

Adapting Applied Plain Language Training for Translators Who Communicate Health Information

UAMS
Center for Health Literacy

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Introduction

Hispanic adults have significant challenges with health literacy compared to other groups in the United States.¹ To ensure this group can use materials to improve or sustain health, it is important that Spanish language materials are easy to read and understand. Even when the full range of plain language practices are used to develop materials in English, we must incorporate those qualities into the translated version. Unfortunately, translators are not trained to use plain language principles that promote ease of reading and understanding in the new language. This often creates disparities between the source material and the translation. In most cases the translations have a greater level of difficulty.² To help ensure that materials are properly translated, the UAMS Center for Health Literacy set out to train translators to incorporate plain language practices. As with plain language writing in English, this is a nuanced skill that requires intensive training.

Methods

Plain language and translation experts developed and piloted a two-part Applied Plain Language training for a small group of medical translators. Each session was two hours long and were held two weeks apart. The training included didactic instruction to explain and demonstrate plain language principles and interactive exercises to give participants the opportunity to apply the principles on health materials and receive feedback from trainers. Training learning objectives included:

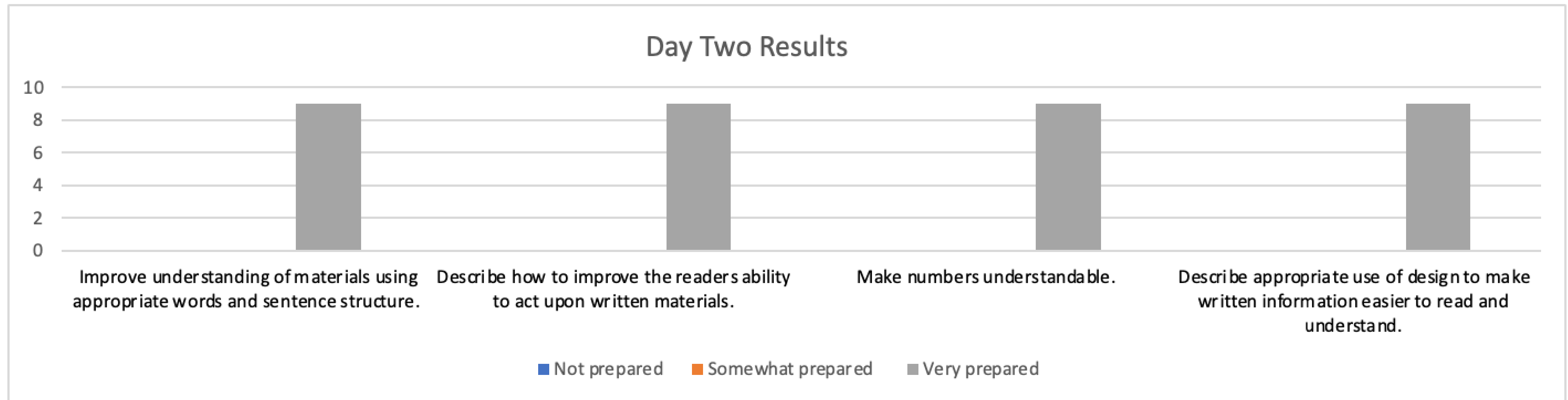
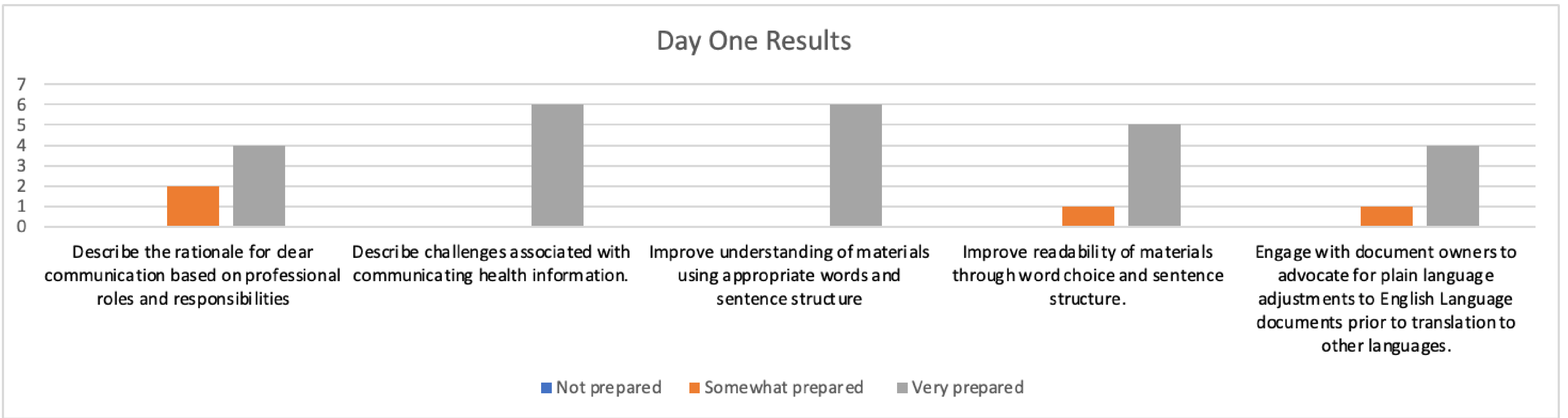
- Describe challenges associated with communicating health information.
- Improve understanding of written materials by using appropriate words, sentence structure, and use of numbers.
- Describe how to improve readers’ ability to act upon written materials.
- Describe appropriate use of visual aids in written materials.
- Engage with document owners to advocate for plain language adjustments to English language documents prior to translation to other languages.

After learning objectives were developed, trainers drafted a lesson plan, slides, and participant materials. The two sessions were presented virtually via Zoom. The same nine participants attended both sessions. Training participants spoke either Spanish or Marshallese and were not familiar with the content.

An evaluation aligned with learning objectives was developed for participants to complete at the end of each session via a REDCap survey. Results from the evaluations were extracted from REDCap into an Excel file where we analyzed using Excel formulas.

Results

Six out of nine participants completed the day one evaluation, and all participants completed day two. Results for both days were favorable, with learners expressing confidence in their ability to carry out newly learned skills. There were only four items from the entire evaluation that the translators marked as somewhat prepared. For all other items participants marked as very prepared.



Impact

The training evaluation indicates that the material presented to participants will prepare translators with plain language tools to identify high quality English materials and improve the quality of their translation. This will contribute to efforts to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services and advance health equity.

References:

¹ Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., Jin, Y., and Paulsen, C. (2006). The Health Literacy of America’s Adults: Results From the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NCES 2006–483). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

² Sprager, L. and O. N. Martinez, Jr. 2015. Beyond Translation: Promoting a New National Standard for Equity in Health Materials Translated from English. *NAM Perspectives*. Commentary, National Academy of Medicine, Washington, DC.