Sites of Translation

Gonzales, Laura

Published by University of Michigan Press

Gonzales, Laura.
Sites of Translation: What Multilinguals Can Teach Us about Digital Writing and Rhetoric.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60437

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2157599
6 • How Do Multilingual Professionals Translate?

Translation Moments in the Language Services Department at the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Los lenguajes están VIVOS—Languages are alive. Language moves, it breathes, it changes, and as translators we have to know how to adapt with it. That’s a lot of work, and we have to do it every single day, in every single moment.

—SARA PROAÑO, DIRECTOR OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

After working with student translators at KLN, I wanted to further understand how the extent of translators’ experiences and training influences their approach and engagement with language transformation. Because the translators introduced in chapter 5 did not necessarily have formal training in translation and represented a traditional college-age demographic, I deemed it important to connect with another community that may help me contextualize how translation activities play out in a professional setting. As Terese Guinsatao Monberg explains, when analyzing cultural-rhetorical work in context, it is important to acknowledge how individuals experience and navigate communication “within their own borders or communities,” noting how individuals who may speak similar languages navigate their own “recursive spatial movement” as they make linguistic transitions (22; emphasis in original). In other words, even though translators at both of my research sites were moving between Spanishes and Englishes, it was important for me to work with two different organizations with different participants, so that I could more intricately understand how translation differences play out within distinct Spanish-speaking communities.
To understand how translation is enacted in professional contexts, I began working with employees in the Language Services Department at the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, a small translation and interpretation office in Grand Rapids. In this chapter, I illustrate how professional translators navigate translation moments within this office, as they facilitate communication between Spanish-speaking community members and English-speaking service providers such as health care practitioners, government officials, and other local organizations. To introduce translation in this professional context, I first share some background information on the Language Services Department and the nonprofit organization that houses that establishment. As I did for KLN in chapter 5, I then share a narrative story that contextualizes the relationships I built with translators in the department. Finally, I provide specific examples of the multilingual/multimodal translation processes enacted by translators in the department, paying specific attention to the different ways in which professionals’ translation activities inform A Revised Rhetoric of Translation. I end this chapter by emphasizing that translation in a professional context, particularly within the Language Services Department, is prompted by extreme exigencies for services and support and frequently results in powerful consequences for the livelihood of community members from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Background on the Language Services Department

The Hispanic Center of Western Michigan is a nonprofit organization located in Grand Rapids. The purpose of this organization is to provide access, education, and resources to the Latinx community in western Michigan and beyond (www.hispanic-center.org). Although the center as a whole is a nonprofit organization, the Language Services Department located inside the center is a for-profit translation and interpretation business aiming to provide language accessibility to the Latinx community. All of the revenue earned in the Language Services Department is reinvested in the Hispanic Center, fueling various programs for the larger organization (e.g., support groups for survivors of domestic violence, local youth initiatives, and campaigns concerned with Latinx health and wellness). In this way, the Language Services Department at the Hispanic Center works under the same institutional constraints as a nonprofit organization, while simultaneously charging a small service fee that is then reinvested into the community.
The Language Services Department at the Hispanic Center employs approximately thirty multilingual translators and interpreters, with verbal and written proficiency in Spanish, English, and a wide range of indigenous languages from South America, Central America, and North America. These professionals facilitate communication between, on the one hand, community members who identify with heritage languages other than English and, on the other, over fifty local service and government organizations in the city of Grand Rapids (e.g., the local police department, hospitals, Child Protective Services, technology businesses, local museums, and other nonprofit organizations). All of the interpreters and translators who work in the Language Services Department are trained in-house, meaning that the department recruits and trains multilingual community members from the Grand Rapids area who are interested in becoming professional translators and interpreters. Each year, the director of the Language Services Department, Sara Proaño, facilitates training programs that give bilingual or multilingual community members the hands-on training and experience needed to eventually be hired (either by the Language Services Department or by other local agencies) as interpreters and translators for the community. All of the interpreters and translators who work in the Language Services Department live in the community that they serve, gaining an income and supporting their families through the revenue earned by providing language accessibility to that same community.

Sara Proaño is a bilingual (Spanish- and English-speaking) professional translator and interpreter who holds a degree in neuropsychology from a university in Quito, Peru. She had been working at the Hispanic Center for approximately seven years at the start of my study. After immigrating from Peru and finding herself unemployed in the United States, Sara began working at the Hispanic Center by shredding papers and conducting other office duties, before moving up to direct the Language Services Department. Through her experiences rebuilding her career, Sara established and sustains what she describes as a “three-tiered approach to community engagement,” one that fuels the foundation for the translation and interpretation work that takes place in the Language Services Department. During an interview with Sara, she defined her three-tiered approach through the following organizational goals:

1. language accessibility, which entails providing translation and interpretation services that allow Spanish-speaking community members to access social services and to adequately understand government procedures;
2. sustainability, which Sara defines as earning a modest income from language services and then applying that income to other initiatives within the Hispanic Center;
3. leadership and professional development, which includes providing workshops, training, and access to national certification exams for all translators and interpreters who work in the Language Services Department.

