avoid such misunderstanding, Mr. Tomasi recommended the term *contestación*, which he encountered in legal codes from Latin America and Spain. For "guilty plea," he proposed *admisión de culpabilidad*.

Another problematic term came up in Laura Cahue's session on understanding the language of medicolegal death investigations: *médico forense*, literally, "forensic doctor," which is actually an imperfect rendition of the term "coroner," since not all coroners are doctors. Penal codes in Latin America and Spain refer to the *pesquisidor*, or "legal investigator," a term I had come across as a translator but rarely used as an interpreter. In order to convey the nuance contained in the word "coroner," the phrase *sobre muertes no naturales*, [of unnatural deaths] needs to be added.

As a language enthusiast, I say: the more terms, the merrier! But just as I was considering enrolling in law school in Buenos Aires, I attended Holly Mikkelson's presentation. Ms. Mikkelson discussed a study of court interpretation in Hong Kong. When Hong Kong was a British colony, laws were written only in English, and court interpreters had to coin their own Chinese language terms which could be readily understood by the public. Then, when Hong Kong became part of mainland China, Hong Kong hired legal translators to translate all its laws into Chinese. The terms chosen by the legal translators, not surprisingly, were often more lengthy and obtuse than those previously introduced by interpreters. In the interest of strict formal equivalence, the legal translators opted for Chinese legalese. Court interpreters were then faced with the dilemma that their listeners often did not understand the new terminology. Many interpreters began to compensate by using the new legal translations and then adding a more accessible, interpreter-created term to aid comprehension. Ms. Mikkelson pointed out that these interpreters were employing the Skopos theory of translation, which focuses on *function*, or how well a translation, or in this case, an interpretation, achieves its purpose. This type of compensation sounded like a very reasonable approach, especially for relatively short terms. But coming out with *pesquisidor sobre muertes no naturales o médico forense* [legal investigator of unnatural deaths or forensic doctor] each time a judge says "coroner," might leave even a Spanish-language auctioneer tongue-tied.

Although one might think that formal terms introduced by legal translators were more accurate than those coined by court interpreters, according to this study, a Hong Kong judge actually determined that, as the laws were written, a defendant was guilty of a particular charge according to the language of the law in English, but innocent according to the language of the law in Chinese. Such a finding makes one wonder whether exact equivalence in legal concepts is even possible between two languages or different judicial systems.

In another session, Mexican attorney Tony Rosado described a situation when Mexican attorneys and judges were observing proceedings in a U.S. courtroom. The interpreters' listeners were no longer laypersons, as had been the case in Hong Kong, but legal professionals. It turned out that the Mexican attorneys and judges did not understand many of the terms the interpreters bandied about, and were even amused by some, because they were not used in the Mexican legal code. He mentioned the term *juez menor*, which many interpreters use to interpret the title "magistrate." Unfortunately, and to the amusement of the visiting Mexican judges and attorneys, this may also be taken to mean "younger judge." The equivalent term in the Mexican legal system is *juez de preinstrucción*, according to Rosado. Some of the Mexican legal terms he mentioned, however, did not match terms proposed by Tomasi. One interpreter commented that since in California and the southwest, most listeners are from Mexico, interpreters should employ Mexican legal terms. I briefly considered adding a law degree from Mexico to my to-do list.

All these different options left me feeling a little bewildered. Which term is the best? I don't have a definitive answer, but it is certainly a question worth asking. Monday morning, however, the courtrooms were waiting, and I knew my terminology decisions had to be made in split seconds. For now, I suppose I will choose my terms based on several factors, including my audience, whether I am interpreting in simultaneous or consecutive mode, and other situation-specific factors.

I am grateful to all these presenters for helping expand my lexicon and for giving me tools to evaluate my choices. I wonder if it might be possible for court interpreters to incorporate both equivalent and functional terms in our terminology lists, and then we can choose the best option depending on the situation, without betraying our professional standards. I am certainly glad to have *pesquisidor sobre muertes no naturales* as part of my arsenal, but I'm not going to discard *médico forense* yet.

Some interpreters might find it frustrating that so many renditions are possible for common legal terms in English. Some might find it even more exasperating that interpreters cannot agree on which terms to use. I suppose that language is a complex moving target that does not lend itself to rigid, mathematical absolutes. I have witnessed many disagreements, including some at the conference, in which one interpreter claims that another's preferred term is incorrect, when perhaps each term might serve well in certain situations. Blatantly incorrect terms should clearly be rejected, but criticizing others' preferred terms because they do not match one's own is not the best way to advance our profession. Rather, we should view terms as an array of tools, and make it our goal to load up our tool belts as much as possible. Furthermore, our passion for whichever is our preferred terminology is a sign that we take our jobs seriously.

In my view, we should constantly evaluate the terms we use, be willing to change them if we discover more apt ones, and openly share terminology with others. We might have to occasionally agree to disagree, but we should also accept that rarely is a single term the most suitable in all situations. Moreover, it is in an interpreter's interest to be flexible and adaptable. After all, the ability to adapt terminology to varying contexts is what distinguishes us from machine translation, which is something that translators, and perhaps interpreters, too, must do to maintain their livelihood. To keep the peace, we might still want to avoid debating politics and religion amongst ourselves, but freely discussing terminology will certainly benefit our profession. Just don't ask me how to say "coroner" in Spanish if you are in a hurry.

