UnitedHealthcare’s Benefit Operations Multicultural and Translation Services department (MTS) plays an essential customer service role across the company. Initially serving UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement, we now provide best-in-class language services to all benefit businesses and Optum.

Our Integrated services provide UnitedHealth Group the ability to communicate with members with “one voice,” regardless of language. MTS’s long-term objective is to ensure that our customers and prospective customers receive – the first time – the materials they need in the language and manner they prefer.

We work toward making our operation simple, effective and flexible to support affordability without sacrificing quality or security. Our focus is on delivering on the high expectations and needs of our members, providers, customers and regulators.

To understand why UnitedHealthcare’s MTS was created, one need not look any further than the changing demographics of the U.S. population. Census predictions indicate that the United States will become more than 50 percent non-white by 2050. According to a 2011 study by the Pew Research Center, 50.1 million Americans speak a non-English language at home – with an overwhelming 37.6 million of them speaking Spanish.

Limited in-language resources can contribute to cultural or language barriers, which can eventually lead to disparities in health care outcomes. MTS’s mission is to help close this gap for our customers.

The demand for more health care information in non-English languages is constantly growing. A recent analysis of
UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement members, who have asked for help in a foreign language, revealed that 95 percent self-identified with four spoken language preferences: Spanish, Mandarin (Chinese), Korean and Cantonese (Chinese).

Our internal data also show that our customers’ demand for language services skyrocketed more than 5,000 percent since 2009. Of this number, 76 percent of requests were for Spanish language services, a statistic that reflects the Hispanic population’s remarkable 43 percent growth from 2000 to 2010.

Although Spanish is the most common second language among our members, MTS is keenly aware of our growing Asian-language member base. Chinese and Korean are the next most in-demand written languages.

UnitedHealthcare realizes that the changing face of America calls for the health care industry’s ability to provide the same level of service to a diverse consumer base. Accordingly, MTS also focuses on meeting the demands of members who request services in other languages, such as Vietnamese, Russian and Italian.

We believe all members and potential members should be able to access information in their preferred language, and our regulators require us to meet our members’ needs within a reasonable timeframe.

Furthermore, diverse members may have different cultural concerns or needs. We strive to meet their needs through a four-pronged approach to ensure the high quality of service UnitedHealthcare provides to all of its members.

Through advocacy and partnerships, MTS works with various organizations that advocate for multicultural communities across the country to increase engagement in health care related activities and ultimately improve health care outcomes.

MTS collaborates on strategy and campaign development with marketing teams across UnitedHealthcare. We assist with culturally minded effective marketing campaigns. This helps ensure that new business plans and front-facing projects, such as those on social media and consumer websites, are culturally sensitive and correct from the start.

In the same vein, MTS has in place processes to develop non-English communications and literature, as well as translations, to support members’ individual requests. We make sure that translations represent our brands’ standards and “voice,” demonstrate cultural competence and are distributed efficiently. Our processes heavily rely on linguistics and language experts, quality assurance reviews, and certified translations to secure language consistency and the content clarity that consumers expect.

Lastly, we work closely with Enterprise Sourcing & Procurement to create a core pool of translation and multicultural marketing vendors that provide the best quality services at competitive prices. Optimizing the translation vendor pool supports cost efficiencies by leveraging economies of scale and reusability of translations.

Through these four levels of engagement, MTS was able to deliver more than 4,000 translated projects in 2013 and is prepared to meet the growing needs of our changing population.

As we continue to become fully integrated across the entire enterprise, we are committed to delivering valuable products, services and health education, and creating proper, satisfying membership experiences in our diverse customers’ preferred language.

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**What makes a good translation?**

By Gilberto Vazquez-Valle
Marketing Communication Specialist – Spanish Linguist, MTS

Translations are more than just changing text from one language to another or rendering the translated text in such a way that it’s understood in a clear, unambiguous manner. A good translation takes into account the particular cultural and linguistic nuances of the intended audience. It reads and flows naturally. It sounds and feels familiar. Equally important, a good translation should not reveal that it’s actually a translation.

