

## **NH Immigrants' Perspectives on Their Experiences Serving As Language Brokers for Their Families**

Danelis Alejo\*

The author would like to thank the McNair Scholars Program at the University of New Hampshire-Durham, her faculty mentor: Professor Judy Sharkey, Professor Barbara White for all of her support and help with this process, as well as her friends and family for their love.

### **Abstract**

Many communities lack trained and/or licensed bilingual professionals that reflect the recent demographic changes in the United States. Consequently, immigrant youth whose English language proficiency is often better than their parents/caregivers are being used as interpreters to help their families in a range of contexts from schools to doctors' offices and more. With this in mind, a qualitative study was conducted with seven New Hampshire immigrant young adults on the benefits and challenges of their childhood experiences as language brokers. Insights gained from this study could help New Hampshire's growing immigrant population and the professionals who serve them.



## Resumen

En muchas comunidades hacen falta profesionales bilingües licenciados y/o calificados que reflejen los recientes cambios demográficos en los Estados Unidos. Como consecuencia, jóvenes inmigrantes que tienen un mejor dominio del idioma inglés comparado con el de sus padres o representante legal son usados como interpretes para ayudar a sus familias en varios contextos que van desde la escuela hasta el consultorio médico y más. Con esto en mente, un estudio cualitativo fue conducido con siete jóvenes inmigrantes de New Hampshire sobre los beneficios y desafíos de sus experiencias de la niñez como interpretes. Los conocimientos obtenidos de este estudio podrían ayudar a la creciente población de inmigrantes de New Hampshire y a los profesionales que les sirven.

## Introduction

### Problem Statement/Definitions

There are about 40 million immigrants, including refugees in the US (U.S. Census: American Community Survey, 2012). These newcomers have greatly increased the cultural and linguistic diversity of the overall population. However, the public sector workforce in education, health and safety has not seen the same amount of demographic change and the workforce development system has not been addressing the needs of this demographic change (Jordan, 2009). In 2008, there were about 50,900 jobs in interpretation and translation but only 28 percent of these professionals worked in educational institutions, 13 percent in social assistance and healthcare, 9 percent in government, and the rest in other areas (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010-11). These



numbers are not adequate enough for the growing number of newcomers entering the US. Due to the lack of interpreters, children often start to take responsibility for many cross-cultural situations that would usually be handled by adults (Villanueva and Buriel, 2010). There are questions about the appropriateness of children interpreting for their family members in certain situations. When children are used as language brokers, their stress increases, which increases their chance of having poor socioemotional health and academic functioning outcomes (Suarez- Orozco, 2001; Martinez, McClure, & Eddy, 2009). Reynolds and Orellana (2009) argue that these children have to speak in authoritative discourses that change their position in society at different times. This position can produce anxiety for children and adults (Reynolds & Orellana, 2009). On the other hand, there are benefits in terms of the child's teaching and tutoring skills (Orellana, 2003).

Although some states like California and cities like New York have articulated statewide or citywide requirements regarding federally funded agencies providing language assistance to those with limited English proficiency, many have not, including New Hampshire, a state with a growing immigrant/refugee population. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2009 NH had a foreign born (undocumented immigrants, temporary residents, legal immigrants) population of about 68,462 compared to 54,154 in 2000. In 2009, most of this population lived in Nashua, NH, and Manchester, NH, with percentages of 11 and 12 percent respectively. (U.S. Census, 2009). Training and certifying more people as professional interpreters in more languages is essential to the minimization of youth in the family being used.

### Research Question

In an effort to inform the NH discussion and possible development of guidelines for the role



of immigrant youth in interpreting, I sought out the experiences that NH youth have had while language brokering. If in fact the system is not keeping up with this demographic change, what are the effects of children who are being asked to serve as interpreters? The overarching question is: What do NH immigrant youth identify as the challenges and benefits of serving as language brokers for their families? This study focused on young adults because they have the perspective of personal experience as interpreters in informal settings and can provide mature responses.

