

# Style Guide for Community Translations into Spanish

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## 1. Audience and scope

This style guide is intended for professional translators and translation checkers, and may also be useful for copyeditors, community review panels, and machine translation post-editors. The document sets the expectations for community translators in particular and outlines the preferred style for translations into Spanish. The document is unable to cover all the relevant translation, language and style issues, but focuses on aspects that have been judged important based on a review of Spanish translations currently available in Australia. The style guide was prepared with the understanding that translators undertaking translation work for public services would have already received adequate training and/or NAATI certification.

## 2. Background

Both in Australia and worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of timely, accurate and effective translation – probably more than any other phenomenon or crisis. Governments, community organisations and leaders, the media, and people in general have had to deal with or hear about the need for translation to communicate public health advice to all residents, regardless what their first language is. Translation has been in the spotlight – mostly because of its essential contribution to health literacy and public health, but sometimes also because of translation or production errors.

Community translations play a key role in public messaging. They facilitate communication between governmental and non-governmental services and end users who speak a language other than English. Community translations allow departments, agencies and services to reach out to CALD communities, and facilitate access to public information and instructions that would be inaccessible due to language barriers. Community translations are also effective communication tools with community members who have a functional command of English but prefer to receive information in their LOTE. Public messaging through the target audience's first language or the language they emotionally identify with, is likely to have more impact.

Community translations are part of the communication strategies of organisations that publish content to inform and educate the Australian public, including in healthcare, legal, social service, educational and other sectors. The value of translations therefore lies in the extent to which they are communicatively effective and fit for purpose. Back in 2014, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care noted: 'There has been some concern that translation of information about health and health care is not done consistently and to a high standard' ([Health literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality](#)). Such concern is still current, at least in relation to some published translations. A translation may be at the highest standard in terms of language correctness and accuracy, but it also needs to communicate contents in a way that suits the target audience, helps them understand information and act upon it.

As professional translators are well aware, translation does not consist of replacing words in one language with 'equivalent' words in another, or mirroring phrases and sentences found in the source text. It needs to convey the messages of the source text, keeping in mind the type of text being translated and its communicative function. For public messaging, in particular, translations also need to read and flow 'naturally', appear credible, and be suitable for the target audience, so that they can use, understand and act upon the messaging.

### **3. Translation approach**

There is wide agreement that a communicative or functionalist approach to translation is the most appropriate, especially for community translations. In this approach **the translator is guided by the function of the text, rather than the words or sentences themselves.**

Two broad categories of texts are translated for the benefit of CALD communities: regulatory texts and informative/instructive texts.

Regulatory texts define procedures, rights, entitlements and obligations in a formal tone, which makes them legal texts or close to legal texts. An example is the Australian Tax Office's document [Registering for GST](#).

Informative and instructive texts aim to inform, raise awareness, educate, and encourage the public to take action. These are the most typical texts translated as part of public messaging. Examples are the COVID-related translations available on the [website of the Department of Health](#).

While translations of legal and regulatory texts require special attention to accuracy and precision because of the legal implications involved, translations of informative and instructive texts need to be accurate and precise too but have accessibility and impact as their paramount aims. **Governmental and non-governmental organisations produce such texts to inform and get people to act. Community translations should also be written in a style that can get the message across and get readers to respond.**

#### 4. Audience: Personas of community users

Every writer has an audience in mind; translators are no exceptions. The only difference is that the translator's audience is already determined in the instructions received from the commissioning organisation or author (translation brief). To visualise the audience of a given translation, the notion of 'persona' is extremely useful. 'Personas' are typical user profiles within the target community which a translator can imagine or outline on paper (or an electronic device) based on the translation brief and their knowledge of the relevant community (in our case Spanish speakers in Australia, Spanish-speaking older people in NSW, etc.).

For each translation task, the translator would need to have a few 'personas' in mind to determine the most appropriate language (i.e., style, lexical choices, structural complexity, etc.). These personas will need to cover as many backgrounds and sub-groups of the target readership as possible (e.g., literacy levels, country of origin, age, etc.). For example, for the [vaccination advice](#) available on the website of the Department of Health, we can create the following personas:

**Mateo:** 70-year-old Chilean man; has been living in Australia since the 1980's; able to understand written English, but more limited when speaking it. Completed primary school in Chile; continues to communicate mainly in Spanish with family and in social situations; however, finds reading in Spanish challenging when the text contains complex structures or specialised terminology.

**Daniela:** 25-year-old woman from Colombia; arrived in Australia recently on a student visa to study English; completed a degree in Market Research in Colombia and enjoys reading information on social media, mainly in Spanish as not too confident reading in English yet. Likes keeping informed and up to date.

**Víctor:** 50-year-old Salvadoran male; migrated to Australia as a refugee because of the violence in his country; highly literate in Spanish, but with a beginner level in English.

**Ana:** 35-year-old Spanish woman; arrived in Australia recently on a temporary visa with her young family; has limited knowledge of English; spends most of her time looking after her baby and does not have time to read the news. When looking for information, she prefers it to be brief and to-the-point.

## 5. Language variety

Even though Spanish speakers in Australia use different variants of Spanish, translations of informative texts should aim to use language that is **as neutral as possible** for written communication.

