



Bilingual  
Communications

# Bilingualism vs. Translation

Is being bilingual enough to  
translate with quality?





## Executive Summary

Here, we use recent primary research to explore whether being bilingual in Spanish and English will cut it when it comes to accurate translation of your documents - and the specific impact quality translation can have - whether you're a growing business with international employees, or a school containing native speakers.

What we will cover:

- ✓ The cognitive differences between bilingualism and translation; in easy terms
- ✓ Recent population statistics which show how many people are literacy proficient in the US, by native language spoken
- ✓ A clear, concise exploration of how and why translation is a trained specialization, and insights into the tangible value it can bring to your business or institution.

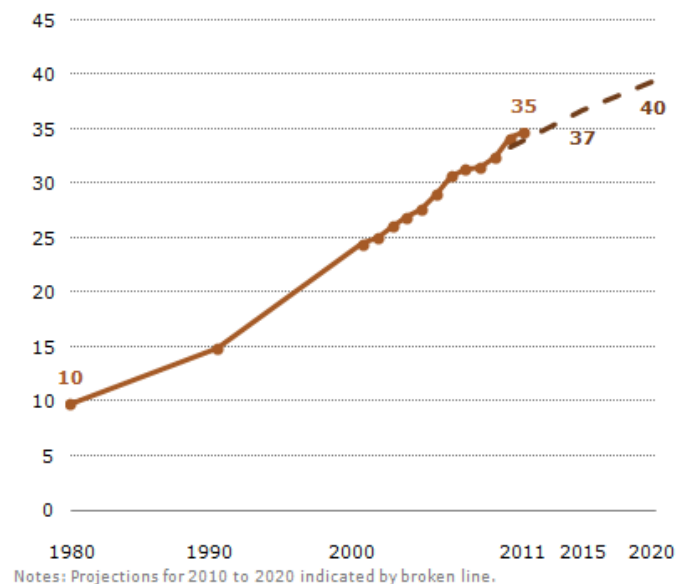


## Introduction: Spanish Bilingualism in the U.S.

The Spanish-speaking population in the USA is growing, and accurate translations are evermore important in day-to-day communications - at work, in school, in government and within local communities.

And many of these Spanish-speakers can speak English too. According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2012, 87% of Hispanics believe Hispanic immigrants need to learn English to succeed in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> But at the same time, nearly all (95%) Hispanic adults believe it is important for their future generations to be able to speak Spanish, with the level of Spanish proficiency (reading) increasing from 41% among third-generation Latino immigrants, to 90% Spanish proficiency in foreign born Latinos living in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

**Number of Hispanic Spanish Speakers in the U.S., Actual and Projected, 1980-2020**  
(in millions among Hispanics ages 5 and older)

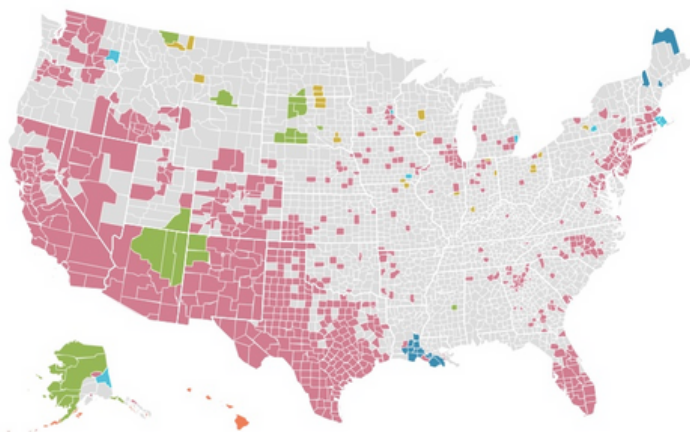


Source: Pew Research Center <sup>2</sup>

### Most common languages

Counties where at least 10 percent of people speak a language other than English at home:

- Spanish  
708 counties
  - Native American languages  
29 counties
  - German  
21 counties
  - French  
15 counties
  - Pacific Island languages  
12 counties
  - Other languages\*  
11 counties
- \* English is spoken in at least 90 percent of homes in 2,347 counties.



Source: Census American Community Survey 2007-2011

With these statistics in mind, is there an emerging generation fit to bridge the language gap between the English and Spanish-proficient populace?



## The Literacy Landscape in the U.S. Today

A study conducted in 2013 by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute of Literacy<sup>5</sup> found that 18% of the U.S. population (of adults aged between 16-65) couldn't read or only had basic reading capabilities (below Level 1 literacy rate - i.e. "read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information that is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive").

As we will discover, professional translation requires being an outstanding reader in a second language, as well as an above average writer in your native language. Consider then, how many bilingual English-Spanish speakers in the general population are truly exceptional readers and also above average writers? According to data available on the US population as a whole, the answer may be fewer than expected.



