

# Language Access in Healthcare for and with Indigenous Language Speakers

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LANGUAGE  
ACCESS  
FLORIDA



Robin Lewy,  
Co-Founder and  
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Artwork by Valentina Sierra  
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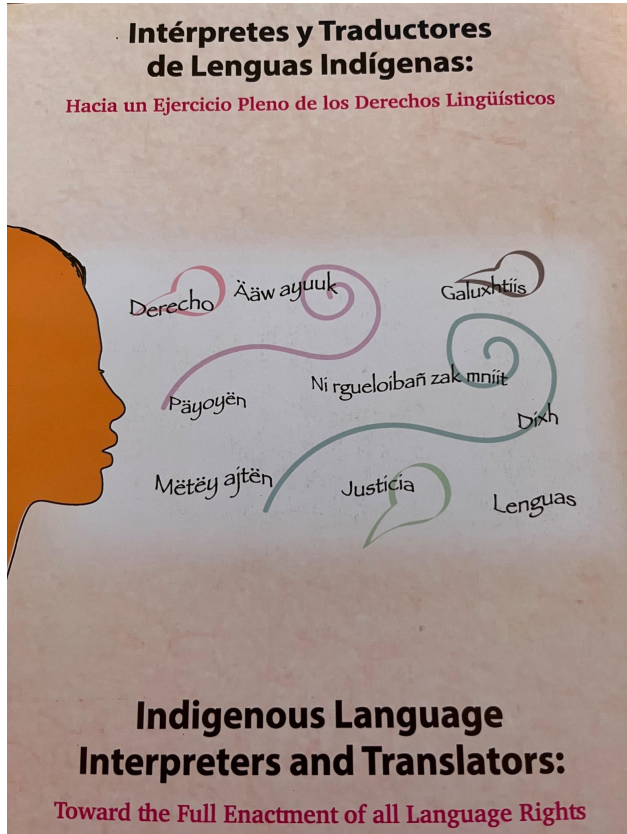
# Learning Session Objectives

- ▶ Participants will understand some ways in which Indigenous orientations to health differ from Western conceptions of health.
- ▶ Participants will gain specific strategies for designing health messaging specifically to better align with Indigenous approaches to health
- ▶ Participants will see sample materials that use Indigenous approaches to health and collaboration among multiple entities to design effective health messaging for Indigenous language speakers.

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## Who's here?

**Share name, pronouns, organization,  
and intentions for this session.**



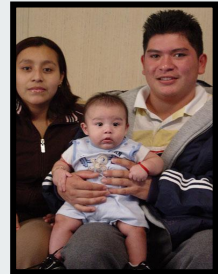
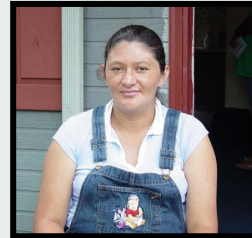
Translation of written, audio, and video materials into Indigenous languages spoken in Mexico and Guatemala (hundreds of variants)

Language justice consulting and training

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# Rural Women's Health Project

Working With Rural Communities To  
Strengthen Their Capacity To Overcome  
Health Barriers.



Robin Lewy,  
Co-Founder and  
Director of Programming

# Our Team



Robin Lewy

Laura Gonzales

Viana Lucía  
Gonzalez Ajiataz

Erika Hernández Cuevas



## INTÉRPRETES Y PROMOTORES INTERCULTURALES



120 Intérpretes

80 variantes lingüísticas

**24 intérpretes** certificados por el **INALI**  
(Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas)



**INTÉRPRETES  
Y PROMOTORES  
INTERCULTURALES**



# Ki'kotemal TV

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# Health Literacy

Isabel Gross (she/her/ella)  
Occupational Safety and Health Project Coordinator  
Farmworker Justice

- ▶ “The degree to which individuals have the capacity to **obtain, process,** and **understand basic health information** ... needed to make appropriate health decisions.” <sup>1</sup>
  
- ▶ “[Health literacy] skills include **reading and writing** in English; **speaking and listening** in English; **numerical computing; critical thinking;** and **decision making.**” <sup>2</sup>

1 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *Healthy People 2010* (2nd ed.) [with Understanding and Improving Health (vol. 1) and Objectives for Improving Health (vol. 2)]. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office

2 - Singleton, K., Krause, E., (Sept. 30, 2009) "Understanding Cultural and Linguistic Barriers to Health Literacy" *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. Vol. 14, No. 3, Manuscript 4.

