

12-2022

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Recommended Citation

Manuel, Jessica, "Language Brokering in Immigrant Families" (2022). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 1409.

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Language Brokering through Children with Immigrant Parents

Jessica Manuel

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies

Introduction

This capstone project focuses on children's language brokering in immigrant families. A practice engaged in by many immigrant youth who interpret and translate oral and written language for their own family. Typically, these language events occur as part of everyday life and involve the need for communication. In this case the brokers that we will be focusing on are children and adolescents with parents whose primary language is Spanish. Many of these children are a reliable source for their parents to communicate and understand a primary language in a country where they migrated to.

Language brokering is a demanding and difficult task that requires a child to master or moderately know two different languages. Research shows the developmental benefits that children gain from this task. Many of these successes can be academically and social advantages that a child might gain. (Martinez, 2009). Children gain a benefit from translating to their family members but it can take a toll on their mental health and put them at a higher risk of depressive symptoms (Kim, 2017). These negative tolls can be a burden to these adolescents due to the relationship between the parent/family and the child as well. I presented a workshop that will explain the benefits and risks that language brokering might bring on children. This workshop explained what can help parents and/or families make this task a positive developmental experience as well as provide resources that can help children who are language brokers.

Needs Statement

Immigrant parents often struggle to speak the English language, and they often rely on their children to serve as language brokers. When families immigrate to the US, children tend to learn

English faster than adults, and this is why they become translators for the family (Shin, 2002). Children with immigrant parents may face challenges when being the translators for their parents. It can cause many difficulties with the way they feel about translating and helping their parents. These younger members of the family often act as translators for their older relatives in many situations' for example, at the doctor's office or at a teacher-parent meeting.

My project focuses on immigrant parents with children who serve as language brokers and how they can acquire challenges when completing the task. This topic is very important to present because parents should be informed of the challenges and negative tolls that might affect children's well being when translating. This workshop consisted of informing the parents about the benefits of the task and how it helps their cognitive development. It will also include the negative impacts on children's social emotional development when performing this task. Parents also will learn resources that are able to help them and their children with this task.

The challenges of immigrant families

My project is oriented towards immigrant parents who are still learning the English language or don't know the language at all. Many of these parents need help understanding the language when they are in a public space or with a person that could only communicate using a language they aren't familiar with. . Their children step in as language brokers which is a practice engaged in by them where they interpret and translate oral and written language for their own family. This task is done by many children but research indicates that, “ individuals from immigrant families report beginning to language broker at 8 to 10 years old”(Weisskirch, R. S., & Alva, S. A. 2002). This is typically a task added on to many other responsibilities that children from immigrant parents might have.

Immigrant children tend to have a lot of responsibilities, according to research children from immigrant families tend to have family obligations. This refers to Norms of children assisting the family exist within the cultural traditions of many immigrant groups in their native countries, and these traditions take on very real significance as immigrant families attempt to adapt to a new and different society (Fuligni, A. J. 2021). Language brokering is just one of many other obligations that are included in many cases of children's strong sense of obligation in their immigrant families' well being and economic state.

What is challenging about language brokering in childhood

Children start becoming more talkative and start understanding the translation system at the age of 8 through 10. They are then asked to help translate for others because typically during this age they are in elementary school and have already started to learn english. Children are very fast learners but they aren't prepared to have this difficult task be perfected overnight. Children's stress might come from the demands of translation in situations that they aren't familiar with. For example when a child is put in a position where they need translation in a doctor's office or even at work related situations. Many of the vocabulary and conversation is done at this setting with high standard words that they might not understand. Children might not say out loud when they are in a situation, "some have recollections of feeling embarrassed because they weren't able to understand something" (Termcoordinateditor, 2015). In many other cases they become stressed and frustrated or when they are in a setting that sometimes might have inappropriate subjects for a child to hear.