[The author is a state and federally certified court interpreter in Los Angeles. He is also an ATA certified Spanish-to-English translator.]

Items of Interest

Bilingualism

The Bilingual Advantage

Interesting Fact

'Run' as the English Verb with Most Meanings

Books of Interest

Kendall, Joshua. (2011). *The Forgotten Founding Father: Noah Webster's obsession and the creation of an American culture*. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons. ([NY Times Book Review](#), May 29, 2011)

Indigenous language rights in Mexico

Yucatan passed a law to protect community rights, to take effect January 1, 2012. A new institute will be created to provide training for Mayan interpreters and translators.

<http://www.yucatan.com.mx/20110412/nota-9/104640-jueces-y-traductores-mayas-con-la-nueva-ley-indigena.htm>

Terminology Sources: Prison Talk

- United States <http://www.prisontalk.com/forums/showthread.php?p=6030818>
 - Spain <http://www.infoprision.com/glossary> [thanks to Laura Cahue]
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Website of Interest

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Getting Down to Business

Grabbing the Bull by the Horns, or: Woops, He Morphed into a Bear!

María Cristina de la Vega

We can't afford to be lazy during an economic downturn. This is the time to act, to put one's house in order to turn things around, if not in the short term, certainly for the long haul. I heard **Barbara Khan**, noted Wharton scholar, currently dean of the University of Miami Business School, say recently that businesses which retool themselves and reach out to clients during the financial crisis are the ones best positioned to profit after the recovery.

The world is a village that modern-day communications and trade have drawn together so tightly that events taking place halfway around the world have a more dramatic impact on us than ever before. We can no longer logically espouse the policy of **isolationism** that was widely followed in the U.S. before WWI. For example, mutual funds invested in European countries are going down as the EU struggles with the backlash of the financial predicament here, while funds invested in emerging economies, which did not suffer recessions and have received direct foreign investment, are up. Japanese products such as auto parts and electronics not arriving on time after the March earthquake and tsunami are affecting factories and vendors in the U.S. Seismic shocks have happened this year around the world in Haiti, Chile, China, New Zealand and Japan, draining those economies as well as the economic health of the countries with financial ties to them.

The current crisis in the Middle East is causing the price of gasoline to reach heights not seen since July 2008, causing stock market tumbles. At a time when each passing day brings news of another crisis, when economists are at their wits' ends and at odds with one another in **forecasting** how and when we will emerge from the present fiscal debacle, we all need to take stock of our livelihoods and position ourselves to have the most positive influence possible on the present moment, which in short order will become our business future.

Many events are beyond our control, but if we identify those we can affect and proactively do so, we will guide outcomes in our **sphere of influence**, which is all we can do.

We need to go from the macro to the micro analysis, breaking down a gargantuan task to bite-sized pieces that we can begin to sink our teeth into. A practical way to do this is by adhering to what I have coined as the five Ps: Preparation, Planning, Prioritizing, Performance and Presumption.

Preparation is acknowledging where we are starting from, studying where we would like to be, and drawing the bow back expertly so that the arrow is pointed at the right target with the requisite force behind it. In practical business terms, we need to get a true picture of the status of our business. To do this, we can carry out a **market study**, study the competition, the economy as a whole, determine where we want to be in 5-10 years' time, and calculate what it will take to get there. We then need in-depth planning to see what it will take to get from point A to point B. Do we need certain certifications? Join associations to help shorten the learning curve? Do we need to hire personnel, obtain funding, find a partner, acquire more education?

The first step is to reflect on this process on your own. Once you have your thoughts down in black and white, consult with your inner circle of family, friends, colleagues or consultants to make sure your outlook is not myopic. A good way to test your tactics is to have them analyzed professionally by creating a **business plan** to move you towards action mode. The business plan provides guidance for your organization so that the major operational strides needed to reach your goals are defined.

At the next stage, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the seemingly unending list of to-do tasks before one begins to see any accomplishments. It is very important to **prioritize** effectively, as management guru **Stephen Covey** advises, or you can easily waste time and lose momentum on busy work that takes you nowhere fast. It is always infinitely easier to revert to busy work (reading e-mails, answering every time the phone rings, paying bills, etc.) instead of forging new neural pathways by forcing our intellect to apply itself in ways that will bring about the long-term substantial results we seek: new, unfamiliar tasks, such as making sales calls and going back to school, take more effort and may challenge our self-esteem.

What comes next is the nitty-gritty. Everything that came before helped to set the framework for actions that will differentiate us from the pack. To determine whether we are on track to meet our goals, performance must be measured. In business, this is traditionally done by setting KPIs (**Key Performance Indicators**). These indicators are like stepping stones that show how far we have progressed in our plan. They differ from industry to industry, depending on the desired outcomes of each. Typical KPIs for an LSP (language services provider) might be the number of interpreting assignments per month, number of translations or their dollar equivalents, number of new clients contacted, number of assignments lost, etc. You must have a reasonable goal for each category. They are never cast in stone, and if the purpose of a KPI no longer serves you after a time, you remove or adjust it to fit your needs. The important thing is that you take the time periodically, each month or quarter, to take stock of your progress and change tactics if something is not showing good results.