### Significance

New Hampshire has also seen increasing diversity in its population and like many other communities in the U.S., it lacks sufficient numbers of interpreters for its growing immigrant population. Some institutions, such as Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital in NH are trying to provide those with limited English proficiency interpretation services so that family members are not used as interpreters at appointments. The problem with enforcing strict guidelines though is the lack of certified interpreters in all the languages that patients might speak. In fact, the NH Department of Education (2012) reported that 136 non- English languages are spoken by English Language Learners in the state of NH. The New Hampshire Department of Education also states that more than 76 languages are spoken by students in Manchester public schools (Southern New Hampshire Area Health Education Center, 2006) and the City of Nashua reports that more than 49 languages are spoken in Nashua public schools (City of Nashua, 2011); two of the largest cities in the state.

By understanding these young adult's experiences, this study may help NH develop guidelines that protect immigrant youth from interpreting in inappropriate situations and contexts (e.g., emergency rooms, detention centers, etc.). Reynolds and Orellana (2009) mention that



immigrant children experience challenges that they have to grapple with when they are put into such complex positions. With this research, there can be an understanding of which situations necessitate laws and guidelines and other alternatives that can raise awareness of how important it is that the public services system catch up with the demographic change. The importance of professional interpreters is, as Council Member Mendez from New York City said, that vital city services be accessible for immigrants which is “part of making the American dream open to everyone” (Loeser, S., Erskine, E., & McShane, J., 2008).

## Literature Review

Data on the changing demographics in the U.S. reveal that of the population of approx. 55 million that speaks a language other than English, the most common language among this population is Spanish with 62.3 percent speaking it as their native language (U.S. Census, 2007). Over 25 percent of immigrants in the United States are from Asia and more than 50 percent emigrate from Latin America (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Children are being used to language broker or interpret for their family members that are limited in their English proficiency. There is a controversy regarding the pros and cons of this practice in which a significant percentage of the sample in this study views it as a benefit while the remaining group sees it as a disadvantage associated to negative experiences.

Before going much further, there are several terms that require explanation. These include: language broker, demographic imperative, and newcomer. Language brokering, interpreting, translating, natural translation, and informal interpreters are all terms that have



been used to describe the different ways in which youth that are bilingual use their skill of two languages to listen, read, speak, and write for others. There is also another term that is used to describe this process, which is paraphrasing. This term has been used to speak about those who put what they hear, read, write, and speak into their own words to explain to their family members in their native language or to explain to the personnel in English (Orellana, 2003). By demographic imperative I mean the importance of providing services that are inclusive of immigrants' needs because of the changing demographic in the United States where ethnicities from many diverse language communities are increasing (Betancourt, Green, & Carrillo, 2002).

Due to this demographic shift, institutions need to change their strategic planning and budgeting to include those who are the majority in the demographic change (Jordan, 2009). For the purposes of this study, "newcomers" refers to individuals that come to the United States to live and/or work and include immigrants, domestic migrants such as Puerto Ricans, and refugees as well. By young adults I am referring to those between the ages of 18 to 25, youth are those between the ages of 14 to 18 and children are those younger than 13. The sociocultural factors that I am referring to when I use that term are age, gender, birth order, language(s), and country/culture of origin. Having defined the key terms included in this paper, I will now turn the attention to important highlights from the literature.

