


Breaking the Language Barrier: Describing Chicano Archives with Bilingual Finding Aids

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ABSTRACT

As American society becomes more diverse, archivists increasingly work with multilingual collections and patrons. In Arizona, this situation occurs most frequently with materials created by individuals and communities using Spanish as their primary language. This case study discusses Arizona State University's creation of English and Spanish finding aids for six collections processed as part of a Council on Library and Information Resources grant. It describes the process of creating a Spanish finding aid template; reviews the challenges encountered and solutions designed while translating, encoding, and publishing Spanish guides; and analyzes use of the final documents.

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KEY WORDS

College and University Archives, Description, Encoded Archival Description (EAD), International Archives, Labor Records

In December 2010, Arizona State University's Archives and Special Collections (ASC) received support from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) for a project entitled "Labor Rights Are Civil Rights/Derechos de Trabajo Son Derechos Civiles." In this project, we processed and described six collections documenting how "labor, race, and civil rights have shaped the experiences of Mexican[s] and Mexican Americans" in the Southwest: the Alianza Hispano Americana Records, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Collection, the Maricopa County Organizing Project (MCOP) Records, the SER/ Jobs for Progress Records, the United Steelworkers of America Local 616 Records, and the Arizona AFL-CIO Records.¹

As part of this grant, Project Archivist Xaviera Flores and Assistant Archivist Elizabeth Dunham created finding aids for each collection in both Spanish and English, encoded them using EAD, and posted them on Arizona Archives Online (AAO).² The project team hypothesized that a considerable portion of the likely audience for these materials would be native (possibly monolingual) Spanish speakers and that providing finding aids written completely in Spanish would make them more accessible to these users. In addition, we hoped that posting fully bilingual finding aids³ would further strengthen relationships between ASC and the Mexican American community.⁴

Literature Review

Currently available literature discussing multilingual information access examines the issue primarily in the context of the digital library. This technology is designed to allow a user to input a query in any supported language and retrieve all relevant documents in the database, whether they are written in the same language as the initial query or not. The majority of these publications focuses on the system itself, either detailing the exact design and function of the search and/or translation mechanism(s) or discussing the logistics of designing, testing, implementing, and evaluating a digital library system.⁵ These systems usually work in one of three ways: by translating the user's query into the language represented in the digital library,⁶ by translating documents or annotations into the supported query language(s),⁷ or by translating the query into the language of the document collection and subsequently translating the document(s) retrieved into the query language.⁸ The majority of this translation is performed using computer algorithms.

The few studies discussing user interaction with these systems concur that searchers who do not speak English as a first language but need to access English language materials have generally become proficient in obtaining and translating these documents.⁹ This phenomenon is particularly common among individuals working in fields where most of the professional literature is published in

English. Anne Aula and Melanie Kellar, and Paul Clough and Irene Eleta refined this conclusion, noting that multilingual participants in their studies tended to choose their search languages based on the materials they wanted to find. For example, searchers who perceived most of the literature in their field to be written in English usually searched for such publications using English. Were they looking for information about a particular geographic area, however, searchers would use the language most common in that place (for example, searching in German when planning a vacation in Switzerland).¹⁰

Users have considerably more trouble searching for information created in a language that they do not understand. As Dan Wu, Nanhui Gu, and Daqing He reported, many searchers in this situation rely on online translation tools, but they generally are not satisfied with the accuracy of the output.¹¹ Dan Wu, Daqing He, and Bo Luo's 2012 study obtained similar results, finding users satisfied with their ability to access information in foreign languages they can understand but unsatisfied with online translation tools. Indeed, 68% were inclined to give up when faced with information in a language with which they were not familiar. Maria Gäde's research supported these findings, noting that users are more likely to visit a page (including a search portal) if it is presented in their preferred language and positing that multilingualism can pose a major barrier to effective searching.¹²

These user studies also agree that individuals who either do not speak English at all or who are not fluent have the most pressing needs for foreign language materials. Clough and Eleta noted that searchers who are not fluent may be able to understand a document written in English but be unable to construct the query necessary to retrieve it and suggested that cross-language searching would be most useful to these users.¹³ Wu, He, and Luo made a similar argument, positing that nonnative English speakers have higher expectations of digital libraries because they express a greater need for foreign language information.¹⁴

Descriptive Standards and Process

Prior to the start of this project, ASC had never attempted to make finding aids available in any language other than English.¹⁵ In earlier guides, foreign language materials were noted by listing the relevant language(s) using EAD's <langmaterial> tag at the collection and item levels and by transcribing formal titles when they could be represented using the Roman alphabet.¹⁶ No attempt was made to translate supplied titles, container lists, or front matter. Thus, local descriptive standards for the projected Spanish finding aids had to be designed for the first time in this project.

