

The Voice of Interpreters and Translators

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**A MULTIDISCIPLINARY  
TEAM OF LINGUISTIC ATHLETES**

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The coordinators of the Language Services team. Standing from left: Fernando Camino, Rosario Bustamante, and Adriana Carbajal. Seated from left: Daniel Aparicio and Angie Tapia. (Photo by Adolfo Leo)

## A Multidisciplinary Team of Linguistic Athletes

We might think that sports and languages don't mix, but the Lima 2019 Pan American and Parapan American Games and the Language Services team proved that to be far from true.

In recent years, Peru has gained the attention of the world for having an increasingly more stable economy, attractive tourist sites, friendly people, and, of course, great food. These factors have led to the country being selected as the host of numerous major international events, including the 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2014, the Meetings of the Board of Governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 2015, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum in 2016, and the Summit of the Americas in 2018.

### THE PAN AMERICAN AND PARAPAN AMERICAN GAMES

On October 11, 2013, Lima, Peru, was chosen as the host city for the XVIII Pan American and Sixth Parapan American Games, the largest international multidisciplinary sports event in the Americas and the second most important in the Olympic and Paralympic circuit in the world.

Now that the pressure of such an important international event rested on our shoulders, the first challenge we had to tackle was communication. Since Peru had almost no experience in the organization

of this type of multidisciplinary sporting event, the Peruvian government needed to sign a collaborative agreement with a government that did have such experience. So, the U.K. and Peru signed a Government to Government agreement making the U.K. their key partner in supporting the preparation and delivery of the Games. When the agreement with the U.K. government was signed, and English and Spanish were established as the official languages of the Games, the question of having an in-house language department was raised. After drawn out debates about the importance of an in-house language services team and the costs of outsourcing these services, the powers that be opted for an in-house team.

Shortly after, the first two professional translators were hired to be part of Lima 2019 Language Services, but they could not manage the increasing influx of documents alone. The first translation project manager, and head of Language Services, was hired shortly after in order to gain a sense of the services to be provided for the benefit of the project. A few months after, the chief interpreter was hired, followed by other key roles, such as chief translator, quality assurance coordinator, and multilingual desktop publishing coordinator.

Around 20 team members were added within a two-year period before the Games were scheduled to begin in July 2019. The team would not only handle the increasing amount of content that required translation, proofreading, and desktop publishing, but also provide interpreting services at several meetings, conferences, and events before and during the Games.

Once the Games started, Language Services had among its ranks 50 team members and was managing approximately 350 volunteers and coordinating their operations at the competition venues alongside the various event areas. The scope and complexity of this project was something Peru had never seen before.

### PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Hiring a translation project manager and the leader of the team was key. Angie Tapia, head of Language Services, was



The Language Services team at the General Assembly.

able to manage, organize, and prepare her team for the challenges of this multi-sport event. One of the initial challenges she faced was the need to adapt her vast experience with dedicated translation project management software to the resources made available to the team, such as the tools offered in Microsoft Office 365 (instead of the trusty Post-It notes she had been using).

Another challenge was convincing the Peruvian members of the Organizing Committee representatives to purchase computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool licenses through tender processes so her team wouldn't have to continue translating and proofreading directly in Microsoft Word. Some of the translators were not well versed in CAT tools, so they would need to be trained.

Linguists also needed to be reminded about the importance of meeting deadlines, not interfering with project management-related tasks, and improving their daily translation capacity.

One of the most difficult challenges was communicating the importance of setting reasonable deadlines to several clients who required translation but had no idea what it entailed (e.g., "I need this 12,000-word equestrian sports technical manual ready for tomorrow."). Organizing schedules and planning the resources necessary to complete the official documents that were going to be published was essential, especially considering that the translation stage was the last step of every publication. A lack of thorough planning could directly affect the production process of Language Services, including its efficiency and

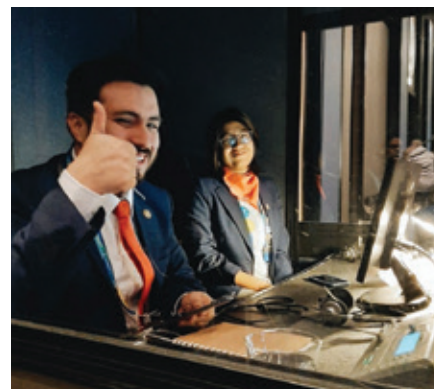
productivity. The Language Services project management team took over the task of planning publications for the Games and added the desktop publishing process to its tasks, both to save time and guarantee quality results. The team even proved to be quite resourceful in terms of obtaining information on sports events in real time in order to anticipate publications, press releases, or tweets that required translation.

*One of the most difficult tasks of Language Services was convincing the organization that having multilingual desktop publishers as part of their team was a necessity.*

Once the responsibilities, tasks, and processes were properly communicated and delegated within the team, Language Services worked smoothly, met deadlines, and translated over 4,000 projects (more than six million words) in just under two years.

## TRANSLATION

The translation team also faced the challenge of translating Lima 2019's communication with the world, working with the press and social media. They also had to work with all types of internal documents for the project, including sports



Daniel Torres and Licetd Pérez interpreting in the booth.

technical manuals, sanitary reports on the water conditions of competition venues, security policies, and the World Anti-Doping Agency online training platform.

Translating sports media content proved harder than it looked, as articles and press releases were filled with metaphors and expressions related to sports that were unfamiliar to the team. In addition to the content of the documents, terminology, linguistic-related problems, and deadlines were among the most challenging aspects of Lima 2019. Since all documents were always labeled by the client as "urgent," "important," or "priority," the translation team had to permanently work against the clock, trying to keep up with the quality standards required for this kind of event.