Once you get into the habit of tracking performance, making sure that all your “P” components make sense, that your KPIs are aligned with your objectives and are sustainable based on your business plan and the preceding market study, you are in business. At this point, it is imperative that you presume the plan is going to work, that you have faith, which translates into confidence and is intuitively picked up not only by yourself but by your clients, investors, employees and the universe at large which will orchestrate the experiences that come your way. Instill **positive thinking** practices in your everyday behavior and allow your thoughts to reinforce your actions and goals. Thoughts are things. Doubts will only undermine your well-laid plans while constructive affirmations will shape and interpret the occurrences in your life accordingly. *Carpe diem!*

*[This is a regular column for Proteus. The author is a federally certified Spanish interpreter, conference interpreter, and co-owner of **ProTranslation** in Miami.*

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Lexicographer's Lair

Academic Dust-up Over Gutter Slang

Dennis McKenna

Lexicographers, that dreary group of people described by Samuel Johnson as “harmless drudges,” rarely find themselves the focus of public attention. And yet, the recent appearance of the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* has caused its head lexicographer, Concepción Company Company, a storm of bad publicity. Some Mexican intellectuals have harshly criticized the book and its editor, and now the general public has got wind of the controversy. What once was a dull subject has all the makings of a good street fight. The Mexican newspaper *El Universal* (Ventura, 2011) openly mocked the dictionary by running a headline “¡Órale, que hot-dog es un mexicanismo! [Wow, so hot dog is a Mexicanism!]” It has become something of a spectator sport to watch a leading academic like Concepción Company struggle to explain why English words like “hot dog” and “baby doll,” and vulgarities like *guaguis* [blowjob] and nearly 250 words for penis should be included in a book published by the staid Mexican Academy of the Language (AML).

Much of the criticism appears to be partly in jest, and may serve to distract and entertain a public all too weary of bad news about drug cartels and public corruption. However, to create a new dictionary is a gargantuan task that involves elaborate planning, countless hours of research, plus editing by a large staff. If we were to dismiss a work of this magnitude based on a few scathing reviews we would be wholly unfair to its editor.

El Universal (Ventura, 2011) reports that critics have identified these shortcomings in the work: 1) an inaccurate definition of *mexicanismo*; 2) the inclusion of foreign words (*extranjerismos*); 3) the selective nature of source material; 4) mistakes in definitions or descriptions of meaning; and 5) faulty lexicography. But much of the criticism seems to focus on what exactly is meant by the term *mexicanismo* [Mexicanism]. *El Universal* (Ventura, 2011) quotes Company’s own definition from the introduction, which states that *mexicanismos* are “*las voces, simples y complejas, las expresiones lexicalizadas y las acepciones que caracterizan la lengua, popular o culta, o ambas, de este país, fundamentalmente, en la variedad o las variedades urbanas del Altiplano Central de México* [words, phrases, lexicalized expressions, and the meanings that characterize the language, colloquial or learned, or both, of this country, fundamentally the urban sort or sorts as used in the Mexican Central High Plateau].”

The book’s detractors, however, have strenuously objected to such a vague and all-encompassing definition. Poet and former AML member, Gabriel Zaid, is one of the dictionary’s most outspoken critics. Zaid (2011) points out that the inclusion of words like *lejía* [bleach] indicates that improper criteria were used for entries in a work about language that is uniquely Mexican:

Dada la antigüedad de la lejía y de la palabra ‘lejía,’ sorprende que la Academia Mexicana de la Lengua la incluya en su Nuevo Diccionario de mexicanismos... Es una palabra originada más de un siglo antes de que el español llegara a México [Given the many years that bleach and the word ‘bleach’ have been around, it is surprising that the AML would include it in their *Nuevo Diccionario de Mexicanismos*... It is a word that originated over a century before the Spanish language arrived in Mexico].

With my curiosity piqued by this discussion of standard vs. non-standard terminology, I took a closer look at some of the entries under the letter “A.” Here is a sample comparison of entries from the new AML dictionary side-by-side with the standard meaning. (Except where noted, all definitions on the right are from the DRAE and refer to the first sense or core meaning of the word.)

