

## ABSTRACT

### LANGUAGE BROKERING EXPERIENCES OF LATINO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

By

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The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine the experiences of Latino/a university students who grew up interpreting and translating for their parents or still did. The sample consisted of 14 self-identified language brokers. The study focused on the stressors associated with language brokering, the parent child relationship, perceptions on how public facilities can help with the process of language brokering and the gifts or positive attributes gained due to their experiences. Participants shared various settings in which they language brokered. Stressors included challenges with terminology, having many demands, pressure and expectations from their parents, and having adult responsibilities. Language brokering was not perceived to negatively affect the parent-child relationship, and participants shared their views on how systems can help in providing efficient services for their limited English proficient parents. Participants mentioned various gifts/benefits gained, including fluency and ethnic identity. Implications for research and social work practice are discussed.



LANGUAGE BROKERING EXPERIENCES OF LATINO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Many Latino immigrant children are the first in their families to attend school in the United States and learn the English language (Buriel, Love, & Villanueva, 2011). Because children tend to acculturate faster than their parents, they learn the English language first and also speak their native language. These skills make it possible for them to communicate with teachers and other adults in their new country who only speak English (Buriel et al., 2011). As a result, these bilingual children often times take on the role of interpreters and translators, also known as language brokers for their parents. Language brokers must develop skills including “.... negotiation of power differentials between children and adults, and navigation of cultural mores...” (Weisskirch et al., 2011, p. 43).

According to Buriel et al. (2011) language brokering is very common for Latino children of immigrants and they typically begin language brokering at the age of 10, this role often times continuing into adulthood. Language brokering also occurs in families where the children are second generation Americans. According to Fry and Passel (2009), 52% of the nation’s 16 million Hispanic children are second generation children, which means that they were born in the United States and have at least one foreign born parent. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), in Spanish speaking homes, 17.5% of the individuals speak English less than “very well.” In the state of California, the population 5 years and over who speaks English less than “very well” is 19.6%, and in

Los Angeles County California the percentage is almost twice that of the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Studies on language brokering demonstrate how this activity can have both positive and negative experiences. One of negative consequences is stress, which can include acculturation stress, depressive symptoms and emotional distress (Kam & Lazarevic, 2014). Adolescents from immigrant families who were language brokers have reported increased levels of psychological distress (Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). According to Kam, (2011) children can feel confused and torn between multiple cultural identities that can lead to stress. Also, language brokering can cause a disturbance on the familial roles within the family and place more responsibilities on the child, also leading to stress. Therefore, a better understanding of the experiences of Latino undergraduate/university students who have interpreted/translated for their parents is needed.

#### Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Latino/a students who have interpreted and translated for their parents. A second purpose was to determine, if any, the stressors associated with language brokering and whether or not language brokering affected the parent-child relationship. A third purpose was to gain insight into the perceptions on how participant's feel/think schools and other systems can help with this process. A fourth purpose was to determine the gifts or positive attributes language brokers have gained due to their experiences as language brokers.

#### Research Problem

Latino children of non-U.S. born parents continue to interpret and translate for their parents in many settings, including schools, hospitals, banks, and stores to name a

few. Lack of services allows for non-U.S. born parents to struggle communicating with individuals who only speak English. Lack of services also allows for children of non-U.S. born parents to hold the responsibility of becoming language brokers for their parents and in some cases, extended family members and family friends. This in turn creates stress within the family and within the child.

#### Importance to Social Work

This research is important to social work as language and cultural diversity are part of the profession's mission and advocating for individuals who lack needed services is part of the social justice that is valued in the profession (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2009). This research will increase the awareness of social workers regarding the life experiences of Latino undergraduate/university students and their language brokering role. The proposed study aimed to help social workers better understand the services needed for Latino families and for social workers to seek, provide, refer and advocate for the access to services in the language required for the client. This study also aimed to expand the knowledge to professionals about the consequences brought about because of language brokering and the feelings connected to that (e.g., clinicians working with immigrant families and processing the stress and tensions between parents and their children). The information gathered through this study is intended to be beneficial for professionals working with Latino immigrant families and understanding the many roles and dynamics within the family, as well as finding ways to better assist and meet the needs of the family.

## Multicultural Relevance

Language brokering can occur in various cultures across the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), out of the Spanish speaking homes, 17.5% speak English less than very well. In other Indo-European speaking homes, 2.2% speak English less than very well, and in Asian and Pacific Islander speaking homes, 5.5% speak English than very well (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). These statistics highlight the possibility of language brokering occurring in many homes where English is not the primary language and making language brokering multi culturally relevant.

A study done by Kwon (2014) focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Korean-American language brokers. Through open-ended questions and follow up probes, participants reported that their parents had Limited English Proficiency and that they perceived their role in the family as that of holding down all family responsibilities until their parents established settlement (Kwon, 2014). Participants also reported to helping family members access resources and having to frequently advocate for their parents. Participants also shared that their experiences as language brokers reinforced their Korean identity and they felt ethnic belonging. However, there were participants that expressed resentment towards their parents for the need of dependency and feeling like they had to grow up to fast (Kwon, 2014).

In a study by Jones, Trickett and Birman (2012), the purpose was to gain a greater understanding of the child culture broker role within Russian immigrant families. Findings showed that parents who frequently used their child as a language broker, led to more family disagreements and the children experiencing emotional distress. Findings also highlighted the positive relationship between child emotional distress and child

cultural brokering (Jones et al., 2012). Both studies demonstrate the idea that Language brokering occurs in many cultures.

#### Definition of Term

*Language broker* is a term used to refer to children, adolescents and young adults who interpret and translate for their parents, extended family members and other adults (Morales, Yakushko & Castro, 2012).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a large increase in the number of non-English speaking immigrants in the United States, making the study of language brokering an important topic (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Research on language brokers (LBs) has grown throughout the years and has demonstrated how children and young adults who interpret and translate written and verbal communication for their parents both experience challenging and rewarding moments. Language brokering may begin in childhood, and in some cases, through adulthood and into college (Weisskirch et al., 2011). Early work by McQuillan and Tse (1995) and Tse (1995a, 1995b) revealed that in the majority of cases, immigrant children and adolescents have the responsibility to language broker (LB). They may also begin language brokering as young as 8 or 9 years of age and after having arrived to United States in within 1 to 5 years (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a).

During childhood and adolescence, it is important to note that children who LB interact with other children their age through play and other activities, however, when they have to interpret and translate for their parents and family members, LBs assume adult like responsibilities (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Tse 1995a, 1995b). Weisskirch (2007) states these children and adolescents are brought into situations or interactions in which they typically would not participate. Because these children often times help their parents in complex and difficult situations, situations that

may not be age appropriate, stressors might be experienced by the child or the adolescent (Morales & Hanson, 2005).

There are mixed findings from previous studies that indicate language brokering is a stressful and negative experience for children and adolescents, but this is also seen as a task in which the child or adolescent obtains positive effects later on (Weisskirch, 2007). This literature review looked at research of both the positives gained and stressors experienced connected to language brokering. It is also important to note that language brokering occurs across various cultures and ethnicities, not just within the Latino culture. Making this topic important to the profession of social work, as it would provide clinicians and professionals with a greater understanding of the effects language brokering can have on an individual and on the family involved.

This literature review also focused on the stressors associated with language brokering; how language brokering has affected the parent-child relationship, gender differences and the role gender plays with interpretation and translation. The Latino cultural values were addressed as well as how outside systems have helped with the task and the positive gains due to language brokering. Language brokering with different Latino cultural groups, and theories implemented in the past with this topic were also covered.

#### Previous Research on Language Brokering

Research shows that there are many settings in which Latino children and adolescents interpret for their parents, extended family members and friends. Corona et al. (2012) report that the two most frequent settings where children translate are in health related settings and schools. However, translation also occurs in retail stores, restaurants,

rental offices, supermarkets, banks, laundromats, car dealerships, varied public service offices, and while watching television (Corona et al., 2012; Dorner, Orellana, & Jimenez, 2008; Morales et al., 2012). It has also been identified that children are asked to LB written documents. This can include letters from school, bank statements, job applications, car insurance documents, letters from medical professionals, credit card offers, utility bills and other forms of documents (Corona et al., 2012; Dorner et al., 2008; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales et al., 2012; Tse, 1995a, 1995b), and that the school setting can be seen as a stressful place to LB (Villanueva & Buriel, 2010).

In the many settings and forms of documents children must translate and interpret for their limited English proficient parents, research has shown that both positive and negative consequences can occur within the family. In a study by Morales et al. (2012), the purpose of the multiple qualitative case study was to understand how language brokering affected the relationships within six two-parent Mexican immigrant families. Through semi-structured interviews and language brokering simulation it was found that language brokering had an important role within the family relationships. Parents in the study shared their relationship with their child as trusting, intimate and approachable. Most of the parents shared having good communication with their children and having a sense of connectedness. However, when the broker was an adolescent, tensions were felt. The LBs in the family expressed feeling comfortable discussing any topic with their parents without having to feel judged and feeling a sense of self-worth. In the study, the overall family relationships both had moments of closeness and tension (Morales et al., 2012).



In regards to feelings, parents expressed pride, support, happiness and confidence when their children assisted them, but also expressed feeling useless, embarrassed and ashamed because they could not help themselves. The child brokers expressed feeling happy, proud and confident when they felt they were assisting their family, but they also shared feelings of frustration, anger and obligation (Corona et al., 2012; Morales et al., 2012).

Corona et al. (2012) also focused on the parent-child relationship with 25 Latino adolescents and their parents by facilitating a semi-structured interview. It was expressed by some of the youth and parents that language brokering was seen as normal, suggesting that language brokering is simply part of their daily lives and closely tied to the value of *familismo*, when family members are consistently helping each other (Corona et al., 2012). This idea could imply that language brokering is neither a positive or negative experience, but rather expected and normal (Coronal et al., 2012).

According to Dorner et al. (2008), within the system of a family, role-reversal does not occur when an adolescent is language brokering for his or her parents. This was a longitudinal case study for immigrant adolescents, who had once been interviewed when they were in elementary school and once again as adolescents. Participants in the study described moments of tension and annoyance when having to broker, but little suggestion was given to the idea of role-reversal. Participants also expressed feeling conflicted with their responsibilities in the family and with their own interests they had outside the home (Dorner et al., 2008). However, findings also highlighted the idea that language brokering is seen as a family task. Participants in the study reported to siblings helping each other when translating for their parents and parents themselves joining with

their children to find out the meaning and significance of the task (Dorner et al., 2008). Once again, tied in to the value of *familismo* within the Latino culture.