One of the most important lessons we learned was that, for this type of project, it's important to consider hiring a trained team of professional translators from day one. Linguists need time to adapt and adjust to new topics, terminology, and other work-related conditions to deliver the highest quality possible. As stress intensifies and shifts get longer, it's also essential to have a committed team that is fully aware of the importance of an event like the Pan American and the Parapan American Games.

## PROOFREADING

The task of proofreading was essential to the translation process. Although translators may do their own proofreading in a freelance market, in the context of such a massive event, it was necessary to separate both these tasks. The proofreaders were allowed to change



At the opening ceremony.

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anything and everything to ensure a high-quality final product.

We soon discovered that hiring proofreaders was a more difficult task than it seemed. For one thing, finding translation professionals with a university degree in translation and a near-native level of English in Peru is like finding a needle in a haystack. To be a proofreader, it's not enough to have studied translation—Peruvian universities don't require you to know English before enrolling—or to be a native English speaker. (The “your/you're” mistake makes one thing clear—just because you know it, doesn't mean you know it well.) When we finally found the elusive proofreaders we needed, to no one's surprise, they knew next to nothing about sports, which meant they had a long road of research ahead of them.

One of the many lessons we learned from this process was the importance of having well-trained proofreaders from day one. This way, the translation memory will only have content of the highest quality, making it more efficient and useful. Also, for future, less time-consuming projects,

it would be ideal to prepare specialized glossaries for translators to make the proofreaders' job just a little less stressful.

### MULTILINGUAL DESKTOP PUBLISHING

One of the most difficult tasks of Language Services was convincing the organization that having multilingual desktop publishers as part of their team was a necessity. However, once the publications started taking shape, it quickly became obvious that it was essential to have a specialized team within the translation process to carry out this task. Language Services began to receive a wide variety of documents created in dedicated graphic design software, such as Illustrator, Photoshop, or InDesign, that required a team specialized in editorial design who could prepare the text for the translation process and later edit and correct the layout of the translated file to deliver it to the client.

Another crucial task that was eventually assigned to this four-person team, alongside the marketing department, was the desktop publishing of all publications for the Games, both in their original

language and their translations. This change was both cost- and time-efficient, especially due to the amount of urgent last-minute changes that many of the publications required. Finally, finding professionals with the specific profile necessary to provide a service that is still not very widely known in Peru was also a challenge. They had to have a combination of skills that is not common among professional designers, and they also needed the proper training to adapt their skills to the translation process.

### INTERPRETING

Hiring a group of professional freelance interpreters was another very difficult task for Language Services. Not only because of the nature of the profession, which tends to make some freelancers afraid of committing to a long assignment for one client and causes them to shy away from a traditional nine-to-five job, but also because the rigorous hiring process of the public sector in Peru is not attractive for the typical freelancer.

A few months after being hired, the chief interpreter was joined by a group of seven interpreters with different backgrounds, skill levels, and personalities. Almost all the interpreters had some type of formal training in interpreting. Before the Games, they had worked on assignments in various settings, including press conferences for the medalists, visits to venue construction sites, discussions with leaders from different sports federations, general assemblies of sports organizations, referee training sessions, language support for international technical delegates, anti-doping control trainings, and budget auditing.

Some coordination of meetings or visits from international consultants required the use of portable interpreting equipment. The rest of the assignments were done using consecutive interpreting or whispered interpreting. During the Games, only the international sports federation and sports confederation assemblies at the official hotel required simultaneous interpreting with a booth, with English and Spanish as the working languages. There was a second booth at the Pan American Village that was used for meetings of the chefs de mission (the

leaders of each national team) and for some sport-specific technical meetings.

Before hiring in-house interpreters, the Organizing Committee was relying on the services from different external agencies. The priority when hiring those services was cost savings, which led to some issues concerning the professionalism required by such an important international multidisciplinary sporting event.

Teamwork and good practices were fostered among all the interpreters who, in most cases, understood the importance of acting professional. Even though they had put their freelance careers on hold to work for the Lima 2019 Games, they appreciated having the opportunity to interact with the rest of the Language Services team. It was an opportunity for those who were inexperienced to learn from their more seasoned peers.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The Language Services team insisted on the importance of confidentiality, teamwork, and good practices, but, as is common among all teams, incidents happened and some egos collided. Long working hours, stressful situations, and the pressure of the Games brought out many emotions, including frustration, anger, and anxiety. The team later learned that this was normal in this type of international multidisciplinary event. Nevertheless, although Language Services itself was divided into several teams responsible for different tasks, they were, at all times, one team with the same goal: to do their part so that the Lima 2019 Games could be a success.

Hiring an in-house team of professionals resulted in quality translation services and consistency in terminology, and also saved the organization money! Something that was key for the team to function properly was the versatility of its members. On a few occasions, due to high demand, some translators had to face their fears, remember their undergrad interpreting training, and interpret. Likewise, some interpreters had to focus for longer periods of time, stop speaking, pay attention to details, and translate. Some project managers with a translation background had to translate or interpret, and some

desktop publishers without any translation background had to train this diverse group of linguists in the use of design software.

*Finding professionals with the specific profile necessary to provide a service that is still not very widely known in Peru was a challenge.*

We might think that sports and languages don't mix, but the Lima 2019 Pan American and Parapan American Games and the Language Services team proved that to be far from true. This was, without a doubt, a great opportunity for learning and growth. Lima 2019 taught the Language Services team many lessons. First, that terminology is important when translating, but so is having good communication with the proofreader. Second, having a well-equipped interpreting booth is important, but so is knowing the speaker, who you may have happened to sit with during lunch the day before. And, finally, we learned that having a productive team is key for the project's success, but so is having fun and relaxing. The Games' slogan is "Let's All Play," and Language Services played and did it as a team. ◉



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## Members of the Lima 2019 Language Services Team

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