



Translation Toolkit

Foreign Language Guide

The purpose of this section is to help you identify the appropriate language(s) to translate your written materials into, so that you can communicate most effectively with people who prefer languages other than English.

This document provides information on the top six languages spoken in MA, and is a general reference. Therefore, it cannot adequately characterize any population and the differences within it. Please use it in combination with other data specific to the group or population you are trying to reach.

For a step-by-step guide on the overall translation process, see the document entitled “Translation Toolkit.”



Office of Public Health Strategy and Communications
Revised October 2010

First Language is Not English (FLNE) Report

Information on public school students for whom English is not their first language and those who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Go to: www.mass.gov/dph/healthequity and click on “Data and Statistics.”

Top ten languages are:

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Chinese
- Haitian Creole
- Vietnamese
- Khmer
- Cape Verdean
- Russian
- Arabic
- Korean

Interpreter Services in MA Acute Care Hospitals

A DPH report documenting the interpreter services provided at 72 MA hospitals during the Federal Fiscal Year 2007. Hospital interpreter services data are good indicators of populations that lack sufficient English proficiency and need language access services. These populations are likely to have a need for written translations of health information. Go to: www.mass.gov/dph/healthequity, click on “Interpreter Services,” then click on “Interpreter Services in Massachusetts Acute Care Hospitals.” Top ten languages are:

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Chinese
- Haitian Creole
- Cape Verdean
- Vietnamese
- Arabic
- American Sign Language
- Albanian

Modern Language Association Language Map Data Center

Maps and tables based on the 2000 US Census and 2005 American Community Survey. Go to: www.mla.org/map_data&dcwindow=same and choose from the drop-down menus. Top ten languages in MA are:

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Chinese
- French
- French Creole
- Italian
- Vietnamese
- Russian
- Greek
- Khmer

Birth Registry

When mothers give birth in a MA hospital, they are asked the language in which they prefer to read or discuss health-related materials. Contact the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics at 617-740-2620 for more information. For the period of 2006-2008 the top ten languages were:

- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Other (aggregate of all languages except English, Spanish, and Portuguese)
- Haitian Creole
- Mandarin
- Vietnamese
- Arabic
- Russian
- Cantonese
- Cambodian

Surveillance and Program-Specific Data

Programs with a disease-specific focus may use surveillance, enrollment, and hospital discharge data to identify patient demographics.

Refugee Resettlement Program

Refugees from selected countries and regions are admitted to the US yearly. The Refugee and Immigrant Health Program has arrival information. Upon request, data can be provided at the regional or city level. Go to www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/rhip/wwwrihp.htm, click on “Programs” and then “Refugee and Immigrant Health Program.”

Race, Ethnicity and Language (REL) Data Collection

DPH has adopted regulations for the collection of race, ethnicity, and language information, requiring hospitals in Massachusetts to submit detailed data on all patients in order to more fully describe them. The goals are to assess health disparities and more effectively target programs. Gradually, community based health centers and DPH programs are adapting the proposed REL collection tool, which eventually will enable us to identify specific languages and detailed ethnicity backgrounds for the populations we serve.

The Massachusetts Community Health Information Profile (MassCHIP)

Free, online access to MA health and social indicators, as well as demographic information from a variety of sources. Community-level data are available. Go to <http://masschip.state.ma.us/default.asp>.



Background

The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language has worked to maintain the uniformity of the language, at least in its formal written form, by deciding what constitutes “standard” Spanish. With more than 20 countries using Spanish as their primary language, having uniform, mutually understandable writing is challenging. To add complexity, consider that in these countries language has evolved independently for more than five hundred years. It is no surprise, then, that what might be standard, everyday Spanish in one country may not have equal meaning or affect in another.



Written Spanish: Neutral Spanish, Regional Variations, and Spanglish

When developing public health messages for an English-speaking audience, we tend to favor informal language, everyday speech, and even colloquialisms. This poses a challenge to translators. The best way to ensure uniformity in Spanish is to avoid regionalisms, slang, idiomatic expressions, and most of the techniques we favor when writing our English language materials.

In the interest of clarity, it is preferable to use a less standard word in a translation, or in extreme cases even Spanglish, than it is to risk hindering our audience’s understanding of the message due to increasing the literacy level or using regional variations.

When buying translation services, or developing Spanish language materials, “US Spanish” should be requested. However, all translations should undergo a review by native Spanish speakers from different countries. For those working with medium-size and large translation firms, ask specifically for US-based translators. Translation agencies tend to outsource their services abroad, therefore increasing the chances that your Spanish translation may have lots of regional flavor.