Because ASC's standard procedure is to encode finding aids in EAD and post them to AAO, the project team chose to create DACS-compliant finding aids in English and to translate those finding aids from English to Spanish instead of establishing a different set of standards for Spanish finding aids. The only section of the finding aid not translated contained the controlled access terms, as these terms were taken from the Library of Congress authority files and have no Spanish equivalents. Furthermore, we quickly noticed that if these terms were translated, AAO's search mechanism would consider the Spanish and English versions of the same subject term to be two different terms, not the same term in two different languages. Thus, translating these terms would not only make it incumbent upon the department to develop and maintain authority files to ensure standard application, it would also make it more difficult for researchers to search using subject headings because both the Spanish and English versions of each term would need to be entered to produce all of the relevant documents.

The first collection to be processed was also the smallest—the League of United Latin American Citizens Collection.¹⁷ The English version of the finding aid was completed quickly: students working on the project entered the container list into the Microsoft Access database designed for the purpose, and these data were easily converted into an EAD-encoded container list using established procedures. The remainder of the finding aid was encoded using the existing EAD template, and the final document was made available on AAO soon thereafter.

The technical aspects of developing an EAD template for Spanish front matter were straightforward: because most of the labels in the English template are produced using the <head> tag or the label attribute, the English text could be replaced easily with the equivalent Spanish once Flores determined the proper translation. Determining these translations, however, proved more difficult. Flores was reluctant to simply transcribe the relevant terms from the Spanish version of the *General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G))* because ASC's EAD template uses the headings given in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACs)* rather than those listed in the English version of the *ISAD(G)*.¹⁸ Flores wanted to reflect the deliberate differences in word choice and so translated each of the headings used in the English template individually. Although this approach took more time, it produced a Spanish template more closely related to its English counterpart than it would have been otherwise.

Other challenges emerged when project staff began translating the container list. One of the most serious issues stemmed from the fact that they were not familiar with the intricacies of the mining industry and labor organizations. Thus, staff were frequently stumped by apparently simple questions. For example, how do you say “smelter” in Spanish? In Mexican Spanish? In Mexican American Spanish? Another challenge emerged when project staff needed to translate ideas and concepts like *salary lost time* that do not exist in

Spanish-speaking countries. Because being paid for time lost while striking is at best a very new idea and at worst completely unfamiliar in Central and South America, *salary lost time* proved a very difficult concept to communicate.

Further issues were discovered surrounding the construction of personal names. The author of the preliminary inventories from which project staff worked was not aware that Central and South Americans traditionally have two last names. One of these names is the father's surname; the other is the mother's surname. In much older documents, the name of a patron or the individual's place of origin may be included as well. Thus, because the names included on the inventory did not correctly communicate the name of the relevant individuals, the materials had to be reorganized and folder titles had to be reentered instead of simply transferred from the inventory into the finding aid.

Once the proper translations were identified, project staff faced several technical challenges. Students working on the container lists reported that Access frequently displayed letters with accents, umlauts, and tildes incorrectly, meaning that they often had to repeat work that they had believed complete. Project staff also found it difficult to mark words when they were unsure of the translations and to make notes as they worked, both of which slowed the translation process. They eventually resorted to translating the container list using Microsoft Word, which allowed for quicker translation but required a significant amount of additional time and effort to convert into EAD.

To resolve these issues, we altered our approach when translating the container list for the next finding aid.¹⁹ After Dunham encoded the English finding aid, she emailed it to Flores. Flores and her staff opened it using Word and completed their translation using that program. The resulting Spanish container list was returned to Dunham, who merged the list with the Spanish front matter, validated the document, and loaded it to AAO. Using this method, subsequent guides were translated with relative ease.

Researcher Reactions and Use

According to data collected by Google Analytics,²⁰ between April 3, 2013, and March 12, 2014, the six English finding aids were viewed nearly seven times as often as their Spanish counterparts: the English guides received 883 visits (see Table 1), while the Spanish guides received 130 (see Table 2).²¹ Historical data reveal that this gap narrowed and stabilized over the course of the year. The English guides were viewed 6.9 times more than their Spanish counterparts (286 views versus 41 views) between April 1 and July 30; 4.9 times more than their Spanish counterparts (359 views versus 72 views) between August 1 and October 30; and 5.1 times as often as their Spanish counterparts (180 views versus 35 views) between November 1, 2013, and January 30, 2014.