Negative effects of children's language brokering

Many children have this pressure of language brokering that negatively affects their mental health by putting unnecessary pressure on them. This can also cause a distraction on children and withdraw the focus they should be having on other responsibilities for example, school. According to studies many children language brokers have higher levels of depression (Rainey 2013). The problematic factors that are contributed by language brokering are the family relationship between the child and the parents. If the parents give children translation tasks that are above their developmental level, the child will most likely feel embarrassed, nervous, obligated, scared, uncomfortable, and worried when language brokering (Weisskirch 2007). The social emotional development that is the most affected during language brokering is the child's self esteem. These can be caused by the child's experiences when completing the task because there can be variables that make the child uncomfortable and bring their self esteem down. This is related to my capstone project because it is finding about children feelings and challenges when language brokering.

Family relationships

Language brokering does not have to be a burden to children nor have to be a task that stresses adolescents out. Children develop their skills from experiences and from the people that surround them. When children are given the opportunity to complete a task or learn a new word they comprehend and will proficiently do it depending on how the task is portrayed to them. Studies have shown that one of the ways to foster positive development on the idea of language brokering is to have a strong relationship with the person being helped whether it is the parent or the family member. If there is a strong sense of connection with the family and some sort of appreciation for activities that the child does for them, then there can be positive outcomes (Crafter, 2021). Parents should also take in consideration the kind of translating they ask their

children for help on. It is different when translating professional papers and financial decisions than translating at a grocery store. The reason for this is that it can hold a mind stresser on children due to the High-level programming language that those papers might have. This sub topic is related to the capstone project because I will be explaining the positive development skills that can be gained by the child when facilitating a translation task.

Important resources that can help children translate

Another way to reduce the stress of young language brokers is to locate bilingual resources that can help children translate for their families. One of the most important actions that should be talked about with parents is the need to be understanding and patient with their children because it is not an easy task to complete. We can show parents how they can help their child have a better experience translating, instead of being forced to do it just because it's needed. The connection with the parent or the person in need of help should be moderate so the child can feel comfortable translating. If in need of more professional help, there are always school counselors that are available to help as translators. Children should be the parents' last resort of help for language brokering because they aren't fully developed mentally or have maturity to translate in an area where there are upper division terms. If they are being helped to understand a language that they aren't dominant in, they should be able to know the negative effects that can be put on their children. The resources like school counselors and public libraries offer translation services for parents and children that are having a hard time. For example, the Union Library in Los Angeles C.A, offers English classes for free and translation services for parents. This is one of many organizations that can help with this task.

It is important to inform parents about these challenges for them to be aware of how it can negatively affect a child. Learning about the challenges and the resources that they might find helpful can lead to a better support system for the children who play a big role in their understanding of a language where the parent isn't familiar with.

Theory

The theory that applies to this capstone project is Lev Vygotsky's Theory. His theory is known for his sociocultural theory of development. He believed that human development and learning originate in social and cultural interaction. The classic theory of cognitive development proposed by Lev Vygotsky underscores how social interaction can facilitate the development of play, language, and other cognitive skills, such as attention and memory (McLeod 2022). A parent child relationship is one of the most complex and important relationships in life which then is the foundation for a child's upbringing, development, and identity. My targeted participants for this workshop are parents who have an immigration background and have children. This theory applies to teaching them and helping them understand the mixed effects of being a language broker. As a parent who might only speak Spanish, they might not know or understand resources that can help them and their children have a more fulfilling experience when translating. This theory was incorporated into the workshop because I felt like it is important to have a scientific connection to the explanations of the mixed effect on their children when being brokers.

I created a workshop for parents to help them understand a child's experiences when being a language broker. If these parents are informed of the importance of parent-child interaction and how it can help their children then they are able to make a better experience for them when they are translating.

Diversity

The participants for this project were Latino Immigrant parents with children. I gathered eight parents in total, six of them were female and the other two were male. I feel like gender played a neutral role in my project because both the mothers and fathers were very interested in the topic and answered to the assessment very truthfully. All of the participants had children from ages ten to sixteen. The parents that decided to participate in my project originated from Central America, six of them were from Mexico, specifically towns like Sinaloa, Puebla and Oaxaca. I think because my project came from parents with a Central American background they might have given me the answers that were put down.