<i>Diccionario de Mexicanismos</i>	<i>Diccionario de la Lengua Española</i>
ABDOMINALES: F. PL. Ejercicio que realiza alguien acostado boca arriba, flexionando el abdomen y llevándolo hacia delante, con la finalidad de fortalecer esta parte del cuerpo	[Larousse] ABDOMINAL: 2 Ejercicio gimnástico en el que se ejercitan o fortalecen los músculos del abdomen. S.f.pl.
ABOLLADURA: F. Mella en un objeto de metal, como consecuencia de un golpe	ABOLLADURA: f. Acción y efecto de abollar
ABOLLAR: TR. Dejar mella en un objeto que ha sido golpeado: “¿Tu abollaste la defensa del carro?”.	ABOLLAR: tr. Producir una depresión en una superficie con un golpe o apretándola. U.t.c.pnrl.
ABREVIAR: TR. Acortar, aminorar: “Abrevien sus respuestas en el examen”.	ABREVIAR: tr. Hacer breve, acortar, reducir a menos tiempo o espacio.
ACERCAR: TR. coloq. Llevar a alguien al lugar exacto que tiene como destino: “¿Quieres que te acerque a tu casa?”	[Larousse bilingual] to drop: ¿puedes acercarme a mi casa? Can you drop me at my house?
ACOTACION: F. Aclaración o precisión sobre algo: “Por favor, ponga la acotación en el margen”.	ACOTACION: 2 Señal o apuntamiento que se pone en la margen de algún escrito o impreso
AGARRADO: ADJ. coloq. Tacaño: “No seas tan agarrado y préstame cien pesos”.	AGARRADO: adj. coloq. Tacaño (ll miserable).
AMANERADO: ADJ. coloq. Homosexual: “Dicen que el conserje nuevo es bien amanerado”. 2. <i>Referido a hombre</i> , que tiene modales femeninos: “Cuando Jorge se pone borracho se porta muy amanerado”.	[Larousse:] AMANERADO: 3. Afeminado, que tiene modales o actitudes femeninas: <i>era un chico afectuoso y amanerado.</i> adj/ s.m.
AMETRALLADORA: F. supran. Metralleta, arma de fuego automática, portátil y de repetición de cañón más corto que el fusil y de gran velocidad de disparo.	AMETRALLADORA: f. Arma automática, de tiro rápido y repetido, que se utiliza apoyada en el terreno.
ANGOSTO TA: ADJ. Estrecho: “Por allí no cabemos, el pasillo está muy angosto”.	ANGOSTO, TA. Adj. Estrecho o reducido.
APLICARSE: INTR. PRNL. Prepararse, esforzarse alguien: “Aplicate este año para que te den la beca”.	APLICAR 7. Pnrl. Poner esmero, diligencia y cuidado en ejecutar algo, especialmente en estudiar.

From this quick review, clearly, Concepción Company conceives of a *mexicanismo* differently from many others inside and outside of the Mexican intellectual establishment. The inclusion of standard Spanish terms is not the only thing that has raised eyebrows. According to linguistics and Spanish literature professor Luis Fernando Lara (2011), the book includes many expressions of Latin American Spanish, citing *beneficiar* and *beneficio* (for “processing coffee, rice or sugar cane), *capitán* (for “head waiter”), *chunche* (for “any old thing”), *ñor* (short for *señor* or “sir”).

For Lara and Zaid, a faulty definition of what a *mexicanismo* really is accounts for the many foreign words included in the entries. Nearly all the offending words cited in the *El Universal* (Ventura, 2011) article are from English: jeans, break, boulevard, coffee [sic], aerobics, baby doll, drink, boulevard [sic] and mouse. *El Universal* (Ventura, 2011) illustrated the article with a cartoon of a Mexican *charro*, or cowboy, with the new dictionary flying out of his mouth. It is not surprising that a book that openly embraces Anglicisms would meet resistance from scholars in Mexico. But the decision to include standard Spanish, Latin American Spanish, and English in a work ostensibly about Mexican Spanish is not all that has stuck in many an academic's craw. The dictionary, moreover, was published in November 2010, its appearance coinciding with the 200th anniversary of Mexico's independence and the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. How could national history be honored by a book of words referencing sexual dalliances (*movida* or "the other woman"), sinecure (*beca* or "patronage job"), and scatological expressions (*comérselas muertas y cagarlas vivas* or "to think one is hot shit")?

Luis Fernando Lara (2011) believes it was the selective nature of the source materials unnecessarily limited the scope of the book. Such sources included comics and popular movies by **Cantinflas** and **La India María**, materials listed in the introduction as among the primary sources used for research. The list has struck many academics as overly lowbrow. "*Esas fuentes inclinan la balanza hacia un vocabulario soez, humorístico y, muchas veces, individual...de tales fuentes, tales resultados* [Those sources shift the balance towards crude, humorous, and, often, individually based vocabulary...such sources generate these kinds of results]" (Lara 2011).

The use of popular culture sources probably explains the profusion of rhyming slang, wordplay, sexual innuendo, insults, and words to describe crooked cops, contraband, and cheating. Should *la India María* and a handful of other representatives of modern popular culture really be used to define the speech of an entire nation? Luis Fernando Lara (2011) begs to differ.

Lara (2011) believes the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* reflects some of the language spoken in Mexico, rather than being a work of language unique to Mexico or what others would call Mexican Spanish. In 2010, the Colegio de México came out with its own *Diccionario del Español de México*, edited by Lara, which may account for some of his animosity to this rival project. He points out (Lara, 2011) that this other title, with roughly twice as many entries as the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos*, aims to compile all the language spoken in Mexico. The Colegio de México work intends to document:

...la manifestación integral del español de México como hecho de la cultura, que dio mayor peso a la lengua escrita, y a la necesidad metódica de verificar el uso social de las palabras [...the comprehensive statement of Mexican Spanish as a cultural reality, which accorded more importance to the written language and the need to fully verify the actual usage of words]. (Lara, 2011)

Of the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos*, Lara says (2011), "*Que sean mexicanismos, está por verse; que formen parte del léxico de la sociedad Mexicana, es dudoso en múltiples casos; que muestren los 'grandes ejes culturales' alrededor de los cuales 'se concentra el léxico del español de México,' en el que se trasluce nuestra identidad, es una barbaridad*" [That these are Mexicanisms, is yet to be seen; that they are a part of the Mexican public's vocabulary is doubtful in many cases; that they show the 'great cultural axis' around which 'the Mexican Spanish lexicon revolves,' is outrageous]."