Table 1. English Finding Aids (April 3, 2013–March 12, 2014)

Collection	Page Views	Unique Page Views	Average Time on Page
Alianza Hispano Americana Records	612	480	2 minutes, 40 seconds
United Steel Workers of America, Local 616 Records	72	54	1 minute, 23 seconds
League of United Latin American Citizens Collection	76	65	2 minutes, 20 seconds
SER/Jobs for Progress, Inc. Records	47	38	5 minutes, 40 seconds
Maricopa County Organizing Project Records	170	145	3 minutes, 44 seconds
Arizona AFL-CIO Records	121	101	3 minutes, 53 seconds
Total	1,098	883	

Table 2. Spanish Finding Aids (April 3, 2013–March 12, 2014)

Collection	Page Views	Unique Page Views	Average Time on Page
Alianza Hispano Americana Records ²²	60	21	3 minutes, 5 seconds
United Steel Workers of America, Local 616 Records	19	14	3 minutes, 49 seconds
League of United Latin American Citizens Collection	18	16	2 minutes, 40 seconds
SER/Jobs for Progress, Inc. Records	24	19	1 minute, 58 seconds
Maricopa County Organizing Project Records	51	40	1 minute, 42 seconds
Arizona AFL-CIO Records	29	20	1 minute, 40 seconds
Total	201	130	

Users who had their browser preferences set to Spanish were more likely to view a guide in English when a Spanish counterpart is available, but they used English guides only twice as often as Spanish guides.²³ They also regularly viewed English guides that had no Spanish equivalent, the two most popular being the Reubén Darío Papers (18 unique hits; average of 4 minutes, 39 seconds spent on the page) and the Alberto Francisco Pradeau²⁴ Collection (19 unique hits; average of 2 minutes, 28 seconds spent on the page). Spanish-speaking searchers were most likely to be located in Mexico (72 visitors), followed by Spain

(34 visitors), and the United States (27 visitors). Users located in the United States were divided between California (5 visitors) and Arizona (14 visitors).²⁵

One possible explanation for these user behaviors is that most searchers who have their browser preferences set to Spanish are not monolingual Spanish speakers but bi- or multilingual users who prefer Spanish-language materials but are able to search for English language information and understand the documents they discover. As mentioned earlier, this search behavior is common among academic users who do not speak English as a first language: because they have frequent need of English materials, they have become adept at accessing them, but they prefer to use their native language when possible. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Spanish-language finding aids are providing a valuable service to these users by making information available to them in their preferred language.

Spanish-language finding aids have also proven to be valuable tools for building community relationships and further developing the Chicano/a Research Collection. The collection's curator and curator emerita both report encountering members of the Mexican American community who feel that Spanish finding aids show an appreciation and respect for their language and culture that is often lacking in their dealings with Anglo society. Efforts to make content on the Chicano Collection's Facebook page available in both Spanish and English have also been very popular.²⁶

Future Opportunities and Obstacles

The Spanish EAD template and translation workflow developed during this project make it comparatively easy for ASC to create additional bilingual finding aids. The most significant issues affecting larger-scale implementation of bilingual finding aids are time and the need for staff possessing the relevant language skills. Translation is a time-consuming process, and the amount of translation needed increases significantly when translating both front matter and container lists. The CLIR grant enabled us to hire bilingual students who could be assigned to translation work, but the department employs only one person who is fluent in both Spanish and English outside of this project staff. Thus, we will need to seek other resources to enable us to continue translation work going forward.

Because Spanish-speaking student translators are relatively easy to obtain and the Chicano/a Research Collection is the only one of our repositories that holds a significant amount of materials created in a foreign language, it is most feasible for us to create bilingual finding aids for selected materials held in this section. Due to the amount of time and effort involved in translation, guides that are already available in English will not be translated retrospectively. Newly

created guides will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and translated if a qualified student can be made available (either by transferring the student from other work in ASC or “borrowing” a student from another department), or if the work was specifically requested by the collection’s donor. Should the container list be particularly long or involve large amounts of specialized vocabulary, we will consider translating only the guide’s front matter. If appropriate student labor cannot be found, the guide will be made available only in English.

Ideally, AAO would make all of its finding aids available in multiple languages by converting the current system into a multilingual search portal capable of translating the user’s query into English and then translating the identified guide(s) into the query language. However, this approach currently is unfeasible. AAO has no dedicated staff and a budget designed to cover only its basic needs,²⁷ meaning that this type of development work is well beyond its capabilities at present.