# Health Literacy and other SDOH

Isabel Gross (she/her/ella)  
Occupational Safety and Health Project Coordinator  
Farmworker Justice

- ▶ English proficiency
- ▶ Assumption that health literacy means health literacy **in English**
  - ▶ Co-occurring determinants of health
  - ▶ “Among Spanish speakers, language-discordant relationships with providers resulted in the poorest health communication, regardless of health literacy.” 3

# Health Literacy and other SDOH

- ▶ Also intersects with cultural considerations

*"While applying [health literacy] skills, one must be able to move with some comfort between one's own cultural values and beliefs and those of the dominant healthcare system"*

-Singleton and Krause

# Effects of Limited Health Literacy

- ▶ Affects **9 out of 10** English-speaking adults
- ▶ Lower health literacy  less likely to have health insurance
- ▶ Results in:
  - ▶ Less use of preventative services (flu shots, mammograms)
  - ▶ Poor management of chronic illness (diabetes, high blood pressure)
  - ▶ Errors taking medications (due to misunderstanding of labels)
  - ▶ Increase in preventable hospitalizations
  - ▶ Poor understanding of nutrition/food labels (HHS 8-10)

Isabel Gross (she/her/ella)  
Occupational Safety and Health Project Coordinator  
Farmworker Justice

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**What are Indigenous approaches to  
health literacy?**

**How can Indigenous orientations help  
us learn about language access in  
healthcare?**



Abigail Castellanos García, Indigenous language activist from the community of San Juan Tabaá, Oaxaca

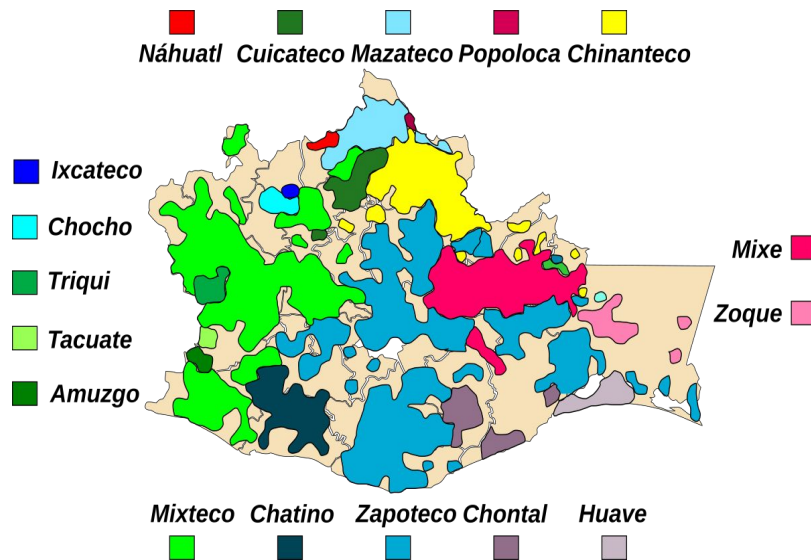
## **Acceso a la información: interculturalidad y derechos humanos**

“Desde el inicio de la pandemia, la información sobre la enfermedad fue dándose a cuentagotas. Existía mucha desinformación alrededor no solo sobre qué era COVID-19, sino cuáles son los síntomas para detectarla, cómo cuidarte y qué hacer si te contagiabas. Estos aspectos eran tan recurrentes en las urbes donde los medios de información estaban a la mano, sin embargo, hubo sectores que se abandonaron totalmente como es el caso de las comunidades indígenas”

# En Oaxaca se hablan 16 lenguas



1. Amuzgo
2. Cuicateco
3. Chatino
4. Chinanteco
5. Chocholteco
6. Ixcateco
7. Mazateco
8. Mixteco
9. Popoloca
10. Triqui
11. Zapoteco
12. Mixe
13. Zoque
14. Huave
15. Náhuatl
16. Chontal



**176 variantes lingüísticas**

(information provided by Erika Hernández Cuevas, speaker of Chatino)



## Lesson:

- Language is more than words or information.
- Language is culture, recognition, participation, land, family, heritage.