Lara (2011) also argues that Company's work is too Eurocentric in contrasting Mexican Spanish to peninsular Spanish instead of to a Latin American norm. This accounts for the inclusion of many unnecessary terms like "*hasta*" and "*recién*." According to Lara, the use of *hasta*—"Hasta ayer llegó el cheque [The check didn't arrive until yesterday]"—to mean "not until" is shared by other countries in Latin America, so why include it here as a *mexicanismo*? The same is true for *recién* ("*Recién me di cuenta* [I just noticed]"), making it another entry that has no business being in a book about language and usage specific to Mexico. In Lara's view (2011),

Si el diccionario es 'incluyente' en cuanto al resto del español en América, su carácter mexicanista vuelve a desdibujarse y la obra tiende a documentar un diccionario de americanismos [If the dictionary is 'inclusive' with respect to the rest of Latin American Spanish, its uniquely Mexican nature gets blurred and the work tends toward being a compendium of Latin American Spanish].

Reading through the pages of the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos*, one is struck by the humor and wordplay in evidence. *Primate* is given as a word meaning "cousin" (think *primo*), while *vendimia* [grape harvest] is given for "sale" or *venta*. Lara (2011) decries the inclusion of such witticisms, not because he disapproves of this most Mexican of activities, but because he does not think they qualify as dictionary entries. To make his point, he (Lara, 2011) cites his own examples of wordplay that, in his estimation, would not merit inclusion in a dictionary published by the Mexican Academy of the Language: *barniz* [varnish] for *sí* [yes]; *ahí nos bemoles* [see you flat note] for *ahí nos vemos* [see you later]; *kuleid* [Kool-Aid] for *culero* [coward or asshole].

Lara (2011) also takes issue with Company over the use of “*igor*” for “*ano*,” “*abuela*” for “*partera*,” “*aguadito*” for “*vagina*,” [igor for anus, grandmother for midwife, watered-down for vagina] and “*ibm*” (y ve y me... or “do me a favor and go and...”) as “*persona que realiza una acción por encargo ajeno* [individual who runs an errand for someone else].” About this last entry he says, “One has to wonder if this is really widely used in Mexico with this meaning” (Lara, 2011). He also doubts that each of these entries has been independently verified in three separate sources; his standard is that separate sources are ones not wholly or partially copied from one another: they must be truly independent (Lara, 2011). Good lexicography calls for separate verification of each term. It also requires that when you state that, “*las acepciones entran por frecuencia de uso según las fuentes consultadas* [the various meanings are listed by order of frequency of use according to the source materials that have been consulted]”, as Company does in the introduction (2010), “...*haría falta un conjunto de datos de varios cientos de millones de contextos, como sabe cualquier lexicógrafo profesional* [...one would have to have a dataset of several hundred million contexts, as any professional lexicographer knows].”

As to mistaken meanings, Gabriel Zaid (2011) again cites the false *mexicanismo* “*lejía*,” stating that “bleach” is not used *para blanquear la ropa* [to whiten clothes], as the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* states, but rather in Mexico in 2011 is only used to unplug drains. Lara not only cites the entries for *igor*, *abuela*, *aguadito*, and *ibm* as flawed. He also faults Company’s second definition of *culero* as “*mal amigo* [bad friend],” stating that it only means “coward” or “cowardly.”

Responding to her critics, Ms. Company (Ventura, 2011) alternates between doggedly defending the research and lexicography that went into the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* and admitting to its shortcomings. In the book’s defense, she states in an interview that the Academy is simply describing Mexican Spanish as it exists today, not blithely engaging in the propagation of stereotypes, as some of her critics have suggested: “If there is a good deal of sexual terminology, it must be because there is an established, centuries-old pattern of lexicalization of this kind of language in Mexican Spanish” (Ventura, 2011). How’s that for an explanation of saucy speech? She defends the use of “hot dog” because, “*al Diccionario de mexicanismos no le importa si ciertas palabras son extranjerismos* [the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* doesn’t care if some words are foreign]” (Ventura, 2011). She goes on to say, “We Mexicans don’t eat *perritos calientes* [literal translation of hot dogs],” pointing out that in Mexico they have even come up with a Hispanicized version of the word “hot dog”: *jocho*. As far as using movies by La India María and Cantinflas as source material, she refuses to see this as a defect, pointing out that all of the language listed has been verified, and, “*Además de eso salimos a la calle, tuvimos informantes, hablantes espontáneos* [In addition, we went out on the street, we had informants, spontaneous speakers]” (Ventura, 2011),

She admits that *lejía* is used for clearing clogged drains and not to whiten clothes, as listed in this first printing (Ventura, 2011). Her apologetic response to criticism of the work for containing much vocabulary not unique to Mexico is to say that next year she hopes to bring out a revised second edition which will contain an ample appendix with terms that are truly unique to Mexico (Ventura, 2011),

Company is not convincing on this last point of defense. After all, her detractors will ask, why did the focus ever get away from uniquely Mexican terms in the first place? And with respect to her statement that source material wasn’t all centered on popular movies, that the compilers actually went out on the street to interview passers-by, wouldn’t it have been better to do a statistical analysis of a corpus, with hundreds of millions of examples of usage, as Lara suggests? In short, Company’s response to critics only seems to provide more fodder for them.