However, research has shown that when mutual support is not in the family, language brokering can significantly affect the child/adolescent. In a study by Weisskirch (2013) where the focus of the study was to investigate the variables connected with the experiences of language brokering seen as burdensome or as approving of self-efficacy with a sample size of 75 Mexican American emerging adults. It was found that with lack of parental support, the LB felt a sense of burden. It was also identified that participants had lower self-esteem and self-efficacy when feeling burdened. In contrast, more frequent language brokering predicted a sense of self-efficacy and mastery (Weisskirch, 2013).

The differences adolescents have when compared from high demand language brokering environments to low demand language brokering environments has also been studied, highlighting stressors children and adolescents can experience. Martinez, McClure and Eddy (2009) found that when language brokering is low in a home or environment (bilingual children with at least one bilingual parent), the adolescent experiences more positive adjustment, higher levels of homework quality, better academic performance, less likelihood of substance use when compared to high demand language brokering (bilingual children with monolingual Spanish speaking parents). Results from the study also suggested that youth who language brokered frequently had a less sense of ethnic belonging (Martinez et al., 2009).

Research has also highlighted language difficulties LBs can experience. In a study by Villanueva and Buriel (2010), difficulties within nine first and second-

generation adolescent Latina LBs experiences were found. Lack and/or limited knowledge of words (vocabulary), understanding the statements or the dialogue in the designated language (comprehension), and pronunciation were all seen as language difficulties (Villanueva & Buriel, 2010). Similar to this study, Corona et al. (2012) and Morales et al. (2012) findings state that LBs also shared difficulties with interpreting and translating due to their limited language skills and shared the challenge of continuously having to switch between languages.

Adding to the stressors many children/adolescents who interpret/translate have, the relationship between language brokering and mental health has also been examined by Rainey, Flores, Morrison, David, and Siltan (2014). According to these researchers, more anxiety and depression is present in LBs when compared to non-language brokers.

#### Stressors Associated with Language Brokering

Studies have demonstrated the effects language brokering can have on an individual's life, including stressors impacting their well being (Kam, 2011; Kam & Lazarevic, 2014; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014; Weisskirch, 2005; Weisskirch et al., 2011). Kam (2011) collected self-reported data from 684 middle school students of Mexican descent in 2006, 2007, and 2008 from a substance use prevention program to examine the effects language brokering has on mental health and risky behaviors. Results indicated that language brokering frequently and having negative feelings towards the task was positively related to family acculturation stress. Family acculturation stress also related to alcohol use and other risky behavior (Kam, 2011).

Similar to this study, Kam and Lazarevic (2014) examined the direct consequences of language brokering using longitudinal survey data from 234 Latino sixth through eighth graders. Results demonstrated that language brokering can be a stressor, depending on how the adolescent views and feels about the task. The study revealed that for participants who felt language brokering was a burden, brokering was related to family based acculturation stress (stress emerging from differences in cultural values between the parents and the child), and in turn, was associated to alcohol and marijuana use. The study also revealed that having negative feelings towards language brokering was related to depression symptoms.

Research has also shown that although knowing and understanding many languages can be advantageous, children and adolescents may feel pressured to correctly translate and interpret for their parents and family members. It can also consume their free time and prevent them from addressing other responsibilities such as their education, ultimately, causing stress (Kam, 2011). Weisskirch (2005) also notes that stress can be stemmed from the difficulty of the material being interpreted or translated, as well as the situation in which the child, adolescent or young adult is in. Cases in which individuals have to LB beyond their comfortable skill level can become stressful (Weisskirch, 2005). Also, because LBs are often times seen as having more adult-like responsibilities due to the decision making responsibilities they have, this can be seen as a stressor as well (Morales & Hanson, 2005).

In a study by Weisskirch et al. (2011), the researchers surveyed 1,222 university students online, comparing non-LBs, infrequent LBs, and frequent LBs, focusing on acculturation, cultural variables, ethnic identity, and familial ethnic socialization. The

stressor identified in the study was the pressure frequent LBs felt having to be and take part of their own culture as well as becoming part of and learning the American ways. This highlighted the acculturation stress that comes along with the task of interpreting and translating.

Niehaus and Kumpiene (2014) also discuss how first generation immigrant students from middle and high school who LB are more likely to experience lower happiness and satisfaction, experiencing lower emotional well-being, when compared to U.S. born students. These findings highlight how acculturation and the stressors involved with learning the American culture, while holding on to one's individual ethnic identity can be challenging. These findings are correlated with the many stressful environmental conditions many students who are recently migrated and who LB face. Some of those environmental conditions can include poverty, family separation and discrimination (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014). Language brokering and the many variables involved can ultimately make the situation stressful and challenging for the child, adolescent, or young adult.

#### Parent-Child Relationship

Within the family dynamics and the roles that family members have in Latino households, research has shown that it is typically the eldest child in the family (Luna, 2013; Morales & Hanson, 2005) and usually the female who takes the responsibility of language brokering for her parents (Luna, 2013; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Villanueva & Buriel, 2010; Weisskirch, 2005). Morales and Hanson (2005), Kam (2011) and Weisskirch (2007) have also explained how there are two views on the issue on how language brokering can affect the parent-child relationship. One

view was that children should not be translators and interpreters for their parents, as this experience can negatively affect family dynamics and disrupt family roles. This experience can cause the parents to become dependent on the child and have the child feel overwhelmed by his or her role. However, the second view was that the experiences gained through language brokering can only help the parent and the child grow a strong bond and feel more connected with each other. The following studies will delineate these contrasting views.

Love and Buriel (2007) studied the relationship between LB responsibilities, parent-child bonding, autonomy, depression and biculturalism with 246 seventh and eighth grade Mexican American youth who attended junior high schools in Los Angeles County with all of the participants identifying as having at least one parent that was born in Mexico. Results from the study revealed that girls had more positive feelings about language brokering than boys and reported more biculturalism. Boys on the other hand, reported to having more autonomy in privileges than girls. Both boys and girls from the study had a strong parent-child bond if they had positive feelings towards language brokering, indicating no gender difference. For boys, a strong parent-child bond was related to less depression, as this relationship was seen as a prevention or reduction of the stress experienced with language brokering. However, this was not found with girls. Love and Buriel explain that girls can view language brokering as something added to their household responsibilities and not seen as a reason for stress.

Within immigrant Latino families, it is expected for girls to spend a larger amount of time with their parents, having the ability to serve as LBs, and that girls traditionally

are given less independence than their brothers. This can explain the reasons as to why boys reported more autonomy (Love & Buriel, 2007).

Weisskirch (2007) also studied the family dynamics, language brokering experiences, emotions experienced when language brokering and adolescents level of self-esteem with 98 Mexican American seventh graders by having them answer a questionnaire. Boys reported translating more than girls, and feeling more pressured when language brokering than girls. The top five positive feelings reported by participants included feeling helpful, happy, proud, trusted and good/positive. The top five negative feelings reported included feeling angry, guilty, scrutinized, ashamed and anxious.

The study revealed that when the feelings expressed by participants were negative, there was an indication that there were family problems and/or conflict. When children experienced language brokering positively with the absence of family problems, the children had higher self-esteem. The study also revealed that the combination of being born in Mexico, being a male, experiencing negative emotions and self-esteem was a forecast of worse family relationships.

Perry (2014) studied three different African refugee families who had young children and all had different levels of education and English fluency level, focusing on the practice of brokering. Perry collected interviews and observational and artifactual data over a period of 18 months. Perry did this by visiting the families at least once a week and attending the children's classroom at least two times a month. Perry's research revealed that parents valued their children's brokering skills and for teaching them the language throughout the process. The parents reported feeling proud of their children,

viewed them as having competence with linguistic, literacy and cultural expertise and expected their children to provide this type of support. It was also found that both the parents and the children experienced literacy and language improvement and the children assisted the parents in understanding the U.S. culture.

Research on the relationship between parentification and language brokering has also been studied (Kam, 2011; Mercado, 2003). Parentification can be defined as a role reversal occurring when family members are involved in brokering or when children or youth see themselves as the adult in the family and act in mature ways beyond their age, also known as adult parentification (Kam, 2011).

Mercado (2003) studied the relationship between language brokering, parentification, stress and gender with 90 Latino undergraduate students attending school in New York City. Results demonstrated that high levels of language brokering were positively related with high levels of parentification, with females reporting higher levels of parentification, although language brokering was not found to be a gender specific task. The results also highlighted that participants who reported higher levels of parentification as a result, reported higher levels of stress. Mercado explains that stress occurs when LBs have to make decisions for others from what they have interpreted or translated. However, Kam (2011) found that brokering frequency was not related to parentification, demonstrating mixed findings.

#### How Outside Systems Have Helped With Language Brokering

There has been an increase of individuals living in the United States who do not know how to speak, write, read and understand English, resulting in the inability to interact with other systems in the community (Carter-Pokras et al., 2004). In the United



States, Latinos are the largest minority group (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009) with the Spanish language being the language most frequently spoken (Modern Language Association, 2009). It is now being recognized that the need and value of professional health care interpreters is important and the services for limited English proficient (LEP) individuals has grown (McDowell, Hilfinger Messias, & Estrada, 2011).

In health care settings the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care, also known as the CLAS standards, serves as a guide to implement language interpretation services in clinics, hospitals, and public health services in the United States (McDowell et al., 2011). McDowell et al. (2011) explain that in health care settings, policy makers, practitioners and researchers understand and realize that there is a need to provided language interpretation services to patients who do not speak English. Those interpretation services consisting of community language banks (volunteers who come in to help with language needs), telephone interpreters, contracted interpreters (work through an agency or freelance), on-staff salaried interpreters, bilingual staff and family members or friends (Carter-Pokras et al., 2004).

Carter-Pokras and his colleagues (2004) developed a questionnaire that was distributed to clinical practice managers from the University of Maryland School of Medicine to look at the need for resources and interpretation services provided to LEP patients. Results demonstrated that having interpreters in health care settings removing language barriers resulted in patient satisfaction, compliance with medications and appointments, and improved scores on health-status scales.

McDowell et al. (2011) also explain through their research the experiences and perspectives of health care interpretation work by interviewing 27 interpreters. Results highlighted the idea that interpretation work has many demands, where interpreters do not just serve as the voice of patients, but must also pay attention to nonverbal communication, culture, education levels and emotional status of patients to effectively deliver communication that the patient understands, and at the same time establish trust.

#### Positive Gains due to Language Brokering

In a study by Niehaus and Kumpiene (2014), the goal of the study was to determine if students in the sixth through 11<sup>th</sup> grade, proficient in both Spanish and English with language brokering experiences were associated with self-concept. The participants were 66 Latino students from public school districts in the Southeastern United States. Results from the study showed that foreign-born students had more positive feelings towards language brokering and language brokered more frequently than U.S. born students. It was determined that if students had positive feelings towards language brokering, they believed they could improve academically, they considered themselves somewhat popular, feeling more connected to peers at school and were happy and felt more confident about their physical appearance. The study also showed how first generation immigrants brokered more frequently in difficult circumstances and had a more positive outlook towards language brokering than United States born students, however students born in the United States expressed more happiness and satisfaction than students who were not born in the United States (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014).