I spent two years forming relationships and collaborating with participants in the Language Services Department. During this time, I recorded over two thousand translation projects, both using screencast software to record how employees completed written translations on their computers and using video recordings to capture how participants interacted with each other and with their surrounding environment throughout their
translation and interpretation activities. While collecting this data, I worked part-time in the Language Services Department, where I coordinated and completed various translation projects. Similar to my work at KLN, I conducted artifact-based interviews with employees at this research site, using these interviews as a way to triangulate my coding and analysis processes with my participants’ own interpretations of their work. Although I will share specific examples of how translators in the Language Services Department enact multilingual/multimodal communication through their daily activities, I want to frame these examples through A Revised Rhetoric of Translation, specifically by sharing a story that illustrates how linguistic transformations are embedded in other rhetorical and cultural contexts within this organization. The following excerpts from my journal entries recording my first interactions with Sara in the Language Services Department illustrate how her leadership and vision shape the translation work in her department, while simultaneously influencing the well-being of the surrounding community.

Gonzales Journal Entry, 12 March 2014

Today was my first official day of work as the translations coordinator in the Language Services Department. Although I was a bit hesitant to come on board as a part-time employee while also collecting data for my dissertation, I will never forget Sara’s words to me during our initial visit: “You can’t just study translation without doing translation, Laura. I would love to have you here in the department. But if you want to be a part of us, you’ll have to truly be a part of us.”

At first, I didn’t quite understand what Sara meant by “be a part of us.” I thought that not working as an employee while studying the work of the office would allow me more time for reflection and analysis. However, what I’ve come to realize in just a few hours is that the driving force behind professional translation is the immediate exigence for and urgency of this work—an exigence that can’t be described or understood through observation alone. Today, as I learned how to navigate the document templates housed on the department’s computer, clients continuously walked through the door. Through this movement, each project in the office quickly became a person, a story in transition that needed my assistance—a mother seeking the translation of her children’s vaccination records from Oaxaca so that she can enroll them in school, a hospital calling for an emergency interpretation to help during a surgery procedure, a young man coming through the door in need of a resume translation to
help him find employment after his recent arrival in the US, a representative from the local morgue coming in twenty minutes before closing to request the translation of ten death certificates that needed to be delivered to families as soon as possible.

While I know that I would be sympathizing with all these stories if I were merely sitting in the corner of the room taking notes and video recording, the fact that it is now my job to coordinate these translation projects—figuring out which ones I can take care of myself in-house and which will need to be outsourced to other translators—completely reorients my approach to this work. These are no longer my participants, and this is no longer just my dissertation—this is my job in this community, and I now understand that what Sara was pushing me to do by requiring that I come on board as a translator was not just to help me with my project but to also ensure a reciprocal collaborative relationship that would allow me to contribute my language skills to the very community that would fuel my research. I have never been more grateful.

Gonzales Journal Entry, 24 March 2014

Today was my third Friday of work at the office. At the beginning of the day (after I got here late again!), Sara mentioned that she wanted to take me out to lunch. Because I don’t live in Grand Rapids and I commute from Lansing each day, I haven’t gotten the chance to see much of this town. Although I was super-excited, I couldn’t quite wrap my head around how both Sara and I would be able to leave the office on a busy Friday to go have lunch. There’s just always so much work to do.

At around 12:30, Sara closed her computer, pulled out her curling iron from inside a filing cabinet, and began curling her hair. She then handed me her lip gloss as I sat slouched over my computer: “Este color te va quedar bien. Esto es parte del trabajo, amiga” (This color will look nice on you. This is part of the job, my friend). A few minutes later, we walked out the door as Sara very politely informed Olga (the woman at the front desk), “Ya venimos. ¿Te traemos algo Olguita?” (We’ll be right back. Should we bring something back for you, Olguita?). Sara is never the person to eat without offering to share. She reminds me of my mami that way.

As we walked out of our building and began walking through the neighborhood, Sara’s shining smile greeted everyone who walked by us. Sometimes she would stop and wave, and other sometimes she would share a casual “Buen día!” (Good day!) with one of the neighbors. It was clear that everyone knows who Sara is and that they find comfort in her
confidence, just like I do. “Aquí siempre se saluda, Laura” (We always greet each other here, Laura), she said, prompting me to also look up from my phone, look around, and smile as we approached the locally owned Mexican restaurant where we would have lunch.

I can’t believe that I’ve lived in Michigan for over a year without making my way to the tortas in Grand Rapids before today. Immediately, life-altering goodness ensued in both food and conversation.

SARA: ¿Entonces, como te va Laura? Como te está gustando el trabajo? (So, how’s it going, Laura. How are you liking the job?)

LAURA: La verdad es que me encanta, pero a veces sí es un poco . . . overwhelming. (To be honest, I love it, but it’s definitely a little . . . overwhelming sometimes)

SARA: Si, a veces es muy estresante. Pero vale la pena. (Yes, sometimes it’s really stressful. But it’s worth it)

As we continued eating and laughing, I came to learn more about Sara’s role in her community, and I acknowledged the powerful role that she has already come to play in my life even after just a few short weeks. Sara is a fighter like I’ve never seen before, experiencing all of life’s challenges as an immigrant single mother who came to the US seeking happiness and stability, before learning quickly that this stability is granted to some and made impossible for others.

SARA: ¿Y, como te va con las traducciones? (So, how’s it going with the translations?).

LAURA: I like them. I mean, it’s very hard for me because I was in third grade when I stopped writing in Spanish at school. So, me gusta hablar más el Español que escribirlo, pero lo estoy aprendiendo nuevamente. (Me gustan. O sea, es muy difícil para mí porque yo solo escribí el español en la escuela hasta el tercer grado. Entonces, I like speaking Spanish more than I like writing it, but I’m learning it all over again.)