Since the potential recipients of these messages are Spanish speakers from different backgrounds and cultures, the translator needs to maximise readers' chances of understanding and acting according to the information delivered. Always try to **avoid regionalisms and localisms** in terms of syntax, lexical choices and idioms that may not be **understood by the majority of the target audience**. Choose the most widely used options; where there are regional variations, you may also include alternative terms between parentheses just to ensure accessibility for as many people as possible.

**Example:** Use of the term '*barbijo*' might not be generally understood, whereas more people will be familiar with the term '*mascarilla*'.

**Formality** is preferred to colloquialism and needs to be coherent throughout the entire translation.

- As a general recommendation, when translating the personal pronoun 'you', use the formal '*usted*' instead of '*tú*'.
- However, if you are aware that the written material is to be used as part of an audiovisual communication strategy (e.g., video on COVID-19 restrictions), social media or if the target public are children or adolescents, the informal '*tú*' as the second person pronoun and its associated conjugation paradigm may be more appropriate. Advice to and consultation with the commissioner or translation agency are key in this regard.
- The **use of '*vos*' is not recommended**, as its use is restricted to certain regions.

Be aware that further adjustments may be required in terms of the degree of formality, as Spanish colloquialism is expressed differently than in English.

If using a regional dialect (for audiovisual dissemination), in order to make the translation as inclusive as possible, extreme regionalisms (i.e., words and expressions only known in a specific region) are to be avoided. If the information is aimed at a particular Spanish-speaking community (e.g., Mexican), use the relevant regional dialect, or decline the assignment if unable to translate into that variant.

## 6. Coherence and cohesion

**Texts—including translations—need to be coherent and cohesive to make sense to the audience. Coherence is the semantic connectedness within a text and between the text and its context.** Coherence requires meaning connectedness (smooth flow of ideas), consistency and relevance to the topic or context at hand. Sentences should make sense in their context, be semantically related, and show conceptual and logical consistency (e.g., no contradiction).

In the following example, judging from the context and general knowledge, it is clear that TGA has a list of all approved vaccines and whenever a new vaccine is approved, it is added to the list. The way it is expressed in the English source text, however, suggests that a list of vaccines is kept after TGA approves a vaccine. Such coherence issues should be reported to the commissioning organisation. In terms of translation approach, this is not a legal text or a personal official document (e.g., birth or marriage certificate) where the translator would use [sic] to indicate errors or inconsistencies in the source text. Instead, the sentence should be translated having in mind sense and coherence: “Once TGA approves a vaccine, it adds it to the list of approved vaccines”.

Source text	Less coherent translation	More coherent translation
Once TGA approves a vaccine, it keeps a list of all vaccinations it approved.	Una vez que el TGA aprueba una vacuna, mantiene una lista de todas las vacunas aprobadas.	Una vez que el TGA aprueba una vacuna, la incluye en la lista de vacunas aprobadas.

**Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical linking between sentences and paragraphs, which ensures that the resulting text hangs together and flows smoothly.** Cohesion can be based on linking words and syntactical consistency (e.g., use of pronouns or grammatical tense). It can also be based on lexical reference (e.g., repetition of the same word, collocation, use of a synonym or a word referring to a larger category, ellipsis or omission of words because they have been mentioned earlier or because they can be inferred from the context).

Coherence and cohesion are related: coherence relates to conceptual and logical connections within a text; cohesion relates to connectedness at a structural and referential levels.

**Cohesive devices are essential to readability and comprehension,** probably more so for Spanish than English. Mirroring English language structures without due attention to linking words often leads to Spanish translations that are difficult to follow and less coherent texts. Translators need to make the necessary syntactical adjustments to ensure cohesion.

Spanish sentences are usually longer than English ones and are typically linked using conjunctions or discourse connectives such as *‘para empezar’*, *‘para continuar’*, *‘por un lado’*, *‘por otro lado’*, *‘a continuación’*, *‘en conclusión’*, and so on.

Linking devices in Spanish are used for a variety of purposes. The following are just some examples:

- To express **contrast, differentiation or contradiction**: *‘no obstante’*, *‘en cambio’*, *‘con todo’*, *‘sin embargo’*, *‘por el contrario’*;
- To express **causality** (cause-result relation): *‘por lo tanto’*, *‘en consecuencia’*, *‘de modo que’*, *‘así’*, *‘por lo cual’*, *‘por consiguiente’*;
- To **justify or explain**: *‘es decir’*, *‘en otras palabras’*, *‘por ejemplo’*, *‘dicho de otro modo’*, *‘en resumen’*;
- To **link events chronologically**: *‘a partir de’*, *‘después’*, *‘en primer lugar’*, *‘para resumir’*, *‘finalmente’*;

- To **add**: *'igualmente', 'además', 'también', 'por otra parte', 'asimismo', 'de igual manera'*.

Source text	Less cohesive translation	More cohesive translation
Infections are on the rise and more hospitalisations are expected. Everyone with symptoms needs to get tested to help stop the spread of COVID-19.	Las infecciones continúan en aumento y se esperan más hospitalizaciones. Todas las personas con síntomas deben someterse a la prueba para ayudar a frenar la propagación del COVID-19.	Las infecciones continúan en aumento y se esperan más hospitalizaciones. <b>Por lo tanto</b> , todas las personas con síntomas deben someterse a la prueba para ayudar a frenar la propagación del COVID-19.

## Consistency

It is important to maintain consistency throughout the translated text to ensure that it holds together coherently. **Lack of consistency can cause confusion.** Some elements where consistency should be applied include:

- Terminology: creating and maintaining a glossary of terms helps achieve a consistent translation;
- Letter case;
- Syntax (e.g., where some constructions are repeated);
- Infinitive vs imperative when translating instructions;
- Format (e.g., quotation marks, bullet lists);
- Punctuation;
- Verb tenses;
- Level of formality.