Weisskirch (2005) also studied the effects of language brokering on Latino early adolescents, focusing on ethnic identity. Weisskirch studied 55 sixth graders through a

questionnaire focusing on their experiences and feelings towards language brokering, their level of acculturation and ethnic identity. Weisskirch explains how language brokering can be a way to learn behaviors, values, lifestyles and the language of the primary culture. How language brokering can lead to acculturation, meaning, adjusting and modifying one's self to live in a new environment (Weisskirch, 2005).

Participants from the study in most cases stated feeling positive about language brokering, girls having significant higher positive feelings, translating more frequently, and higher ethnic identity than boys. Adolescents in the study reported translating to help care for their parents, brokering helped them learn a different language, and described to feeling more grown up and overall feeling good about themselves, having a positive view on language brokering (Weisskirch, 2005). This study demonstrated that if children or adolescents, as well as young adults have a positive outlook, this experience can lead to stronger feelings about their ethnic identity and building stronger ties with their dominant culture, becoming bicultural (Weisskirch, 2005).

College students with two immigrant parents who LB has also been studied, focused on comparing non-LBs, infrequent LBs and frequent LBs with acculturation and ethnic identity (Weisskirch et al., 2011). Data were collected online from students at 14 different universities around the United States and was found that college students from immigrant parents who LB more frequently reported a greater possession of cultural values, practices and a greater sense of identity when compared to college students who LB less or not at all. Weisskirch and colleagues (2011) explain how language brokering can facilitate the preserving of cultural values and practices due to the experiences the children have with their parents in their "heritage language and culture" (p. 49). That the

more time being spent together and communicating with each other can increase knowledge about his or her culture from part of the child, adolescent, or young adult.

Luna (2013) also focused on studying the relationship of acculturation, hope, shame and resilience with 63 high school Latino students of Mexican descent in Oregon who indicated being LBs by completing a group administered questionnaire. Results showed that the students who LB more often in various settings, demonstrated more Mexican orientation, levels of internalized shame decreased, and levels of hope, agency and resilience went up. Luna explains that frequent language brokering is related to the decrease of participants viewing themselves negatively and provides LBs with a feeling of competence. It should be further noted that Mexican immigrant families hold the value of familism, being engaged in traditional practices and rituals, and strict parenting rules (Bacallo & Smokowski, 2007), highlighting the strong Mexican orientation participants reported (Luna, 2013).

According to Dorner, Orellana and Li-Grining (2007) their study revealed that higher levels of language brokering were positively linked to improved fifth and sixth grade standardized reading tests. The researcher's tested the hypothesis that language brokering is related to academic outcomes by having a longitudinal research design that followed 87 students test scores in math and reading over a period of five years by making a comparison of active LBs, partial LBs and non LBs. Results showed that active brokers improved on their reading and math when compared to their first and second grade scores and by scoring higher on their tests by fifth grade when compared to partial and non LBs. Dorner et al. (2007) highlight the idea that if family members work together with interpretation and translation frequently, the academic outcomes of children

can improve and the development of the child can be increased. Morales and Hanson (2005) also report that child LBs develop higher cognitive and decision-making skills because of their experiences as LBs.

#### Language Brokering with Different Latino Cultural Groups

There has been extensive research focused on the experiences of LBs with participants identifying as Mexican (Dorner et al., 2007; Kam, 2011; Love & Buriel, 2007; Luna, 2013; Morales et al., 2012; Orellana, Dorner & Pulido, 2003; Weisskirch, 2005, 2007, 2013). However, there have been other studies where researchers have utilized a combination of Latino backgrounds from participants, with a large portion of participants from most studies having identified as Mexican. Most of the participants from Kam and Lazarevic's (2014) study consisted of (89.3%) of Mexican, Mexican-American or Chicano descent, while 10.7% were of other Latino/Hispanic descent. Villanueva and Buriel's (2007) research also consisted primarily of participants of Mexican descent (88.9%), one participant identifying as Salvadorian, and one as mixed Latino, identifying as Guatemalan and Mexican. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2009) study focused on 90% of the participants tracing their origins to Mexico, while the remainder of the participants traced their origins to Peru or Central America. Dorner et al.'s. (2008) study focused on participants who identified as Mexican or from Central America, while Niehaus and Kumpiene (2014) had a combination of different Latino cultural backgrounds, with 49% of the participants born in the U.S., 21% from Cuba, 18% from Mexico and the remaining 12% from Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, Bolivia, Argentina and Ecuador. Weisskirch et al. (2011) had 41.4% of the participants identify as Latino,

and Corona et al. (2012) had several Latino countries of origin represented, which included those of Mexico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador.

Many of the studies did not identify major differences or similarities between different Latino backgrounds, but rather generalized the results by labeling all participants as Latinos. However, Niehaus and Kumpiene (2014) results highlighted the idea that language brokering frequency is related with country of origin. The researchers reported those participants born outside of the United States language brokered more often than United States born participants. Weisskirch (2007) also found in the study that there were differences from the participants based on where they were born. Participants who were born in Mexico were less acculturated than those participants who were born in the United States.

### Theories

Different theoretical perspectives have been applied to the research of language brokering. Niehaus and Kumpiene (2014) utilized Bandura's social cognitive theory (mastery experiences assist with having positive self beliefs) to apply to the results found in their study, which focused on the association between self-concept and language brokering with middle and high school students. Dorner et al. (2008) applied a grounded theory approach to analyze the data for themes and patterns; Martinez et al. (2009) applied and relied on the social interaction learning theory and utilized the ecodevelopmental theory approach, as the study focused on examining behavioral and emotional adjustment within the family, depending on the high or low demand of language brokering within the family. Martinez et al. looked at language brokering and the behavioral outcomes as a process that occurred, across various social contexts.

Kam and Lazarevic (2014) incorporated general strain theory and the theory of planned behavior to determine when language brokering could contribute to or secure early adolescents from the development of mental health outcomes, as the study focused on the direct and indirect effects of language brokering on mental and behavioral health consequences. Kam (2011) incorporated role theory and general strain theory in the research and Morales et al. (2012) applied the ecological theoretical model to guide the researcher's study that focused on understanding how brokering and the demands that come with the task, affected Mexican immigrant families.

The theory of resilience will be used as a guide for this study. Resilience can be defined as "widespread human capacity to cope effectively, adapt, maintain equilibrium, and even thrive in times of crises" (Collins, 2005, p. 1). Resilience can also be explained as individuals having protective factors that allow them to withstand to life stressors, which can include personal, family, social and organizational security (VanBreda, 2001). According to Greene (2002) resilience theory involves the process of person-in-environment exchanges, can happen across the lifespan of development and is connected to the stressors experienced in life and the coping capabilities individuals have. Greene also explains resilience as being increased through relatedness and connections people have with others and affected by diversity and resources available. Greene (2002) goes on to further explain that resilience is multi systemic, including micro, mezzo and macro factors that influence it.

Research by Luna (2013) highlights the idea that as LBs frequently serve as interpreters and/or translators for family members, higher degrees of resilience are experienced. Luna suggests that as an effect, LBs may have the ability to cope, adapt and

succeed in moments of difficulty. For this study, resilience theory will be applied, as it is consistent with the social work profession.

### Conclusion

This growing literature on language brokering has demonstrated mixed findings, including both the positive and negative consequences that come with interpreting and/or translating. Research has found that language brokering can bring the Latino family closer and in other cases create tensions in the home. Research has also highlighted the challenges experienced by LBs and how it affects their emotional state, stress, and mental health.

This study will contribute to the growing literature as it examines the experiences of Latino adults who have language brokered for their parents as a child or still do, the stressors involved, if any, and whether or not it affected the parent-child relationship. This study is unique in that it focuses on the experiences of Latino undergraduate/ university students from California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) who have or are currently language brokering. A gap addressed in the study is an exploration on how participants think schools and other settings could have or can help with the process of language brokering and to further explore the gifts or positive attributes LBs have gained due to their experiences.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design and Data Collection

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board of California State University, Long Beach, a qualitative, exploratory design with individual face-to-face interviews were conducted. Participants were recruited through non-probability purposive sampling. Flyers were passed out in classes within the Chicano and Latino Studies Department in CSULB. This was done after the researcher introduced herself to the class, informed students about the study, the procedure, eligibility criteria and provided contact information. The researcher presented her study to a total of five classes. A mass e-mail was also sent out to a total of 13 Latino Organizations on campus where the purpose of the study, procedure, eligibility criteria, attached flyer and contact information about the researcher was disclosed, in an effort for the flyer to be passed on to members of the organization on behalf of the researcher.

Participants were eligible to participate under the following criteria: (a) Participants identified as Latino/a. (b) Language brokered for their parents as a child or still did. (c) Were 18 years of age or older. Interested candidates contacted the researcher by both telephone and e-mail. The researcher explained the purpose, procedures, and identified whether or not they met criteria. If participants were interested after the screening process the researcher arranged a place and time to meet face-to-face and go

over the informed consent with the participant. It was at this point when participants were asked about their choice of a ten-dollar gift card from either Target or Starbucks as an incentive, which was handed at the end of each interview.

During the face-to-face meeting, the researcher explained the informed consent, read the informed consent and provided the participants with a copy. The researcher explained the limits of confidentiality and advised participants that some of the questions from the interview guide might make them feel upset or sad. Participants were reminded of their right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any point without consequences. Participants were given a list of mental health urgent care centers in the event that they experienced emotional distress because of the project.

Every participant was required to sign a consent form and given the choice to sign the consent to be audiotaped. All participants agreed to be audiotaped and all interviews were later transcribed. The interviews ranged from 30-40 minutes in duration and were conducted on campus, at the Coffee Bean, University Student Union, and in an empty room in the psychology building, as well as outside of campus in a coffee shop.

### Sample

The sample consisted of 14 self-identified Latino CSULB students who have had experiences as LBs for their parents. Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of the sample population. The age of the participants varied, with four of the participants identifying as 22 year old (29%), three of the participants were 23 (21%), three were 24 (21%), while two (14%) identified as having 25 years of age. The remaining two participants were 30 and 43 years old. The vast majority ( $n = 12$ , 86%) were female. Four participants reported living in the United States for 22 years (29%), three had 23

years living in the United States (21%), another three participants identified as having 24 years living in the United States (21%), while the remaining four participants had different responses. Over three fourths ( $n = 11$ , 79%) of the participants were second generation Americans, meaning they were born in the United States, while three participants (21%) identified as first generation Americans, meaning they were born outside of the United States. The participant's number of years as interpreters and translators for their parents varied. One participant did not respond to this question. Most ( $n = 11$ , 79%) of the participants identified as Mexican, while two (14%) participants identified as Salvadorian, and one (7%) participant as Guatemalan.

