

# Gained in Translation

## Editorial

It is my pleasure to introduce a new article in the Translation Section. Carolina Rojido, a medical doctor working as a freelance writer, explains how she first stepped into medical translation and what the challenges were. Enjoy the article!

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## Career Shifts: My experience transitioning into medical translation

I think going from actual medical writing to translation or vice versa is not a one-way street but an avenue. On a personal level, I think that translating goes hand in hand with being bilingual, or trilingual as I am now with Spanish, English, and French, although my writing in French is not yet at a native level. Now that I am used to it, I really enjoy being able to easily use different languages as needed and to be able to translate into Spanish and English for my clients. For those who do not do this, they may wonder how to become comfortable shifting languages. When living in a foreign country, translating is really a part of daily life as immigrants may talk, read, and write at a minimum in their native tongue and in the language of the country in which they live. Here in Europe, it is quite common to shift among three or more languages when talking with a group of friends or colleagues. On the other hand, when living in one's native country, things are different. It is just a matter of immersing oneself in the non-native language by, for example, watching movies, reading books, or doing all the activities possible where you have to use these languages.

Anyway, the basis of achieving any of the above, regardless of where a person lives, is a mental openness and desire to learn and communicate with others.

My particular path into translation went like this: Once I graduated from medical school in Argentina, I left for the US where I studied and worked in medical research for 13 years. Some of my jobs were as a clinical trials coordinator, so I often found myself acting as an interpreter for patients coming to our research centre in Florida. Although I do not practice medicine, I really care to help and go above and beyond to make sure patients' needs are fulfilled. And for patients, being able to understand in their native language

what is happening to them goes a long way in this respect. Later, as a project co-ordinator for a National Institutes of Health-sponsored study I had many duties, including writing or collaborating in the writing of a large number of study documents. And of course, I did translate several documents aimed at Spanish-speaking patients and caregivers. First, I was asked to proofread and edit an already-translated document. Of course, this was quite different from translating from scratch. This is the process I followed: I read the original and the translation; then I did it again making sure that there were no literal translations (word for word) where oblique ones (in which the structure or concept of the phrase cannot be literally translated) would be more appropriate; then I edited and proofread the translation, paying special attention to country-specific wording that may have been used unintentionally. I did translate other documents myself using literal and oblique translation techniques as well. I found that these techniques complement each other naturally and that with some practice they are used almost seamlessly.

The "country-specific wording" that I mentioned deserves a special mention. One thing is to translate into "official" Spanish or American or British English. For Spanish, the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), as well as many other sources of linguistic information, comes in really handy as an official reference for the Spanish language. For English, one simply has to settle into either British or American English and their

corresponding subtle differences, which the Cambridge Dictionary and word processing software help discern. However, both of these languages have their own little towers of Babel: English is the official language in 94 countries and Spanish another 20. This may have to be considered for the target audience of the source text, and – no doubt – has to be conveyed into the target text as well. What is the nationality of the target readers? What is their level of education? Is the target reader a patient? The answers to these questions easily determine the characteristics of the original text and help you to convey the message it contains with appropriate wording for the target readers.

Now that I am in Europe and I am officially a freelance medical writer, I am, of course, doing some translations and editing related documents. I have found that translation skills are a great complement to medical writing, especially because our trade frequently involves working with professionals from all nationalities. For freelancers in particular, this is especially useful as it serves to diversify the services we can provide.

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