



IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATING

# BRIDGES

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## SAFETY & TRAINING MATERIALS

# BRIDGING THE GAP

**Loretta Mulberry – Terra Translations**

Workers across the US depend on safety and training materials to do their jobs well and come home happy and whole each day. However, those materials are often available only in English despite the fact that a large and growing portion of our construction workforce is made up of people who do not speak English as their native language. After English, Spanish is by far the most common language spoken natively in the US and in Wisconsin, specifically. While it's often assumed that people living in the US understand enough English to get by without major issue, the US Census states that around 40% of native Spanish-speakers self-report speaking English "less than very well." People don't





## A COMMITMENT TO LANGUAGE SERVICES IMPROVES A TEAM'S COHESIVE NATURE AND CULTURE, WHICH SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES AN ORGANIZATION'S CHANCES OF BOTH HIRING AND RETAINING THE BEST POSSIBLE TALENT.

often feel comfortable speaking up about not understanding something because no one wants to be seen as incompetent or difficult by colleagues and superiors, but widespread risks arise for the whole team when the language barrier prevents even one person from fully comprehending safety and training materials. In fact, OSHA estimates that language barriers are a factor in 25% of on-the-job accidents.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that one in four construction industry workers were born outside of the US, with about half of all construction laborers being Hispanic. This number has been rising steadily over the last twenty years, meaning that a large and growing population is likely to speak Spanish as their primary language. Note that our immigrant workforce is not exclusively Spanish

speaking, but this piece focuses on the Hispanic community due to its prevalence in construction. The same risks and solutions outlined here apply to organizations employing workers with limited English proficiency from all backgrounds. If documentation outlining their rights and responsibilities is only available in English, then they are not being afforded the same access to knowledge as their native English-speaking counterparts. It's an easy thing to take for granted for many of us who have never had to learn or work in a second, or even third, language. Yet this lack of language access is all too common. It's a disservice to these employees, an unnecessary risk to all workers, a legal and regulatory compliance pitfall, and could be seen as a signal to the public that safety is not truly an organization's top priority.

There are many ways to begin bridging the language gap within a company, and perhaps the best first step is understanding some of the terminology. "Language services" refers to one or more language-related services, such as translation (converting written documents from one language to another), interpreting (in-person or remotely converting spoken language), subtitling and/or voice over (dubbed) work for videos, and more. Speaking with a professional language services provider (LSP) will help to determine which services a particular company would benefit from most. While it's tempting to rely on bilingual employees or AI to perform these tasks, working with a professional linguist or agency will provide a much higher level of linguistic and cultural accuracy. LSPs have industry knowledge as well as technical language skills to accommodate the nuance of language when preserving a particular tone and vernacular and determining the proper variant and register for a specific audience.

Beginning a company's language access journey might seem overwhelming, but there are small steps that can be taken to start slowly and build a proper foundation. First, identify which languages are spoken throughout the team and evaluate whether there are concerns over illiteracy and other learning disabilities. Nearly one in four people in the US experience low literacy rates in any language, though it's common to hide this fact from employers. Next, determine which documents take priority for translation. This might be anything that causes friction, inefficiencies, damages, or injuries when not communicated clearly, such as employee handbooks, toolbox talks, training courses, or other HR forms. Translation is an investment in your employees' well-being and your company's operational success. According to the CPWR - The Center for Construction Research and

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- MASONRY MORTARS
- BUILDING PRODUCTS FOR THE  
CONCRETE AND MASONRY CONTRACTOR
- AGGREGATES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY



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Training, employees who are trained in their native language report substantially better understanding of and adherence to safety protocols with a 90% increase in engagement with safety materials, a decrease in injury incidents for all employees, and improved working efficiency and team morale. Effective training and better adherence to safety protocols is not just the right thing to do for employees' safety, but also the fiscally responsible thing to do for employers given the expenses related to jobsite incidents, such as delays, injuries, insurance investigations, regulatory fines, short-staffing, and retraining.

On top of the safety and operational benefits of translation, a commitment to language services improves a team's cohesive nature and culture, which significantly improves an organization's chances of both hiring and retaining the best possible talent. With the ongoing shortage of construction labor, it's more important than ever that we find new ways to keep our teams running at full strength. It's also worth noting that companies who do not provide training in employees' native languages could be deemed



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in violation of the OSHA Training Standards Policy Statement which requires training "be provided in a language the employee can understand" and that said training must account for limited English proficiency.

In closing, translating safety and training materials protects not only workers, but also an organization's reputation with future hires, customers, competitors, and regulatory bodies. We're living in an exciting moment in history where safety is more of a priority than it ever has been. It speaks volumes when companies dedicate such significant resources to keeping workers safe and educated on the job, and language access is the perfect next step to make sure employees are getting the most out of those resources. Every document counts and everyone must start somewhere, so let this be the sign you've been waiting for to begin! 



Loretta Mulberry

**TERRA**  
TRANSLATIONS

## EVENT REMINDERS



- **NETWORKING SOCIAL**

June 11, Altoona

- **10-HOUR OSHA TRAINING**

May 8 & 9, Eau Claire  
June 10 & 23, Appleton  
June 13 & 20, Madison  
June 20 & 27, Milwaukee

- **FIRST AID & CPR TRAINING**

May 9, Madison  
May 23, Milwaukee  
May 27, Appleton  
May 30, Eau Claire  
June 13, Milwaukee

- **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS 2-PART WEB SERIES**

May 13, Live-Online

- **QUALIFIED RIGGER & SIGNAL PERSON TRAINING**

May 16, Madison  
June 20, Appleton

- **2025 APPRENTICESHIP GRADUATION BANQUET**

May 16, Wisconsin Dells

- **GOLF SCRAMBLE AT THE OAKS**

May 29, Cottage Grove

- **NEC ELECTRICAL EXAM PREP**

June 4, Madison

- **MILWAUKEE BREWERS TAILGATE & GAME**

June 6, Milwaukee



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