Artwork provided by Vianna  
Lucía González Ajiataz

**Jose, speaker of Q'anjob'al. From Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Lives in Lake City, Florida**

*“My boy already speaks three languages, Q'anjob'al, Spanish and English. At home, I only speak [our] dialect (Q'anjob'al) with my son, so he can continue learning and won't forget. I want him to learn it because one day it's going to be useful for him to be able to help other people.”*

*“I'm like mute, like blind. It's like I can't see or hear anything.”*



Artwork by **Valentina Sierra Niño**, University of Florida

**Karen Chura, speaker of Aimara.  
From El Alto, Bolivia, lives in  
Gainesville, Florida**



## Aimara y Castellano

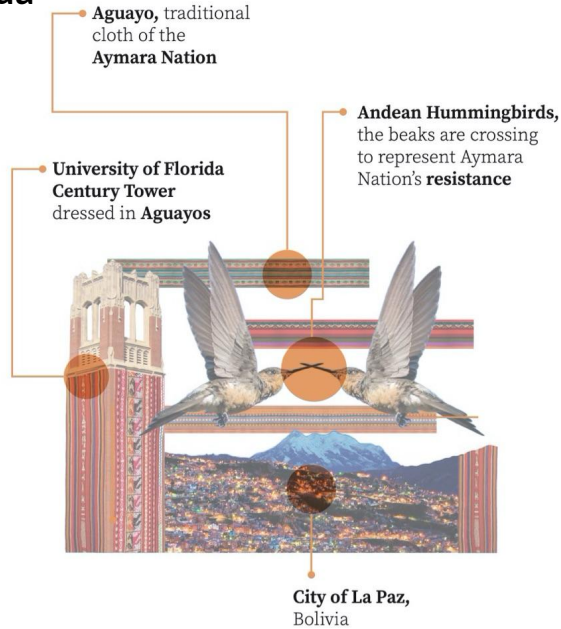
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*Es muy difícil identificar el idioma materno porque uno crece en medio de la diversidad. Mi idioma funcional es el castellano, pero el Aimara es mi idioma también. La Nación Aimara ha tenido mucha resistencia. El Aimara es un idioma que te ayuda a entender una nación. El Aimara es parte de mi vida porque he crecido entre esos conceptos expresados a través de las palabras.*

*Es importante tener intérpretes porque no muchos (indígenas) vienen con el conocimiento del inglés. Con alguna nación indígena, se puede llegar a hacer una mala interpretación o representación de la cultura. Se pueden cometer muchos errores y por eso es importante conocer las diversidades. No puedes entender la cultura sin el idioma.*

Artwork by Valentina Sierra  
Niño, University of Florida

# Karen Chura, speaker of Aimara. From El Alto, Bolivia, lives in Gainesville, Florida



*"The aguayo is very representative of Bolivia. Different communities have different aguayos, with different colors and shapes. Aguayos are actually texts written through fabrics."*

Artwork by **Valentina Sierra Niño**, University of Florida

## Aymara and Spanish

*It is very difficult to identify a mother tongue because one grows up in a society with a lot of diversity. My functional language is Spanish, but Aymara is my language as well. The Aymara Nation has had a lot of resistance. Aymara is a language that helps you understand a nation. The Aymara is part of my life because I grew up amongst those concepts expressed through words.*

*It's important to have interpreters because not many indigenous people come knowing English. With indigenous nations, there is a risk of making misinterpretations or misrepresentations of culture. You might make mistakes and that's why it's important to understand diversities. **You can't understand the culture without the language.***

### OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA:

Haitian Creole, Spanish, Portugese, Mandarin Chinese, Tagalog, Mixteco, Zapoteco, Punjabi, Odia, Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Mam, Chug, K'iche, Akateko, Ixhil, French, Swahili, Patois, Q'anjob'al, Awateco.

# Miguelito (known as “el niño trilingüe”)

Speaker of K'iche  
Lives in Lake City, Florida

[https://youtu.be/Q7otT-62\\_zM](https://youtu.be/Q7otT-62_zM)



# What does this have to do with health literacy?

Everything!

Indigenous orientations to health are guided by language and its connection to land, heritage, and sustainability.

“Mi lengua es cultura, es resistencia”---Karen, speaker of Aimara, lives in Gainesville, Florida

To survive a pandemic, you need resistance, resilience, and hope for future generations.

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# Translating and reviewing RWHP's materials



**...the people must read their  
own reality and write their  
own history.**

***-Paulo Freire  
Pedagogy of the Oppressed***



# All testimonial materials are centralized in the communities we serve



Friends, the *novela* is our favorite medium.

...it is known and timeless.



# We take the idea of basic health prevention steps



- Wash your hands
- Cough into your elbow
- Sleep apart when sick
- Get vaccinated
- When sick use a mask around others



And transform them into a visual story...