SARA: Yes, it’s difficult to switch languages, but you will keep getting better. The challenge is learning to adapt, porque los lenguajes están vivos [because languages are alive], Laura—Language moves, it breathes, it changes, and as translators we have to adapt with it. That’s a lot of work, and we have to do it every single day in every single moment. We are the people who move this city. I’m so happy you’re here, amiga.

Yes, amigas (friends) indeed.
The journal excerpts shared here are only a glimpse into the many profound things that Sara understands and enacts about the power of language in her community. Through our work together, Sara taught me the connections between space, identity, language, and culture in a way that I had never before experienced. Always aware of her surroundings and her place in the community, Sara works as a force for those around her through every interaction—whether she is sitting in an office completing a written translation, driving around the city to facilitate verbal interpretation, or using her lunch break as an opportunity to greet and support local business owners in her city.

Sara’s comment about the fluidity of language resonates with much of what I learned about language from sociolinguistics (García and Li Wei), which is unsurprising given Sara’s training in neuropsychology and translation. Before coming into this office, I understood how language practices change based on cultural and rhetorical contexts. Yet, what became clear to me both through Sara’s comment and through my ongoing work with the Language Services Department is that language does not only move and change—it also causes movement in its surrounding context; as Ríos puts it, “Space produces time rather than vice versa” (“Cultivating,” 68). The movement that I traced in the Language Services Department did not just happen as words were transformed across Spanish and English. Instead, those linguistic transformations fueled material action, allowing children to enroll in school, community members to receive health services, and people to get the jobs they need to support their families in a different country.

Indeed, I later learned that the entire Hispanic Center of Western Michigan was first only a translation and interpretation office, one of the first Latinx community service centers to be established as part of larger efforts to mobilize and support Chicanx and Latinx communities in the Midwest. Thus, what I witnessed and participated in through my work with this organization was A Revised Rhetoric of Translation in action, through a small glimpse of a broader network established and sustained by Latinx communities in the United States who are seeking to get ahead despite all the adversity placed in front of them. From the beginning, the people in this organization have understood that the power of language extends beyond words. Translating documents and conversations is important, but it is only one piece of a bigger imperative in community action. Thus, analyzing the linguistic moves in this organization is only one piece of the puzzle, as it is also important to note how this linguistic activity impacts the broader movements within the city. From this understanding, I now turn to provide specific examples of the translation activities facili-
tated by the Language Services Department, illustrating how multilingual/multimodal practices fuel the sustainability of an entire community.

“The People Who Move This City”: Multimodal Translation Activities in the Language Services Department

Because the Language Services Department is founded on Sara’s three-tiered model of community engagement, the goals and aims of the organization span beyond providing translation and interpretation services. The three-tiered approach and related organizational objectives inherently affect the daily activities of employees within this organization. For instance, translators act not only as adapters of language but also as community advocates, consulting with service providers to tailor information for Latinx communities rather than merely translating provided content. In addition, not only do employees translating legal documents aim to complete translation projects quickly to turn a profit, but they also seek to help community members use this translated information to fulfill material objectives like earning residency and employment. As Sara explained during an interview, activities within the Language Services Department are “always new, as you never know what you’re going to get.”

Understanding how employees navigate translation moments in the Language Services Department requires added attention to context and circumstance, following the first pillar of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation. Through this perspective, it is not enough simply to account for the objects facilitating translation and interpretation (e.g., computers, telephones, and translation tools and applications); it is also critical to account for the things being internalized and experienced both by the translators and by the community members throughout the translation process.

A video montage is available (https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9952377.cmp.1) that provides a brief but contextualized illustration of the multilingual/multimodal activities and the movement that happens in the Language Services Department. This video introduces Sara as the director of the Language Services Department; Eloy, the coordinator who assigns interpretation jobs to other interpreters at the center; Carla, who is currently working as an interpreter; Graciela, a more experienced interpreter who has been working in the Language Services Department for over six years; and me, depicted as I interpret a phone call between a health service provider and a Spanish-speaking community member.

The video montage illustrates the constant movement and convergence
of modalities—physical, material, and embodied (nonvisual)—that are enacted as professional translators and interpreters navigate translation moments. For instance, the video depicts Graciela explaining how interpreters have to work with health care providers and other clients to develop an adequate translation for Spanish-speaking community members. When Graciela says, “We were, like, writing, coloring, trying to get the point across, and we managed, but it was very difficult,” she signals the ways in which interpreters have to combine visual and verbal modes to accomplish accurate translations. Furthermore, the examples shared by Graciela describe the immediacy and urgency through which successful interpretation happens. When interpreters are on a job, they translate information in the moment, with little time to second-guess their choices. Over time, interpreters develop a critical awareness of the kairotic impacts of translation, understanding, first, how the immediacy and urgency of any given situation may influence how information may be perceived by a particular individual and, second, how the information should be interpreted within the context of that situation. In these instances, interpreters like Graciela draw on a wide range of modalities and media to communicate information across languages.