### **Effects of Language Brokering**



### Background on language brokering

Students who are language brokers are used in situations that may or may not be appropriate. Usually these children and youth language broker/interpret about one year after their arrival in the United States and usually start in elementary school (Morales & Hanson, 2005) due to the need for their parents to function effectively in American society (Martinez, McClure, & Eddy, 2009). Interpreting was more frequent with children who were prosocial and the oldest child since they were given more responsibilities in the family, and the one with the highest fluency level in the native language (Chao, 2002; Villanueva & Buriel, 2010). In their study Cohen, Moran-Ellis, & Smaje (1999) found that immigrant grandparents and parents felt more comfortable with their young family members (who knew English) interpreting for them because they are able to understand their needs better and professional interpreters were not available, therefore children needed to help. Before looking more in depth at the possible benefits and damages/risks to children and youth that language broker, it is important to understand the different factors that may influence an adolescent's positive or negative perception of their language brokering experience. One study by Wu & Kim (2008) researched Chinese American adolescents to learn why they may have certain perceptions towards language brokering. Those who were what Kim and Wu termed "more Chinese oriented" (p.12) believed that they must help their family, therefore they felt more of a sense of efficacy (feeling like they are being helpful and useful). The adolescents that were "less Chinese oriented" felt that they had less



of a family obligation and were more likely to perceive the language brokering process as burdensome (being uncomfortable with it, feeling burdened, and embarrassed) due to not thinking that their relationship with their parents was of high quality. Another reason that could influence the perception of whether they feel a sense of burden or efficacy is the difficulty of what the youth or child needs to interpret (Wu & Kim, 2008; McQuillan & Tse, 1995).

### Benefits

In their study of nine youth, McQuillan & Tse's (1995) participants believed that language brokering helped them socially mature, have confidence, high self-esteem, and independence. More than half of the participants enjoyed the experience and 46% were proud to be language brokers for their family members. In their study of 358 youth, Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido (2003) found that participants helped their family use technology and have access to the Internet, as well as protect their family from any judgments from outsiders by interpreting only certain things about their family. Orellana and her colleagues (2003) found that there are some children and youth that have fun with language brokering and see the process as being normal; and Wu & Kim's study (2008) found that child interpreting has positive outcomes such as positive parent-child relationships and high academic performance. McQuillan & Tse (1995) found that for some youth the interpreting experience helped build a trusting relationship with their parents. Some of the adolescents in a study said that translating got easier with time as well (Dorner, Orellana, & Jimenez, 2008). In the following paragraph, disadvantages that some studies have found will be discussed.

### Disadvantages/Risks





There are several disadvantages that have been found by different studies. One of the risks is that there is a shift of roles in the public and private spheres between parents and youth, and there may be a power shift as well; Additionally, these shifting roles can be challenging and stressful for the language brokers to understand (Villanueva & Buriel, 2010). At home, there is still an expectation for respect and obedience towards parents where everyone is expected to speak their native language (Valdez, 2003). Martinez, McClure, & Eddy (2009) found that the Latino families that had a high use of language brokering contexts were under a greater amount of stress compared to those with low use. They also found that there was a low amount of effectiveness in parenting and the adolescents had a harder time with academic functioning, as well as lower socioemotional health, and more substance use. McQuillan & Tse (1995) found that 9% felt that language brokering process was a burden and 9% felt embarrassed. The general practitioners that were interviewed in the Cohen et al. (1999) study feared that the children would not be able to satisfactorily interpret since they did not know the medical terminology and that they should not be dealing with adult situations. In that same study, some of the youth who language brokered felt stressed when they learned about their parents' sexual activities and health. This is of concern since it may influence the parent-child relationship.

The positive and negative aspects of language brokering cited in the research literature shed light on the differing opinions surrounding this topic. This information can help New Hampshire professionals who serve the growing immigrant population



understand the perspectives and experiences of the youth who are interpreters or have interpreted. The current state of policies and laws regarding language assistance in differing cities and states is the topic that I turn to next.

### **Policies/Guidelines/Laws on Language Assistance:**

In the following section, policy on the national and local level will be discussed across the United States and then in New Hampshire. The search for policies and guidelines with regards to the use of children as language brokers yielded little information. What I did find were some federal orders and some state/city guidelines. The most instructive policies were in California with Senate Bill 853, New York City with Executive Order 120, and a Massachusetts law that was passed in 2001. Understanding how NYC and the state of California successfully established these policies will inform policy possibilities for NH. In the next paragraph, I will be discussing federal orders and documents.