#### Instrument

The interviews were facilitated utilizing an interview guide that included six demographic questions developed by the researcher for participant's to fill out on a separate sheet, and open-ended questions related to participant's experiences as LBs that were developed from current literature about language brokering (Morales et al., 2012). The questions when necessary were adapted for an adult participant and six questions were created and added by the researcher (refer to the appendix for the interview guide and demographic questionnaire). The demographic questions included information on age, gender, number of years in the states, whether they were first generation or second generation American, how many years they did or have language brokered and their Latino ethnic background.

The first set of open-ended questions were related to participant's language brokering experience. Specific questions included, "Tell me about a time you interpreted and/or translated for your mom and/or dad?" and "What did you or do you usually

translate and/or interpret for your parents?” The second set of questions focused on feelings about language brokering. This section included a discussion on positive and negative feelings experienced, stressors involved with interpreting and translating, and an exploration on the parent’s feelings. The third set of questions focused on language brokering and the family. These questions included “What is your relationship like with your parents?” and “Is it different compared to your other brothers and sisters who did or do not broker?”

There was one open-ended question exploring participant’s perceptions on how public facilities should have and can help with the process of interpreting and translating. The researcher provided examples for this question, as several participant’s appeared confused and clarity was needed. This was followed by a set of questions related to the gifts or positive attributes gained due to language brokering. Questions included, “What do you think are some good things about having been/being a translator and interpreter for your parents?” For the final question, participant’s were given the opportunity to share any experience they felt was important for the researcher to know, if not discussed.

#### Data Analysis

The sample was described using frequencies. The interviews were transcribed and later examined to identify common themes utilizing content analysis. The researcher separated responses by questions, some questions being grouped together, depending on the similarity of the questions. The researcher read the responses repeatedly, highlighted similar words used by participants and codes were created by question capturing key thoughts/concepts, ultimately identifying themes and patterns in the data regarding the experiences of Latino university students who language brokered as a child or still did.

The main themes were summarized utilizing the narratives to highlight the findings of the researcher.

TABLE 1. Demographics of Study Sample

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
22	4	29
23	3	21
24	3	21
25	2	14
30	1	7
43	1	7
Gender		
Male	2	14
Female	12	86
Number of Years in the United States		
22	4	29
23	3	21
24	3	21
15	1	7
25	1	7
28	1	7
43	1	7
Generation		
1 <sup>st</sup> Generation American	3	21
2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation American	11	79
Number of Years as a LB		
11	1	7
12	2	14
14	1	7
15	2	14
16	1	7
17	2	14
18	1	7
20	1	7
22	1	7
30 +	1	7
Latino Background		
Mexican	11	79
Salvadorian	2	14
Guatemalan	1	7

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study through narratives of the participants. The first section depicts the language brokering experiences, including the various settings in which participants had to LB and frequency in how often they currently LB, in an effort to gain perspective on the needed assistance required from their parents. An exploration of the family dynamics and shared responsibility among family members to LB is also presented. The second section highlights both the positive and negative feelings experienced through language brokering. What follows is the stressors and difficulties experienced and the parent-child relationship is examined, to identify whether or not language brokering affected the parent-child relationship. The subsequent section highlights the participant's perceptions on how public facilities can assist with the process of language brokering and the chapter ends with the gifts and/or benefits that come with growing up in a home where language brokering is needed.

#### Language Brokering Experiences

The 14 participants discussed the different situations and settings in which they acted as LBs and what types of forms and in which instances they were LBs. Their words highlight their versatility, as they interacted with various systems/contexts, whether that was with individuals or with large organizations, reflecting the dynamic roles participants took.

Several common themes were identified, which included participants language brokering in doctor appointments for their parents, in school settings, and translating forms or documents. Nine (64%) of the participants stated that they were LBs during doctor appointments.

Participant #1: I have translated doctor appointments when my mom would take me as a kid. I remember I would go for my physical, and my doctor was a Caucasian lady, so the doctor would speak to me and I had to translate everything for my mom.

Participant #7: I translate mainly for my mom right now. She has a mental issue, she is schizophrenic. So I just went with her to her appointment like two weeks ago, and even though the doctor spoke Spanish, it's funny how I still had to translate it. Like my mom would ask me questions like "well what is she taking about why cant she say it in Spanish" but it's like, it's stuff my mom didn't want to hear, so she would tell me in English (the doctor) so I had to translate it for my mom and kinda make it nicer for her to hear and more understandable. Like I had to go from doctor language into my mother's language.

Participant #13: There was a time when I had to take my mom to her doctor's appointment. Her doctor couldn't speak Spanish so I had to translate for her . . . At one point my mom was really sick and we always had to go to the hospital or the clinic by our home, and um, I was always doing it.

Ten (71%) participants reported to language brokering for their parents at their school as a child. One participant shared, "I did it in school for open house every year, or maybe any school event, conference, teacher-parent conference." Others stated,

Participant 11: A specific time I can think of is while being at school when I was a kid, for back to school night or open house. I can remember going in to all my classes and having to translate from my teachers to my mother and the other way around. I do remember having difficulties at times with certain words having to translate them from English to Spanish for my mother to understand, which in those situations I do remember making something up or just cutting my translation short.



Participant 3: I did it in school as well and I also do it all the time for school documents that come in the mail from my sister or just school papers in general. In my school I interpreted everything, I could have told her like “yea I’m passing,” and I could be failing and she wouldn’t know. But you know I was pretty honest about it.

All but one of the ( $n = 13$ , 93%) participants stated that they interpreted and translated various forms and some types of documents. This included mail, letters, car insurance forms, bank statements, school notes as children, doctor forms and/or applications, insurance letters, bills, social security forms and IRS forms. One participant stated, “I remember when I was little, the school cafeteria application to see if I would qualify for free lunch, I would help my mom fill that out, as well as the emergency cards.” Others stated,

Participant 4: Mainly documents. Government based. Since my mother receives social security benefits whenever that comes I have to fill it out, or me and my sister have to fill it out. Or they are also semi having problems in the IRS on my mother’s side, so when that comes its like “oh this came in the mail for me, stop what you are doing and help me translate this for me.”

Participant 14: About a time is when it was a letter regarding my dad’s car insurance. So that is when my dad asked me to translate . . . the usual things I would say are bank statements, car insurance statements, any financial statements is usually what I have to interpret.

Six (43%) of the participants also shared having to LB for anything and everything that was in English and that their parents did not understand and needed help with. One participant stated, “I have done it in the stores and in the banks. Pretty much anywhere and everything I have done. Anything that was worded in English, I pretty much translated for them.” Others stated, “I would translate everything that was written in English,” or “All of the letters that they receive, either insurance letters, certain bills, or anything that is in English that they don’t understand.” One participant shared,

Participant 8: Well um, I usually do doctor appointments, my moms. I uh, call her pharmacy all the time to get her monthly prescriptions, uh, I've done some translations for her in the police department, um, say like I think it was a couple of months ago, she had a problem with her identity, so I had to translate everything, which was a little tough (giggles). I translate anything that has to do with my sister's in school . . . and um, I basically translate for everything.

Other places that were mentioned included stores, the Department of Motor Vehicles, restaurants, when watching television or movies, and language brokering for extended family members.

One participant narrates her first experience as a LB when she was five years old in a Woman, Infants and Children (WIC) center, demonstrating how early children from immigrant parents can begin interpreting and translating for their parents.

Participant 4: Okay, well the very first memory I have of translating, I was five, and we went to the WIC center because my mom was pregnant with my sister, the lady kept asking her, "what's your name?" and my mom was just staring at her and the lady would repeat it like "what's your name?" and then I remember, she had just picked me up from first grade and I barely knew the language as well, and I remember I pulled on her shirt and told her the lady was asking for her name, and I told her this in Spanish and then she is like "Oh," and then she told the lady her name, and the lady was all like, you know, the lady just laughs. And you know, this continues and I just kept doing it.

These narratives illustrate the work it takes for individuals to interpret and translate for their parents. As illustrated, these participants language brokered in various settings, underscoring the time and energy that went into assisting their parents with communication and understanding the English language.

When asked about the frequency of how often they did or currently LB for their parents, all 14 (100%) participants reported they continue the task of interpreting and translating. However, it was very common for participants to share that they did not do it as often as before. Ten (71%) participants shared this common theme.

Participant 2: As a child I would say in a week I would constantly do it because of school, take home papers maybe 4-5 times. Now since I no longer live with them it's less maybe twice a week when I am home visiting them.

Participant 4: Right now, not that often because I don't live with them, so maybe every 2 weeks I translate like a document, anything that came in the mail and they don't understand and want to verify, whether it is important or not. As a teenager all the time. I am going to say anywhere we went I would have to translate.

Four (29%) participants however, stated that they continue to LB for their parents often and on a regular basis. One participant shared, "Well, there is six days of the week that we get letters so I basically do it everyday. A lot of documentation is what I translate for my mom." While another stated "Now as an adult like four to five times a week." One other participant shared,

Participant 8: When I was a kid it was, I wanna say a couple times a week depending, but usually at the end of the month when all the bills came, it was like okay, in a week it could have been every single bill so like 4-5 times maybe, doctors appointments and stuff like that. Um, and during the month it would vary. And now I wanna say it is about the same.

During the interview, participants were also asked to share about their family dynamics, and whether or not they had other siblings that LB as well. All 14 participants identified as having siblings, 11 (79%) of them identifying as being the oldest. It was a common theme for them to also express having most of the responsibility with interpreting and translating for their parents, being their role as the oldest child in a Latino family. Nine (64%) participants expressed this common theme by stating,

Participant 10: I am the oldest so I would say that I do it the most and I feel that my parents depend on me the most to do it. If I am not available then it would either be my sister or my brother. But yes, I would say that I am the one that they go to the most.

Participant 12: Well like I said, I am the oldest of three boys and my younger brother would sometimes get asked by my parents to translate things but he would not be able to do it. My parents would constantly say “ill just ask your brother” and me being the oldest child it would always fall on me to do the translating around the house.

Also, over half of the participants ( $n = 9$ , 64%) stated that language brokering was a shared responsibility between siblings in the home. Emphasizing the mutual help that was being provided to the parents in the Latino household and seen as an important value that the Latino family holds.

Participant 12: I have an older and younger sister and we all help to translate. I am the second oldest child, me and my older sister shared the responsibility most of the time when we were younger and helped each other out at times to translate. If I was translating and I didn't know a word, I would ask her, she would jump in, and then it was better and quicker because we were both helping. I did this and she did this as well.

Other participants shared, “Yes we would sometimes share the responsibility evenly because pretty much who ever was with my mom at the time would translate for her” and, “I have a younger sister and my sister does it when I am not around.”

