



**Alianza Latina en contra la Agresión Sexual**  
*(The national Latina alliance against sexual violence)*

**Position Paper Regarding Workshops in Spanish at  
State and National Conferences**

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This ALAS position paper is a call to action for promoting training in Spanish. Though the focus is on conferences, the recommendations are also applicable for other training events. There is a fundamental difference between training offered in Spanish by bilingual, bicultural trainers familiar with the sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, etcetera, terminology, and what is possible via interpreter services. Professional interpreter services do have a critical role to play in direct services and certain conference events. However, direct training in Spanish (and other languages) empowers populations and cultures that traditionally have been rendered silent and invisible within anti-sexual violence efforts led by white, English-speaking groups. This position paper aims to contribute to the discussion by sharing *nuestras voces*.

**The Reality**

- As of April 2010, there were 50 million Latin@s/Hispanics in the United States, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest and fastest-growing ethnic or racial minority. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- There are currently 16 states with half a million Latin@/Hispanic residents according to the Census Bureau, and among these are the three states where the National Sexual Assault Conference state coalition organizers are based: California, Illinois, and Pennsylvania.
- Spanish is the second most-common language in the United States and many non-metro states have experienced a rapid increase of Spanish-speaking residents.
- 35.5 million U.S. residents 5-years-old and older spoke Spanish at home according to 2010 census findings.
- According to eMarketer' "Hispanic Youth Online" report, Latin@s are increasingly going online; one third of them are 35 years of age or younger.

**The Ongoing Challenges**

- Most rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters do not have adequate numbers of Spanish-speaking staff to meet existing needs.
- Most rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters do not have Spanish language victim services content on their websites ("The Current State of Latin@ Victim Advocacy" Arte Sana /ALAS 2010).

Given the growing Latin@/Hispanic population, and in order to establish efficient outreach to the community, it is undisputable that bicultural and bilingual program staff and volunteers are necessary to provide effective services. Therefore, training workshops in Spanish are necessary to promote the ongoing professional development of bilingual and bicultural sexual assault victim advocates, prevention specialists, and other allied professionals such as *promotor@s* or community health workers.

Since 2005, Arte Sana has offered workshops in Spanish during its Nuestras Voces (Our Voices) national conferences. Furthermore, in 2008, Arte Sana began to offer a complete track of workshops presented in Spanish by bilingual and bicultural trainers. In 2009, Arte Sana supported the National Sexual Assault Conference (NSAC) when it began to offer workshops in Spanish. However, after three years of rotating NSAC hosting coalitions, the lack of national standards and procedures for soliciting, reviewing and presenting workshops in Spanish has stagnated what could be a dynamic upgrade in Latin@ outreach and inclusion efforts.

It is imperative that the problem be addressed without excuses by first understanding there is a problem and second, recognizing that change is necessary to move from social justice theory **to action**. The "*there was no overwhelming support for it*" excuse must no longer be the default response to Spanish language accessibility. In order to meet growing training needs and avoid costly errors in the planning process, it is important to avoid the following suppositions listed below.

### **Erroneous Assumptions Regarding Workshops in Spanish**

1. *Workshops in Spanish are primarily for Latin@/Hispanic conference attendees who do not speak English.*
2. *Offering interpreter services for Spanish-speaking attendees for workshops presented in English is the same as offering a workshop in Spanish.*
3. *Workshops presented in Spanish should be made available for English monolingual conference attendees as well.*
4. *The "all-or-nothing" argument: if we do this (translate, interpret) for Spanish speakers we need to do it for all linguistic groups or not do it at all.*

In order to be employed at a rape crisis center or domestic violence program, advocates need to speak English, so Latin@ advocates are bilingual and can attend workshops presented in both English and Spanish. Workshops offered in English with Spanish language interpreter services are not the same as workshops offered in Spanish by bilingual/bicultural trainers who are capable of engaging the audience directly in Spanish through a culturally relevant presentation.

The topics presented in Spanish are similar to those that have been presented in English at various conferences throughout the years; the difference is that they are presented in Spanish with a cultural lens so that bilingual staff can upgrade and/or develop Spanish language outreach techniques and presentations. Furthermore, while interpreter services continue to be necessary within the direct services context, and may be useful during carefully planned plenary presentations, they are not recommended for conference workshops.