On the other hand if it was a group of parents from another part of the country then the answers might have been completely different. I feel like because they all came from the same social economic background and had similar immigrating stories, then that might have been a part of the outcome to the assessment. They all immigrated to the U.S during their teenage years and only spoke Spanish but some were bilingual in their native language. None of the participants knew how to speak English but some did understand certain words. In fact 17.8 million U.S children live with at least one immigrant parent and more than half of them reside in households where parents speak limited English. (Orthy, 2022). I decided to focus on this group of parents because I felt like a lot of them who have children as a reliable source to translate might not be informed about the impacts that this task might have on them and how they are able to make their experience positive.

Learning Outcomes

Through this workshop I decided to focus on three different learning outcomes that parents had to reach at the end of the presentation.

1. Parents will be able to learn at least one challenge that children go through when language brokering
2. Parents will be able to learn why it makes it easier for children to translate when they have a good relationship with their parents.
3. Parents will be able to learn about resources where their child and themselves can get help for language brokering skills to improve or where they can get help other than their children.

Methods

Locations and Participants

This project was conducted in two different places. The full one day workshop was supposed to be at a Starbucks Cafe in Watsonville , C.A but it didn't go that way fully. This workshop was partially done at Starbucks and then the other half was done in a living room where there was a quieter place. I had a total of eight participants, their ages ranged from 34 to 46 years old. There were 6 females and 2 male whose immigrating status was unknown because they wanted to keep that personal. All participants had children of their own and all have had their child translate for them before.

Procedures and Materials

At the beginning of my workshop, I introduced myself and asked all the parents to say their names and how many children they had. They also were asked to share how many of them have used their children to translate for them. The parents talked amongst themselves first , then we shared as a group. I then shared a little bit of my experience of being a language broker and how growing up I had always translated for my parents, till this day I do. I felt the need to connect my personal experience to my project so they were able to understand a child's perspective. One by

one the parents shared their experiences of having their children translate and how they thought their child might think about the task.

The first part of the workshop was done through a series of powerpoint slides. These slides had all the information that correlated to my first learning outcome, which was that parents will be able to learn the challenges of children who are language brokers. I first stated the amount of children that are translators for their parents in an overall percentage of immigrant families. I then proceed with information that I gathered from research articles that explained certain challenges that some children might encounter when being language brokers. Towards the end of the first section of the presentation I asked the parents if they had any questions about this first section. I then passed out a worksheet that asked them a question regarding the challenges that they had learned. They proceeded to fill out that worksheet and we took a 5 min break.

In the second part of the workshop, I did another presentation; but before I started I asked my participants a question regarding their relationships with their child. It was optional, and not all responded to the question. I then proceeded with the presentation where I explained to the parents how it might be easier for their children to translate when they have a good relationship with each other. Some of the points that I stated during the workshop was the negative feelings that a child might have if the task becomes a burden. I also stated how a child can have positive feelings when they have a sense of self efficiency. Given that I stated some tips on how a parent can better communicate with their child, for example ask them how their day was and how they are feeling about certain tasks that they tell them to do. I then had an open conversation assessment where we discussed what they learned from this part of the powerpoint. I asked my participants questions like , “why do they think it is important to have a strong connection with

their child ?” As open conversation started I feel like more parents felt comfortable asking questions about how they are able to talk to their children about this task. We then moved on and took a two minute break.

In the last part of my workshop, I was explained certain resources that they and their child can use to get help with translation. I explained how this task does not have to be a burden but a positive aspect can come out of it when a child has self efficiency doing it. These resources were mentioned to the parent as a way to contribute to their understanding of having other resources for translating other than using their children. One of the resources that I stated was school counselor. I decided to state this because I feel like parents might not feel comfortable going to their child's school because they might think that everyone that works at a school speaks a language they can't understand. I stated that their child school is a place where they are able to get help but libraries as well. Libraries are public and certain ones are funded to help their communities. In this case they can ask if there is open public help for parents and children that translate in any language.

I finalized the presentation for this learning outcome I asked to flip the worksheet I gave during the first assessment. Behind was another assessment for this third section where they wrote down one or two resources that they learned that day. I concluded the workshop thanking them for participation and asked if they had any questions.

