



Recording Voices Initiative

Asian Pacific American youth as family language brokers: Impact on acculturation, attitudes and well-being

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Introduction

The United States is known as the “land of opportunity”. However, for almost 12 million people, these opportunities cannot be accessed because of difficulty communicating in English (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003). Nationally, almost 25% of these individuals are children under 14 years of age (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003). The Asian Pacific American (APA) community is particularly affected with approximately 12% of children living in linguistically isolated households being Asian Pacific American (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2006).



Often, children play the role of *language broker* for their family, teachers, neighbors, or other adults, influencing the content and nature of the messages communicated, which in turn affect decisions made by the parties involved. Acting as a language broker may affect child development and the parent-child relationship.

Methods and Materials

The project utilized a mixed-mode data collection methodology to examine the nature and impact of language brokering on Asian Pacific American youth and families in New York City.

- ❖ Youth language broker survey (N=89) – The language broker survey inquires about:
 - For whom youth language broker
 - Settings in which they language broker
 - Materials they have translated
 - Affective aspects of language brokering

- ❖ Youth focus group – The focus group explores the effect and psychosocial aspects of language brokering on youth

- ❖ Parent interview – The parent interview examines the effect of language brokering on family dynamics

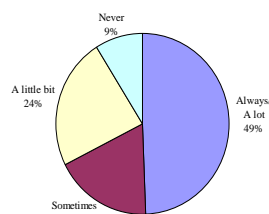
Results

“As long as English is involved, we are needed.”
– Chinese-American youth, 20 years old

Prevalence of language brokering in APA community

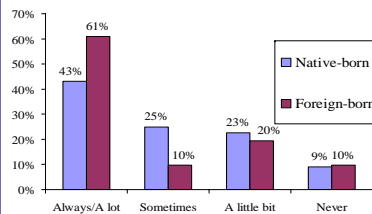
- ❖ Almost half of youth surveyed reported interpreting/translating for a parent always or a lot.

Chart 1: Frequency of language brokering (N=89)
(How often do you translate for your parents?)



- ❖ Nativity of youth was a factor in determining how frequently youth language brokered.

Chart 2: Experience translating for parents by nativity of youth (N=85)



- ❖ One participant explained that youth language broker, “because we are in New York City, there is just so much access, so much diversity in the city, so our parents don’t feel like there is such a great demand to know the [English] language.”

Materials Interpreted/Translated

Table 1: Materials translated (N=89)

| Material | % |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Notes/letters from school | 83.1 |
| On the phone | 66.3 |
| Instructions for new equipment | 57.3 |
| Bank statements | 49.4 |
| Telephone bills | 49.4 |
| Forms from dr’s office | 49.4 |
| Credit card bills | 48.3 |
| Insurance forms | 46.1 |
| Immigration forms | 39.3 |
| When someone comes to the door | 30.3 |
| Job application | 29.2 |
| Rental contracts | 21.3 |



Youth translating over the phone for school staff

Impact of Language Brokering on Youth

- ❖ Many youth assume *decision making responsibilities* for their family when they serve as language brokers.
- ❖ Many youth consider themselves to be accountable to their family. One youth said, “I feel it’s my duty [to language broker] because they are my family.”

Table 2: Attitudes towards language

| How often do you feel this way when translating? (N=89) | Always/A lot (%) |
|---|------------------|
| Translating has helped me care for my parents | 45.5 |
| I feel good about myself when translating for others | 39.3 |
| Translating has helped me learn my native language | 37.9 |
| I feel obligated to translate for my parents/family | 37.9 |
| Translating has helped me understand my parents better | 37.5 |
| Translating for others makes me feel more grown-up | 32.6 |
| I have to translate for others even when I don’t want to | 30.3 |
| I feel nervous when I translate for others | 18.0 |
| My parents know more about Americans because I translated for them | 18.0 |
| I like to translate | 16.9 |

- ❖ One youth expressed concern for her parents and asked, “In the case of an emergency, if I am not there, would they be able to handle the situation?”

Conclusions

As this study demonstrates, language brokers play the role of care-giver, translator, mediator and guardian. Given these responsibilities, CACF makes the following recommendations concerning language brokers:

- ❖ Public institutions must allocate appropriate funding to provide bilingual support services to match the linguistic and cultural needs of the communities served.
- ❖ Increase public resources to community based organizations to hire additional bilingual/bicultural staff to provide essential culturally competent and language accessible services in the APA community.
- ❖ Public and private institutions should always use professional interpreters/translators when working with limited English proficient families.
- ❖ A more comprehensive needs assessment should be conducted to evaluate the prevalence and impact of language brokering on APA youth and their families.

Literature cited

U.S. Bureau of Census. (2003) Language Use and English Speaking Ability:2000. C2KBR-29, October 2003.
U.S Bureau of Census. (2006). 2000 Summery File Four Data. Data derived from analysis by the Asian American Federation Census Information Center.

Acknowledgments

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For further information

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