Finally, the all-or-nothing or “multilingual access” stance, when used as an argument against training in languages other than English, rather than a proactive, results-based strategy; is best addressed mathematically. Victim advocates and conference planners should consider that there is a **33 million difference** between the top two predominant second languages spoken in the United States, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data: Spanish (35.5 million speakers), Chinese (2.5 million speakers), Tagalog (1.5 million speakers), French (1.4 million speakers), Vietnamese (1.2 million speakers), German (1.1 million speakers) and Korean (1.1 million speakers).

National conferences such as the NSAC, and those organized by the NCADV, WOCN, SCESA, Casa de Esperanza, the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence, among others, are well positioned to offer bilingual/bicultural advocates the opportunity to upgrade their skills in Spanish in order to develop culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Being bilingual is not the same as being bicultural. Bilingual and bicultural trainers can speak to the diversity of Latin@ language, culture, and history. These cultural experiences and fundamentals are key to building capacity of those working to reach and engage diverse Latin@ communities as agents of change and partners in prevention. They provide Latin@ advocates authentic learning spaces that should not be tampered with, or limited by “reverse” interpreter services for English monolingual advocates.

### **Recommendations for Offering Workshops in Spanish at National Conferences**

Invite and welcome a specialized committee of bilingual Latin@ victim advocates and prevention specialists from throughout the country to:

- Work in partnership with the conference planners.
- Develop templates of conference forms that can be updated each year rather than having to make duplicate translations of complete forms.
- Assist with web-based application language issues, i.e., maximum number of words in a workshop title, summary, etc.
- Establish a protocol for review, selection and publication of sessions offered in Spanish that honors language/presenter integrity, and prevents double standards.
- Ensure the relevance of workshop topics to better meet existing training needs.
- Clearly identify workshops offered in Spanish by actually including the summaries in Spanish in all conference program content posted online or printed.
- Validate the work being done to include Latin@s as partners and agents of change nationally.

### **SAMPLE PROGRAM SCRIPT**

***In an effort to enhance the professional development of those doing outreach work with Spanish-speaking communities, certain conference workshops will be presented in Spanish. Since the Spanish language workshops will not include interpreter services or devices, it is strongly recommended that only bilingual persons attend these sessions.***

# **The Complexity and Possible Pitfalls of Interpreter Services in Workshops**

## **Simultaneous Interpreting**

In simultaneous interpreting, the speaker's words are translated concurrently. Interpreters sit in a soundproof booth or at a tabletop booth with special technical equipment. Two interpreters are required for simultaneous interpreting because it demands an extremely high level of concentration. One interpreter on their own can perform this challenging task for at most 20 to 30 minutes at a time; then their colleague takes over. So there are always two interpreters, each taking turns. The National Sexual Assault Conference (NSAC) has offered variations of this type of service since 2009, with different results. Headsets can and do have malfunctions. *"During my presentation in 2009 a couple of English speakers blurted out 'It's not working' and I had to stop a couple of times because of apparatus malfunctions."* (ALAS member trainer)

## **Consecutive Interpreting**

This form of interpretation requires more time since the interpreter is repeating segments of the presentation. With this method, presenters need to time their presentation to incorporate pauses after every 2 - 3 sentences; depending how quickly the presenter speaks. Sufficient time for the *"What did she say?"* questions/pauses will also be needed during the discussion phase. In essence, a trainer who presents in Spanish with consecutive interpreting actually has less time to cover the content from her/his workshop.

Depending on the venue, whether contracted professionals or volunteers are used, the size of the room, and whether headsets are used, this method can be distracting for presenters and counterproductive for both those who require interpretation and those who do not.

## **Whispering interpreting**

This process is similar to simultaneous interpreting and is often used by SA/DV programs agencies as a first step in community presentations. The interpreter sits or stands behind the person requiring the translation and "whispers" it into the ears of the listener or (a maximum of two) listeners. However, the interpreter works under extremely difficult conditions without a headset, and hears not only the speaker but also all other sounds and voices in the room.