Results

The first learning outcome of this workshop was that parents will be able to identify at least one challenge children have when language brokering. At the end of the first section of the one day workshop I handed the participants a worksheet where they were told to write down two language brokering challenges that they had learned. I reviewed all the participants' answers on

the worksheets. Seven out of the eight participants wrote down two challenges that they learned. Only one of the participants wrote one challenge that a child might go through when language brokering. The first learning outcome was fully met because more than 50 percent of the participants were able to name two challenges.

The second learning outcome was that parents will be able to learn why it makes it easier for children to translate when they have a good relationship with their parents. At the end of this second section I conducted an oral assessment for all the participants. We had an open conversation where I asked questions regarding the learning. For example, I asked, “Why do you think it is important to have a strong connection with your child when asking them to translate.” After confirming their answers, only four out of the eight of the participants were able to give me a response based on the importance of child-parent relationships when giving them a task to translate. In this case only 50% of the participants were able to give me an answer so the second learning outcome was partially met.

The third learning outcome is that parents will be able to identify one resource where they and their child can get help when in need of translation. After presenting this part of my workshop I conducted the assessment through a worksheet, where I asked them to state one resource that they learned on this section of the learning. All of the participants were able to name one resource that they are able to use when in need for translation. The third learning outcome was fully met.

DISCUSSION

From the information collected from the parents the overall results to all learning outcomes showed that 75 percent of all participants understood the concepts of all learning

outcomes. This capstone focused on conducting a workshop where parents would be able to get informed about the challenges that might arise when children are language brokering. I do think that my project was very successful because two out of my three learning outcomes were fully met. This then concludes that 75 percent of my participants understood the material and were able to learn one challenge that children might obtain when language brokering.

My second learning outcome was that parents would be able to learn how a good relationship with their children can lead to positive outcomes when language brokering. Even if not all participants were able to state a reason for having a good relationship with their child, I do think they were engaged in the conversation, they might have just over thought of what they were going to share. The third learning outcome was that parents will be able to learn at least one resource where they are able to seek help for their translation needs. All participants named one resource that they learned that day so that assessment and learning outcome was successful.

Overall I think my project was successful, the only thing that I would have wanted to change might have been my assessment for learning outcome number 2. I think the participants were more confident to answer a question through a worksheet and not in conversation.. Even though they were engaged they might not have felt comfortable. One of my limitations was definitely the setting of my workshop, I definitely would have preferred a reliable and comfortable setting. I would definitely like to create a workshop where parents and their children are able to participate and talk amongst each other about this task. In the future I hope to expand my audience and have more written assessments for the participants.

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Assessment

Nombre _____

Fecha _____

Ahora escriban lo que aprendieron sobre las ventajas y desventajas de un adolcente traduciendo.

Ventajas	Desventajas
1.	1.
1.	2.
2.	3.

Appendix A

Intermediación lingüística en familias inmigrantes

Jessica Manuel
Día- Noviembre 1, 2022
Clase de estudios de desarrollo humano y estudios de la familia 400 B

Identificar cuantas veces le has preguntado a tu hijo e hija que tradusca para usted ?

Cuantos de ustedes han nesesito la ayuda de sus hijos e hijas para traducir alguna carta al espanol ?

- En casa
- En la escuela
- En el trabajo



LOS RESULTADOS DE APRENDIZAJE

1. Los padres podrán aprender los desafíos para los niños que son intermediarios lingüísticos.
2. Los padres podrán aprender por qué a los niños les resulta más fácil traducir cuando tienen una buena relación con sus padres.
3. Los padres podrán aprender acerca de los recursos donde sus hijos y ellos mismos pueden obtener ayuda para mejorar las habilidades de intermediación lingüística o donde pueden obtener ayuda además de sus hijos.

Como podria afectar el desarrollo de su hijo o hija al traducir

- La intermediación lingüística coloca a los niños en roles muy influyentes en las familias, roles que pueden o no ser apropiados para el desarrollo.
 - salud mental
 - ansiedad
 - Depresión
 - vergüenza
 -



Appendix B

Language Brokering in Immigrant Families

— Jessica Manuel
Human Development and Family Studies

Introduction

I designed a workshop to inform immigrant parents about the challenges of language brokering for children.



Personal Experience

- Translated for my parents at an early age.
- Felt stressed when my parents asked me to translate words I did not understand.

What is Language Brokering ?