#### Feelings Experienced Through Language Brokering

Participants were asked to share about the feelings they have experienced when interpreting and/or translating for their parents. Participants were asked to identify a positive and a negative feeling. It was a common theme for participants to reveal feeling valued and needed through their narratives. The participants, being helpful, providing support and doing for others, for their parents, expressed a sense of altruism. Nine (64%) participants shared this common theme by stating,

Participant 4: A positive feeling is that I feel like I help them. I do. Well I give them some sense of relief, I feel like this is something that they don't have to worry about because they depend on me to do it.

Participant 6: When my brother was getting into trouble in high school nobody spoke Spanish and people that did speak, it was broken Spanish so I was able to advocate for my mom and help her. Because even though she didn't speak the language she had somebody there for her. So that is a positive feeling. And providing her support.

Participant 5: They are my parents and helping them when they need it gives me a good feeling because I know they need my help and I feel good about it, because I provide them with less stress or worry because they know I can help them and they know I will.

Participant 9: I never mind translating for my parents, but I guess a positive feeling would be the satisfaction of giving back to my parents in sort of way. Meaning that my parents always tried their best in helping me and my sisters and brother out. So the least I was able to do was to translate for them.

Two (14%) participants also expressed feeling proud of themselves for having the ability to speak two languages and assisting their parents with communication.

Participant 2: I feel like the positive feeling was that I was really proud of myself. Because growing up you didn't know too many people who knew how to speak two languages fluently. Because I can read, write and speak fluently in English really well.

Participant 8: Well um, sometimes I feel really proud because I sometimes have struggled with translating but I find the means to explain it or either I think about something else and it comes back to me. So um, sometimes I do feel proud that I am able to translate and help. More that I am able to help because with translating you can figure out a way to do it, I mean there is other resources you can use, but to me I feel more proud when I am able to help them and really read it and translate it for them correctly.

One participant expressed feeling grateful by stating, "A positive feeling would be grateful because if it wasn't for my mom coming to the U.S. then I would have probably not learned the English language." Additionally, two (14%) participants were not able to identify a positive feeling. Participants expressed never having to think about language

brokering, so never really paying attention to their emotions tied with the responsibility.

Language brokering was expressed as just something they grew up doing.

Participant 7: I don't know how I feel about it, I really haven't thought about it. I feel like I have been so used to doing it that I don't even know how I feel about it. I have always just been expected to do it.

When asked about negative feelings experienced, it was a common theme for participants to feel frustrated when having to interpret and/or translate for their parents ( $n = 9$ , 64%). As participants expressed, this frustration was due to a variety of reasons. Frustration because of the challenge with terminology or because of the pressure placed on them by their parents, their parents depending on them and feeling obligated to LB. Or simply because they had many other demands to uphold to and language brokering was something else they had to add in. Participants stated,

Participant 10: A negative feeling would be that they just depend on me, like, "can you help me, tell me what this means" or um, I would say frustration because sometimes I have other things to do or um I have to make time to go and interpret and drive to my parents home when I have other demands in the home. It's just something that I have to work in my schedule, next to my job, picking up my kids, cooking, and getting my kids to bed.

Participant 11: If I had to pick a negative feeling I guess it would be frustration because sometimes I couldn't translate some words. It was difficult for me in instances when I had no idea how to do it so I felt frustrated, frustrated that I did not understand and could not help my parents.

Participant 3: I feel frustrated, like when I don't have things to do, I don't mind, but I am a college student . . . I feel like it is a lot of pressure on me because they depend on me and I am the only one that can do it. I sometimes feel obligated because if I don't do it, who else is going to do it, you know. And even my sister she tells me "you do it better, I cant" and she was born here, so she speaks it, but the thing is, she speaks Spanish, but it is not fluent, she has trouble.

Participants expressed a sense of obligation, being aware that if they did not help their parents, their parents did not know who else to ask. Therefore, their parents would be unaware of what to do and ultimately not get things done or maneuver through the American life. This knowledge and need resulted in the children taking on the responsibility as interpreters and translators.

Three (21%) other participants described having felt embarrassed. One participant shared, “I was embarrassed because I knew my parents could do it. I was embarrassed because my dad wouldn’t know and he has been here for many many years.” One participant expressed feeling she was an enabler for her mother, stating, “that I am enabling her, because if I wasn’t there she would have to learn English and she would be able to speak for herself, advocate for herself and do much more things.” Additionally, one other participant expressed feeling disappointed in herself for not being able to fully help her parents due to not knowing the Spanish language fluently, and she had feelings of inadequacy. She states,

Participant 14: I would say I feel disappointment in myself that I don’t know the language. Because I went to a Latino dominated school you know, like I took French courses, while my friends were taking Spanish, their writing was getting better, they were taking AP literature, and I was like “I cannot even read this” so that’s why. My parents came from Mexico here and Spanish is what was spoken mostly in the home but then I started going to school and things changed. And when I came to college, I mean, I was in a (pause) my field is not Latino dominated. I major in math, so I would say there is a lack in representation in the math field.

Other participants expressed feelings of inadequacy and not being understood by their parents as to why they could not in some instances interpret as children and as adults. Participants expressed their parents had high, unfair expectations that they know

English since they were in the United States and going to school and learning the English language. Three (21%) participants shared this theme stating,

Participant 5: Whenever I don't understand something they are like "well you speak English don't you, why cant you understand it, you go to school, why cant you understand it?" and I am like "I don't know these words, I don't know." And my parents get mad when I tell them I don't know because they expect me to be able to help them since I am from here, and born here.

Participant 2: I think it was a little bit harder when becoming a teenager only because of my shyness and because my parents due to lack of education they really didn't know how to handle it. Because I was shy they couldn't understand why I was shy. So my dad would think, "you don't know what he is saying." If I couldn't translate it correctly to him or fast or whatever, he would become angry. He would be frustrated for him, and then for me. But I couldn't say anything because I was a kid. So in his mind, he would say, "she doesn't know what she is doing, she's slow" basically . . . I didn't want to help. Because I knew that I was going to be called names by my dad or scolded and get in trouble so I kinda stood away from it and felt frustrated.

#### Stressors and Difficulties Associated with Language Brokering

Participants were also asked to share about their experiences pertaining to difficulties they have had as LBs. All, but one participant who did not answer the question ( $n = 13$ , 93%) attributed their difficulties or challenges to not knowing specific words or terminology in the Spanish or English language and not knowing what certain words meant or how those words can be translated effectively. They shared,

Participant 4: I don't have a specific time, but I know there were instances um, like in legal matters, that I couldn't explain to them what it was saying because there were certain terms that I didn't know what they meant, those terms weren't in my vocabulary.

Participant 9: A time that was hard, I remember it was when my dad got a bank statement. I think they were offering like \$100 if you would open a saving account or something like that. It is the terminology, I just couldn't translate it. I just couldn't translate it, I was wondering how do you translate certain words in



Spanish, I went on Google translate and it didn't sound right. So that was a challenge, especially with the jargon. What made it difficult for me was the terms and being able to switch between two languages at the same time.

Two (14%) out of the 13 participants also attributed their difficulties as LBs to their shyness as children. One stated, "Um, probably before I became a teenager, only because I was extremely shy and I felt like I was saying the wrong thing." While the other shared, "yes, all the time. Especially because I was shy, really really shy. Um, and I still am, but it was really hard speaking out or advocating for my mom when she didn't understand something when I was a kid."

Four (29%) of the participants stated how they would attempt to explain difficult terms they did not understand to their parents by providing examples and explaining or describing the term/s.

Participant 8: Uh, well a few weeks ago when I was translating for the police department, um, there was this word that I just got stuck on and I had to define it for them, like explain it so that they would understand what I was trying to say, but I also have trouble sometimes. So it's like I know what it means in English but with my mom, I think he (the cop) was giving me some policy about identity theft, and so I knew what he was talking about but I couldn't translate it to my mom. So I had to explain it to her too and it's a lot of explanations. It made it difficult because I understood it in English but in Spanish I totally forgot the word so I had to explain it.

Participant 1: There are times when I even tell my mom, "I know what it means in English, but sometimes in Spanish it does not have the same meaning or a different word is used." Like you cant just literally translate it with one word, and I try to Google it or something and I show it to her and she is like "I have never heard it before" and it is the Spanish word. So I try to define it and try to explain it to her . . . the content is what sometimes makes it difficult for me.

Participant 3: There was a time when my mom received a document from the government regarding her citizenship and it was difficult to translate because it had some words that I knew in English but never had to translate in Spanish. So I had to give my mom different examples until she was able to understand me.

That's normally how I do it, if I don't know a word in Spanish, I go my way around it and provide examples, like I describe the word.

Two (14%) out of the 13 participants also expressed a lack of understanding when they had to LB in occasions, but they also felt a sense of obligation to LB because they knew more English than their parents. One participant stated "And because even though my Spanish was not perfect, I knew more English than my parents so it was expected of me to help." The other participant shared,

Participant 9: As a child when I didn't understand certain documents, like doctors or letters they would receive in the mail, or things like that. That I wasn't really able to understand, but I still had to translate because I at least understood more than them.

In regards to stressors experienced by participants due to language brokering, it was a common theme for participants to ascribe their stress to the large amounts of paperwork that needed translation for their parents. As college students, having many demands, they added language brokering to their agenda as well. Five (36%) participants shared this common theme stating,

Participant 3: Again, it goes back to that, you get home and like they are like "hi, how was your day" "it was good" and they have the papers in their hand, and then you are like "okay." And then sometimes you are sitting there and translating and thinking you have so much stuff to do but I am here doing this. I mean, I don't mind where it is that big of a deal where I am upset or mad, no, no, its just that it is a bit stressing, when I think about it and I have other stuff to do, and I also have a job, so.

Participant 7: Yes, going on right now, with the whole healthcare issue, we applied for it along time ago, but like, my parents put it on me, because it hasn't happened, so the papers finally came in this week, week of finals when I am never home because I am typing all these papers out, so my dad is kinda like "do it now, do it now" but I hate that I have to be the only one to translate it and fill it out. So it's annoying and frustrating and this responsibility falls on me and I work. My mom before getting mentally ill, she was able to speak and understand English

very little and my dad understands it, but he can't speak it. So right now I am feeling a little stressed out with all that is going on.

Participants felt the pressure and the stress accumulate due to the demands and expectations from the parents to help at home.

Four (29%) participants reported to experiencing stress due to feeling the inability to help their parents understand what needed to be translated or interpreted because they themselves did not know or understand. One participant stated, "because she doesn't understand what I am saying and I can't find a way to tell her in a way she understands, I get stressed." Others shared,

Participant 5: Even until now, sometimes I get stuck with words or I simply just don't know how to explain such complex situations or concepts so that causes some stress on my part because my parents are relying on me to help them.

Participants expressed having to go above and beyond to translate a document, or look up words they didn't understand, or use online resources such as Google translate.