In the video montage, Carla describes a translation moment that she experienced as she tried to translate the word labor in English for a mother who was giving birth. During this translation session, Carla explains, the doctor stated that he was going to “break [the patient’s] water in order to get the labor started.” In that moment, Carla had to make a decision about using the literal translation of the word labor in Spanish, which happens to be the same word. This literal translation for labor was referenced in one of Carla’s training manuals on medical terminology, which directed her to translate labor in English with the same word in Spanish. Rather than using the word labor in her translation, however, Carla decided to adjust the language and tell the Spanish-speaking client, “Le voy a romper la fuente para empezar con el nacimiento,” which translates, “I’m going to break your water so that we can get the birth started.” As Carla clarified in her conversation with the interpretation coordinator, Eloy, “I could have said ‘to get the labor started,’ but I knew in that moment that the patient could have misinterpreted the word labor to reference a job or profession.” In this translation moment, Carla knew that she had to erase any potential confusion for the Spanish-speaking patient, especially during the intensity that is already overwhelming the mother giving birth. During this brief but critically important translation moment, Carla used her own experiences and her knowledge of Spanish and English
to make a rhetorical decision that she then verbalized to the patient. Thus, Carla used multimodal strategies by rhetorically negotiating semiotic resources to reach a specific audience in a specific rhetorical situation.

In a follow-up artifact-based interview with me, Carla explained that in the specific translation moment discussed with Eloy, she “knew how scared” the patient giving birth was during this session. Because Carla is a mother herself, she understands the fear and stress that takes place during a birth. Recalling her experiences giving birth, Carla empathized with the patient during this high-stakes situation and decided to change the word she used, not because the use of labor is inaccurate but because Carla believed nacimiento (birth) would be a more effective and soothing word for the birthing mom to hear in this translation moment. As evidenced through this translation moment, when Carla interprets for her community, she draws both on her medical interpretation training and on her lived experiences as a Spanish-speaking Mexican American mother who struggled for years to navigate linguistic and cultural barriers on her own. Carla makes connections with the patients for whom she interprets, making important rhetorical decisions that take account both of “accurate” definitions of medical terminology and of contextual factors influencing the understanding of medical information in high-stakes environments. These decisions and the exigence that fuels them also render multimodal translation practices as translators work in digital environments to complete linguistic transformations for their community.

Digitally Mediated Multimodality in the Language Services Department

While interpreters like Carla and Graciela illustrate multimodal translation processes through their nonalphabetic, embodied experiences, other elements of multimodality also emerged as employees in the Language Services Department interacted with digital technologies in their written translations. For example, in a translation session shown briefly in the video montage mentioned above, Sara was translating a flyer regarding an event sponsored by the organization Heart of West Michigan United Way. As she read the English version of the flyer aloud during her translation process, Sara began gesturing back and forth with her fingers, pointing to the computer screen and moving her hands as she continued reading aloud. As she continued gesturing back and forth with her fingers, Sara said,

I’m going to start later in the sentence, even though the English version starts with the words “Heart of West Michigan United Way.” Rather than keeping
the order the same in Spanish, I’m going to start the translation in a different spot in the sentence, because if I start the translation with “Heart of West Michigan United Way,” the Spanish-speaking reader will not be compelled to keep reading. Last time we did a flyer translation, when we started with the name of an organization in English, the Spanish-speaking clients did not feel like the flyer was intended for them. So here, I’m going to start differently.

During this translation moment, Sara combined the strategies of gesturing and reading aloud when making a decision about where to begin the Spanish version of this flyer. Sara was not necessarily struggling to come up with the translation of a specific word in Spanish. For this reason, using a digital translation tool would not have been useful in this instance. Instead, Sara used her own previous experiences (“Last time we did a flyer translation . . .”), as well as her own embodied practice during the invention process, to make a rhetorical decision that helped her overcome this translation moment. As Sara moved her fingers back and forth in front of the screen, she envisioned and decided between various sentence structures that would facilitate understanding for Spanish-speaking users interacting with this flyer. By moving her fingers across the screen, Sara visualized how the various grammatical structures could be presented in both Spanish and English, deciding to start her translation with a word in Spanish rather than keeping the English name of the organization at the beginning of the sentence. In this way, Sara used embodied strategies, through her gesturing at the screen, to navigate this particular translation moment.

As she continued translating this same flyer, Sara paused to decide how she would translate the word champion into Spanish. During this translation moment, Sara used the digital translation tool WordReference (http://www.wordreference.com/) to look for a word in Spanish that would signal a “champion” in health insurance rather than a champion of a race or sports event. As she considered WordReference’s options to decide which word to use in her translation, Sara repeated each word provided by WordReference aloud, using her indexed cultural knowledge and lived experiences to decide which word most accurately matched the rhetorical situations in which she has used this term before. During this translation moment, Sara repeated the words campeón and triunfador (potential translations for English champion) over and over again during her translation process, attempting to trigger her memories regarding previous contexts in which she has seen these words. As she moved back and forth between these two options, Sara moved her fingers in front of the computer screen, pointing back and forth at each printed word on the screen and signaling
a recursive back-and-forth movement as she made her final decision. As she moved through this translation, Sara continued to layer rhetorical strategies and modalities to transform information, using her body, her memory, and several digital tools to assist during this cyclical and recursive process, consequently echoing the second pillar of A Revised Rhetoric of Translation.

In another project (not included in the introductory video montage), Catalina, another translator for the Language Services Department, was working to translate a marriage certificate for a community client. During this process, Catalina experienced a translation moment as she paused to decide how to translate the word *notarize* in reference to the marriage certificate being legally issued and notarized in a government agency. At first, Catalina used the Linguee digital translator to look up Spanish translations for the word *notarize*. Linguee provided three possible Spanish words: *notariado*, *notarizado*, and *escriturado*. While these translations were helpful, all three translation options were provided by Linguee as present-tense adjectives, and Catalina was looking for a past-tense description. During this translation moment, Catalina was left to improvise a translation.