Regional Variations and Education Level

We should recognize that our target audience’s main barrier to understanding our messages is actually literacy itself, not regional variations or word choice. In MA, 46% of Hispanic adults have a literacy level below basic.⁴ Therefore, we should use plain language when writing all of our materials, especially if they are going to be translated.

Spanish Speakers in Massachusetts

Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in our state.⁵ Speakers come from a variety of countries, educational backgrounds, and have varying degrees of acculturation. The census collects Hispanic or Latino race in four categories: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other. You may consult the U.S. Census Bureau to find out the geographic distribution of Hispanic or Latino race in MA. However, other information suggests that the primary Spanish-speaking groups are the following:

- **Dominicans and Puerto Ricans**, who account for the majority of the Spanish-speaking population statewide.

⁴ 2003 State Assessment of Adult Literacy and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

⁵ According to the 2005 American Community Survey, 7% of Massachusetts residents five years and older speak Spanish.

- **Central Americans**, represented primarily by Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Costa Ricans.
- **South Americans**, primarily Colombians but also Venezuelans, Peruvians, and Ecuadorians.
- **Indigenous groups.** It is worth mentioning that the population of indigenous groups from Central and South American countries residing in MA has been growing steadily in recent years. The Southeastern (Fall River, Brockton, New Bedford, and Taunton) and Northeastern (Milford) regions are said to be home to these groups. There is indication that these are speakers of Quiche and Quechua, and that they may not be proficient in Spanish.

Geographic Distribution in Massachusetts

According to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data, the 10 school districts with the highest number of Spanish-speaking students in public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (in descending order) were Boston, Lawrence, Worcester, Springfield, Lynn, Chelsea, Holyoke, Lowell, New Bedford, and Revere.



Background

Portuguese is spoken in Portugal (including the islands of Azores, Madeira and Porto Santo), Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, East Timor, and Macau. In that vast area, the standard written language is very uniform, with small differences in spelling and grammatical structure. Educated Portuguese speakers usually have no difficulty understanding each other's writing (except when regional vocabulary is used). As for the spoken language, differences are more significant.¹



Written Portuguese: Brazilian vs. European

Rather than developing or translating materials in one or both variations of the language, programs should study the target population and decide the base variety of Portuguese to use. Materials should always undergo a review process that includes native speakers—preferably from different Portuguese-speaking countries—to ensure appropriate usage. For example, if a program is developing materials targeted for women of reproductive age statewide, it is preferable to translate into Brazilian Portuguese, because Brazilian immigrants tend to be younger in age. Particular vocabulary that is not common to other Portuguese-speaking countries can be corrected by either adding a second word or replacing the Brazilian term with alternative words or phrases that reflect a more universal type of Portuguese.

Portuguese Speakers in Massachusetts

Portuguese is the third most commonly spoken language in our state.² Speakers can be grouped in three broad categories.

- **Brazilians** account for the majority of recent arrivals and tend to be younger adults (46% ages 20-34; 24% ages 35-44³).
- **European Portuguese** speakers (Portugal, Azores, and Madeira) belong to a previous migration period, with its majority of Portuguese-only speakers now older adults and senior citizens. Having been established in the state longer, European Portuguese speakers are more likely to be acculturated and to have US-born adult children.
- **Cape Verdeans** speak a Creole dialect, but the official language of the country is Portuguese. Individuals who are literate will most likely speak Portuguese. For those who did not attend school in Cape Verde, as was often the case with women, Portuguese may not be a meaningful means of communication. Due to reporting often as “Portuguese,” Cape Verdeans in MA might be undercounted.

Geographic Distribution in Massachusetts

According to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data, the 10 school districts with the highest number of Portuguese-

¹ Adapted from Modern Portuguese, a Reference Grammar. Mário A. Perini, Yale University Press, 2002.

² According to the 2005 American Community Survey, 3.54% of Massachusetts residents five years and older speak Portuguese. According to the same source, English and Spanish make up the first and second most commonly spoken languages, respectively.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

speaking students in public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (in descending order) were Fall River, Framingham, New Bedford, Everett, Somerville, Marlborough, Lowell, Boston, Milford, and Malden.