President Clinton signed Executive Order 13166, which directs federal agencies to provide guidance on how to accommodate those who are limited in their English proficiency and to address any issues with this (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has also provided a document giving guidance, “stating that all recipients of federal funds must take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access” (Chen, Youdelman, & Brooks, 2007). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services- HHS (2002) also released a document with their own guidance for organizations/programs that are HHS- funded. This document stated that agencies that receive federal funds are required to provide free language services for those with limited English proficiency through oral interpretation in person by bilingual staff, professional staff interpreters,



family members, or friends if the patient desires (U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services, 2002). The organization/agency can allow the patient to have their family member interpret instead of a professional temporarily during emergencies if an interpreter is not available, but for other times they must make sure to investigate the family member's competency. (US Dept. of Health & Human Services, 2002).

One order was passed for the City of New York in 2008. Mayor Bloomberg passed Executive Order 120 in New York City so every city agency that has any public contact is required to provide language assistance in the six most used languages in the city. These six languages include Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian, and French Creole. The Mayor also refers to the fact that there are 1.8 million New Yorkers with limited English proficiency, which makes interacting with the government challenging (Loeser, S., Erskine, E., & McShane, J., 2008). Therefore, as said by Andrew Friedman, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York, "millions of immigrant New Yorkers will now be able to go interact with City government and get the help of an interpreter when they need it" (Loeser, et al., 2008, p. 1). Another law that was enacted on January 1, 2006 was the Senate Bill 853 in California. It requires the State Department of Managed Health Care to have language assistance services, such as translations of documents for the patients that are not proficient in English (Schroeder, 2009). Massachusetts also passed an Emergency Room Interpreters Law in 2000 that requires interpreters in the emergency rooms of acute care hospitals, assurance of the training of the interpreters, and to abstain from encouraging patients to use family members or minor children as interpreters (Destine, Simpson May, Auerbach, Bigby, Murray, & Patrick, 2008).



NH has had an increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity over the several years. In 2011, New Hampshire's population consisted of 5.6 percent immigrants, compared to 4.4 percent in 2000 and 3.7 percent in 1990. Among the foreign-born in New Hampshire in 2011, 34.8 percent were from Asia, 25.8 percent from Europe, 20.3 percent from Latin America (this includes South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean), 11.8 percent from Northern America (Canada, Bermuda, Greenland, St. Pierre and Miquelon), 6.7 percent were from Africa, and 0.6 percent from Oceania. (Migration Policy Institute, 2011). Knowing the statistics of diversity in the state of New Hampshire, it is important to know what services are currently available to help immigrants and refugees maneuver language barriers.

There are interpretation services in New Hampshire provided by the Lutheran Social Services Foundation named LanguageBank. They have rates for the use of their services and translate things like documents and do face-to-face interpretations (LanguageBank, 2012). LanguageBank and the International Institute of New Hampshire (an organization that helps resettled refugees) help agencies provide language interpretation and translation for their patients/clients. Many agencies in NH are working towards helping those with limited English proficiency receive services, especially in the health care aspect. Right now, hospitals have different practices for their unique situations depending on the distribution of languages that patients are speaking. The problems that some hospitals and agencies are encountering though are shortages in funds to pay for professional interpreters and a lack of foreign language interpreters in less common immigrant languages. The New Hampshire Minority Health Coalition is also a major leader in



helping deal with the need for professional interpreters in the state. This coalition works with many agencies to help with funding and training medical interpreters. (NH Advisory Committee, 2005). Even though all of these things are being done, there are still many residents in NH whose needs are not being met. This may be due to many healthcare providers not putting this issue first or not being held responsible through constant law enforcement. (Chen, et al. 2007).