## 7. Readability

A text that hangs together with the help of appropriate cohesive devices is likely to be more readable, but there is more to readability than just cohesion. Readability is the extent to which a written text can be understood by readers with different literacy levels. Many elements can contribute to readability:

- Sentence length and complexity: shorter sentences with no subordinate clauses are more readable than longer sentences with subordinate clauses;
- Word length and lexical complexity: a dosed frequency of specialised terms or uncommon words make texts more readable. **When you have a choice, use the most commonly used word or expression;**
- Correct language use (grammar, punctuation, and spelling);
- Presentation (e.g., font size, spacing, visual aids, etc.);
- Appropriate lexical choices for the type of text and context: use terms that one would expect to appear in a text about the topic at hand in Spanish;
- Unnecessary repetitions and redundancies: these should be avoided to make the text more reader-friendly;

- Appropriate text and sentence structure: transferring the meaning(s) of the source text in a way that complies with the structural norms of the Spanish language for comprehensibility;
- Use of small words: the use of indefinite and definite articles enhances the clarity of a Spanish written text;
- Active voice: the use and/or abuse of the passive voice in Spanish makes a text sound unnatural and more difficult to read and understand;
- Use of personal subject pronouns: while English requires the use of the pronouns ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’, etc.’, in Spanish the verb endings usually provide the information about the subject of the sentence. Accordingly, explicit use of the personal subject pronouns in Spanish is often unnecessary and may impact on readability.

**Readability is key to accessibility of information in community translations. Improving the readability of translations (e.g., by adding and/or omitting lexical and/or syntactic elements to ensure clarity) is not a translation error. As long as the meaning in the source text is not altered and the addition/deletion is justified, that is not considered a mistranslation.**

Source text	Literal translation	Less literal translation
What happens after I get tested? <b>You</b> need to stay at home until <b>you</b> get a negative result.	¿Qué pasa después de que me hagan la prueba? <b>Usted</b> debe permanecer en su casa hasta que <b>usted</b> reciba un resultado negativo.	¿Qué pasa después de que me hagan la prueba? Debe permanecer en su casa hasta que reciba un resultado negativo.

### Plain English

Public information messages tend to use ‘plain English’. Some of the characteristics of plain English may need to be adapted into ‘clear’ Spanish to avoid calquing and to make the text more readable. For example:

- Plain English often uses the frequent repetition of a word, however the same strategy in Spanish may result in awkward and clumsy sentences. You can improve readability in Spanish by replacing the repeated term with a synonym, a pronoun or by omitting it altogether **provided that the meaning is still accurate and clear.**

Source text	Literal translation	Less literal translation
A maximum of two <b>Medicare cards</b> can be issued per family. If you’re 15 or older, you can get your own <b>Medicare card</b> . If your <b>Medicare card</b> is lost or stolen, you can easily request a new one.	Se pueden emitir un máximo de dos <b>tarjetas de Medicare</b> por familia. A partir de los 15 años, puede obtener su propia <b>tarjeta de Medicare</b> . Si su <b>tarjeta de Medicare</b> se pierde o se la roban, puede solicitar fácilmente una nueva.	Se pueden emitir un máximo de dos <b>tarjetas de Medicare</b> por familia. A partir de los 15 años, puede obtener su propia <b>tarjeta</b> . Si <b>la</b> pierde o se la roban, puede solicitar fácilmente una nueva.

- The use of very short, telegraphic sentences in plain English might affect the readability in Spanish. When all the sentences are short and/or of the same length,

the flow seems unnatural and sounds monotonous. This can be avoided, for example, by **logically joining two short sentences together with a connector**.

Source text	Literal translation	Less literal translation
A vaccine is medicine that can help you fight a virus. It can stop you getting very sick.	Una vacuna es un medicamento que le ayuda a combatir un virus. Puede prevenir que se enferme gravemente.	Una vacuna es un medicamento que le ayuda a combatir un virus <b>y</b> puede prevenir que se enferme gravemente.

- c. Public messages in plain English tend to address the target audience directly using the pronoun 'you'. This same strategy does not always sound natural in Spanish. If the text allows it, you should use the Spanish impersonal form with 'se'.

Source text	Translation with 'usted'	Alternative translation: 'se'
You can be infected with the coronavirus and not have a fever or other symptoms.	<b>Usted</b> puede estar infectado con el coronavirus y no tener fiebre ni otros síntomas.	<b>Se</b> puede estar infectado con el coronavirus y no tener fiebre ni otros síntomas.

## 8. Idiomatic language

Idiomatic language refers to expressions, collocations and sentence structures that are typical of a given language. Appropriate use of idiomatic language makes texts read natural. Unidiomatic language, on the other hand, is often a sign of a literal approach to translation. **When translating into Spanish, always ask yourself: What is the idea/message here? How would I normally say this in Spanish? What would a text of these characteristics and content 'sound' like in a monolingual setting?**

**When revising your first draft, read it as if you were one of the 'personas' you created and try to imagine their reactions to the idiomatic component of the translation.**

Avoid the use of calques (translating phrases and structures word-for-word) as they often result in unsuccessful renditions and unnatural language.