They say there’s no such thing as bad publicity. But in this case, attention has been diverted from the useful content of a new reference work to its many shortcomings. Given all the controversy, one might assume that the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* is more deserving of a Bronx cheer than of accolades. Yet to my mind, it’s a valuable contribution to Mexican lexicography. I’ve only had my copy for a little over a month, and I find myself turning to it time and again. It’s already an integral part of my reference library. Just one peek at a section of the letter “p” will illustrate my point:

Piñar. TR. Pop/coloq. Engañar o estafar a alguien: “*Piñaron a la señora con el precio de esos muebles*”.

Piquera. F. Establecimiento donde se sirven bebidas alcohólicas, **cantina**: “*Se fueron a tomar unas cervezas a la piquera*”.

Piravar. INTR. Pop/obsc/eur/p.u. Practicar el coito: “*Quiero piravar con la chava de las copias, pero tiene novio*”.

Pirix. M. pop. En Yucatán, trasero: “*Esa muchachita tiene un lindo pirix*”.

All these are valid terms, as can easily be confirmed on the Web. And, by the way, of the supposed “mistakes” Lara identified, “*ibm*” is a term recognized by many of my Mexican friends for what we call a “gofer.” It also checks out on the Web (IBM reference, n.d.): “*Soy un IBM* [I’m a gofer];” “*ibm a traer café* [why don’t you go get me some coffee?];” “*ibm a depositar al banco* [go do a bank deposit for me];” “*ibm a contestar el teléfono*...[go get the phone for me...]” Is it possible that a person living in Mexico would not know this? Perhaps, but when you base criticism of a dictionary’s editors on how they did their research, you had better be able to back up your objections. For the study of slang, perhaps being an academic is not an advantage. I myself often go to online Websites to look up American slang, instead of consulting a formal print dictionary. In the 21st century, we all have to make some adjustments to keep current, and that includes the editors of major dictionaries like Luis Fernando Lara.

Is the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* a perfect example of a dictionary of regionalisms? No. Would I recommend it to anyone interested in Mexican Spanish? Absolutely. It contains much useful information about language currently spoken in Mexico. For me, the real mystery is why the *Diccionario de Mexicanismos* created such a fuss in the first place, and why the more established linguists had to be so sharp-tongued in their criticism. Zaid (2011), for example, states, "Compiling a list of silly terms in alphabetical order is not what creating a dictionary is about." Zaid (1999) speaks in reverential terms of Francisco J. Santamaría's 1959 *Diccionario de Mexicanismos*, compiled by the famous revolutionary, soldier, statesman, linguist and proponent of Mexican culture. Lara (2011) shares this view of Santamaría, considering his dictionary a national treasure. Clearly, from the tone of their criticism, Lara and Zaid place Concepción Company in another category. Why exactly is anybody's guess. I wonder if it has something to do with the lead editor being a woman. Is it because many still believe that no woman should be allowed to tread on the hallowed ground of the Academia Mexicana de la Lengua or take part in a project of this importance?

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Book Review

Dreaming in Chinese: Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love and Language

Reviewed by Yu Yan Chen



Dreaming in Chinese: Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love and Language

Deborah Fallows. 2010

Walker & Company. | ISBN: 978-0-8027-7913-7

205 pages. \$22.00

When a second-language learner starts to dream in the language, it's a sign that the language has taken root in the sub-conscious and can be managed with ease. In her book *Dreaming in Chinese: Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love and Language*, Deborah Fallows not only depicts the trials and tribulations of studying Mandarin in her adopted home, but also seeks to unravel the intricacies of Chinese culture and behavior, based on linguistic cues. The result is a book steeped in authentic and funny anecdotes about her encounters with the *Laobaixing* [common folk] in modern China, through which the reader discovers their abundant humanity and particular psychological makeup.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters, each identified by a Mandarin expression highlighting an aspect of the author's experience. Like a travelogue, each chapter begins with an encounter that leads readers into the labyrinth of Chinese grammar, history and culture. Whether it is the Uighur seller touting the author by saying *Woaini* [I love you], the frustration of trying out different tone variations at the Taco Bell in Shanghai, or the final triumph of chewing out a taxi driver in Chinese for an overcharged fare, the author maintains a personal touch, as though she had lifted the text directly out of her journal. In this sense, *Dreaming in Chinese* isn't simply a tool book like others of a similar genre, but a book that entertains as well as informs. Upon reading of her experiences, learners of Mandarin at all levels will have the urge to dig deeper, while those unfamiliar with the language will enjoy the ride and perhaps become inspired to learn.