Participant 8: A lot of the government documentation she gets from like Medical and all that stuff. They use a lot of big words, so I primarily use dictionaries (giggles) and then if I don't find like the word or something, or a way of how to explain it for her I use translators, but I mean I am more dependent on my own and I try to figure it out. If it comes to where I am really stuck and I don't know what to say, like I do use resources.

Participant 14: When my parents need the translation at that moment that is when I feel stressed out because I don't know who to reach out to, to translate. And Google is not the best, so the pressure is on me and you know (laughs).

Two (14%) participants contributed their stress of language brokering to the expectation their parents had, to know everything that needed to be language brokered in Spanish, even when they realistically did not know. Participants stated,

Participant 10: Yea, well when I was child and I wasn't fluent in English um, it was very stressful for me translating to my parents what a letter would say or other documentations. Some of the words I didn't know what they meant and they would also get frustrated and be like "well, why are you going to school then" or stuff like that. So I did feel that pressure that I had to know everything just to make my parents feel happy.

Participant 11: I had no clue what something meant and that would get my parents mad, and just stress me out because they ask for my help and sometimes I wouldn't know and they expected for me to know. Like I said before, my parents have always relied on me for the translation, I was born here, I learned English when I was very little starting school and I am much more fluent in the English language than my parents, so I feel like they expected me to know everything since I know the English language very good. Even until now, sometimes I get stuck with words or I simply just don't know how to explain such complex situations or concepts so that causes some stress on my part because my parents are relying on me to help them.

One participant expressed feeling stressed as a child due to taking on an adult role in her family. In some sense, having gone through parentification because she was taking on adult responsibilities at such a young age that she expressed adults were only supposed to do. She states,

Participant 9: I feel like even when I was younger and now, being the oldest it made me feel like I wasn't a child, like I had to know about certain things that I wasn't supposed to. Like life insurance, car insurance. Things like that, that I really didn't care for when I was younger but I had to learn to be able to help my parents. Um, so I was stressed because I felt like I was growing up too fast or like I was exposed to things I shouldn't have been exposed to when I was younger. I felt like I had to be like a mom and take adult responsibilities.

However, there were 4 (29%) participants that expressed language brokering did not cause them stress. They shared, "never stressed out, but like I said before, frustration yes," and "it didn't really ever make me feel stressed out."

### Language Brokering and the Parent-Child Relationship

For many of the participants, language brokering was not something that affected the relationship they have with their parents. Language brokering was seen as “normal.” It was expected of them to help their parents as they grew up assisting their parents with communication through interpretation and translation. It simply just became an expected, ordinary task. It was a norm for many of the participants in their Latino households. For those reasons, 10 (71%) participants expressed that LB did not affect their parent-child relationship.

Participants stated, “I think this is just something that I felt it was just something I had to do since I was little, it was normal and I never saw nothing wrong with it,” “I just think my parents are not embarrassed to ask me for help when they need it, this has just become something we do. I help them when I can and when I know how.” Other’s shared, “I don’t think it has, because we are family that always helps each other out,” and “No, I don’t think so because it was just a role I took on and was very normal for me to do.” One participant stated,

Participant 13: Again, like I said in my home, I grew up with it and it was just something else I had to do. I never thought about it growing up as something bad or wrong, it was quite normal in my family. It was just something that I did and that I continue to do.

However, there were two (14%) participants that stated language brokering did in fact make them closer to their parents, as they were able to communicate with them, have constant conversations with them, because they were with their parents for a lot of the time assisting them with different situations and encounters. Participants shared, “maybe in a sense it made me closer to my parents because I knew all of their personal matters in

certain instances because I had to interpret,” and “I think we became closer because that is a way we had conversations. I would say that was a good thing, was that we got closer because we could understand each other.”

Additionally, two (14%) participants shared that they became more mature, and depended on more by their parents. Their parents saw them as much more mature than their age, therefore giving them more responsibilities. The participants were not necessarily seen as children, but rather as adults by their parents. This is how participants expressed language brokering affecting the relationship they have with their parents.

Participant 11: I want to say it did but not drastically. Like with my mom she has always depended on me when she came to the realization that I could help her with translation. She has always depended on me to communicate so that is another role I took, and in that sense the relationship changed a little, I had another responsibility . . . But with me translating for them, they kinda feel like I am at their level of maturity, I was an adult, even though I was five years old you know, when I started. I mean when I was five they didn't tell me things, but now, I am growing up and they know that when something serious comes up, they know they have to come to me.

One participant shared that it also had to do with her father not being present in the home. She states,

Participant 8: Well, my mother became a little bit more dependent on me, I have an adult responsibility. I feel like with a father there it would have been different; I wouldn't have that much responsibility. But since my dad left, I do feel like I got most of the responsibility, so it did change in that sense. But um, yea I think that is the only way I feel that it has changed this far.

#### Language Brokering and Perceptions on How to Help

Participants were asked to share on how they thought public facilities could help with the process of language brokering. Thirteen out of the 14 participants answered this question. It was a common theme for participants to express that interpreter services

have improved when compared to how they were in the past, this being due to the growing population of Latinos. However, they believed that there continues to be a lack of bilingual staff and certified interpreters in various public facilities. They expressed that hiring more bilingual staff or interpreters that are consistently present to assist when needed, is what they perceived could be done to help with the process of language brokering. Eleven (79%) participants shared this common theme and stated,

Participant 14: Maybe I would say invest in certified interpreters, because I know at the school I work at, we have a certified interpreter and she does an amazing job. So to just, I call it an investment you know, to serve their people, minorities, especially because we are the growing minority, so that's why I think, especially in Latino dominated communities to invest and hire certified interpreters.

Participant 11: What I am trying to say is that if public places, if they offer Spanish language, my parents would have not felt the need to take me so I could help them and translate for them. I think they should hire bilingual people and then our job (meaning herself and the researcher) will be taken away.

One of the 11 participants expressed that hiring bilingual staff was important but also emphasized the need to hire individuals who spoke the Spanish language fluently and not just broken Spanish, meaning, that they would not interpret the meaning of messages and omit and/or change words. She shared,

Participant 9: Providing people who are actually fit to translate. I feel like a lot of places just have people who speak broken Spanish and not fluently, and it doesn't deliver the message you know. Its vague, very basic, and especially government agencies should have people that really really understand and who really have a sense of vocabulary and comprehension to really interpret, because sometimes you really miss important details or words that should have been addressed and weren't and they can cause parents to have negative consequences. So to just have people who really do know how to translate from English to Spanish, and that can accurately translate and not just people who speak broken Spanish or Spanglish.

Two (14%) of the 11 participants also expressed the importance of providing documents or mail forms that were in the Spanish language, as a way in which public facilities could help with the process of language brokering. One participant stated,

Participant 6: Send the information in languages other than English depending on the languages needed as well. There are so many times my mom gets forms sent in the mail that is in English and I am just like “why would they do that?” Sending forms in Spanish I think as well would help.

One participant expressed that in order for public facilities to help with the process of language brokering, providing consistent and efficient translators is what is needed. She describes her experiences in the court and in the school as a LB for her mother and how inconsistent the interpretation services provided were.

Participant 8: Um, I don't know but to me I feel like they should have someone who is professionally good at that, in that area (translation/interpretation). Because I do feel like when you are stuck, you are stuck, and sometimes you just can't figure it out. I mean this has happened to me a couple times, well more than a couple times, but I feel like they don't have, (pause) they say they do because I know in the court they offered my mom one, and then when we got there they were all like “oh, this person got called away or something.” And so, in that case I was like, well, ill do it. In that case, I feel like they promote a lot of translation services but once you are there it's like no, “you better find someone to help you.” And that has happened to me in the school with my mom. For a parent conference one time she got a translator, the translator couldn't even speak Spanish, so my mom kept on looking at me. So I stepped in and I was trying to explain to her what the translator was saying. So I feel like there is not efficient translators and there is not a lot of translators that are being offered in these different type of government services, there is no consistency, and I feel that is what we lack.

Additionally, one participant expressed that services for individuals who don't speak Spanish have progressed and there was nothing more that could be done to assist with the process of language brokering within public facilities. She states,



Participant 4: I think now it is so much easier since a lot of places are bilingual. But I feel like that is just the way society had made it. But back then I remember, besides east LA like if you went out of that area there wouldn't be anybody else. I remember there would always just be that one Spanish speaking person and you kinda just had to wait for them. But now its like, half of the people speak Spanish. I feel like it has gotten so much better. Like some forms come in Spanish now. I thing we have moved forward so I think we are good now.

#### Gifts or Positive Attributes Gained

Eleven (79%) participants expressed that being fluent in both Spanish and English was a positive thing and obtaining that skill was due to their experiences as LB's and was seen as good. They were able to communicate with diverse individuals and expressed that was a benefit acquired. Participants stated,

Participant 6: I think the good thing now is that I am really fluent. I am fluent in Spanish, and I am able to read and I am able to write it. I know how to give directions to people. It's just really good communication that I've learned along the way. So that is one thing that I take from it, that I don't really necessarily mind that I have to translate for my parents. Just because I know that in the long run, it helped me out.

Participant 2: I think my Spanish skills are way better, um, there is a big improvement, um, even in writing and just um speaking to people, it's easier for me, the same in either Spanish or English. Its like if I see someone that needs help I will jump in, because I am confident that I am actually translating the correct things.

Participant 10: Um, well if anything my Spanish is pretty good. I feel like I am very fluent in the Spanish language, I can read, write and speak it well. Yes it is not completely perfect but I am able to have a very good conversation with others who speak Spanish. I am pretty confident with my Spanish fluency.

It was a common theme for participants to express the benefits that came with indicating in their resume that they were bilingual. Seven (50%) participants stated how language brokering and becoming fluent in two languages has benefited them in the

workplace, obtaining a job, and making themselves more marketable in the work area for future careers due to the ability of speaking two languages fluently. They shared, “I think it will benefit me in finding my future career job, as I think of being bilingual as a good asset.”

Participant 13: Yes it has benefited me because by translating at a young age I learned new words that have helped me out as an adult. I can now talk to people in both English and Spanish. I work at Target as a cashier and I can help those customers who speak English and who also speak Spanish because I know the language. And that always looks good for my boss and I think it could have also helped me when I first filled out the application.

Participant 3: Again, that I know the second language, I am more marketable, like that is on my resume, definitely. That I know two languages and when I talk to my boss he is all like “that is something we are looking for, people who can speak it well.”