Conclusion

Even though bilingual finding aids require additional work, they represent a significant opportunity for inclusiveness and diversity in the archival profession. The “SAA Statement on Diversity” affirms that the organization “strives to ensure that its membership, the holdings that archivists acquire and manage, and the users whom archivists serve reflect the evolving diversity of society.”²⁸ The six collections processed as part of this grant document Arizona’s diversity by presenting the experiences of its Mexican American residents in their own words. Describing these collections in both English and Spanish makes them available to a wider audience, potentially increasing the diversity of ASC’s users. Bilingual finding aids also show a respect for the Spanish language and for Mexican American culture that helps to foster good relationships between our university and the Mexican American community and facilitates our efforts to collect additional materials for our Chicano/a Research Collection. This project also provided ASC with an opportunity to increase the diversity of its staff by hiring a project archivist and student workers with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds necessary to process and describe these collections accurately. In these ways, the impact of bilingual archival description extends well beyond the total number of page hits recorded.

NOTES

- ¹ Council on Library and Information Resources, “2010 Funded Projects,” <http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/awards/for-2010>. For more information about the project, see the project blog, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights /Derechos De Trabajo Son Derechos Civiles*, <http://laborrightsarecivilrights.wordpress.com/>.
- ² Michael Lotstein et al., “Labor Rights Are Civil Rights/Derechos de Trabajo Son Derechos Civiles” (grant proposal, 2010), 12. ASC’s standard practice is to encode all new finding aids using EAD and load them to AAO. Efforts to convert legacy finding aids are ongoing.
- ³ In this article, the term “bilingual finding aid” refers to two separate documents, one written in English and one written in Spanish, rather than to one document written in two languages. The information included in these two documents is identical.
- ⁴ Christine Marín, interview by Elizabeth Dunham, Arizona State University, February 6, 2013.
- ⁵ Evgenia Vassilakaki and Emmanouel Garoufalou, “Multilingual Digital Libraries: A Review of Issues in System-Centered and User-Centered Studies, Information Retrieval and User Behavior,” *The International Information and Library Review* 45 (2013): 3–19.
- ⁶ See, for example, Paul Clough and Daniela Petrelli, “Analyzing User’s Queries for Cross-Language Image Retrieval from Digital Library Collections,” *The Electronic Library* 30, no. 2 (2012): 197–219 and Paul Clough, Mark Sanderson, Christopher Yang, and Wei Lam, “User Experiments with the Eurovision Cross-Language Image Retrieval System,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 5 (2006): 697–708.
- ⁷ See, for example, Ching-chih Chen, “Delivery of Web-based Multilingual Digital Collections and Services to Multicultural Populations: The Case of Global Memory Net” (presentation, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA] Meeting, Durban, South Africa, August 18–24, 2007) and Maria Nisheva-Pavlova, Pavel Pavlov, Nikolay Markov, and Maya Nedeva, “Digitization and Access to Archival Collections: A Case Study of the Sofia Municipal Government” (presentation, ELPUB2007 Conference on Electronic Publishing, Vienna, Austria, June 2007).
- ⁸ See, for example, Guo-Wei Bian and Hsin-Hsi Chen, “Cross-Language Information Access to Multilingual Collections on the Internet,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 51, no. 3 (2000): 281–96.
- ⁹ See Anne Aula and Melanie Kellar, “Multilingual Search Strategies” (presentation, CHI 2009, Boston, Mass., April 4–9, 2009); Paul Clough and Irene Eleta, “Investigating Language Skills and Field of Knowledge on Multilingual Information Access in Digital Libraries,” *International Journal of Digital Library Systems* 1, no. 1 (2010); Dan Wu, Nanhui Gu, and Daqing He, “The Usages and Expectations of Multilingual Information Access in Chinese Academic Digital Libraries” (presentation, iConference 2010, Illinois, February 3–6, 2010); and Dan Wu, Daqing He, and Bo Luo, “Multilingual Needs and Expectations in Digital Libraries,” *The Electronic Library* 30, no. 2 (2012): 182–97. It should be noted that the majority of these studies focus on such academic users as students and faculty rather than on the general public.
- ¹⁰ Clough and Eleta, “Investigating Language Skills and Field of Knowledge on Multilingual Information Access in Digital Libraries; Aula and Kellar, “Multilingual Search Strategies.”
- ¹¹ Wu, Gu, and He, “The Usages and Expectations of Multilingual Information Access in Chinese Academic Digital Libraries.”
- ¹² Maria Gäde, “User Behavior and Evaluation of Multilingual Information Access in Digital Libraries,” *Bulletin of the IEEE-TCDL* 7, no. 1 (2011).
- ¹³ Clough and Eleta, “Investigating Language Skills and Field of Knowledge on Multilingual Information Access in Digital Libraries.”
- ¹⁴ Wu, He, and Luo, “Multilingual Needs and Expectations in Digital Libraries.”
- ¹⁵ ASC has, however, created bilingual online exhibits and brochures for the Chicano/a Research Collection. For an example of a bilingual exhibit, see Arizona State University Libraries, “The Chicana/Chicano Experience in Arizona,” <http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/website/>.
- ¹⁶ For example, Arizona Archives Online, “MSS-203: Guardian of the Flame Sri Lanka Manuscripts Collection,” <http://www.azarchivesonline.org/xtf/view?docId=ead/asu/guardian.xml>, contains materials in Pali, Sinhalese, and Sanskrit.