At first, Catalina asked out loud as she was translating in the office of the Language Services Department, “Como dirían ‘notarized’?” (*How would you all say “notarized”?*). Sara, who happened to be in the office at the time, responded to Catalina by stating, “*Notarizado*?” Catalina replied, “Yeah, I think so, pero [but] what about *notariado*?” Catalina and Sara then repeated both words interchangeably aloud several times, “*Notariado, notarizado, notariado, notarizado*—which sounds better?” They then Googled both words to find examples of each used in articles written in Spanish. At this point, Sara explained, “I think *notariado* is the correct translation grammatically speaking, but *notarizado* is used most commonly in practice.” Based on this conversation and on their collaborative research, Catalina used *notarizado* in her translation.

Like Sara’s repetition of the Spanish translation options for the word champion (*campeón* and *triunfador*), Catalina and Sara’s repetition of the words *notariado* and *notarizado* served as memory triggers that, in combination with the digital platforms of Linguee and word-processing software, assisted in navigating translation moments both accurately and successfully. Neither Catalina nor Sara could find a definite answer online to navigate this translation, but through their combined experiences and their collaborative effort to figure out what “sounds right” by repeating translation options out loud, Catalina and Sara reached an effective translation in this translation moment.
In these brief examples, the combination of digital and material modes led the professional translators and interpreters Sara, Catalina, and Carla to reach effective translations that adequately reflected the digital and cultural needs and values of their respective Spanish-speaking audiences. While translators in this professional office used deconstructing, gesturing, repeating, and storytelling strategies like those use by the translators at KLN (discussed in chapter 5), the added lived experiences and training of translators like Catalina, Carla, and Sara allowed them to make more connections between what is considered an “accurate” translation by a dictionary or digital tool and what may be understood most successfully by Spanish-speaking clients experiencing urgent and important situations. These connections to previous experiences and the coordination of technological and cultural resources continued to gain importance as translators worked to complete visual multimodal projects.

Mirror Translations in the Language Services Department: Visual Multimodality across Languages

In addition to digital platforms like Linguee, WordReference, and Google Translate, employees in the Language Services Department enacted multimodal translation practices through their visual translation projects. While the Language Services Department facilitates many different types of written and verbal translation projects (e.g., medical interpretation sessions on the phone and in person, website translations, and flyer translations), the most common type of project to enter the Language Services Department is the translation of technical documents such as birth certificates, legal documents (e.g., court reports), and education records. After moving to the United States from other North American, South American, and Central American countries, Latinx community members often have to translate technical documents in order to establish official residency, enroll in school, and qualify for health insurance (among other purposes). For this reason, the Language Services Department provides low-cost document translation to community members. During my work with the Language Services Department in 2015, employees in this office translated approximately fifty-six hundred legal, medical, and education documents for members of the community.

Although the language on these types of technical documents is often limited (ranging from one to two pages and from one hundred to three hundred words), much of the work in these types of translations requires that translators design and redesign logos, seals, and other visuals across
languages. To ease language accessibility in technical translations and to ensure that government agencies will accept translated technical documents, the Language Services Department provides clients with “mirror translations,” which consist of translated documents that identically match the design, layout, and formatting of the original text (Pym, 486). Because the Language Services Department provides mirror translations, graphics like the seals must be translated and designed before the translated document is considered complete. Due to the frequency of translations requiring seals (birth certificates, proof of something, etc.), the Language Services Department’s greatest source of intellectual property has become their extensive, editable, document library of translated seals. Translators have built this extensive database of translated seals and stamps over the course of twenty-seven years. Seals and stamps are organized into the categories of birth/death/marriage certificates, educational/medical records, and other document templates, organized by the country of origin of each original text. Figures 10–12 illustrate various seals and figures that were designed by translators during the period of my data collection in the Language Services Department.

The image at the top of figure 10 is a picture from an original Mexican birth certificate seal submitted for translation at the Language Services Department. The image on the bottom is a screenshot from the translated seal designed by a translator in the department. As evidenced in these two images, employees in the Language Services Department must both translate the information contained in the seal (e.g., “Office of the Civil Registry”) and include the images and logos in the translated document, for reference. In this way, translators act also as designers in the translation of birth certificates, ensuring the usability of translated documents by providing mirror translations that can be clearly understood in both the original language and the target language.

The image at the top of figure 11 is a picture from an original Cuban education certificate submitted by a client of the Language Services Department. On the bottom is the image designed and translated by an employee from the department. The translated phrase “sealed species,” which signals that the client paid the taxes due on her original document, provides added credibility to the translated document, indicating to an English-speaking reader that the educational record was submitted to and accepted by the Cuban embassy.

In recent years, government agencies have been providing ways for individuals to digitally verify the authenticity of technical documents such as birth certificates. Although translators cannot re-create digital barcodes on
Fig. 10. Original (top) and translation (bottom) of a birth certificate seal from Tepehuanes, Durango, Mexico.

Fig. 11. Original (top) and translation (bottom) of an educational record stamp from Cuba.
birth certificates and other documents (as depicted in fig. 12), it is important for translators to place barcodes and their corresponding verification numbers in the right position on finalized documents. In this way, government agencies can verify the validity of these technical documents via a verification number.