## New Translation: The Power of Specialization in Business & Bureaucracy

As a result of a booming Hispanic population in the USA, the demand for bilingual workers is rising. While U.S. employers posted roughly 240,000 job ads aimed at bilingual workers in 2010, that figure had more than doubled by 2015, growing to approximately 630,000. The share of postings seeking bilingual employees also increased, with the portion of online listings targeting bilingual individuals rising by 15.7 percent in the same time period.<sup>6</sup>



**The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 46% increase in translation and interpreting jobs between 2012 and 2022.**



- Jeremy Munday<sup>7</sup>

And as the U.S. business landscape's demand for bilingual workers rises, there are three important things to consider when producing quality translations:

- 1 Bilingual resources are needed more in day-to-day employment. However, increasing bilingual employees' time spent on translation at work will have a negative effect on their performance, as time otherwise spent refining their professional skills is being used instead for translation. Besides bilingual employees' possible lack of professional qualifications in this area, the treatment of translation as a side-focus

could further hinder quality of output.

- 2 As the bilingual Spanish-speaking population continues to steadily increase in line with a diversifying population, so does the demand for highly proficient translators to maintain the quality in translation for institutions - which includes native Spanish-speakers without a high level of English proficiency.
- 3 Many professional translators are also trained to handle highly specialized and complex vocabulary with nuanced meanings, which the average bilingual individual would never need to know, such as medical interpreters, or those translating for government bureaucracy, business, insurance, or sensitive school documents.

How do shifting parameters in population and culture affect language?



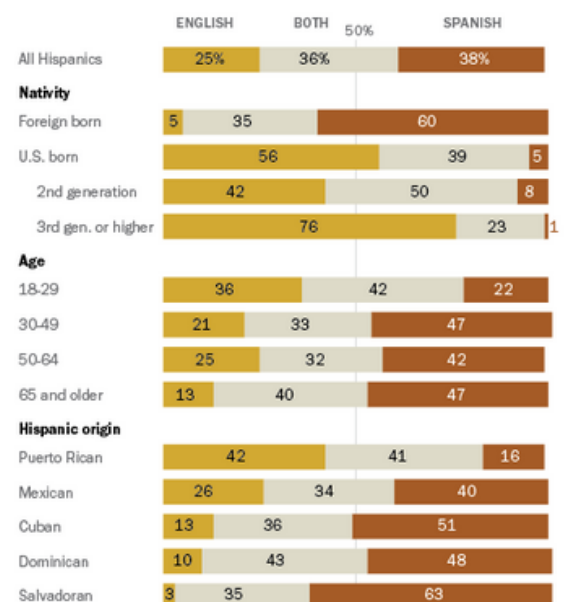
## The Rise of Spanglish: Emerging Standard or Slang?

About six out of ten U.S. adult Hispanics (62%) speak English or are bilingual, based on an analysis of the Pew Research Center's 2013 National Survey of Latinos.<sup>8</sup>

"Spanglish," an informal hybrid of both languages, is widely used at home among Hispanics in the USA between the ages of 16 to 25. Among these young Hispanics, 70% report using Spanglish, according to analysis.<sup>9</sup> This means that the emerging and current generation of bilingual business owners, employees, teachers, government officials and other community-leaders - more of whom will speak English and Spanish - may lose the original form of each respective language to an informal

### Half of 2nd Generation Latinos Are Bilingual

% of Hispanic adults who mainly use English, Spanish or both



Source: Pew Research Center<sup>8</sup>





business owners, employees, teachers, government officials and other community-leaders - more of whom will speak English and Spanish - may lose the original form of each respective language to an informal amalgamation of both.

Eventually, as is often the case with language, this Spanglish hybrid may reshape the landscape of modern language and become an accepted form of communication by communities not only within the comfort of home, but in business and bureaucracy - in academia and in civil life. But this kind of linguistic transformation and acceptance can, and has taken decades to sweep across society.

And until it does, we must look to those who are highly proficient and trained in Spanish translation, to bridge gaps in communication from English within both the business world and broader society.



## Translation as a Specialization: Art or Craft?

Bilingual individuals are considered by many people to be competent translators simply because of their ability to speak two languages. However, according to research this rationale is not correct, because the skills of a bilingual person are very different than those of a trained, professional translator.

- **Bilingual individuals** are able to take **their own thoughts and ideas** and express them orally in their native language and a second language, sometimes well enough to pass for native speakers
- **Translators** must be able to **read, understand, and retain, somebody else's ideas**, and then **render them accurately and completely** in a way that conveys the original meaning effectively and without distortion

While translation means converting the source text into another language, that doesn't mean it's a mechanical process. For the translation to be accurate, the translator must have complete comprehension of the original text, and render it into the target language without compromising the original. Translation has a great impact on literal content such as manuals, legal documents, books, documentation, technical publications, medical and scientific information.



But it will go beyond this: in many cases, translators will have to honor creativity and more flexible linguistic direction; never losing meaning while transposing a text open for more artistic interpretation into a different language.