# A consejo

## COVID-19 Consejo #12

### Un Circulo de Protección para la Salud Familiar

Mantenga un ambiente sano para su familia con estas cinco acciones para reducir la transmisión de COVID, gripes y catarro.



Dormir aparte cuando está enfermo.



Recibir la vacuna contra el COVID.



Si está enfermo, usar una tapaboca alrededor de otros o en espacios compartidos.



Toser hacia el codo, ¡nunca en las manos!

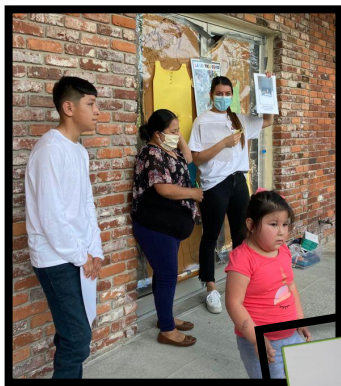


Lavarse las manos con frecuencia.



*A game*

# La Lotería COVID



## LA LOTERÍA COVID

A 4x4 grid of 16 small images illustrating COVID-19 prevention and safety measures. The images show people wearing masks, handwashing, social distancing, and avoiding large gatherings. Some images have a yellow 'X' over them, indicating incorrect or unsafe practices. The grid is titled 'LA LOTERÍA COVID' in large, colorful letters at the top.

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www.rwhp.org

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# A novela



Seguro para tí, seguro para toda la familia



Luisa se vacuna



Papá, estoy preocupado por ir a la escuela. Un niño en mi clase tiene COVID.

Sólo siga usando el cubrebocas y lavándose las manos.

Nos sentimos un poco cansados, el día de la vacuna, pero después de esto, nos sentimos bien.

Está bien... usted ha sido muy cuidadoso.

¡Y ahora estamos protegidos! En este momento podemos volver a ver a sus abuelitos.

Y cuando sea el momento, podrá recibir la vacuna.

Oh, entonces si me ponen la vacuna, ¿puedo jugar con mis amigos después de la escuela?

Por supuesto.

¿La Vacuna? ¡Pero mi amigo dijo que la vacuna me enfermaría, mamá! Yo no quiero enfermarme.

Aunque deben jugar afuera y mantener sus cubrebocas puestos. ¿De acuerdo?

No, eso no es cierto. Por el contrario, la vacuna significa que no se enfermará de COVID.

Si tengo que ir a clase, ¡pero ahora me siento mejor!

Su padre y yo nos vacunamos. ¡Recuerda!


No puedo esperar hasta que ella esté vacunada.


Será bueno no tener que preocuparse. La vacuna la mantendrá a salvo!

**Llamado a la acción:**  
La vacuna contra COVID-19 está disponible para niños de 5 años en adelante; hable con su proveedor de atención médica hoy.

**Puntos Claves:**

- 1 La vacuna contra COVID-19 evita que los niños se enfermen gravemente y transmiten el virus que causa COVID-19.
- 2 La vacuna ha sido probada y es segura para los niños.
- 3 Después de vacunarse, los niños deben seguir tomando algunas precauciones.





PROCEED, Inc. NCTSTA

## Lessons from Indigenous Language Translators and Activists

“The Mexican government has produced a lot of information in Spanish for the community here, but for Indigenous communities, it’s not enough to just translate this information. As we translated information related to COVID-19, we also had to make it more relevant for our communities.”

“Indigenous communities care more about our community than we do about ourselves, so if we want people to stay home, if we want them to skip going to work, we can’t tell them to do it just for themselves; we have to tell them to do it for their communities.”



Edith Matías Juan, interpreter and translator of Dixhzaa (Zapoteco), variant from Villa Díaz Ordaz.

# Centro Profesional Indígena de Asesoría, Defensa, y Traducción, A.C.

“Contrary to Western ideas, our Indigenous communities know that our lives don’t end at death, so telling people to not get sick because they will die, like the Mexican government is telling us, doesn’t work as well as telling people to instead say “yes!” to life. The focus here is on having a better life, in whatever form, rather than being guided by a fear of death”

-Edith

<https://cepiadet.org>



Seguir las medidas de prevención frente al **COVID-19**.

es cuidar y preservar la vida y la diversidad de nuestros pueblos.

**Cuidemos** a las personas que son **vulnerables a esta enfermedad**:

Niños, niñas, mujeres embarazadas, personas mayores, con obesidad y personas que tienen alguna enfermedad.