As evidenced in figures 10–12, the translation of technical documents, at least for participants in the Language Services Department, inherently requires multilingual, multimodal design that stems beyond alphabetic writing in a single language. Indeed, in the video and screencast footage that I recorded during my time working and researching in the Language Services Department, 65 percent of the time translators spent in the translation of technical documents was focused on designing logos and images, to render translations that make sense visually and alphabetically in both English and Spanish for specific purposes and contexts. During an interview, one translator, Holly, explained that her time spent translating a single birth certificate encompassed “thirty minutes total: ten minutes translating the text, twenty minutes fixing seal graphic templates.” Since the Language Services Department has been in business for twenty-seven years and since all translations completed at the Hispanic Center are stored
on a secure server, previous translations are used as templates for new projects, decreasing the amount of time that translators have to spend recreating frequently used seals and images. For instance, Mexican state seals that have remained the same for decades are copied into new technical document translations repeatedly. However, as Holly explained in her description of “fixing seal graphic templates,” although the Language Services Department has this extensive library of translated seals, their insertion into documents still requires formatting and manipulation to completely mirror and communicate (to the best of the translator’s ability) the original document. In the case of technical translations such as birth and marriage certificates, multimodality is enacted both through the combination of images and words on final translated documents and through the embodied, material modes deployed by translators like Sara and Catalina as they consult each other and their own lived experiences when making decisions in the moment of translation.

In addition to mirror translations of technical documents, translators in the Language Services Department often have to navigate other visual digitally designed elements in their translation projects. During my work in the Language Services Department office, a local institution that was preparing information materials regarding home foreclosure issues for community members in Michigan requested the translation of a seven-part document (127 total pages). The institution sought to have these documents available in English and Spanish on their website, so that members of the Latinx community could utilize the institution’s services. In particular, the institution aimed to provide resources (in both Spanish and English) to help community members understand and navigate through processes of home foreclosure. This translation project consisted of translating an entire website, with hyperlinks to external content.

When the Language Services Department originally received this translation request, I observed a conversation between Sara and Holly, where they discussed the value of this project. “This is a great resource for our people,” said Sara, adding, “They can really use information on foreclosure.” Holly then replied, “Yes, but how are we going to do it?” To complete this translation request, translators not only had to complete mirror translations, which included formatting and designing to match the original website. They also had to delegate discrete translation and design activities to different team members, as well as design the translations with the end users, client, and web developers in mind. Thus, the translators engaged in multiple, overlapping multimodal activities normally undertaken by specialized project managers, translators, user experience design-
ers, and web developers. Since the Language Services Department is a small, low-budget office and since translators for the organization are trained bilingual community members who typically have not had extensive professional technological training outside of the office, technical equipment (e.g., design software) is not readily available. Instead, translators have to work with limited software (e.g., Microsoft Office) to complete all projects.

In addition to translating technical language about home financing and foreclosure, the four translators who worked on this project had to negotiate roles as project managers and designers. The 127-page file was initially delivered to the office as a PDF document (see fig. 13). Later, after a client conversation regarding formatting and style, the document was resubmitted by the client as an editable Microsoft Word file. Translators worked on this editable Word file to complete and format the initial translation, taking into account visuals that could be seen directly on the document in which they were working. However, three weeks into the project (after all the language translation had been completed), the client contacted the Language Services Department to request that the content be reformatted into a file format that would make the content suitable for transfer into web publishing (see fig. 14). This last-minute reformatting, which facilitated web design and online accessibility, resulted in an additional fifty hours of work for the Language Services Department, because the formatting update requested by the client required knowledge in web coding (marking spaces, headings, etc.) that was not readily available to participants in the department. In turn, to complete this reformatting, translators had to learn to navigate new software (SDL Trados, a popular digital translation tool), while simultaneously keeping in mind how this new translation format might impact Spanish-speaking readers aiming to understand the content in the finished project. Reformatting this document required translators to understand how English content was segmented in the original version and then to develop a way to similarly break up Spanish content in a way that would fit within the specified parameters of the new format.

As figure 13 illustrates, the content presented in the original document allowed translators to see how information would be presented to the target audiences. Translators working in this document could see the images and space limitations and could make translation choices based on these parameters. In the reformatted version depicted in figure 14, however, information is broken into line segments. Translators working with this document do not always have a reference point for how their words will be
Welcome to the Starting Over After Foreclosure Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help people who have been through home foreclosure or are now in the foreclosure process to rebuild their financial lives. There are eight distinct units available for use in this toolkit. They are:

- Getting a Fresh Start After Foreclosure
- Reimagining Your Future: What Direction Do You Want to Go?
- Assessing Your Financial Situation
- Rebuilding Your Financial Situation and Credit History
- Finding a Place to Call Home
- Knowing Your Rights and Responsibilities
- Getting Prepared, Getting Organized
- Returning to Homeownership

You may use each of the units in the toolkit when appropriate depending on where you are in the financial rebuilding process after foreclosure. You do not have to read them in order from start to finish, although you could.

This unit, Getting a Fresh Start After Foreclosure, covers how home foreclosure affects a family’s finances and lays out the steps it takes to start to rebuild. You’ll identify your family strengths, recognize your family’s needs and identify strategies you can use to help your family cope with change.