As an experienced linguist with many languages under her belt, Deborah Fallows explains the notable elements of Chinese grammar. While English speakers "use tense to build information about time right into the verb itself," "Chinese can...add a few shades of meaning to a verb with something called aspect." Pronouns such as "I," "he" and "she" are also frequently omitted in Chinese. Using a fun and conversational approach, the author points out other unique characteristics of Mandarin such as tone variations, doubling the verb, the use of Chengyu (classic four-character set phrases) and formation of compound words by bringing together two antonyms. While these constructions might appear daunting, the author makes them easier to understand by providing appropriate examples in Chinese and good analogies in English.

Another section of the book traces an overview of the Chinese language by discussing its history, the fundamentals of *Hanzi* [characters], naming conventions and the semantics of time and space. The author tells us that the "Chinese sound system uses only about 400 syllables, compared to 4000 in English." This results in a tongue twisting story composed of 92 characters by Chao Yuen Ren (also written as Zhao Yuanren in Pinyin), each character being pronounced in a different variation of the syllable *shi*, illustrating the importance of learning Chinese characters in conjunction with their pronunciation. Without knowing the characters, even a native speaker of Chinese would have been totally baffled by it. Furthermore, as Deborah Fallows rightly points out, among a population numbering 1.3 billion, countless dialects exist, including Cantonese, Wu, Gan, Min, Hakka, Yue, and Xiang. Written characters function as an Esperanto among the Han Chinese. Despite their accents and dialects, "all people can look at the same characters and derive the same meaning."

The Chinese psyche is itself a fascinating subject, and *Dreaming in Chinese* vividly depicts China's Regular Joe. Every *Laobaixing* [common man] is looking for a good deal and will act quickly when the opportunity strikes. The author remarks that while a shopping crowd can cause a stampede or even death, crowds can also provide companionship and protection when crossing the streets. Chinese are also extremely gregarious, as indicated by their fondness for *renao* [hot and noisy, bustling atmosphere]. "If foreigners are exhausted by *renao*, Chinese are energized by it." As her understanding of Chinese culture deepens, the author also discovers how many rules and regulations in China can be flaunted. They merely exist just in case the authorities find it convenient to apply them. This discovery, along with an accumulation of knowledge over time, allows the author to think like a Chinese person and thrive in her adopted homes of Shanghai and Beijing.

While I enjoyed the author's exploration of quirky elements of the Chinese language, as a native speaker, I also beg to differ on certain aspects. For example, it is suggested that Chinese language speakers are often impolite to the point of rudeness. Such is not necessarily the case. While textbooks in beginning and intermediate Chinese might not focus on the nuances of honorifics, it doesn't mean that these terms don't exist. They can be quite elaborate at times, especially in business settings and classic Chinese literature. These politeness terms often exhibit humility when one refers to oneself while manifesting respect and approval of others. The distinction between in-group and out-group can also be shown by honorifics. The language used among friends tends to be casual while business associates converse in a much more formal manner.

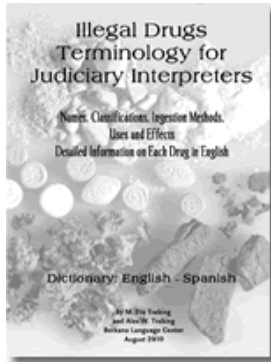
Overall, I really enjoyed the book, both as a guide to studying Mandarin and as a travelogue. It is extremely difficult to explain Chinese language and culture in a nutshell, but Deborah Fallows does an excellent job.

[The reviewer is a New York certified court interpreter in Mandarin and holds a diploma in public service interpreting in the UK. She has a master's degree in creative writing and specializes in translating poetry and fiction from Chinese to English. Her poems have appeared in literary journals.]

Book Review

Just Say "Yes" to this Drug Text

Reviewed by Julie A. Sellers



Illegal drugs: Terminology for judiciary interpreters

Traving, M. Eta & Traving, Alex. W. 2010.

Berkana Language Center.

ISBN: 978-088431-507-0

293 pages.

\$60

Terminology related to controlled substances is in constant flux, given that the substances and methods of ingestion can change nearly as quickly as the street slang used to reference them. Interpreting for cases involving controlled substances requires court interpreters to develop depth and breadth of related content. In addition to knowing the formal equivalents for standard names of narcotic substances, we are also called upon to recognize street and slang usage referring to those substances. A broader understanding of drugs, including their classification, method of use, effects and appearance, facilitates this type of knowledge. *Illegal drugs: Terminology for judiciary interpreters* by M. Eta Traving and Alex W. Traving provides a useful compendium of drug terminology and related information.

The text is organized in two main sections and an appendix dedicated to drug testing and screening; each section is organized alphabetically. The first section describes and defines the five "schedules" for controlled substances. Detailed information for illegal drugs provides both official and street names in English. Each individual entry contains the drug's classification, method of ingestion, medicinal uses and effects, as well as black and white photographs of the substance. More in-depth entries are provided for some drugs. For example, under "cocaine" is an explanation of the various stages of production and the substances used in manufacturing. Entries are alphabetized by group (e.g., **amphetamines** and **inhalants**) and then by name, either individually or within the group. The standard format for each entry facilitates locating needed information on each substance.

The first section also contains descriptions and photographs of agencies involved in the enforcement of laws governing controlled substances, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Air National Guard (ANG) and the United States Customs and Border Patrol (US CBP). Although these agencies and other related terms (e.g., **money laundering**, **meth labs** and **drug paraphernalia**) are sprinkled in amongst the drug entries themselves, they do appear alphabetically.

