

Gained in translation

Communication at the multilingual crossroads

This issue's translation section is all about tools supporting the search for the proper term or phrase. Fernando Navarro brings to you the second part of his glossary of English-Spanish malapropisms.

By the way—the word 'malapropism' is derived from an 18th century comedy by Richard Sheridan, *The Rivals*. One of his characters, Mrs. Malaprop, used to substitute words for similar-sounding incorrect words, such as when she described an acquaintance of hers as "the very *pine-apple* of politeness" (i.e., *pinnacle*). George W. Bush also became famous for his malapropisms. Together with similar verbal slips, these have come to be known by the neologism Bushism, such as in "The law I sign today directs new funds [...] to the task of collecting vital intelligence [...] on weapons of *mass production*" (i.e., *mass destruction*) or in "I am mindful not only of preserving executive powers for myself, but for *predecessors* as well" (i.e., *successors*). Mike Tyson, too, appeared to have been only too

aware that nothing lasts forever: "I might just fade into *Bolivian*, you know what I mean" (i.e., *oblivion*), and US baseball player Charles Shackleford is reported to have described his shooting skills like this: "I can shoot with my left hand, I can shoot with my right hand, I'm *amphibious*" (i.e., *ambidextrous*). Against this backdrop, Spanish patients talking about their *mesopotamia* when they mean *menopausia* or substituting *médico nudista* for *médico naturista* are in select company indeed.

There's also a brief review on a novel and highly promising internet tool—Linguee, the first internet search engine for translations based on a unique technology developed by a German duo of programming freaks. Currently available for the German-English language pair, additional languages will soon follow suit.

Gabi Berghammer

gabi@the-text-clinic.com



Patientspeak: A Spanish-English glossary of lay medical malapropisms—Part 2

by *Fernando A. Navarro*

Malapropisms are common among patients with scant formal education when attempting to pronounce technical terms they have never seen in writing. Such malapropisms do not, however, normally pose any particular difficulty in conversations between native speakers of the same language. The experienced English-speaking physician will readily recognise in nonsense expressions such as *superstitious fleabites*, *arthromycin*, *urinal track*, *Dilatin* or *colour bone* a medically unsophisticated person's version of *superficial phlebitis*, *erithromycin*, *urinary tract*, *Dilantin* or *collarbone*.

The situation is much more complex, however, when two languages are involved. English-speaking physicians or interpreters may find it tremendously difficult to understand what Spanish-speaking patients mean by phrases such as *diarrea festival*, *hernia fatal*, *óvulos rojos*, *pasta centrifuga* or *plastificación familiar*.

Translators, interpreters and healthcare professionals working in settings involving Spanish as one of their working languages can now draw from an extensive Spanish-English glossary which lists nearly four thousand medical malapropisms frequently used by Spanish-speaking patients. This glossary is designed to be easy to use so that readers can go straight to the word they want. Its structure, marks and style labels were explained in a previous article published in the June 2009 issue of *TWS* [18(2):149-150] <www.emwa.org/JournalArticles/JA_V18_I2_Navarro1.pdf>.

The second part of the glossary, covering the letters from D to M, has now been made available on the EMWA website at www.emwa.org/Journal-public.html.

Fernando A. Navarro

*Physician and Medical Translator, Cabrerizos, Salamanca, Spain
fernando.a.navarro@telefonica.net*