According to the 2000 census, Brazilians are concentrated in three major areas:

- Boston and the North Shore – comprising principally Allston/Brighton, Somerville, Medford, Everett, Malden, Chelsea, and East Boston.
- Metro West – Marlborough, Framingham, and Milford.
- South Shore, Cape Cod, and The Islands – Barnstable, Yarmouth, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

European Portuguese are concentrated mainly in the Cambridge, Fall River, and New Bedford areas.

Cape Verdeans are concentrated in the Boston area (Dorchester, Roxbury, Quincy, Mattapan, and Randolph) and an onset in Somerville/Cambridge), Brockton, Taunton, Fall River, New Bedford, and Cape Cod.



Background

There are nine main dialect groups in spoken Chinese, of which Mandarin and Cantonese are the biggest. Most of these dialects are not mutually understood; a Cantonese speaker and a Hakka speaker will not necessarily understand one another easily. Mandarin is the official spoken language of the People's Republic of China – it is taught in schools and strongly encouraged by the Chinese government. Most educated mainland Chinese speak Mandarin, even those whose native tongue is a different dialect.



Written Chinese: Traditional Vs. Simplified

The most confusing thing about Chinese translation is that spoken Chinese dialects do not correspond directly with writing systems.

There are two main Chinese writing systems in use today: Traditional Chinese and Simplified Chinese. The Traditional script was in common use everywhere in the Chinese-speaking world until the 1950s, and is still used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and many other places outside mainland China.

Simplified Chinese is the official writing system of the People's Republic of China. It was introduced by the government in the mid-1950s as part of an effort to increase literacy. In 1956 the Chinese government published the *Scheme for Simplifying Chinese Characters*, and over the next two decades the system was refined. The result was that over 2,000 commonly used characters were made less complicated.

Choosing Traditional or Simplified Chinese

Simplified characters are used in mainland China, Singapore, and Malaysia. Traditional Chinese characters are used in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and in most overseas Chinese communities. This means that a Cantonese speaker from Canton, China and a Cantonese speaker from Taipei, Taiwan might be able to understand each other in a spoken conversation, but would not be able to communicate in writing because each uses a different system. Often people who grew up with Traditional Chinese can figure out (with varying levels of difficulty) Simplified characters, but people who learned Simplified as a child will not understand Traditional Chinese without some study.

Although the writing systems can be used by speakers of different dialects, word choices and the meanings of characters can differ based on the dialect. Depending on where your translation will be used, you may need to adapt your document. Different Chinese-speaking audiences have different vocabularies, as language variations continue to develop over time. Units of measurement, currencies, local demographics, brand names, and different governmental structures must be taken into account.

Chinese in Massachusetts

As is the case with most overseas Chinese communities, the predominant writing system uses Traditional characters.

⁶ Most of the information on this sheet was provided by Cetra, Inc.

According to the 2005-2006 FLNE Report, Cantonese was the most commonly spoken dialect of Chinese in MA public schools. Mandarin was the second most frequently encountered dialect, followed by the Taiwan, Fukien, and Shanghai dialects.

According to Birth Registry data, between 1999 and 2005 Mandarin was more commonly spoken by mothers giving birth in Massachusetts than Cantonese or any other Chinese dialect. This information may suggest that Mandarin is the emerging Chinese dialect in the Commonwealth.

Data on preferred writing systems are not available.

Geographic Distribution in Massachusetts

According to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the 10 school districts with the highest aggregate number of Chinese-speaking students in public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (in descending order) were Boston, Quincy, Newton, Malden, Lexington, Brookline, Winchester, Westford, Acton, and Shrewsbury.



Background

Massachusetts is home to thousands of Haitians. The two official languages of Haiti are French and Haitian Creole. All Haitians speak Haitian Creole, while only a small portion of the population can be considered fully bilingual in French and Haitian Creole. Traditionally, the two languages served different functions, with Haitian Creole being the informal, everyday language of all the people, regardless of social class, and French being the language of formal situations: schools, newspapers, the law and the courts, etc.



Literacy

Haiti's education system was reformed in 1978. One major change was the use of Haitian Creole as the language of instruction in the first four grades. Until then, all grades were taught in French. According to the 1982 census in Haiti, more than 60% of the adult population was illiterate. More recent data (2003-2008) show a 62% adult literacy rate.⁸

The low literacy rates combined with several other factors – such as the formal introduction of Haitian Creole in schools as of 1978 – has at times resulted in conflicting language preference among Haitians. While the use of Creole is popular for oral communication, its written form may not be meaningful for those formally educated in French, or for people who do not have regular contact with written Creole.

