

Consejos: A Decolonized Translation Process Guide for Burke Boxes



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Framing

Located in Seattle, Washington, the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture has seen increased requests for educational programs to be provided in Spanish. Although some translation efforts had been made, the educational department sought to use Burke Boxes as a case study to continue these efforts. The Burke Boxes are unfacilitated rental kits of museum collection pieces with accompanying curricula that get shipped all across Washington State.



As informal learning spaces museums are essential in serving their multilingual communities, seeking information and programs in languages other than English (Fuentes, 2023). Despite a recent shift to be more accessible, the American Alliance of Museums acknowledges that although there are many cases when museums seek to reach non-English speakers, most translation efforts lack consideration of cultural differences and instead directly translate sources from English to other languages (Bishop, 2022). This points to some critical considerations for museums and their translation endeavors to be more inclusive and culturally-responsive.



Purpose & Impact

Purpose: This project aimed to develop a process guide for translating Burke Boxes from English to Spanish—framing language as a cultural practice, centering decolonization in the translation process, and grounding the work in the voices and input of the Latine community.

Outcomes:

- Gain awareness and challenge the problematic legacy of translating material from English to other languages, including colonial methodologies and approaches to translation.
- Consider the needs of educators who will use the Spanish Burke Boxes with their Spanish-speaking students.
- Uphold and value the Latine-rooted methodology of Consejos to intentionally guide and translate material for local Spanish-speaking communities.

Audience: The Burke Box education team

Process

A comprehensive needs assessment was deemed essential to guide a Spanish adaptation of Burke Boxes that addressed the specific needs of the Latine community. My desire to center experiential knowledge led me to a methodological approach consisting of Consejo sessions with eleven Latine community leaders and educators in the greater Seattle area who had diverse experience working directly with the Latine Spanish-speaking community. Drawing from Indigenous and Latine ways of knowing, Consejos are narrative advice grounded in cultural wisdom, lived experience, and care for the community. As Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1994) writes, they are “imbued with emotional empathy and compassion, as well as familial expectation and inspiration” (p. 314).

Seven Consejo sessions were conducted in either an interview or listening session format. Community leaders took part in one-hour individual interviews, while educators participated in a 2.5-hour group listening session. The conversations with community leaders offered broad guidance on engaging with the Latine community, whereas the educator session provided more targeted insights related to translating the Burke Boxes educational program. Each session was deeply personal and distinct, grounded in a reciprocal exchange of experiences.

Deliverable

The product is a digital guide that will be used to advise Burke educators on how to approach future Spanish translations for the Burke Box program and other educational initiatives. The decolonized translation guide consists of the following sections:

- About this project
- Research in related fields
- Breakdown of the Consejos method
- Guiding principles for ethical Spanish translation
- Consejos for the Burke Box program

Reflections

From the Consejos, I identified three guiding principles that community leaders and educators felt would support ethical, community-centered translation that centers the Latine culture. The following three principles provide a strong foundation for Burke educators as they begin their work creating with and for the Latine community.

- 1. Relaciones y la Comunidad/Relationships and the Community:** Center the Latine cultural value of strong community and family bonds, recognizing that interdependence, mutual care, and collective responsibility are core to how we show up and thrive together.

2. Cultura y Lenguaje/ Culture and Language: Translation can carry worldviews, relationships, and histories, not just words. For Latine communities in the United States, the Spanish language reflects survival, resistance, and belonging.

3. Identidad/ Identity: Working with a community means people show up as their whole selves—their lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and layered identities. Translation, then, is not just about linguistic accuracy, but about honoring how people make meaning, connect, and express who they are.

References

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Acknowledgments

This project would not be possible without the community of folks who joined me on this journey. I would like to extend gratitude and acknowledgment to the educators and community leaders who shared their stories and consejos with me: Daniel Reveles, Andrea Fuentes-Diaz, Aide Villalobos, Ana García, Laura Orjuela, Judy Avitia-Gonzales, Gayne Ortega, Angélica Amezcua, Irene Gomez and Nancy Salguero McKay. I thank my thesis committee members, Eileen Jimenez, Jessica Luke, and Devin Leatherman, for their constant support. Finalmente, gracias a mi gente Latine, especialmente mi mamá Yolanda Mora, mi papá Pedro Villagomez, y mi hermana, Monica Villagomez quienes inspiran mi trabajo cada día. And thank you to my best friend Isabella who spent countless hours bouncing off ideas with me.