**Examples of idiomaticity:**

Source text	Awkward/unidiomatic	More natural/idiomatic
New methods to reduce the potential for the termination of pregnancies.	Nuevos métodos para reducir <b>el potencial para</b> la terminación del embarazo.	Nuevos métodos para reducir <b>la posibilidad de</b> interrumpir el embarazo.



## 9. Writing style and tone

Translators are guided by the style and tone of the source document. The tone of the source document normally conveys the author's or the commissioning organisation's relationship with the readers and how they would like the target audience to respond to their messaging. Translators should attempt to maintain the original style and tone of the source document, while adhering to the norms and conventions of the target language (in this case Spanish), as well as fulfilling the expectations of the target community (See *Personas* in Section 4).

Keeping in mind, however, that certain elements may not translate easily into the target language, it is essential for translators to use their best judgement. **Rewriting of the text should only be used in order to improve clarity or readability**, and unnatural literal translations should always be avoided.

### 9.1 Special case: Translation of 'please'

In English, the word 'please' is commonly used to make a request more polite and to make an order less direct. Spanish tends to use a more direct language, and there is usually no need to translate every occurrence of 'please' as it can make the text cumbersome. Purposely omitting '*por favor*' in the translation of requests and orders should not be considered an error but a translation strategy.

Source text	Literal translation	More direct translation
If it's an emergency, please call 000.	En caso de emergencia, por favor llame al 000.	En caso de emergencia, llame al 000.

### 9.2 Special case: Translation of instructions and commands

Often, instead of through the imperative, orders in English are expressed in the indicative mood with the auxiliary 'must' (e.g., 'you' + 'must'). In Spanish, however, the preferred verb forms for instructions and commands are the infinitive and the imperative. It is therefore important, particularly when translating public information messages, to understand the intention of the author and to maintain the tone and intent by making the necessary adjustments.

Source text	Literal translation	Improved translation
You must not allow a person to visit your home.	No debe permitir que una persona visite su casa.	No permita visitas en casa.

**Unless instructed otherwise in the translation brief, community translators need to take into consideration the crucial information conveyed in the source text and the constraints of the target language and community, and strike a balance between them.**

## 10. Grammar

### 10.1 Syntactical structure and word order

Although both English and Spanish are languages that share a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure, Spanish has more flexibility in terms of word order. As a result, Spanish speakers will more likely change the word order to emphasize one element of the sentence over another. Translation from English into Spanish requires adaptation to the norms and conventions of the target language and careful attention should be paid to the syntactical order to better express meaning. **Mirroring the structure of English sentences often leads to unidiomatic and poorly connected translations.**

Source text	Literal translation	Improved translation
Your Centrelink record <b>will not be updated</b> with the information you provide in this claim, except for your residential address	Su historial de Centrelink <b>no se actualizará</b> con la información que proporcione en este reclamo, excepto su dirección residencial.	<b>No se actualizarán</b> los registros de Centrelink con la información que facilite en esta solicitud, a excepción del domicilio.

### 10.2 Active and passive voice

Active- and passive- voice structures are syntactical options available in both English and Spanish. However, the functions and frequency of passive voice in Spanish are not the same as in English. In Spanish, the active voice is usually preferred. **The fact that we have a passive construction in an English source text does not mean that we must always use a similar structure in Spanish.**

For example, in the following case, it is preferable to choose the active voice instead of the passive voice of the original:

Source text	Literal translation	Adjustment: Active voice
The vaccine <b>was developed and improved</b> by the researchers.	La vacuna <b>fue desarrollada y mejorada</b> por los investigadores.	Los investigadores <b>desarrollaron y mejoraron</b> la vacuna.
New measures <b>were announced</b> by the governments of Victoria and South Australia.	Nuevas medidas <b>fueron anunciadas</b> por los Gobiernos de Victoria y Australia Meridional.	Los Gobiernos de Victoria y Australia Meridional <b>anunciaron</b> nuevas medidas.

If the subject of the sentence is not identified, often due to impersonality of scientific information, Spanish prefers the use of 'se':

Source text	Literal translation	Adjustment: Use of 'se'
This medication is <b>administered</b> by mouth.	Esta medicación <b>es administrada</b> por vía oral.	Esta medicación <b>se administra</b> por vía oral.

People aged over 60 <b>will be vaccinated</b> next month	El próximo mes <b>serán vacunados</b> los mayores de 60.	El próximo mes <b>se vacunará</b> a los mayores de 60.
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### 10.3 Multi-word noun phrases

Noun phrases with several pre-modifiers and/or post-modifiers can often lead to mistranslation or ambiguous renditions. In the following examples, the **bolded words** are clearly the heads in their respective phrases (the main item we refer to), while the other words provide additional information:

- Pre-clinical **trial**: '*prueba preclínica*'
- Medicare funded **services**: '*servicios subvencionados por Medicare*'
- Australian Technical Advisory **Group** on Immunisation: '*Grupo Asesor Técnico Australiano para la Inmunización*'
- Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia **syndrome** (TTS): '*Síndrome de Trombosis con Trombocitopenia (STT)*' (not '*Trombosis con síndrome de trombocitopenia (TTS)*')

It is important to read such phrases carefully in context, identify the main referent (the head) and translate them accordingly. Often the order in English is pre-modifier + pre - modifier, etc. +\_head, which is generally translated into Spanish in the opposite order (head + modifier + modifier, etc.).

