

Letter to the Editor

Corresponding author

Francesco Vetri, MD, PhD

Department of Anesthesiology
University of Illinois Hospital & Health
Sciences System
1740 West Taylor Street Suite 3200 W
Chicago, Illinois 60612, USA
E-mail: Vetri@UIC.EDU

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Lost in Translation

Francesco Vetri, MD, PhD*

*Department of Anesthesiology, University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System,
Chicago, Illinois 60612, USA*

As anesthesiologists, in whatever part of the world we live in, it is very common to be exposed to different cultures and languages. In some hospitals it happens on a daily basis, in others seldom, but the challenge of dealing with the “other” remains. In many institutions, like the one where the Author works, it is mandatory to use a professional medical translator, at least for the consent. However, even when such resource is utilized, there are aspects of communication that transcend language. Translation may address the meaning of word, but it may not get to the very goal of communication, which is, to understand each other. We are confronted with different cultures, where individuals perceive the same “words” in very different ways, and, more importantly, attribute to them a very different affective value. The challenge, then, consists in making the art of communication work. However, this is something that, as anyone of us has learned, it is often independent of the language used. We may run into a great deal of troubles with miscommunication even when we speak the same language... This brings us to talk about empathy, which I think is a necessary element when approaching our patients. It is our responsibility making sure that our message is conveyed to our patients, that they understand the pros and cons of anesthetics and procedures we are going to perform, along with the possible complications. In doing so, we must put all the necessary effort in trying to envision what our patients are seeing and feeling, trying to understand the cultural differences as well as the socioeconomic status. And..... let’s not get lost in translation!

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