- ¹⁷ Arizona State University Archives and Special Collections, “League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Collection 1945–2001,” <http://www.azarchivesonline.org/xtf/view?docId=ead/asu/lulac.xml>.
- ¹⁸ For example, *DACS* 6.3 (“Related Materials”) corresponds exactly to *ISAD(G)* 3.5.3 (“Related Units of Description”). Although the same types of materials are described under both headings, the words used in the headings themselves differ. Thus, rather than using the term given in the Spanish version of the *ISAD(G)* (“Unidades de descripción relacionadas”), Flores translated the heading given in *DACS* (“Materiales relacionados”) instead.
- ¹⁹ Arizona Archives Online, “Los Registros de la Alianza Hispano Americana 1894–1994,” http://www.azarchivesonline.org/xtf/view?docId=ead/asu/alianza_spa.xml.
- ²⁰ Google Analytics was configured to collect data regarding ASU’s guides specifically beginning on April 1, 2013. Only the guides for the Alianza Hispano America Records, the League of United Latin American Citizens Collection, and the United Steel Workers of America, Local 616 Records were available on this date. The guides for the SER/Jobs for Progress, Inc. Records were added on April 29, 2013, followed by the guides for the Maricopa County Organizing Project Records on June 25 and the guides to the Arizona AFL-CIO Records on September 15. All data regarding guide usage have been drawn from Google Analytics.
- ²¹ All page view calculations have been made using unique page views rather than total page views and include only those visits lasting longer than 00:00:00.
- ²² As of March 12, 2014, the English version of the Alianza Hispano Americana Records finding aid was the most accessed guide in ASU’s collection.
- ²³ Between April 3, 2013, and March 12, 2014, 22 visitors (71%) used the English guides while 9 (29%) used their Spanish counterparts.
- ²⁴ Pradeau (1894–1980) was a native of Alamos, Sonora, Mexico. After studying in Mexico and the United States, he graduated from the University of Southern California College of Dentistry in 1923. In addition to maintaining a lucrative dentistry practice, Pradeau researched the history of the territory ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and became an expert in Mexican numismatics.
- ²⁵ Eleven users did not have their location services set, making an exact count impossible.
- ²⁶ Christine Marin; Nancy Godoy, interview by Elizabeth Dunham, Arizona State University, February 7, 2013.
- ²⁷ At present, AAO’s budget is sufficient to pay a technical consultant to perform basic maintenance work and to cover costs associated with its domain name and server maintenance.
- ²⁸ Society of American Archivists, “SAA Statement on Diversity,” <http://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-statement-on-diversity>. The statement goes on to indicate that diversity is understood to encompass both sociocultural factors (for example community identity) and professional and geographic factors.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Elizabeth Dunham is the assistant archivist for Collections and Records Management at Arizona State University's Archives and Special Collections. She is responsible for directing accessioning, processing, and description operations, encoding new and legacy finding aids using EAD, and providing reference services. She earned both her master of arts in history (2005) and her master of science in information science (2008) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she also worked for the Special Collections Department as a paraprofessional staff member. She is currently serving on the Arizona Archives Online (AAO) steering committee and on the Arizona Archives Alliance (AzAA) board of directors.



Xaviera Flores is an archives assistant at Boston College's Burns Library. In her prior job, she worked for Arizona State University as project archivist for the Council on Library and Information Resources' grant "Labor Rights Are Civil Rights/Los Derechos de Trabajo Son Derechos Civiles." She has an MS in library and information science with an archives management concentration from Simmons College and since 2004 has worked in archives for numerous institutions, including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (where she received a BA in film studies), the New England Conservatory, Boston University, the Guild of Boston Artists, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.