In English, it is common to use a noun as an adjective to modify another noun, while in Spanish this is unusual, and it is only valid with certain words (e.g., '*células madre*'). When translating, you may need to find adjectives for the main noun, or even prepositions, such as in 'home care package', translated as '*paquete de atención domiciliaria*'.

### 10.4 Common grammatical errors

Common grammatical errors in translations from English into Spanish include, but are not limited to:

#### *Missing articles*

In English, it is common to find sentences that start with a noun, with no article at the beginning. In Spanish, you will generally need to insert an article:

Source text	Literal translation	Adjustment: Article
Hospitals are prepared for a rise in hospitalisations.	Hospitales están preparados para un aumento de las hospitalizaciones.	<b>Los</b> hospitales están preparados para un aumento de las hospitalizaciones.

The same applies to the names of organisations, for instance, that need to be adjusted with articles:

Source text	Literal translation	Adjustment: Article
Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations	Coalición para Innovaciones en Preparación para Epidemias	Coalición para las Innovaciones en Preparación para Epidemias

Also remember to use definite or indefinite articles for every item of a list in the Spanish translation.

Source text	Translation with no adjustments	Correct use of definite and indefinite articles
The changes will affect health care workers, medical students and medical associations.	Los cambios afectarán a trabajadores de la salud, estudiantes de medicina y agremiaciones médicas.	Los cambios afectarán a los trabajadores de la salud, a los estudiantes de medicina y a las agremiaciones médicas.

### *Incorrect use of possessive determiners*

Compared to Spanish, English tends to use possessive determiners ('my', 'your', etc.) more often. When translating to Spanish, some might need to be replaced by the definite article:

Source text	Literal translation	Adjustment: Definite article
After receiving <b>your</b> vaccine	Después de recibir <b>su</b> vacuna	Después de recibir <b>la</b> vacuna

Unlike in English, in Spanish possessive determiners ('mi', 'su', 'nuestro', etc.) are not used with parts of the body, and definite articles are preferred:

Source text	Literal translation	Adjustment: Definite article
Use a mask that covers <b>your</b> nose and mouth at all times.	Use una mascarilla que le cubra <b>su</b> nariz y <b>su</b> boca en todo momento.	Use una mascarilla que le cubra <b>la</b> nariz y <b>la</b> boca en todo momento.

### *Lack of gender and number agreement*

One important difference between English and Spanish is the fact that grammatical gender in Spanish affects several words and their inflections. Sometimes, translators work in short translation units. As a result, they may not be aware that the gender of a certain word in the next unit is linked to a previous one, where it is explicit. Machine translation aids tend to assign a masculine class to unknown or ambiguous words. To avoid this kind of mistake, it is crucial to reread the translation paying special attention to gender inflections.

Source text	Literal translation	Grammatical agreement
Pfizer is safe.	Pfizer es seguro.	<b>La</b> Pfizer es <b>segura</b> .
Early data showed that vaccination was effective in preventing older people requiring hospital treatment,	Datos preliminares mostraron que la vacunación fue eficaz para evitar la hospitalización en las	Según se desprende de los datos preliminares, la vacunación fue eficaz para evitar la hospitalización en

and most of them received COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca.	<b>personas</b> mayores y la mayor parte de <b>ellos</b> fueron <b>vacunados</b> con la vacuna contra el COVID AstraZeneca.	las <b>personas</b> mayores y la mayor parte de <b>ellas</b> había recibido la vacuna de AstraZeneca.
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### *Incorrect use of the gerund*

Unlike in English, there are some uses of the gerund (verbs ending in 'ing' which are translated as 'ando' or 'endo') that in Spanish are considered ungrammatical.

The first one is the 'gerund of posterity': the gerund indicates an act **subsequent** (and not immediate) to the one stated by the main verb of the sentence. When translating, an alternative verb conjugation and rephrasing should be chosen:

Source text	Incorrect use of the gerund	Correct rephrasing
The patients were treated with a new drug, <b>improving</b> a week later.	Los pacientes recibieron un tratamiento con un nuevo fármaco, <b>mejorando</b> una semana después.	Los pacientes recibieron un tratamiento con un nuevo fármaco <b>y mejoraron</b> una semana después.

It is also grammatically incorrect to use the gerund in Spanish **as an adjective**:

Source text	Incorrect use of the gerund	Correct rephrasing
New lockdown rules <b>modifying</b> the use of face masks will come into effect tomorrow.	Mañana entrarán en vigor nuevas medidas de confinamiento <b>modificando</b> el uso de la mascarilla.	Mañana entrarán en vigor nuevas medidas de confinamiento <b>que modifican</b> el uso de la mascarilla.

Gerunds used in **English headings** sound artificial in Spanish:

Source text	Incorrect use of the gerund	Correct rephrasing
<b>Requesting</b> your vaccination appointment	<b>Solicitando</b> su cita para vacunarse	<b>Cómo pedir</b> cita para vacunarse

As a general rule, avoid excessive use of the gerund in Spanish.

### *False friends*

False friends (or cognates) are pairs of words that sound and look similar but have different meanings. Using a false friend can lead to distortions of meaning in the translation. Some common false friends are:

Source text	False friend	Correct term
adequate	adecuado	suficiente
to attend	atender	asistir
to assist	asistir	ayudar

actually	actualmente	en realidad, de hecho
consistent	consistente	consecuente, congruente, coherente
commonly	comúnmente	habitualmente, con frecuencia
to consider	considerar	examinar, analizar, tener en cuenta
disorder	desorden	trastorno
notice	noticia	aviso, anuncio
severe (pain)	severo	intenso, fuerte

### *Incorrect use of prepositions*

A common problem when translating from English into Spanish is the incorrect use of prepositions as a result of literal translation.