Five (36%) participants expressed that remaining close to their background roots and culture is a benefit and a positive gain they take from their experiences as LB’s. Language brokering allowed them to stay connected to their family and cultural values or way of living, by staying linked to their parents. They shared, “when you live in a home where Spanish is spoken every day, you grow up watching “novelas” (soap operas) and shows in Spanish, so you pick up a lot of sayings or quotes that cannot be taught in books,” and “I think I found my identity through the means of interpretation and I feel proud of it. Culturally I became more in tune with my own culture.” One other participant shared, “My parents are from El Salvador, so I learned many terms that they say over there. I think that has helped me in staying in touch with where I come from and learning.” One participant, from Guatemala shares how she always helped her mom with community work with an organization focused on helping individuals who identified as

Guatemalan. Through this experience she learned about her culture and the Spanish language as well, assisting with her fluency. She states,

Participant 6: My mom, she does a lot of community service work, she works with an organization in LA and they help Guatemalan people. So she helps a lot and I help her and go to her events and there is people that I talk to so you get to know a lot more people and it helps you I guess broaden who you know and I didn't know much about my roots and I helped her with community work and I know about the Mayan people now.

Two (14%) participants shared they gained confidence, they were no longer afraid to speak out and they were able to build interpersonal skills and build relationships. They stated, "I am not shy as I was as a kid . . . I am confident in my abilities to interpret for my mom or others," and

Participant 11: Being a translator has given me a bit more of a public speaking voice, not as nervous or timid to speak out. I think it has also helped with my people skills, I believe it has helped me with interaction between people, holding a conversation with a person I don't know.

Lastly, two (14%) participants also expressed how language brokering prepared them for adulthood and saw it as a benefit, by becoming aware of the many different situations in which their parents were placed. Situations that they would experience as adults and having the experience of filling out forms and communicating with different people to receive services. They shared,

Participant 8: I wanna say that I am familiar with everything. I mean, when I was 15 I knew everything about bills, I knew how to do everything. I knew how to fill out forms, job applications. I filled out all of my mom's job applications, my dad's job applications, I was set. When I was 18 and they would tell me "fill this out" I was like "oh, okay, I can do this" I didn't have to be like "Oh my god, can you help me (giggles)."

Participant 7: I guess, knowledge since you have to know how things work or what they are saying, you end up knowing what your parents are going through. So I am more familiar with the types of things that I might have to do in the future. Like the whole tax season, I didn't know about it, but the first time I did my own I thought it was easy because I had already gone through this with my parents. And now the whole IRS thing that my parents are going through . . . now I know how much we owe, or why it happened, and my parents are still trying to fight it, so I feel like it has brought me more awareness of what the family is going through.

Other participants also shared how helping their parents and continuously practicing the Spanish language were positive outcomes.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This qualitative study was designed to examine the experiences of Latino students from California State University, Long Beach who have language brokered for their parents in their childhood currently as adults. The study focused on the experiences, the stressors and difficulties associated with language brokering, whether or not language brokering affected the parent-child relationship, the participants perceptions on how public facilities could assist with interpretation and translations services, as well as the gifts gained through their role as LBs for their parents. This chapter is a discussion of the data presented in chapter four with the implications for social work, limitations of the study and the directions to follow for future research on the topic.

#### Summary of Findings

The participants in the study identified various contexts in which they acted as LBs for their parents. Most often, interpreting and translating during medical/doctor appointments, in their schools as children, and translating various forms and documents. This finding is consistent with the work of Corona et al. (2012) suggesting that interpretation and translation services need to be primarily focused in school and medical settings, such as hospitals and clinics. Participants also expressed they LB in stores, various public service facilities, in restaurants and while watching television, supporting

the work of Corona et al. (2012), Dorner et al. (2008), McQuillan and Tse (1995), Morales et al. (2012), and Tse (1995a, 1995b).

Many of the participants reported they began interpreting and translating for their parents at a very young age during elementary school, the youngest at age five. All participants had over 10 years as LBs and three of them had over 19 years as LBs. These findings are consistent with the early findings of McQuillan and Tse (1995) and Tse (1995a) who found that language brokering typically began as young as eight or nine years of age during elementary school. However, this current study reveals that children can begin assisting their parents as young as five years of age, really highlighting the need for interpretation services for parents who only know the Spanish language.

This study also revealed that it was typically the oldest child in the family who held most of the responsibility for assisting their parents ( $n = 11$ ), these results are consistent with the previous research of Luna (2013) and Morales and Hanson (2005). The majority of participants were also female ( $n = 10$ ), supporting previous research as well (Luna, 2013; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Villanueva & Buriel, 2010; Weisskirch, 2005). Over half of the participants (64%) expressed that language brokering for their parents was a shared responsibility with their siblings. Mutual help was provided and it was typical for a sibling to jump in when help was needed or when the oldest sibling was not home. These responses are consistent with the work of Dorner et al. (2008), who stated that language brokering was seen as a family task. Suggesting that assisting each other in a Latino household through challenges and difficulties is very common and consistent with the value of familism that the Latino family holds.

The positive feelings expressed by participants through their experiences as LBs were feelings of being valued and needed, proud and grateful. Valued and needed because they were helping their parents and supporting them. Proud of themselves because they could speak two languages and therefore help their parents, and grateful because due to their parent's sacrifices, they learned two languages. Feeling proud and helpful was consistent with research done by Corona et al. (2012), Morales et al. (2012) and Weisskirch (2007). However, the feelings of being valued, needed and grateful were unique to the participants in the current study.

Negative feelings associated with language brokering by participants included feeling frustrated, embarrassed, enabling, disappointed and inadequate. Frustrated with the task of having to LB either because the terminology was too difficult, because of the pressure placed on the participants by their parents to LB, the dependency of their parents, feeling obligated to LB, or frustrated because they had many other demands and language brokering was an added responsibility. Participants expressed having felt embarrassed about their parents for not knowing the English language, and one participant reported having felt disappointed in herself for not being completely fluent in Spanish and therefore, unable to help her parents fully. A feeling of inadequacy by three participants was expressed, as they perceived there was an unfair expectation from their parents to know English fluently.

The feelings of frustration and obligation as expressed by participants are consistent with previous research by Corona et al. (2012) and Morales et al. (2012). However the negative feelings found through this research are not consistent with the work of Weisskirch (2007), which stated that adolescents experience feelings of

anxiousness, anger and scrutiny. Suggesting that LBs experience a range of emotions due to the responsibility and role they take within their family, and that those feelings are not one-dimensional across all individuals who LB.

The stressors and difficulties associated with language brokering uncovered through this study included challenges with the terminology in either the Spanish or the English language. Not knowing what certain words meant and having a lack of understanding about what needed to be interpreted or translated in order to get the accurate message across to their parents was expressed as a difficulty. These results are consistent with the work of Corona et al. (2012), Morales et al. (2012), Villanueva and Buriel (2010) and Weisskirch (2005) who stated that vocabulary, comprehension, pronunciation, and having to switch between two languages was a challenge and was seen as stressful.

Participants in the study also attributed their stress and difficulties to the large amount of paperwork that needed translation for their parents, the demands, pressure and expectations from their parents to assist in the home, and to know the meaning of everything that needed to be interpreted and/or translated, when realistically, there were instances when they did not know, which left them feeling unable to help their parents. These results are consistent with the work of Kam (2011) and Weisskirch (2005).

Two participants also contributed their difficulties as LBs to being shy as children and feeling incapable of speaking out. One participant expressed feeling stressed as a child due to the adult responsibilities she had to take on and feeling like she was growing up too fast, being exposed to adult situations that her parents were placed in and feeling like a “mom.” This finding is inconsistent with that of Dorner et al. (2008) who stated



role reversal does not occur. This specific participant expressed having to take on adult responsibilities, consistent with the work of Morales and Hanson (2005) who stated that LBs have adult-like responsibilities, on occasions having to make decisions for their parents, and this could ultimately be seen as a stressor. Once again, demonstrating the need for interpretation and/or translation services for parents who have LEP. These services would have relieved the stress and the tasks that this one participant had to take on. Although the rest of the 13 participants did not share this finding, it is important to keep in mind and make services available. Lastly, four participants expressed language brokering did not cause them stress.

The findings for stressors and difficulties in this research are not consistent with the findings of Kam and Lazarevic (2014) and Rainey et al. (2014) who stated that more anxiety and depression is present in LB's. Kam (2011) who found that family acculturation stress is experienced with frequent interpretation and/or translation, and having negative feelings towards the task and with Weisskirch (2011) and Niehaus and Kumpiene (2014) who found that acculturation stress was a result of language brokering, due to the difficulties experienced by trying to maintain ethnic identity and at the same time learning the American culture. Participants from this study did not express these sentiments.

A key finding in this study is that language brokering did not affect the parent child relationship. Ten participants shared this idea by revealing that language brokering was something "normal," something that they grew up doing and did not think of it as something wrong. It was always expected of them. Language brokering was not seen as something necessarily bad or good, they just did it and it was a norm in their household.

These results are consistent with the work of Corona et al. (2012) who focused on the parent-child relationship with 25 Latino adolescents and found that language brokering was seen as normal, as expressed by both the youth and the parents involved in that study.

Two participants expressed language brokering did in fact make them closer to their parents. Attributing it to the ability to communicate with their parents, spend time with them, helping them and knowing their parent's personal matters. However, two participants also revealed that due to brokering, they were more depended on by their parents and were seen as much more mature than their chronological age. These contrasting views are consistent with the two views on the issue of language brokering expressed by Kam (2011), Morales and Hanson (2005), and Weisskirch (2007) whom stated that language brokering can either be seen as a role a child takes that will negatively affect family dynamics and interrupt designated roles, or seen as a role that helps both the parent and the child bond and grow together.

When asked about perceptions on how public facilities can help with the process of language brokering, over three fourths (79%) of the participants shared hiring bilingual staff and interpreters who were fluent, were reliable and the services were consistent, is what needed to be done in an effort to address that gap of communication. It was also highlighted by one participant that hiring individuals who speak broken Spanish is not efficient, as often times through her experience, words are omitted and/or changed and the meaning of messages are vague or not accurately addressed. It was also suggested by two participants that providing documents and forms or mail in the Spanish language would be helpful. However, one participant suggested that nothing more needed to be

done in regards to providing interpretation and translations services, as this participant believed progress has been made and there was nothing more that she thought could be done.

These findings are unique in this study, as participants share and discuss what needs to be done, in an effort for the LB responsibility to be placed on workers and/or professionals or certified interpreters and translators. Ultimately, these participants have been LB's since childhood, understanding the steps systems and public facilities can and need to take to ensure appropriate services for their parents who have limited English proficiency are provided. Research by Carter-Pokras et al. (2004) and McDowell et al. (2011) denote that in health care settings, language interpretation services are imperative and interpretation services are being provided. Participants in this study recognize that, but also believe more can be done to ensure services for the growing population of Latinos in various public facilities are offered.

Lastly, participants discussed and shared the gifts, benefits and positive attributes they felt they gained due to their experiences as LBs. Eleven participants shared being fluent in two languages was a positive outcome, this result consistent with the work of Weisskirch (2005). Being fluent in both the English and Spanish language, participants felt it benefited them in the work place, as they perceived themselves as more marketable and with more opportunities to find a job, indicating they were bilingual in their resume. This finding was unique to this study.