Multicultural and Translation Services performs assessments to ensure the quality of translated texts provided by external vendors. This is not about linguistic rigor for its own sake. The translations we receive become our company’s public face in front of a large and ever-growing number of customers and associates who use our printed materials and websites in languages other than English.

MTS’s dedicated team of native speakers from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds has created a Linguistic Quality Assurance (LQA) tool that identifies eight distinct categories of translation mistakes, including mistranslations, and structural, terminology and consistency errors. These error categories encompass nearly all translation mistakes we may encounter and quantifies them according to three different levels of severity. The resulting error score is then used to calculate a Translation Quality Index (TQI). This TQI provides an effective metric to determine if a translation meets our high standards.
**AN EXTERNAL POINT OF VIEW**

**Tell us about ISI.**

**ISI Translation Services** is an industry leader specializing in culturally and linguistically appropriate translations for the health care market since 1982. ISI enables successful communication through full-service language and localization solutions. Our global team of linguists is deeply rooted in the cultural and technical nuances of virtually every language used in business. ISI was one of the first to address the special linguistic and cultural needs of both non- and limited-English-proficient communities in the United States.

**What moved you to pursue a career in translation?**

I’ve always been passionate about communication, and my love of travel helped cultivate my love for communication across languages. My education has its foundation in literature and linguistics, and I was fortunate enough to turn my language skills into a career as a writer, journalist and university adjunct professor of English. But, early on, it was visiting other countries that put me on the path I am on today. Traveling abroad mindfully meant being able to communicate in languages other than English. I spent some memorable years in Latin America, where I taught English as a second language, and saw first-hand the challenges of communicating effectively across different languages. I knew then that multicultural communication was where I wanted to focus my passion and energy.

**What is ISI’s approach to translation?**

ISI is known worldwide for combining the latest technology with expert human touch at every stage – from project management to translating, editing, desktop publishing, proofreading and review. This approach enables successful communication in hundreds of languages and dialects. True communication in any language requires an understanding of regional slang, colloquialisms, idioms, subject-specific vocabulary and jargon, and cultural and religious sensitivities. Our translators must have that deeply rooted, specialized understanding. Achieving Best In Class quality requires a combination of the latest technology with the human touch – technology that ensures consistency and efficiency, and a process overseen by highly skilled and credentialed professional linguists dedicated to specific clients. This is the foundation of our commitment to quality through consistency. We build linguistic business intelligence at the enterprise level through our scalable yet boutique approach to language support, which helps our partners push forward with confidence and efficiency across all of their threshold languages.

**Why the focus on health care?**

ISI began as an interpreting agency in the ‘70s, when the typewriter was high-tech. Decades ago, during many of our encounters in hospitals, medical facilities and health care clinics, clients began asking for ad-hoc translation services on the spot. An enrollment form here, a dental flyer there. Since then, our business has evolved into a robust, high-touch and high-quality language support provider whose foundation is a multtiered, human-intensive approach to translations, buoyed by the latest in tools and technologies. Knowing that in the health care space so much is at stake, we must get it right each and every time. Delivering clean, first-run translations is our top priority. It affects the people with whom we work, the types of language professionals we hire, internal Quality Assurance processes and every other aspect of our work. We’ve succeeded by knowing where our ‘sweet spot’ lies and working to continually evolve and fine tune our language support.

**What are some of the “myths” regarding translations?**

- **Any bilingual can be a translator or an interpreter.** The ability to write in English does not make a person a professional writer. The ability to speak English does not make a person a professional speaker. Likewise, the ability to write or speak two languages does not mean that a person can translate or interpret. Plenty of people who are perfectly fluent in two languages fail professional exams for translation and interpreting. Most translators and interpreters are highly educated in their area of expertise, with advanced degrees and training in translation, localization, linguistics and so on.

- **Interpreters and translators do the same thing.** The reality is that translators and interpreters have very different job skills. Translators must have great writing skills and training in translation, but they must also be adept at using computer-assisted translation tools and terminology databases. Interpreters, on the other hand, have to develop their short-term memory retention and note-taking skills as well as memorizing specialized terminology for instant recall.