Source text	Incorrect preposition	Correct preposition
Glossary <b>for</b> immunisation	Glosario <b>para</b> inmunización	Glosario <b>de</b> inmunización
The best way <b>to</b> contact us	La mejor forma <b>para</b> contactarnos	La mejor forma <b>de</b> contactarnos
<b>under</b> a new name	<b>bajo</b> un nuevo nombre	<b>con</b> un nuevo nombre

When in doubt about the correct preposition in Spanish, see the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*.

### *Conjunction 'and/or'*

A common mistake in translations from English into Spanish is the use of 'y/o' in the target text when translating the grammatical conjunction 'and/or'. In English, 'and/or' is used to express the possibility of choosing two elements or only one, whereas in Spanish, these two meanings are expressed with the conjunction 'o' alone. Use of 'y/o' is only accepted to avoid ambiguity in very technical and legal contexts.

Source text	Incorrect translation	Correct translation
Written permission must be obtained from the patient <b>and/or</b> their family.	Se deberá obtener el permiso escrito del paciente <b>y/o</b> de sus familiares.	Se deberá obtener el permiso escrito del paciente <b>o</b> de sus familiares.

### *'Should' and 'might'*

When translating from English, translators need to be aware that modal verbs such as 'should' and 'might' generally need to be translated into more certain Spanish statements than those of the source text. To do so, it is essential to understand the intent of the message (an order, a recommendation, or others), as well as the relationship between the author and the target audience.

Source text	Literal translation	Correct translation for certain messages
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People with even mild symptoms <b>should</b> get tested.	Las personas que presenten incluso síntomas leves <b>deberían</b> hacerse la prueba.	Las personas que presenten incluso síntomas leves <b>deberán/deben</b> hacerse la prueba.
What you <b>might</b> expect if you are admitted as a patient	Lo que <b>podría</b> esperar si ingresa como paciente.	Lo que <b>puede</b> esperar si ingresa como paciente.

When translating clearly prescriptive texts, we can use ‘*debe*’ or ‘*debería*’ as valid translations of ‘should’. Remember that instructions in Spanish are usually delivered in the imperative mood or in the infinitive.

### Translation of ‘or’

English sentences that have ‘or’ after a negative verb should be translated into Spanish using the conjunction ‘*ni*’ instead of ‘*o*’.

Source text	Incorrect use of ‘ <i>o</i> ’	Correct use of ‘ <i>ni</i> ’
You cannot eat fatty food <b>or</b> drink alcohol.	No puede comer alimentos grasos <b>o</b> tomar alcohol.	No puede comer alimentos grasos <b>ni</b> consumir alcohol.

## 11. Gender, inclusiveness and political correctness

Unlike English, Spanish is a grammatically gendered language, i.e., nouns, adjectives, determiners and pronouns have an inflection, either masculine or feminine, depending on the referent. This means that as soon as a gender-neutral sentence referring to people is translated from English into Spanish, a decision needs to be made as to whether to use the masculine or feminine form. In Spanish, the masculine form (both singular and plural) has been traditionally used as the standard form, with feminine forms used when reference is made specifically to women. Nowadays, however, there is a growing awareness of gender bias in language and a more gender-neutral use of language is preferred.

Writers, translators included, need to remember that the population is composed of both women and men. They may attempt to be inclusive by avoiding the generic masculine when possible, provided that this will not impede understanding of the text by the target audience (e.g., if the text is targeted at the elderly, a decision will need to be made as to whether the generic language will hinder comprehension or not). In other circumstances, they may use both feminine and masculine lexical items to ensure gender inclusiveness. **As a rule, use both feminine and masculine or neutral lexical items to ensure gender inclusiveness. Also avoid using feminine forms specifically when such language use may be perceived as sexist, such as when the text provides information or instructions about a topic that might be culturally associated with women. It is safe to use feminine forms when the source text is addressed to women only (e.g., pregnancy tips), but sexist when it deals, for example, with childcare, home schooling or cooking. When the source text includes sensitive content (e.g., domestic violence or sexual abuse), it is good practice to check with the translation commissioner whether the translation should use a gender-neutral or a gender-specific approach.**

Some alternatives are:

Source text	Traditional ES translation	Inclusive ES translation
the citizens	los ciudadanos	la ciudadanía
the doctors	los médicos	el equipo médico
the nurses	las enfermeras	los enfermeros y las enfermeras, el personal de enfermería
the client	el cliente	el/la cliente/a

Other strategies are also valid for a gender-neutral use of language, such as the introduction of the impersonal passive voice. For example:

Source text	Non-inclusive translation	Inclusive translation
<b>Members</b> must submit their application form through our website.	<b>Los miembros</b> deben presentar la solicitud a través de nuestro sitio web.	La solicitud <b>se debe</b> presentar a través de nuestro sitio web.

However, beware that sometimes the above strategy might affect the meaning and intent of the source text, and should only be applied when accuracy and intent are retained.

When translating in fields where gender and language have been discussed more in depth (e.g., LGBTIQ communities) it is also important to check with the translation commissioner for an appropriate inclusive language approach.