Fig. 13. Initial PDF document on foreclosure submitted to the Language Services Department for translation
positioned within the context of an entire document; that is, participants have to translate phrases such as “they are” without knowing what “they” is being referenced and where the word “they” may be placed within the text. This increases complexity with the translation process as well as the multimodal complexity of the translation, as translators have to think of ways to rhetorically reposition words in a sentence to make them effective both visually and alphabetically for intended readers.

The documents shown in figures 13 and 14 contain the same language that needed to be translated for this client. However, as the two images illustrate, the formatting and design of each document is dramatically different. While the document in figure 13 contained a file format that facilitated accessibility and design on the side of the client developer, the document in figure 14 required much less technical, visual, and digital manipulation on the part of the translators. Since Spanish content is typically longer than English content, translators working in this new format had to redevelop their translations to fit within the space boundaries of the new file. In addition, translators had to maintain the usability of the document by rethinking captions, titles, headings, and metadata to accompany their translations in this new file format.

During an interview, Sara (who worked as one of the translators on the foreclosure project) explained that the updated file format was “challenging” for their office.

We had to think of new ways to translate information, even though we had already technically completed the translation in the first file version. The pur-
pose of this new format was to publish something on the web, which was not clear to us in the original version. This completely changes the translation because now we have to think about words and space, numbers [with the line segments] and letters, as well as visuals, all while keeping our community in mind and thinking about how they would be using their information. We can’t send them to a hyperlink that is not translated or break up a title just because there is a picture in between the words. We have to think of ways to redirect the information so that it’s available and understandable to them in their language. It’s not just about replacing words.” (emphasis added)

Sara’s reference to the overlapping activities completed by translators within the Language Services Department (in her discussion of “words and space, numbers and letters”) reflects the constant flux of activity that participants in this organization must undertake to successfully complete such a large-scale translation project. Through my observation and participation in this specific translation, I was able to note the various dimensions of multimodality being enacted by translators as they considered how to rhetorically reposition content for their communities. For instance, because the translators in the Language Services Department are experts when it comes to understanding how speakers of Spanish read in Spanish, they can understand how readers of Spanish might navigate information differently than those who can read the information in English. The line segments and text breaks embedded in the reformatted file were created with speakers and readers of English in mind, which meant that the translators were left to make decisions about how these formats could impact their audience. Although translators in the Language Services Department are not formally trained in user experience or web development, these individuals are, as Sara demonstrates, the ones with expertise in these instances, leveraging their cultural and linguistic knowledge across modes, platforms, and media in order to successfully complete their work. Only through interactions among these composing elements are translation projects both effectively completed and holistically understood.

Multimodal Elements Coming Together

This chapter provides several examples of how multilingual and multimodal elements of translation come together in the work of professional translators and interpreters. Mirror translations, web content analysis, and cultural representations are all incorporated into the daily realities of em-
employees in the Language Services Department. In addition, translators in that office represent a wide range of generational and socioeconomic distributions. They have extensive lived experiences to draw from when completing their work, and they serve multiple different parts of their community, working across medical, legal, and educational contexts rather than being constrained to translating in one area.

What most struck me about the translation work completed in the Language Services Department is the immediate impact that professional translation and interpretation activities have on the community members in the surrounding area. While I can separate and analyze the individual multimodal elements enacted through translation in material and digital environments in the Language Services Department, there were certain moments in my experiences with this organization that pushed all of these resources and practices to come together. While analyzing the individual translation moments in this organization helped me see the interactions between the different modes and languages used by translators, witnessing the force behind these individual elements in the lives of human beings helped me further understand how linguistic, technological, and material resources must be combined to render successful community action. To help close this chapter, I share a story that further illustrates the depth, exigence, and power that results when all the multilingual/multimodal elements of translation come together.

Teresa’s Story

During one of my last weeks working in the office of the Language Services Department, I was fortunate to meet Teresa, a community client who came into the office requesting help with a written translation. I vividly remember getting up to greet Teresa after she walked in and requested the translation of a 125-page document that she clenched tightly between her fingers. Figure 15 shows the first page of Teresa’s document, both in the original Spanish and in the translated English version. The complete document contained over 37,000 words and included several hundred seals, logos, and images.

Upon first assessing Teresa’s document, I immediately realized that, even at the discounted pricing that the department offered to community members, this translation would cost Teresa over two thousand dollars to complete, particularly because the project would require both translating the alphabetic words and recreating the images included in the text. As I initially discussed this translation project with Teresa
throughout our consultation, I thought about the different layers of complexity embedded in the document. As a technical translator, I analyzed the linguistic complexity of the text, reading through the legal language and immediately attempting to determine which of the translators would be most suited for this project. I also asked some questions about the translation, trying to find ways to reduce the cost of the project: “Gracias por venir, señora Teresa. Parece que este proyecto es muy importante, pero también está muy complicado. ¿Sera que tiene que traducir todas las hojas, o podríamos omitir algunas para reducir el costo?” (Thanks for coming in, Ms. Teresa. It looks like this project is really important, but it’s also really complicated. Are you sure that you have to have all the pages translated, or can we omit some pages to reduce the cost?) As a human reading through this document in Teresa’s presence, I couldn’t help but notice Teresa’s eyes water, her eyebrows scrunch, and her hands tense up into fists, trying to find strength as I flipped through the pages that contained her story (rather than just my project): “No, sí tengo que traducir todas las hojas. Es lo único que tengo. Tengo que traducirlo todo.
• Sites of Translation

completo.” (No, I do have to have all the pages translated. It’s the only thing I have. I have to translate everything completely.)

