

Why did GM's Chevy NOVA have poor sales when it was introduced in Latin America? Maybe because in Spanish "no va" means "doesn't go." Nobody wanted a car that did not move!

Definitions and Key points:

- Language is part of culture: Every language expresses ideas in different ways.
- **Literal translation** is the strict adherence to the original text's composition and grammatical structure. This may not accurately transfer the meaning of the original text to the target language.

For example, the literal translation of 'what's up?' from English to Spanish is '¿Qué está arriba?' which means 'what is upstairs?'
- **Adaptation:** Replacing cultural or social elements from the original text, first in considering the relevance of the content to your target group, and then with by modifying elements in the translated product as necessary.
- Translators DO NOT usually adapt materials to make them culturally competent. Just because a document is translated it does not mean it is culturally competent. If your document is not culturally competent, you may not successfully engage your target audience even if the document is in their language!
- We strongly recommend not using untrained translators since good translation requires skills, training, and practice (e.g. staff members that speak the target language).
- **Cultural adaptation does not mean changing your message. It means changing how you convey it.**

Guidelines:

1. **Determine your target audience:** Think about the overall characteristics of your target group. This information will help you better adapt the document to fit your target language community. Consider issues such as education level and country of origin.

For example, while Portugal, Brazil and some African countries speak Portuguese, there are differences in pronunciation, the meaning of some words, the slang used, etc.

2. **Copyedit the original document:** Materials should not go out for translation until you have completely finished this task.

3. **Examine the cultural competence of the document for the targeted audience:** Remember, translation does not make a product culturally competent. Make sure the content is as relevant as possible to your target audience.

For example, if you are translating a fact sheet on rates of mental illness into Chinese, does it provide mental illness rates for Chinese Americans? If you are talking about family, is your concept of family the same as that of your target audience?

Tip: The earlier you start working on cultural adaptation of the material in the process of translation the better. Initial adaptations made before translation cut some costs and overall time.

4. **Involve leaders from the target community throughout the process:** In reviewing the content intended for translation, ask what is culturally applicable to their community and what is not. Their feedback is crucial to warrant a culturally competent document.
5. **Identify a translator:**
 - Request samples of previous work.
 - Provide guidance on NAMI Identity Guidelines (www.nami.org/identity) and other wording you prefer. For example, while we use the term consumer to refer to individuals with mental illness, this term is not used in Spanish. If you use the word ‘consumidor’ (consumer) Spanish speakers may not know what you are referring to. You may want to use ‘persona que vive con una enfermedad mental’ (person living with a mental illness) or ‘usuario’ (user of services).
6. **Copyedit the translated document.**
 - Just as you would with an English document, you must copyedit your materials in other languages.
 - Your copyeditor should help make sure your translated document reads like something originally written in your target language, so this person needs to be familiar with the cultural elements of the target language.
7. **Elicit feedback from the target audience.**
 - Select a group of reviewers from target group or host a focus group. This could be with the same group that helped identify cultural considerations in Step 4 above. It is important that individuals providing feedback on the translated document have a proficient grasp of the language.
 - Representatives from your target audience should review your document in order to share what is appropriate or not from their cultural point of view.
 - Give reviewer (s) a list of things to consider when reviewing the documents. For example, ask reviewers to determine:
 - The difficulty level of the material
 - Whether or not the text reads awkwardly due to literal translation
 - If the content specifically address the community it targets (cultural considerations)
8. **If applicable, select a graphic designer that has experience working with your target audience.** Again, provide guidance on NAMI Identity Guidelines (www.nami.org/identity).

Contact us at macenter@nami.org if you have any questions.