## **Conclusion**

The overwhelming ALAS consensus is that workshops offered in Spanish by fluent and bicultural presenters who can identify on some level with their audience are far superior to those that rely on interpreter services, especially when addressing sexual and other gender-based violence topics. Workshops offered in Spanish validate outreach efforts with Latin@s, model respect by conference planners, and help promote networking and community building. Given the need for cost-effective programs and services, workshops offered in Spanish are the less expensive and more effective option.

**About ALAS:** Alianza Latina en contra la Agresión Sexual (the national Latina alliance against sexual violence)

Established in 2004 by Arte Sana, the Alianza Latina en contra la Agresión Sexual (ALAS) is the national Latina-led membership network of victim advocates working to address and prevent sexual violence. Through collaborative efforts and cyber activism, ALAS promotes the leadership of Latin@ victim advocates and develops program models, resources and policies to empower communities and eliminate access barriers for survivors. ALAS honors the diversity of the Latin@ culture by respecting the similarities and differences of our languages and histories.

To learn more about our collective efforts and download ALAS position statements developed since 2004 regarding language access issues, please visit the Arte Sana website at **[www.arte-sana.com](http://www.arte-sana.com)**

## **Direct Spanish-to-English Interpreter OBSERVATIONS**

From an ALAS member, NSAC Spanish language workshop presenter and attendee

No dudo que hay algunos que son muy buenos y profesionales pero no es lo más adecuado, te ayudan a entender en un contexto general de que se trata el tema pero se escapan muchos detalles muy importantes y valiosos.

En el cambio de intérpretes durante la sesión es otro relajo por que obviamente cada uno tiene su estilo y habilidad y muchas veces llega el momento que pierdes el interés en seguir escuchándolos y prefieres apagar el aparato y hacer tu mayor esfuerzo de poner en práctica lo que tu misma sabes de inglés para entender el tema.

Muchas veces los intérpretes como son personas estudiadas utilizan un vocabulario muy elevado en la interpretación que al final te dejan peor de cómo estabas.

Y por último me ha tocado en algunas ocasiones reconocer que el mensaje y contexto de lo que está repitiendo el intérprete nada tiene ver con el del presentador. Y déjame te digo que yo me quedo diciéndome a mi misma ¡eso no fue lo que dijo el presentador! ¿O sí? ¿o soy yo? ¿o es mi corto inglés que creí entender otra cosa?

### English translation

*I do not doubt that there are some very good and professional interpreters, but it (this language access remedy) is not the most appropriate, because while interpreters help you to understand the general context of a topic, many important and valuable details are lost.*

*The change of interpreters is another cumbersome piece because obviously each one has their own style and ability. Many times it gets to a point where you lose interest in listening, preferring instead to turn off the device and just make the best effort to put into practice what little English you know to better understand the topic.*

*On most occasions, because interpreters are highly educated, they use a vocabulary that is too advanced in the interpretation. Ultimately, they leave you more lost than you were before.*

*Lastly, on occasion, I have realized that the message and context of what the interpreter is repeating has nothing to do with what the presenter is saying. And let me tell you that I am left telling myself, "That's not what the presenter said! Is it? Or is it just me? Or, is it my limited English that leads me to understand something else?"*

**Latina Advocate Comments**  
**Regarding the Nuestras Voces National Bilingual Sexual Assault Conference**  
**Spanish Language Workshop Tracks**

“The sessions en español or that started in English and included español (bilingual) were more insightful, enlightening and profound!”

“Language, unity and understanding among Latina mujeres. It was great to share in Spanish.”

*Bilingüe – favor de hacer más en español. Gracias por apoyar el idioma!*

“For the first time – this is a conference that IS Latina, not just a conference that translates languages, but says the same thing. It is truly multi-cultural.”

*"Realmente quedé impresionada con el trabajo que hicieron, especialmente el hecho de poner programas en español, porque habemos algunas personas que aunque somos bilingües aun nos sentimos más cómodas en nuestro propio idioma. Me sentí otra vez como en CASA... esta conferencia me ayudó a sentir más confianza."*

“This has been the only meaningful multilingual and multicultural conference I have ever attended. This conference was put together with heart and soul; it really showed.”

*“Que hay un montón de talleres en español”* (From the evaluation section for best part of the conference)

“This is my first conference as a new promotora and I’ve learned so much in these workshops.”