- **Translation only matters to “language people.”** The need for translation crosses both the public and private sectors. In the business world, executives at companies of all sizes are starting to recognize that translation is a pathway to increasing revenue and entering new markets.

**How do you see the demand for translation and language support changing in the coming years?**

We continually monitor the translation landscape with respect to state and federal legislation, the U.S. Census and shifting demographics, and see deadlines looming and shifting.

There is a level of uncertainty regarding the long-term future of certain pieces of legislation. However, there are two things we know for certain: there will be an increase in the amount of information that must be translated; and there is a potential for a significant increase in the number of different languages health care providers and organizations need to accommodate.

The 2010 Census data revealed even more population trends that affect language requirements for industries for which accurate communication, far from a luxury, is essential to safeguarding the individuals and communities they serve. All the analysts and industry watchers are confirming what we’re seeing every day at ground level – that the need for language services is growing at rapid pace. We continue to enhance ISI’s specialties and expand our resources and technologies to meet this exploding demand.
**MARKET HIGHLIGHTS**

**UnitedHealthcare** has provided a grant to support the National AIDS Memorial Grove youth scholarship program, which began in 2009. Since then, the scholarships have helped support the education of young people who are currently engaged in a wide variety of HIV-related work both in school and in their chosen academic field.

On August 15, the National AIDS Memorial Grove announced the naming of the youth scholarship program in honor of Pedro Zamora, who, at the age of 22, captivated national audiences when he appeared on MTV's *The Real World 3: San Francisco* (1994). Presenting himself as an openly gay and openly HIV-positive young Latino, Pedro shared with the public his joy, integrity and desire to make a difference in the world.

“Pedro dedicated his life to fighting the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic,” said Eric Ciasullo, National AIDS Memorial Grove board member. “Working diligently to raise public awareness, he helped arm other young people with the information and tools they needed to protect themselves against the virus. We honor Pedro’s courage and legacy through this scholarship program.”

“UnitedHealthcare is honored to support the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship Program, which helps the educational efforts of young people who will continue to carry the torch that Pedro lit 20 years ago in the fight against HIV/AIDS,” said Brandon Cuevas, CEO, UnitedHealthcare of California. “This is an important program that is helping inspire the next generation of leaders who will eventually find a cure for this devastating disease.”

Scholarship applications are being accepted through Oct. 15, 2014, and can be downloaded from the National AIDS Memorial Grove website at [www.aidsmemorial.org](http://www.aidsmemorial.org). UnitedHealthcare has launched a Public Service Announcement campaign in both English and Spanish to encourage students to apply.

Scholarship recipients will be announced on World AIDS Day Dec. 1, 2014.

**Established in 1968** by President Johnson and Congress, National Hispanic Heritage Month takes place between Sept. 15 and Oct. 15 every year to celebrate the culture and traditions of people who trace their roots to Spain, Mexico and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

UnitedHealthcare’s Latino Health Solutions is celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month with the launch of three new episodes of its animated fotonova series available in both English and Spanish. The new episodes focus on mental health, exercise and smoking cessation.

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**ON DEMOGRAPHICS**

**46%** Percentage of Hispanics who only speak Spanish who say they are “very likely” to buy health insurance, compared to 27 percent of non-Hispanics who identified the same way.


**83%** Percentage of Hispanic adults reporting having obtained at least some information about health and health care from television, radio, newspapers, magazines or the Internet in the past year.


**$5.7 billion** Worth of outsourceable translation industry in the United States.


**$37 billion** Projected worth of translation services market in 2018.


**46%** Projected increase of translator and interpreter jobs from an estimated 63,600 in 2012 to 92,900 in 2022.


**13%** Of an estimated 63,600 translators and interpreters working in 2012, the percentage who were employed in the health care and social assistance industries.


**30%** Of an estimated 63,600 translators and interpreters working in 2012, the percentage who were employed in the professional, scientific and technical services.


We welcome your suggestions and comments.