### Summary

There are many different perspectives about the benefits and disadvantages of the language brokering process on children. There is a need to help children by decreasing the amount of interpreting they do in certain situations that are meant for adults to handle. Language brokering can also be beneficial in terms of the children acquiring more skills and vocabulary. The executive order in New York City and the bill in California show the importance of public services having availability of professional interpreters. New York's example is admirable because of the availability of services for those who are English Language Learners (ELLs). California is also admirable because they require the Department of Managed Health Care to provide language assistance instead of suggesting or recommending it. These two states represent examples of what could be done to help newcomers that are not proficient in English.

### **Methods/Methodology**

This small qualitative study consisted of phone interviews and in- person interviews with seven NH young adults that are 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants between the ages of 18 and 25 who have language interpreted for their families. Qualitative was appropriate for my inquiry because it



allowed for me to get detailed accounts of their experiences interpreting. It also allowed me to ask open-ended questions so that they could elaborate and/or take the question in whichever way they wanted to.

### Study Design

Phone interviews were done for those that could not meet in-person due to transportation and travel constraints. The purpose of this research project is to understand what immigrant young adults identify as the benefits and challenges of acting as interpreters. Another purpose is to understand the guidelines that are in place in the state of NH in terms of youth being used as interpreters and having mandatory professional interpreters.

### Sample and Selection

The targeted sample population was young adults of 18 to 25 years of age that live in the state of NH who have language brokered for their families. A purpose for the selection of this population was to receive mature responses. These participants were found using snowball sampling, which involves talking to participants that refer the researcher to people in the population they are looking for (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). This allows the researcher to reach their target group in a culturally competent and efficient way especially if the population desired is hard to find (Sadler, et al., 2010).

I also went to organization's meetings on a college campus to ask for participants for my study and asked people to write down their e-mail addresses and phone numbers so I could contact



them. Posters with a specific e-mail for this research project were also posted around places where 18- 25 year old young adults typically frequented.

### Instruments

The first instrument that was used was: a) a one-page survey for the young adults to complete asking for background information on: age, gender, language, etc. The second instrument was: b) an interview schedule for the young adults to get to know their experiences interpreting. I interviewed all of the interviewees and understood the experiences of the participants because of my own experience as a second-generation immigrant youth who served in this capacity. This personal experience drew me to this topic because of the positives and negatives I have encountered and how beneficial it would have been to have professional interpreters assist, especially in moments when I was unable to or did not understand what was being said in the doctor's office for example. To prepare for the interviews I field-tested the questions by informally interviewing several young adults that had interpreted for their families.

### Data Collection Procedures

I asked the participating young adults to answer demographic questions I prepared at the beginning of the phone interview or in-person interview to gather sociocultural background and the rest of the interview was guided by the discussion questions.

### Data Analysis

Once I completed the interviews with the young adults, I transcribed the discussions, sought out the themes in the data by putting all of the information in a chart, and grouped the themes. I also



used the findings from the literature review to help create my analytic framework. The factors and findings in other studies were a foundation for my research study. Description of context was the first level of analysis. This includes the demographics of the participants such as languages spoken and age. It also includes a description of the NH context, particularly the changing demographics and the current policies/guidelines for interpretation services. I compared the different interviews, checking on similarities/differences in process and content (questions asked/answered, etc). I also looked for the type of setting that was the most challenging for them and the least challenging (positive experience/negative experience).

### Participants

Six of the participants were college students and one was a medical laboratory scientist. All of the participants communicated back and forth well with me and were enthusiastic about describing their interpreting experiences. In this study, there were five females and two males and all were currently living or had been living in New Hampshire. 4 out of the 7 participants were the first born in their family and 3 were born last in their family. 4 out of 7 were Asian American, 2 considered themselves African American, and 1 considered herself White American. Participants were asked about the setting of their first experience interpreting and 4 out of 7 responded the doctor's, while the rest had their first experience at the bank, market place, and school. Due to the small amount of participants, we are not able to make inferences about what these demographics may contribute to their responses, but it is interesting to see the distribution of participants.





Below are the demographics of the seven participants including gender, age, languages spoken, race/ethnicity, birth order, first age of interpreting, and first place the participant interpreted. The names in the chart below and in the findings are pseudonyms.



