



ASIA KERKA

Postdoc Alejandro Aballay translates biomedical research news for Spanish-speaking readers.

Science News for the Spanish-Speaking World

Like most postdoctoral fellows, Alejandro Aballay has to balance research, publishing and presentations at scientific meetings. (He has already landed a research job, or he'd be looking for work, too.) The Argentinian researcher at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital also does something quite separate from his efforts to learn how organisms respond genetically to infection from food-borne bacteria: he explains scientific advances to the Spanish-speaking world.

Aballay is the translator for HHMI's biomedical news service, a part-time position in which he translates—on deadline—reports about research discoveries. HHMI distributes the free news service via e-mail to Spanish-speaking readers worldwide. (The articles are available at www.hhmi.org/news/research-esp.html.) Aballay, who

never translated professionally before, has found the work rewarding. "We're really doing something to help people understand current biomedical research," he says.

Aballay enjoys the linguistic challenge of translating news about subjects and pro-

cedures for which Spanish words may not yet exist. No word for "screening," for example? No problem. Aballay combs the literature and consults with his wife, Graciela Vidal, a language instructor and trained translator. "It's a team effort," he says, and together they've compiled a glossary of terms (see box). In some cases, they've had to create phrases such as *examen genético*, for "screening." Vidal first worked with scientific language while helping Aballay edit his doctoral dissertation, which was written in both English and Spanish. "She has always been involved in my writing," he says.

Aballay says translating is "especially gratifying" because of inadequate communication between his homeland and the worldwide community of English-speaking scientists. "In Latin America, not many people study English, even in science," he says. His work helps researchers in Argentina and elsewhere keep up with the latest news and also serves lay readers who usually see little in the way of science reporting. Watching his stories make their way into local publications has been satisfying for Aballay, who says "we've been telling the whole Spanish-speaking world what cutting-edge science is."

He and Vidal will be going back to Argentina in the next year or so, where Aballay will become an investigator at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, or CONICET, in Mendoza. He's using the remaining time in his current position to build a base for his independent research.

Aballay will be happy to return to friends, family and soccer; like most Argentinians, he says, "I miss *asado* [grilled meats] and *dulce de leche* [milk-based caramel]." No matter what the future brings, Aballay says he hopes to continue working as a scientific translator so that he—and other Spanish speakers—can keep tabs on the latest science news.

—CAMILLE MOJICA REY

¿Cómo se dice?

Alejandro Aballay has created more than 100 words and phrases while translating HHMI's research news into Spanish. Here's a sample:

English	Spanish
brain-cell-clogging	placas cerebrales obstructivas
down regulation	regulación por disminución
expressed sequence tag	secuencias de expresión marcadoras
gel-mobility shift assay	análisis de rastro en gel
gene shuffling	intercambio de genes
genetic linkage analysis	análisis de enlace genético
genome-wide scale	escala de la amplitud del genoma
nonsense-mediated decay	degradación mediada por el antisentido
prion proteins	proteínas priónicas
scattering studies	estudios de dispersión de rayos X
wiring	patrón de conexiones nerviosa