Through our conversation and upon further analysis of the document, I found out that it was the only documentation Teresa was given following her husband’s work-related fatal accident in Mexico. Teresa’s husband had left Grand Rapids to complete a construction project in Mexico, expecting to return within a month of his departure. Weeks after her husband was scheduled to return to their home in Grand Rapids, however, Teresa received this 125-page document in the mail, with no other explanation of what had happened. She broke into tears as she recalled, “Ni una llamada, ni una explicación; solo me enviaron este documento por correo” (Not even a phone call, not one explanation; they just mailed me this document). Teresa proceeded to explain that she needed to contract a lawyer in the United States to pursue legal compensation for the tragedy described in her document. Although she had found and was currently working with a successful lawyer, Teresa soon found out that the lawyer (who was not proficient in Spanish) needed the document to be translated and notarized before he could begin Teresa’s case. For this reason, Teresa walked into the Language Services Department requesting assistance, holding this intricate document that contained all her hope for potential justice. She explained, “Tengo que contratar a este abogado y tengo que buscar justicia” (I have to work with this lawyer, and I have to seek justice).

Completing Teresa’s translation required conversations among translators, Teresa, her lawyer, and other legal experts. In addition, completing mirror translations of the seal and logo included in Teresa’s document required the rhetorical manipulation of visuals, completed over several weeks through the use of in-house digital tools like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, in combination with alphabetic translations completed with the assistance of cultural knowledge and digital tools like Linguee and Google Translate. In short, successfully completing translations in a professional office like the Language Services Department inherently required the “thoughtful and aware modification [of texts, visuals, and other modes] for particular audiences and circumstances,” circumstances that sometimes, as Teresa’s case illustrates, hold the highest stakes and most drastic potential consequences (Arola, Sheppard, and Ball, “Multimodality”).

Although Teresa’s case may seem extreme, every document translation—every birth, death, vaccination, education, marriage, and/or divorce certificate—contains a story that starts before the document comes into the office, continues as translators navigate the visual and alphabetic conversion of the text across languages, and evolves through the continued
interactions that are facilitated through the document after it leaves the office. Translation projects like the ones completed in the Language Services Department embody multimodal elements both in practice and product, taking shape in and through the human and technological interactions that fuel their development. In Teresa’s particular case, understanding the story behind the 125-page document helped employees in the Language Services Department find external funding to facilitate the translation. Through our work with Teresa and other translators in the Language Services Department, we were able both to find funds for this project and to understand the care that needed to be taken with this translation if it was to positively influence the lawyer’s case on behalf of Teresa and her late husband. If we had only acknowledged this as a standard translation project, we may have missed the depth of this work and the injustice that led to its development in the first place, not understanding the urgency of the project and the impact of the consequences relying on its completion. Personal interactions with Teresa gave us the opportunity to complete the translation in an ethical and effective manner.

While there are typically several technical and intellectual practices at play in the completion of professional translation, the biggest motivator for this work is the continued livelihood of the people relying on the information being transformed across languages. The focus and exigency for thoroughly understanding professional translation, then, is less the individual words, phrases, and visuals being transformed than the lives that are transformed in conjunction. Multilingual/multimodal activities embedded in these translations are the catalysts for community action, continuously influencing and being influenced by the lives, experiences, and needs of the individuals who make this work possible.

Understanding the stories behind translation, especially in a community organization such as the Language Services Department, requires intricate attention to both process and practice in multilingual, multimodal communication. As Sara mentioned to me during our early interactions, you cannot truly understand translation without actually being a part of the work itself—understanding the various exigencies that drive its completion. To be sure, not all translation work is as intense as the work that is completed in the Language Services Department. Translation work in business settings, for instance, may be completed for entirely different reasons than the translations I witnessed in my small community organization. Yet, although the work of translation may be abstracted and discussed in technical terms alone, understanding the experiences of the translators
themselves and getting a sense of the rhetorical activities embedded in language transformation allows us to better account for the labor that often remains invisible when we discuss multimodal and multilingual communication in both academic and professional settings.

As scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition, technical communication, and related areas continue to make connections between multilingualism and multimodality, I encourage us to think both about multilingual/multimodal texts and projects and about the practices and stories that lead to these productions. Although the multimodal activities and practices encompassed in translation projects within both KLN (discussed in chapter 5) and the Language Services Department took place mostly outside of traditional classrooms, rhetoric and composition scholarship has taught us enough to understand that our students’ experiences extend through and beyond the constraints of our classroom spaces and assignments. For this reason, as Shipka urges, it is important for writing researchers and teachers to understand and value the “roles [that] texts, talk, people, perceptions, semiotic resources, technologies, motives, activities, and institutions play in the production, reception, circulation, and valuation of seemingly stable finished texts” (Toward a Composition, 13). At both KLN and in the Language Services Department, no form of communication was fixed or stable; in fact, it was this instability and constant flux that made translators like Brigitte, Natalie, and Sara so powerful and capable as multilingual/multimodal rhetoricians and technical communicators. In chapter 7, as I present implications for these case studies, I further illustrate how A Revised Rhetoric of Translation, as it was developed through the work of translations at KLN and in the Language Services Department, can help us continue to situate multilingual/multimodal communication in the lived experiences of students and professionals from a wide range of backgrounds.