## 12. Punctuation

In Spanish, there are unified and very detailed rules of punctuation that can be consulted in the *Diccionario Panhispánico de Dudas* at <https://www.rae.es/dpd/>. Here are some examples of common punctuation problems:

### 12.1 Comma

One of the most common problems, both in writing and translating, is the use of a **comma between the subject and the verb**. It sometimes sounds natural to make a pause at that point in the sentence when reading, but that does not mean that a comma should be inserted in writing.

Source text	Incorrect punctuation	Correct punctuation
The children's hospital is the best in the state.	El hospital infantil, es el mejor del estado.	El hospital infantil es el mejor del estado.

An exception to the above is when the verb is immediately preceded by a **clause that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence**. In this case, the clause is set off by commas.

**Example:** *El hospital infantil, el mejor del estado, ha reabierto.*



While in English it is common to find a comma right after the penultimate element of a list of more than three terms, in Spanish this **serial comma** (or Oxford comma) is inappropriate and should be avoided.

Source text	Incorrect use of the comma	Correct use of the comma
Masks, gowns, and hand sanitizer.	Mascarillas, batas, y desinfectante de manos.	Mascarillas, batas y desinfectante de manos.

There are certain exceptions to this rule that can be consulted at: <https://www.rae.es/dpd/coma>

## 12.2 Punctuation in bullet lists

In Spanish, semicolons are used to separate the elements in a bullet list when there are **complex expressions** that include commas within each one. Additionally, a semicolon is used after each element of a list when these are written on **separate lines** and begin with a lowercase letter. Note that a full stop is placed after the last element.

### Example:

- *dolor de garganta;*
- *dolor de cabeza;*
- *molestias y dolores;*
- *ojos rojos o irritados.*

If elements in the list are single words, it is also possible to eliminate all punctuation. However, this would not be possible if the list contains more complex elements.

## 12.3 Em dash

The em dash or long dash (—) is used in Spanish to insert clauses or explanations in a sentence, to make lists and to enter dialogues. Please note that the em dash (—) is different from the hyphen (-).

In Spanish, a **closing dash is always necessary**, even if there is a punctuation mark afterwards. There is a space before the opening dash and after the closing dash (but not when it is followed by a full stop).

Source text	Incorrect use of the dash	Correct use of the dash
Thousands of people have already undergone the procedure - most of them women.	Miles de personas ya se han sometido al procedimiento - en su mayoría mujeres.	Miles de personas ya se han sometido al procedimiento —en su mayoría mujeres—.
Thousands of people—most of them women—have already undergone the procedure.	Miles de personas — en su mayoría mujeres, ya se han sometido al procedimiento.	Miles de personas —en su mayoría mujeres— ya se han sometido al procedimiento.

## 12.4 Quotation marks

There are different kinds of quotation marks in Spanish: « », “ ” and ‘ ’. The *Diccionario Panhispánico de Dudas* recommends using the angle quotation marks (« ») for printed texts and the double quotation marks and single quotation marks if needed within the already quoted text. Please be aware that quotation marks need to be attached to the first and the last word they demarcate.

## 12.5 No full stop or colon after headings and subheadings

There is no full stop or colon at the end of headings and subheadings when they are isolated and are the only text of the line.

## 12.6 Prefixes

Prefixes should generally be attached to the existing word and not separated by a space or a hyphen.

Source text	Incorrectly written prefix	Correctly written prefix
anti-inflammatory, anti-inflammation	anti inflamatorio, anti-inflamatorio	antiinflamatorio

When the prefix precedes a word starting with a capital letter, an acronym or a digit, a hyphen should be inserted.

Source text	Incorrectly written prefix	Correctly written prefix
pro-China	pro China, proChina	pro-China
anti-HIV	anti VIH, antiVIH	anti-VIH
super 8	super 8, super8	super-8

The prefix should be separated only if it affects several words that behave as a unit.

Source text	Incorrectly written prefix	Correctly written prefix
pro-human rights	proderechos humanos, pro-derechos humanos	pro derechos humanos

## 13. Organisation names

Organisation names need to be translated into Spanish. For organisation names that have an official or widely known Spanish name, this name should be used consistently in translation. Translators should research diligently to ensure the correct names are used.

Source text	Incorrect name	Correct established name
World Health Organisation	Organización Mundial para la Salud	Organización Mundial de la Salud

For less known organisations and committees, a functional translation of the name can be used. For names that do not have a semantic meaning (e.g., Centrelink), no attempt should be made to translate them.

In general, organisation names may be included between parentheses (in English) immediately after the Spanish translation of the name. This improves understanding, as the audience would normally know these organisations.

Excessive use of English names of institutions, programs and services may impact the readability of Spanish translations. To ensure a balanced approach, the English name can be inserted between parentheses once (the first time it appears) and subsequently translated.

Please note that organisation and program names should be kept in English if required by the commissioning organisation or client.

## 14. Written conventions

### 14.1 Acronyms and abbreviations

The first time an acronym is translated in the text, it should be spelled out and translated into Spanish, followed by the acronym in brackets.

**Example:** *la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS).*

Wherever possible, the Spanish acronym should be used:

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)	ADN (ácido desoxirribonucleico)
HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)	VIH (virus de inmunodeficiencia humana)
WHO (World Health Organisation)	OMS (Organización Mundial de la Salud)

In cases where the English acronym is commonly used, it should be kept in English, such as *Unesco* for United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

In cases where there is no Spanish version of the acronym or of the name, the original name and acronym should be used, either preceded or followed by an explanation.