Five participants also expressed that remaining connected to their culture and ethnic identity was seen as a gain and benefit. These results support the work of Weisskirch (2005) and Weisskirch et al. (2011) who stated that language brokering could

assist with the maintaining of cultural practices and values and gaining knowledge on their culture. However, this finding was not consistent with the work of Martinez et al. (2009) in which the results suggested that if language brokering was done frequently, the LB had a less sense of ethnic belonging. These results demonstrating mixed findings.

Participants in the study also gained confidence, had the ability to practice the Spanish language and help their parents. Two participants also shared language brokering prepared them for adulthood, they benefited through their experiences by gaining knowledge on adult tasks and responsibilities, such as filling out a job applications, paying bills, filing for taxes, etc.

#### Resilience Theory

Resilience theory was used as a guide for this study. Greene (2002) states resilience is connected to the stressors experienced in life and with the way individuals cope. Resilience can happen across the lifespan and has shown that having supportive relationships with others can bring about resilience (Greene, 2004). Participants from this study all demonstrated a strong connection with their family and expressed several stressors they experienced due to their language brokering experiences. Participants demonstrated resilience, as they were able to maintain their family connections despite all potential for intergenerational conflict. All of the participants continue to help their parents with interpretation and translation, and a lot of them are still doing this for their family. Demonstrating the importance of familism within the Latino culture and providing mutual help in a Latino home, clearly showing a connection to their cultural values.

Resiliency is demonstrated in these participants, as they were able to maintain cultural identity. It is also demonstrated by participants pursuing higher education, coming from immigrant parents and having been faced with many responsibilities as children and now as adults. It was demonstrated through this study that having an attitude and mentality that all things are possible and having a supportive network are all protective factors for the stressors they experienced.

### Implications for Social Work

Through this research it is hoped that social workers will have an increased awareness of the life experiences of Latino university students and their language brokering role within their family. The results should help social workers better understand the services and resources needed and provide resources to Latino immigrant families. These findings demonstrate that through social work advocacy, interpretation and translation services in all public, service facilities should be done. Although many facilities have improved in providing these services, as participants mentioned, not all services are reliable and/or consistent. Having to continue being LBs for their parents, and in some cases, extended family members in a variety of settings.

Findings from the study may be useful when working with Latino immigrant families, Latino children, adolescents or adults. As these results help understand some of the roles and family dynamics within the Latino family. As well as stressors and feelings associated with language brokering.

### Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First, the sample consisted of 14 participants and may not generalize to the larger population of Latino college student

LBs. However, this study reached saturation at about the sixth participant, when responses to questions became common and very similar. Second, these experiences are not likely the experiences of less privileged and educated individuals. Participants were all from California State University, Long Beach. The responses and experiences of individuals who do not have the opportunity to pursue higher education may be different. Third, the geography of this study can be a limitation. Long Beach has a large and growing population of Latinos. Thus, if the study were to be done in a different geographical area, the study may yield different results. Fourth, because two participants were 30 and 43 years of age, while the remaining were in their 20s, their experiences as LBs might have been different. Lastly, the interpretation of the data might have been somewhat biased, as the researcher is a LB as well and has an understanding of the participants' experiences. However, this can also be seen as a strength, due to the researcher's familiarity with and having many similar experiences as those of the participants.

#### Directions for Future Research

There is growing literature focused on the experiences of LBs. This research primarily focused on the stressors, perceptions on how public facilities can assist with interpretation and translation services for parents with limited English Proficiency, gifts and positive attributes gained, the parent-child relationship and the overall experience as a LB. There has been research on the effects language brokering can have on the parent-child relationship. Results stating that the child becomes closer to his or her parents, creating a close bond, or role-reversal and parentification occurs. Mixed findings are present in the literature, making it difficult to generalize the results. Through this study,

one participant stated she felt like a “mom” as a child taking on adult responsibilities.

Many of the participants however, did not share this same sentiment. Further research on parentification associated with language brokering, and whether or not parentification is a social construct of an individual European culture, rather than a Latino culture should be explored.

Previous research has also shown that language brokering is positively related to acculturation stress, linked to risky behavior and alcohol use. Other studies have shown that language brokering is connected to depression and anxiety. This study did not yield those results. Further research on the correlation between language brokering, mental health, risky behavior and acculturation stress within the Latino population should be further explored.

## APPENDICES



APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

“Approved from November 12, 2014 to November 11, 2015 by the CSULB IRB”

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### Language Brokering Experiences of Latino University Students

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Marisol Jimenez, Master of Social Work student from the Social Work Department at California State University, Long Beach. The results will be contributed towards a Thesis project. You were selected as a possible participant in this study based on the following criteria: (a) you identify as Latino/a (b) you have language brokered (interpreted and translated from Spanish to English and English to Spanish) for your parents as a child or still do (c) you are 18 years of age, or older.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Latino students who have interpreted and translated for their parents. A second purpose is to determine, if any, the stressors associated with language brokering and whether or not language brokering affected the parent-child relationship. A third purpose is to gain insight into the perceptions of how participants feel schools and other systems could have helped with this process. A fourth purpose is to determine the gifts or positive attributes language brokers have gained due to their experiences as language brokers. The study will help Social Worker’s better understand the services needed for Latino families and for social workers to seek, provide, refer and advocate for the access to services in the language required for the client.

#### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will do the following things:

Your participation will require completion of a questionnaire consisting of six demographic questions that ask about your (a) age (b) gender (c) length of stay in the states (d) whether you are 1<sup>st</sup> generation or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (e) years of language brokering and (f) Latino background.

Your participation will require the completion of a face-to-face interview led in a conversational manner that is expected to last between 45 minutes to an hour. You will be asked questions that will be used to gather information about your experiences having language brokered (interpreted and translated from Spanish to English and English to Spanish for your parents).

If you agree to participate in this research study, an audio tape of this interview will be made for research purposes. At any time during the interview you may request that the

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recorder be turned off. In the event, that you decide not to be audio recorded, please let the researcher know immediately and handwritten notes of the interview will be taken instead. Please keep in mind that you will still have the opportunity to participate in the study even if you decide not to be audio recorded. You will not have the opportunity to review, edit or erase the audiotape.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is a risk that confidentiality may possibly be breached, depending on the public setting chosen by the participant and the researcher where the interview will take place and someone overhearing our discussion. Audio tapes or transcripts may be compromised with the inadvertent recording of something that identifies you.

The researcher is a mandated reporter and is compelled by law to inform an appropriate other person if she hears and believes that you are in danger of hurting yourself or someone else, or if there is reasonable suspicion that a child, elder or dependent adult has been abused.

Some of the questions in this interview may cause you to feel upset or sad. Please answer only the questions that you are comfortable in answering. You may stop at any time. If you experience any emotional distress because of this project, please call the Department of Mental Health at 1-800-854-7771. A listing of Mental Health Urgent Care Centers will also be provided for your convenience as an alternate resource for counseling.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There is no promise that you will receive benefit from taking part in this study. However, your participation may help Social Worker’s better understand the services needed for Latino families and for social workers to seek, provide, refer and advocate for the access to services in the language required for the client. This study also aims to expand the knowledge to professionals about the consequences brought about because of language brokering and the feelings connected to that.

#### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

As an incentive, you may choose to receive a \$10 gift card from your choice of either Target or Starbucks. The gift card will be given to the participants at the end of the interview.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. No individual identities will be used in any publications resulting from

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the study. All tapes and transcripts will be given pseudonyms/fake names and stored on an encrypted flash drive. Research information will be kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher and her faculty advisor will have access to the files and the audio tapes. After the data has been transcribed from the tapes, the tapes will be destroyed.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which in the opinion of the researcher warrant doing so.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Marisol Jimenez at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by e-mail or Professor Jo Brocato, PhD, LCSW at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by e-mail.

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of University Research, CSU Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-5314. eMail: ORSP-Compliance@csulb.edu

#### SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

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Name of Subject

---

Signature of Subject

---

Date

“Approved from November 12, 2014 to November 11, 2015 by the CSULB IRB”

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio tape me as part of this research. I may still participate in this study if I am not willing to have the interview audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

STATEMENT and SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX B  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

## Demographic Questions

I would like to ask you some questions about yourself just to be able to report the type of population that was interviewed. Please write in and/or circle your answer.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
3. For how many years have you been in the states? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Are you 1<sup>st</sup> generation or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation American? \_\_\_\_\_
5. For how many years have/did you language broker? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your Latino Background?
  - a. Mexican
  - b. Salvadorian
  - c. Guatemalan
  - d. Puerto Rican
  - e. Honduran
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Thank you very much\*

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW GUIDE



## Interview Guide

### Questions About the Language Brokering Experience

1. Tell me about a time you interpreted and/or translated for your mom and/or dad.  
(Describe it to me.)
  - a. What did you or do you usually translate and/or interpret for your parents?
    - i. Tell me about it. (probe)
  - b. How often did you or do you translate/interpret for your parents?
    - i. In a week?
    - ii. In a month?
  - c. Can you recall a time when you felt you were having difficulty translating and/or interpreting?
    - i. Tell me about it. (probe)
    - ii. What made it so difficult? (probe)
  - d. Did/do your brothers and sisters translate and/or interpret for your parents?
    - i. Describe the situation to me. (probe)

### Feelings about Language Brokering

2. How did you or do you feel when you have translated/interpreted for your parents?
  - a. Positive feeling (provide me with an example).
  - b. Negative feeling (provide me with an example).
  - c. Has translating/interpreting for your parents ever made you feel stressed out?
    - i. Tell me about it. (probe)
3. Think of a time when you were translating and interpreting for your parents. How

do you think your parents felt when you were interpreting/translating for them?

- a. Why do you think your parents felt that way?

### **Language Brokering and the Family**

4. What is your relationship like with your parents?
  - a. Is it different compared to your other brothers and sisters who did/do not broker? (Give some examples.)
  - b. Did your relationship with your parents change when you started language brokering?
    - i. Tell me more about it. (probe)
  - c. Do you think language brokering affected your relationship with your parents?
    - i. Tell me about it. (probe)

### **Language Brokering and Perceptions On How to Help**

5. How do you think public facilities (i.e. schools, medical settings) where you have interpreted and/or translated for your parents should have helped or can help with the process of language brokering? (Give some examples).

### **Language Brokering and Gifts/Positive Attributes Gained**

6. What do you think are some good things about having been/being a translator and interpreter for your parents? (Give some examples).
  - a. What are some things you have gained due to language brokering? (if any)
7. Do you think Language brokering has benefited you as an adult?
  - a. Tell me about it. (probe)

### **Concluding Questions and Statements**

8. Is there anything else you would like to add or share about your experience as

your parent's translator and interpreter that you feel is important for me to know?

a. Besides of what we talked about?

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