The first section concludes with a partial list of websites and other sources consulted in the compilation of this work. The authors also provide helpful tips for searching for Spanish names and street names of controlled substances. This list of sources is particularly useful for staying up to date in the ever-changing landscape of controlled substance terminology.

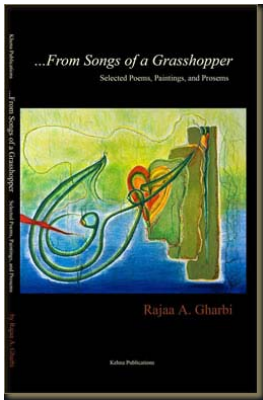
The second section consists of various glossaries, two bilingual and one monolingual. The first, "English to Spanish Dictionary," provides standardized definitions in Spanish for controlled substances and related topics. The second, "English-Spanish Glossary of Drug Slang," is especially useful in its presentation of three columns: 1) drug name in English, 2) drug street name in English, and 3) drug street name in Spanish. These two sections serve as a comparative reference for learning drug name equivalents in English and Spanish. The final glossary is Spanish only and lists street and slang expressions to refer to drugs. This section would prove useful in searching for a street name that was new or unknown to an interpreter.

As a one-stop source of information on drugs, and specifically, as a source for Spanish terminology, *Illegal drugs: Terminology for judiciary interpreters* is a useful text. Despite its linguistic focus on English and Spanish, to the exclusion of other languages, the information provided about drugs, agencies and related topics in the first section is educational and useful to interpreters of any language. The broad presentation enables the reader to gain a holistic understanding, thus promoting a meaningful interpretation rather than word-for-word equivalents. Although it takes time to become familiar with the organization and layout, this work is a valuable tool for court interpreters.

Book Review

Grasshopper Wonderings

Reviewed by *Dena Bugel-Shunra*



...From Songs of a Grasshopper: Selected Poems, Paintings, and Prosems

Rajaa A Gharbi. 2004

Kehna Publications.

100 pages.

\$18.50

Interpreters and translators are of necessity bicultural or multicultural, pacing the lines that join their first and second languages. People often come to our profession as immigrants, their linguistic finesse tempered through the crucible of a change of language, culture, and environment. This experience sets these individuals apart from both cultures, while paradoxically thrusting them into ever-deeper participation in them.

Poet, artist and judiciary linguist Rajaa Gharbi takes the experience of immigration and foreignness and holds it up to the light, looking back into her past in “Remembering 1985” to wonder about “Warnings of wars to come,” but also looking forward in “Judiciary Crossings” at the weaving of English and Arabic into what she terms a “demoqraatey.”

“We enumerate the synonyms of exile/elucidate riddles of the missing” the poetic voice tells us, in “Ode for my Daughter, Half of this Nation of Two,” thus acknowledging the fractured reality of the immigrant family. Who among us has not played the game of trying to stay with only one language for everyday necessities? Who among us has not reached for the comfort of a family-word, making the internal jargon indeed into a nation of only a very few who really understand?

The verbal pieces--both poems and ‘prosems’, as Gharbi terms her own version of the Arabic rhymed prose form known as Maqama--are interspersed with highly textured photos of paintings by this talented and versatile artist.

“Real Djinnees outlive the bottle
because

because
they
are
used to reinventing laughter.”

– “Grasshopper Looks Around the Gardens of Her Neighborhood in the Lost-And-Found Corners of Absence”

“Song For My Mother” beautifully captures the experience of immigrants:

“I drink this shadow-land
and the rock in my throat swells
from tears I
not often
set free”

This same theme is central to “A Language in Exile,” where the question arises whether words can bridge the gap between the here-and-now and the longed-for, imagined, ever missed there-and-then. It is a question with which every immigrant must grapple.

Interspersed with the words are startlingly familiar details from Gharbi's art, combining bold brushstrokes with images that seem to speak Arabic in form and color. Dominant greens and blacks leap out of the flags unfurled in popular uprising. The seventeen details from paintings in ink, gouache, watercolor, and organic dyes beckon the reader to enter ever deeper into the world which the artist captures in shapes, rather than words.

When determining the value of a book of poetry or a piece of art it is always worth asking whether it was an ephemeral experience or lasting piece of cultural life. The best poetry takes a very private, particular experience and transmutes it into something that is universal; when it wears well, poetry returns to its readers when their own particular circumstances align with those universal ones. Emigrating from her native Morocco to Tunisia and then from Tunisia to the United States left Gharbi with a crack in her soul that spilled out a wealth of images and ideas about immigration and language. This pain is alluded to in “I-dentity”, when the poetic voice alludes to this pain, relating how her skin comes off and is ground to a powder with a mortar, then stored in a jar for use as a healing agent. It is an image – a metaphor – that comes back to haunt the fortunate reader. This successful metaphor is but one of many in this delightful book of words and images that grapple with the experience of immigration in the context of language and art.

Read more about Ms. Gharbi's poetry at her website, www.rajaagharbi.com.

Dena Bugel-Shunra of Shunra Media <http://www.shunra.net> has been translating and interpreting Hebrew from and into English since 1989 and is currently based in Port Townsend, WA.

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