

What is Transcreation?

Do you remember Dick and Jane?



Do you remember Dick and Jane? Dick and Jane were child characters in the standard readers that a certain generation of us oldsters were introduced to when we were being taught to read. Dick and Jane were clearly not from Nogales. They were probably from New Hampshire or Ohio, but most certainly not from Arizona, New Mexico, California or Texas.

Dick and Jane were blond and cute and wore red wool coats, cloaks, and knitted caps and mittens. They rode red sleds in the wintertime down tree-lined hills. Being taught the words *cloak*, *mitten*, *sled* and *sleigh* was of no real use to those of us being raised in the Sonoran desert, in the strawberry fields of California, or on the banks of the Rio Grande.

We needed words like *guaraches*, *sombreros*, *shorts*, *chanclas*, *nopales* and *agua*. (Lots of *agua*.) So in the late 60s and early 70s activist teachers all over the west, the southwest and the migrant worker streams from the rest of the country, started realizing that when it came to learning to read, cultural relevance mattered. These educator pioneers started a movement that is now known as Bilingual Education and they used it as a platform to advocate for culturally and linguistically relevant books for bilingual and multicultural children. They concluded that if they wanted us to learn to read, they needed to make readers more engaging, reflective of who we were, and affirming of our culture.

I believe those were the early days of Transcreation.

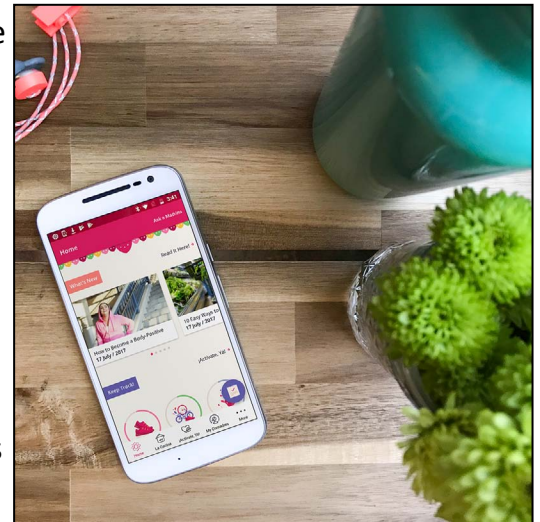
Transcreation is taking a piece of communication that has been researched, written and/or developed for one language group and turning it into a culturally and linguistically relevant piece of communication for another language group.

In this White Paper, I want to stress the relevance of Transcreation as it applies to the field of public health education. As in the case of bilingual education, we have made some progress but honestly, not as much as we would have liked. There are still too many translated health education curricula, pamphlets, websites and dubbed videos developed by well-meaning public health agencies and educators that are missing the mark.

The simple takeaway is this: Translating English words into Spanish words and expecting it to communicate the same value as originally intended doesn't work.

To make your communication truly impactful and meaningful, we recommend Transcreation.

Transcreation applies to all communication you embark on when you start with English text, or research conducted in English and wish to make it relevant in another language. When we designed and created De Las Mías, we started with evidence-based research, proven behavior change theories, and other scientifically vetted information that existed originally in English. Then we designed and transcreated De Las Mías to the needs, values and motivators of our target audience. In the De Las Mías case, our target audiences are Mexican, Mexican American and Latinas living in the Southwestern United States. A nuanced but important point here is that De Las Mías' primary audience is not all Latinas everywhere. It is Latinas living in the Southwestern United States of Mexican or Indo-Hispano origin. This distinction is an important one. When our team at Matiella Health Communications develops materials, communication campaigns or interventions we do not treat Latinas or Latinx as one monolithic group.



Yes, we have a lot in common, but we are also different in rich and important ways.

In some content areas these differences are more important than in others. For example, in the De Las Mías case, it is especially relevant because we are educating Latinas about healthy eating and being food positive. The way Mexicans, Mexican Americans and other Indo-Hispanic groups in the Southwestern United States eat is very different than the way Puerto Ricans and other Latinx groups eat. And although we certainly have a lot in common with our Caribbean and South American brothers and sisters, the universal black beans and rice will only take you so far when it comes to dietary guidelines. These differences need to be acknowledged and celebrated!

As De Las Mías grows and iterates, we have a vision to include foods from all Latin American countries, but for now we are focusing on Mexico and Southwestern United States. This decision is part of our Transcreation Process. We want to show proper respect and love to our similarities, but also for our differences. These foundational steps we have taken in transcreating content related to healthy eating are very important to us because this is how we establish trust (*confianza*) with our audience.

We have a similar dynamic with idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions are the *picante* of our conversations. They give our dialogue extra flavor. And of course, we, the collective Latinx “we” can and most of us bilinguals do understand standard Spanish. But when it comes to establishing *confianza*, you have to go the extra kilometer and treat us like you know us. Each one of our collective cultures has their own special expressions, dichos and other vocabulary that establishes us as kindred spirits. Using the wrong idiomatic expression is a dead give-away and it communicates inauthentic language and evokes feelings of mistrust.



De las mías[™]
Unidas for a healthy life.

An essential piece of the transcreation process is field testing the information with your intended audience. Field testing is the best way to verify that you have hit your mark. There are simple ways of conducting field testing that will give you good feedback and guide you in your revisions and final edits.

Before I conclude my suggestions on Transcreation, let me affirm that sometimes translations are appropriate and even necessary. A good translation is a beautiful thing, but our recommendation is that when you are trying to help your Latinx audience make healthy behavior changes, choose transcreation instead of translation. Lead with culture and follow with language.

Here is a great resource on translations that my colega and comadre Lorena Sprager published with her respected colleague, Octavio Martínez to illuminate your path.

https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NAMPerspective_BeyondTranslation.pdf

And here is another amazing work related to language equity that is a must read. Although it was developed by Oregonians, it is every bit as relevant to the rest of the country.

<https://www.pnwhealthequity.com>

Last but not least, here is a wonderful article on Transcreation by our compadre and Latinx Marketing guru, Manny Rodriguez for your reading pleasure.

<https://www.culturespanmarketing.com/transcreation-language-and-cultural-awareness>

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