¡Es responsabilidad de todas y todos cuidarnos!

#SíLaVida  
#InformarteEnTuLenguaEsTuDerecho

PONTE LA VERDE  
CONTRA EL COVID-19

The infographic features a light blue background with two green virus icons at the top right. The text is in Spanish, providing guidance on COVID-19 prevention and care for vulnerable groups. At the bottom, there is an illustration of an elderly woman with grey hair and a red patterned face mask, being attended to by a younger woman in a colorful patterned dress and red face mask. They are in a rural setting with mountains and greenery in the background. Logos for 'PONTE LA VERDE' and 'CONTRA EL COVID-19' are at the bottom left, and two circular logos are at the bottom right.



## Lessons from Indigenous Language Translators and Activists

“Even though many people don’t read or write in their Indigenous languages, I think it’s important to make these writing systems visible, make them a part of the cultural record.”



Elena García Ortega, interpreter and translator of Ayuuk (Mixe), variant from Santiago Atitlán.

1

**COVID 19 N̄oó kaku tu 'u kanu n̄a tsiniñu kuninií #15**

**N̄ishi kunchaa' ntisa 'a n̄titu 'u ta 'a**  
 N̄o 'o kaku ve u 'un n̄a tsiniñu saá tava maki 'i kue nani COVID, a kue 'e kani 'i katsi 'i a kue 'e kai 'i



Kusu 'u sio 'o tatu ni kii kueeyo 'o



Tsiniñu 'u kaninaa inuu na COVID



Tatu kuuni 'i, tsiniñu kuachuni cubrebocas ta ntakitani 'i tsi inka 'a nivi 'i a ta kuani 'i un ntakita 'a kuanaa




Kashago ini 'i konto ntaago o, kuetsiniñu sa 'aña nu ntaago 'o



Tsiniñu 'u ntakacha 'a nta 'a ke chancha 'a



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@ProjectSALUDRWHP



2

**COVID-19 Kab'lajuj Pixab'**

**Jusetesik pixab' rech uchajixik ri kich'akul ri qalaxik**  
 Chaya juj utzalaj k'olib'al chi kech ri awalaxik ruk' wa' we job' no'jib'al rech man kkit'iq ta kib' ruk' le COVID, q'aq' on ajretza'm.



We yawab' jun achalaxik utz we kwar utukel.



Kkoj le t'is'baq rech le COVID.



We yawab' kkoj le ch'uqb'al ch'ai are chi k'o chi kinaqaj ri winaq on are chi e k'o pa jun ja k'olib'al qajom.




Are chi kt'ojt'ob' jun kkoj ri ch'u'k, jNi jumul kkoj le q'ab'aj!



Amaq'el kchaj ri q'ab'aj



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# Consejo 15 Audio, K'iche

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cyfwqFwdEfenwai4zE\\_I3G2ed6jKEox](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cyfwqFwdEfenwai4zE_I3G2ed6jKEox)

G (mujer)	<p>¡Buenos días Pastor Rodriguez! Se ve muy contento hoy.</p> <p>¡<u>Xsaqarik</u> K'amal b'e! kamik sib'alaj k'ikot la.</p>
PR (hombre)	<p>Buenos días Griselda. Tiene razón. Recibí la vacuna del COVID. ¡Que alivio! Así me mantengo saludable y <u>ayudo</u> a que mi comunidad esté saludable también.</p> <p><u>Xsaqarik</u> al Griselda. Qas tzij chi awech. kinki'kotik xa rumal xinkunax che le COVID, ¡Kjroror ri nuk'u'x! Rumal man kinriq ta chik, le yab'il <u>xuquje'</u> kinto' ri <u>nukomon</u> rech man keyawaj ta ri winaq.</p>
G	<p>Oh no, pero Pastor... ¿no sentía temor de inyectarse el virus vivo en su cuerpo?</p> <p>Ay tatit, k'amal b'e... ¿La man xxi'j ta ib' la are chi' xt'is b'i ri jun k'asal <u>chikop</u> pa ri ch'akul la?.</p>
PR	<p>¡No! Griselda. ¡Eso no es cierto!. Ninguna de las vacunas de COVID contienen el virus vivo. ¡Tristemente es solo un rumor!.</p> <p>¡Maj! al Griselda. ¡Man <u>qatzij</u> ta la', le le'!. Man k'o ta jun t'isb'aq rech le COVID k'o jun k'asal uchikopil chi upam. ¡Xaq kmoloz tzij la' le winaq!.</p>
G	<p>Bueno, también he escuchado que la vacuna....</p> <p><u>Xuquje'</u> in tom chi ri t'isb'aq...</p>
PR	<p>(le interrumpe y le responde) Griselda, tenemos que dejar de estar compartiendo mitos y debemos de empezar a pensar <u>como</u> las vacunas pueden ayudar a proteger a la gente a tu alrededor. ¿Sabías que la vacuna es gratis?</p> <p>Al Griselda, man kqachomaj ta la' ri moloj tzij kb'an le winaq chi rij ri t'isb'aq, are utz la' kqachomaj ri <u>utzilal</u> kuya ri <u>kunab'al</u> chi <u>kech</u> ri <u>qawinag</u>. ¿La <u>aweta'm</u> chi ri t'isb'aq <u>xaq</u> sipatalik?</p>
G	<p>Pastor, estoy escuchando lo que dice sobre la vacuna, pero honestamente todavía tengo dudas.</p> <p>K'amal b'e, <u>kinchomaj</u> rij ri tajin kb'ij la chi rij ri t'isb'aq, k'o ne' na ri man qas ta k'o pa <u>saq</u> chi <u>nuwach</u>.</p>