**“ Our results suggest that both the type and the level of translation expertise play a role in modifying semantic and form-level connections in the bilingual lexicon.**

**The impact of translation expertise seems to be greater in word translation than in word reading.**

**”**

*- Adolfo M. García & Agustín Ibáñez <sup>10</sup>*

A translator’s skills require the ability to fully understand the source language and the culture of the locale where the text came from. The most important ability of a translator is to write in the target language exceptionally well. Bilingual speakers may be able to translate simple text, but they can rarely translate precisely from one language into another - i.e. understand expressions with flawless accuracy.

*Of those with high literacy levels, who are also proficient in both Spanish and English in the US, how many of these can consistently convey original meaning effectively?*



## The Golden Overlap Between Bilingualism & Literary Proficiency

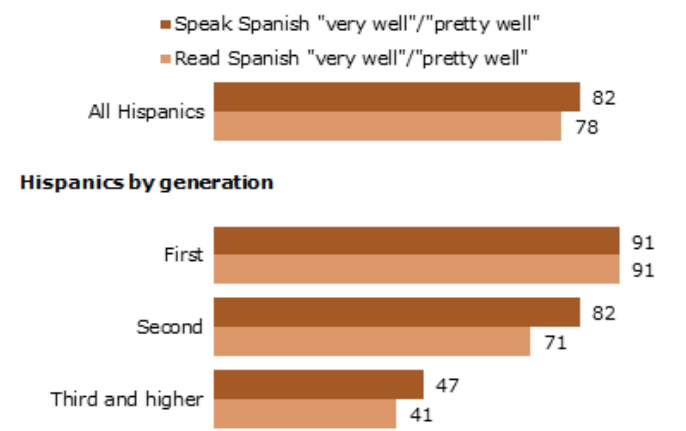
For those who make the A-grade in English and Spanish, there is a clear pathway to professional translation for businesses and institutions throughout the US. But proficiency alone doesn’t necessarily qualify someone when it comes to conveying original meaning, in a separate language, and in a specific context. Official certifications in the U.S. and beyond exist to prequalify proficient bilinguals, to assess their readiness for accurate translation from English into Spanish - and vice versa.

The American Translators Association has a test people can take to see whether they tick the



right boxes<sup>11</sup> in creating a professional translation. Along with demonstrating understanding of the overall context of a document, this means that explicit and implicit challenges in the text are resolved effectively. It means the view, argument and information are presented appropriately for the target culture; and that idioms convey comparable meaning - as well as avoiding any awkward expressions which mark it distinctly as a translation. It means maintaining a smoothly flowing, representative target text for natives to understand, and beyond that - for natives to read them as an authoritative source.

**Spanish Speaking and Reading Ability, by Generation (%)**



Note: N=1,220.  
Source: Pew Research Center<sup>3</sup>



## Translators Are Made, Not Born

In a growing globalized nation, English-Spanish translation is becoming an important and prevalent part of modern society. With an increase in migration from Hispanic countries to the USA, as well as an emerging strength in first-generation preference of - and proficiency in - the Spanish language, first class Spanish translations in the US are becoming a must in many cases, as opposed to a nice-to-have.

From support for schools within Spanish-speaking regions, and scaling businesses in multicultural areas, to local groups and governmental institutions - proficient linguists with specialized subject knowledge are needed to translate the documents that underpin entire communities and bring the U.S. population together.

The idea that someone who speaks two languages would make a good translator makes sense at first consideration. However, being able to communicate in a second language doesn't necessarily equate to having the skill set for translating into, or from that language. A skilled





translator possesses a great command of both their native tongue - and a foreign language, picking up on subtle nuances and cultural subtleties throughout.

There is an increasing need for professional translators: skilled writers, with a strong grasp of the rules of both languages, but with an importance placed on being a native speaker and writer in the target language. The ability to create a sense of authority, confidence and comprehensive understanding of context shouldn't be underestimated or undervalued.

For years to come, professional translators will continue to do this by producing quality translations for that 38% of primary Spanish-speakers; not to mention those bilingual individuals who prefer to speak Spanish. Those companies and communities who embrace quality translation are embracing change and inclusiveness, and building a bridge for future success.



## About Bilingual Communications

Bilingual Communications is a people-based translation agency - putting humans at the core of translation services again, facilitated by the digital world. We believe in the power of building a bridge with language across your most valued communities, combining the smartest technologies, with translators that are native speakers and have degrees in linguistics or translation. We're changing the way schools, governments, and businesses work - from SMEs to enterprises; using affordable, efficient and effective translation to connect minds, and grow channels of communication.

### Our clients say nice things about us:



A++: fast, efficient, and accurate in translation and format.  
Bilingual Communications has expedited communication to our employees - 40% of whom are non-English speaking.



**- Jim Shaw, Personnel Manager, Little River Inn**

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