Choosing to Translate Written Documents into Haitian Creole or French

A series of focus groups sponsored by the MDPH in 2007 found that Haitians in the Metropolitan Boston area prefer to receive their written health information in Creole, not French. The focus groups further reported that whenever possible, bilingual formats should be used. The language pairs for bilingual documents should be Creole and French or Creole and English.

Video and audio formats have shown to be successful media to communicate health information to the Haitian population.

Geographic Distribution in Massachusetts

According to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the 10 school districts with the highest aggregate number of Haitian Creole-speaking students in public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (in descending order) were Boston, Brockton, Randolph, Everett, Malden, Cambridge, Somerville, Medford, Waltham, and Lynn.

⁷ Most information on this sheet comes from “The Haitians, Their History and Culture,” by Michele Burtoff Civan, Refugee Service Center, Center for Applied Linguistics (1994).

⁸ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/haiti_statistics.html#67. Accessed June 2, 2010.



Background

The Vietnamese have been in Massachusetts for decades. Different waves of refugees settled in the Commonwealth during the '70s, '80s and early '90s, and, more recently, as immigrants. As a result, the Vietnamese community in MA is diverse in terms of age, educational background, degree of acculturation, etc.



Language Variation

Vietnamese has traditionally been divided into three dialect regions: North, Central, and South. These dialect regions differ mostly in their sound systems, but also in vocabulary (including basic vocabulary, non-basic vocabulary, and grammatical words) and grammar.¹⁰

Translating Written Documents into Vietnamese

Here are a few things to consider when translating into Vietnamese:

- Some translation companies send their translation jobs abroad. Similar to other immigrant groups, there is a difference between how language is used in Vietnam and how it is used by Vietnamese immigrants in the US. Vietnamese literacy levels between refugees or early settlement immigrants may be different from that of the newly arrived. Make clear to the company that your audience is Vietnamese readers living in the US and, as such, neutral, standard terms should be used. Whenever possible, request a US-based translator. Make sure to use simple explanatory terms and not high level terminology.
- Always have your translations reviewed internally or by end-users. When possible, the translation must be reviewed by more than one person.
- Vietnamese script uses the Latin alphabet with an extensive and complex combination of diacriticals over and below vowels. Therefore, most computers won't readily display it. Always have PDFs of your final documents and ask translators to provide you with the fonts they used. Also, ask to have the document completed using the UNICODE font type.
- Video and audio formats have shown to be successful media to communicate health information to the Vietnamese population.

Geographic Distribution in Massachusetts

According to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the 10 school districts with the highest aggregate number of Vietnamese-speaking students in public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (in descending order) were Boston, Worcester, Quincy, Randolph, Malden, Springfield, Everett, Lowell, Lynn, and Lawrence.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_language. Accessed June 3, 2010.



Background

The city of Lowell alone is home to more than 25,000 Cambodians. Lowell, Massachusetts has the second largest Cambodian population in the US. Many immigrated to the region during the late 1970s/early 1980s resettlements, fleeing from political persecution and genocide.



Literacy

According to the CIA World Factbook the literacy rate in Cambodia is 73.6%.⁹ Other sources cite much lower rates. Adult literacy rates for males are considerably higher than those for females. One of the most alarming facts about literacy in Cambodia is that rates have remained unchanged for many years.

Translating Written Documents into Khmer

Here are a few things to consider when translating into Khmer:

- Some translation companies send their translation jobs abroad. However, there are differences between how language is used in Cambodia and how it is used by Cambodian immigrants in the US. Literacy between refugees or early settlement immigrants is different from that of the newly arrived. Therefore, whenever possible, request a US-based translator. Make sure to use simple explanatory terms and not high level terminology
- There are significant differences in how language is used by different age groups. Academic language is often more difficult to understand than lay terms or the everyday language used in the community. Therefore, make sure the target audience is clearly defined to the translator, including age group.
- Always have your translations reviewed internally or by end-users. When possible, the translation must be reviewed by more than one person.
- Khmer script (abugida) is complex and most computers won't readily display it. Always have PDFs of your final documents and ask translators to provide you with the fonts they used. Also, ask to have the document completed using the UNICODE font type.
- Video and audio formats have shown to be successful media to communicate health information to the Cambodian population.

Geographic Distribution in Massachusetts

According to MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the 10 school districts with the highest aggregate number of Khmer-speaking students in public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (in descending order) were Lowell, Lynn, Fall River, Lawrence, Revere, Attleboro, Worcester, Boston, Chelsea, and Easthampton.

⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>. Accessed on 04/26/2010.