# Feedback from RWHP Indigenous Health Promotores and Community

One health promoter explained that for Indigenous communities living in Gainesville, receiving health messages in their Indigenous languages is very helpful because “It’s important to give people information in their native language.”

A health promoter also pointed out that many Indigenous language speakers in the US are “trying to learn to read and write Spanish better,” especially because migrant farmworkers, for example, work in the community with Spanish speakers.

Juan, speaker of Q’anjob’al, listening to the radionovela: “This is the first time I’ve heard my language in the US since I came here 7 years ago”

# Takeaways

COVID materials in Indigenous languages as information access, language preservation, AND language learning (“Each one, teach one”)

Communicating information in multiple modalities/formats is important for health literacy (visuals, audio, and writing, STORIES)

Specificity is critical (language variants, colors and patterns on Huipiles, culturally appropriate and relevant visuals)

Language access is much more than translation.

## Lessons from Indigenous Language Translators and Activists

“The work that we do as translators of Indigenous languages is not just for the people accessing information, but also for the benefit of the languages themselves.”



Vianna Lucía González Ajiataz, linguist, translator, interpreter, and teacher of Maya K'iche, from Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

## Research Article

# (Re)Designing Technical Documentation About COVID-19 With and for Indigenous Communities in Gainesville, Florida, Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico, and Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

—LAURA GONZALES , ROBIN LEWY , ERIKA HERNÁNDEZ CUEVAS , AND VIANNA LUCÍA GONZÁLEZ AJIATAZ 

**Abstract—Background:** *In this article, we document how our team of translators, interpreters, technical communicators, and health justice workers is collaborating to (re)design COVID-19-related technical documentation for and with Indigenous language speakers in Gainesville, FL; Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico; and Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.* **Literature review:** *Although (mis)representations of Indigenous communities have been an ongoing issue in and beyond technical communication, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought added attention to how government institutions and other agencies fail to consider the cultural values, languages, and communication practices of Indigenous communities when writing, designing, and sharing technical information.* **Research questions:** *1. How can technical communicators work toward social justice in health through collaborative design with Indigenous language speakers? 2. How can technical documentation about COVID-19 be (re)designed alongside members of vulnerable communities to redress oppressive representations while increasing access and usability?* **Methodology:** *Through interviews and other participatory design activities conducted with Indigenous language speakers in the US, Guatemala, and Mexico, we illustrate how Western approaches to creating technical documentation, particularly in health-related contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, put communities at risk by failing to localize health messaging for Indigenous audiences. We then document our work intended to collaboratively design and translate COVID-19-related technical information alongside those Indigenous language speakers to benefit Indigenous language speakers in Gainesville and other parts of North Central Florida.* **Results:** *Through this discussion, we highlight how technical communicators can collaborate with Indigenous language speakers to create, translate, and share multilingual technical documents that can contribute to social justice efforts by enhancing language access.* **Conclusion:** *Through collaborations with Indigenous language speakers, translators, and interpreters, social/health justice projects in technical communication can be combined, localized, and adapted to better serve and represent the diversity of people, languages, and cultures that continue to increase in our world.*

**Index Terms**—Community engagement, health justice, indigenous languages.

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**What are some takeaways that  
you can apply in your own work?**



# Thank you!

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LANGUAGE  
ACCESS  
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