A practice engaged in by many immigrant youth who interpret and translate oral and written language for their own family. Typically, these language events occur as part of everyday life and involve the need for communication.

Needs Statement

- Children's language brokering occurs in locations such as medical offices, schools or/ and parental worksites with a diversity of items like notes from school, insurance documents and bills.
 - Language brokering is a demanding and difficult task that requires a child to master or moderately know two different languages. To some children it might be a burden to complete this task as a demanding expectation.
 - This workshop will explain how parents can help make this task a positive experience for children and adolescents.
-

Needs Statement

Keys findings-

- Children gain a benefit from translating to their family members but it can take a toll on their mental health and put them at a higher risk of depressive symptoms (Kim, 2017). These negative tolls can be a burden to these adolescents due to the relationship between the parent/family and the child .
- Parents who provide a supportive relationship towards their children, report positive outcomes in contrast to parents who are not as involved which reflects on having negative experiences(Weisskirch, 2007).

Lev Vygotsky Theory

[Parent-Child Interaction]

- **Social interaction**
 - **cognitive development**



Vygotsky Theory

- **Much of what children acquire in their understanding of the world is the product of collaboration with others.**

I decided to relate this theory to the workshop because ..

- Parent-child relationships are among the most complex and important relationships in life which leads to the foundation of a child's upbringing, development, and identity.
- good communication skills may be strong to a stressful task like language brokering and may even benefit from it whereas no communication, can amplify stress and be harmful to relationships and health.
- parental involvement generally refers to parents' and family members use and investment of resources in their children's success and work together to make the task a positive development

Learning Outcomes

1. Parents will be able to learn at least one challenge, children acquire when language brokering.
2. Parents will be able to learn why it makes it easier for children to translate when they have a good relationship with their parents.
3. Parents will be able to learn a resource where their child and themselves can get help when in need of translation.

Methods

Location : Starbucks then other half of the workshop was held at a home.

Participants: 8 participants total
6 were female
2 were male



Background :

6 participants were from Mexico
1 participant was from Honduras
1 was from Guatemala

- This workshop was conducted in spanish as a powerpoint presentation.
- One day workshop divided in 3 sections with a 5 min break in between each learning outcome
- Workshop duration: 2 hours

Procedures

LEARNING OUTCOME 1	LEARNING OUTCOME 2	LEARNING OUTCOME 3
<p>This section of the learning I presented a powerpoint explaining challenges that a child might go through when translating.</p>	<p>I presented this next learning with a power point where I stated the importance of having a close parent-child relationship.</p> <p>For example from negative feelings, such as a sense of burden to positive feelings, such as a sense of reassurance.</p>	<p>I presented the third sub topic through a power point where I stated resources that can be found to help children who are language brokers.</p> <p>Showed parents how they can help their child have a better experience translating and how to seek resources for themselves when in need of translation.</p>

Results for LO 1

LO 1: Parents will be able to learn two challenges that children might acquire when being language brokers.

Handed out a worksheet that had them write down challenges their child might face when translating.

- 7 out of the 8 parents wrote 2 challenges that they learned. (87%)
- one parent wrote down one challenge

LO 1 was fully met.

Results for LO 2



LO 2: Parents will be able to learn why it makes it easier for children to translate when they have a good relationship with their parents.

I assessed with open conversation.

After the presentation I asked them questions correlated to the topic and the learning. For example: Why do you think it is important to have a strong connection with your child when asking them to translate.

- 4 out of 8 parents were able to give me a response based on the importance of child parent relationships when giving them a task to translate.

LO 2 was partially met (50%)

Results for LO 3



LO 3: Parents will be able to learn one resource where their child and themselves can get help when in need of translation.

- Worksheet with a question asking them to state at least one resource that are able to help them with translating.
- All participants were able to name one resource.

LO 3 was fully met

Discussion and Conclusion

Successes

- 2 out the 3 learning outcomes were met
- Parents showed interest in the topic and asked me about my personal experience
- They participated in the assessment and payed attention

Future Direction

- Have a different assessment for LO2
- Have a child and parent workshop
- Expand my audience

Limitations

- Setting
- Parent availability

THANK YOU



ANY QUESTIONS ?