**Example:** *la asociación de conductores National Roads and Motorist Association (o NRMA).*

Although some acronyms may acquire a plural form when read orally, they should not be written in plural form.

**Example:** the correct Spanish translation of *NGOs* is *ONG*, not *ONGs/ONG's*.

Acronyms carry the gender of the main word in the abbreviated name or phrase. Acronyms should also be preceded by the appropriate article.

**Example:** *las ONG* (where *Organizaciones* is a feminine noun).

Abbreviations must always be followed by a full stop.

**Example:** *pág.* (for *página*), *p. ej.* (for *por ejemplo*).

## 14.2 Numbers

As a general rule, some numbers should be written using letters, provided that you have space available.

- Numbers that can be written using a single word (*cero*, *veintinueve*), multiples of ten and hundreds

**Example:** *niños menores de doce años.*

- Whole numbers that can be written with two words, or with two words joined by the conjunction *y*

**Example:** *cien mil*, *cinco millones*,  *cincuenta y cinco*.

Percentages up to ten per cent can be written using numerals followed by the percentage sign (%) or by words followed by the words *por ciento*. There must be an unbreakable space between the number and the percentage sign.

**Example:** *15 %*, *quince por ciento* (not *quince %*).

Numbers whose value is above one million and for which at least the last three digits are zeros should be written using a combination of digits and letters.

**Example:** *327 millones*, *3.6 billones*.

In the case of numbers consisting of more than four digits, the digits should be separated in groups of three by a non-breaking space, not by a full stop or a comma.

**Example:** *21 458 personas* (correct), not *21,458* or *21.458*

Numbers of four digits and numbers representing a year, a page or a post code must not be separated

**Example:** *3154 personas*, not *3 154 personas*; *el año 2000*, not *el año 2 000*

The English word *billion* must not be translated as *billón*. In English, a *billion* is equal to one thousand million (i.e., 1 000 000 000), whereas in Spanish *billón* means one million million (i. e.,1 000 000 000 000).

**Example:** *Hay 7000 millones de personas en el mundo*, not *Hay 7 billones de personas en el mundo*.

Please refer to the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* for further information on numbers <https://www.rae.es/dpd/n%C3%BAmeros>

## 14.3 Symbols

Symbols never have a full stop.

**Example:** *ml* for *mililitro*, *kg* for *kilogramo*

Symbols never have written accents, even when the word that is represented is accented.

**Example:** ha for *hectárea*, not *há*

Symbols always represent the singular form of the unit.

**Example:** 25 km, not 25 kms

Symbols usually follow the number and are separated from it by an unbreakable space.

**Example:** 25 km, 100 W, 25 %.

## 14.4 Capital letters

Contrary to English, there are some cases in which Spanish does not use capital letters:

- **Demonyms** (words that identify groups of people in relation to a particular place, such as a country, state, city, etc.) are never capitalised in Spanish.

**Example:** *Los ciudadanos australianos deberán presentar el certificado de vacunación* (not *Australianos*).

- The **months** of the year and the **days** of the week are not capitalised.

**Example:** *lunes*, not *Lunes*; *octubre*, not *Octubre*.

- The names of **languages** are not capitalised in Spanish.

**Example:** *Pida un intérprete de español* (not *Español*).

- In **titles of created works** and in **headings**, only capitalise the first word, not every word as it sometimes appears in English.

**Example:** *Guía de estilo para traductores* for *Style Guide for Translators*.

- When translating **titles of books, newspapers and journals**, take into account that only the first word is capitalised and, as in English, they should be written in italics.

**Example:** *Atlas de anatomía humana* for *Human Anatomy Atlas*.

## 15. Useful resources

### 15.1 Translation and language references

Baker, Mona (2018). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. London; New York: Routledge.

Jiménez Jiménez, Antonio (2018). *Introducción a la traducción: inglés < > español*. London; New York: Routledge.

Taibi, Mustapha and Ozolins, Uldis (2016). *Community Translation*. London: Bloomsbury.

## 15.2 Dictionaries and similar resources

Acronyms: <https://www.rae.es/dpd/sigla> or <https://www.rae.es/dpd/acrónimo>

Fundéu RAE- Buscador urgente de dudas: <https://www.fundeu.es/>

Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de americanismos*: <https://lema.rae.es/damer/>

Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española*: <https://dle.rae.es/>

Real Academia Española, *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*\*: <https://www.rae.es/dpd/>

Real Academia Española, *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*:  
<http://aplica.rae.es/grweb/cgi-bin/buscar.cgi>

Real Academia Española, *Ortografía de la lengua española*: <http://aplica.rae.es/orweb/cgi-bin/buscar.cgi>

Real Academia Española, *Corpus Diacrónico del Español* (CORDE):  
<http://corpus.rae.es/cordenet.html>

Word Reference: <https://www.wordreference.com/>

\* Please note that at the time of publication of this guide, the edition of the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* **available online** was from 2005 and some of its contents might conflict with current rules included in the *Ortografía de la lengua española* (2010) and *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (2009).

## 15.3 Glossaries

Fundéu RAE- Coronavirus: Consejos de escritura:  
<https://www.fundeu.es/recomendacion/coronavirus-claves-de-escritura/>

Fundéu RAE- Coronavirus: Recomendaciones lingüísticas: <https://fundeu.es/coronavirus-recomendaciones-lenguaje/>

## 15.4 Other resources

Australian Government. Style Manual. <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au>