<b>Name:</b>	Amy Casey	Mendo Jean	Aaron Johnson	Aminah Saib	Mali Ann	Nhu Huyen	Iris Khuyen
<b>Gender:</b>	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age:</b>	21	23	22	21	23	25	20
<b>Race/ Ethnicity:</b>	White American: Portuguese	Black/African American: Congolese	Asian American: Vietnamese	Black/ African American : Ghanaian	Asian American : Chinese	Asian American: Vietnamese	Asian American: Vietnamese
<b>Languages other than English:</b>	Portuguese and Spanish	French, Swahili, Luganda, Lingala	Vietnamese	Hausa and Twi	Cantonese Chinese	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
<b>Birth Order:</b>	First Born	Last/Sixth Born	Last/ Fourth Born	First Born	First Born	Last/Ninth Born	First Born
<b>First Age Interpreted</b>	3	13	14	15	8	8 or 9	15



<b>First Place Interpreter d</b>	Business	Market Place	Doctor's	School	Doctor's	Doctor's	Bank
----------------------------------	----------	--------------	----------	--------	----------	----------	------

### Findings

Overall, there were five main themes that were found in this study that correlate with the data that was found in the literature review. After numerous readings and coding using a chart that I completed with all the interviewees' data, there were five themes that were discussed by the majority of the respondents. Four or more out of the seven participants had to discuss or bring up a particular theme for it to be a main theme. The five main themes were an increase in vocabulary, sense of efficacy, becoming more socially mature (social skills), stress/anxiety in certain situations, and loss of time at school. Below I discuss all of these themes in detail.

The first theme is an increase in vocabulary especially words in English that happened through interpreting for their family. All seven of the participants found that learning more vocabulary was a positive/beneficial aspect of being an interpreter for their family. For example, Iris Khuyen said, "Yeah. It really did help me to improve my reading. Like I never knew the words, but when I translated, I got a chance to know new words and when I see those words in reading, I kinda know and didn't have to use dictionary much" (Facebook Follow-Up, January 7, 2013, Question 12). Further, Aaron Johnson said, "financial jargon- IRA, CD, banking system terms are the hardest. I was learning as they were and had to learn quickly (Interview, October, 19, 2012,



Question #5). Other participants had similar examples and responses for how interpreting helped them learn more vocabulary. Orellana (2003) and Borrero (2011) also found that vocabulary was a great skill that youth who language broker may acquire.

The second theme was a sense of efficacy, identified by Iris Khuyen, Nhu Huyen, Mali Ann, and Aaron Johnson (4 of the 7 participants). For example, Mali Ann said, “I am more mature now after being an interpreter. I am more knowledgeable than many others my age” (Interview, October 28, 2012, Question #9). Nhu Huyen also said, “this made me more self sufficient. I know how things work and I know where to look for information and what to ask. It also made me very independent” (Interview, October 26, 2012, Question #9). The other two participants mentioned similar things about their sense of efficacy. Wu & Kim (2008) found that some of the adolescents in their study had a sense of efficacy due to their experience of being interpreters for their family.

Stress/anxiety in certain situations is the third theme that many of the participants mentioned. All seven of the participants experienced stress and anxiety because of interpreting at some time. Mali Ann said “I had so much responsibility in the family to be an interpreter” in a negative tone (Interview, October 28, 2012, Question #5). Also, Nhu Huyen stated that, “at the age of 8 or 9 years old as it became more repetitive, it was very stressful because I was so young”, as well as, “it was stressful, they were very dependent on me” (Interview, October 26, 2012, Question #1). The rest of the participants had experiences that related to the examples I included. Reynolds and Orellana (2009) also found that the youth language brokers had anxiety when in certain situations.



The fourth theme is becoming socially mature/acquiring social skills. 6 out of the 7 participants felt that through their interpreting experience they acquired social skills and became socially mature. For example, Amy Casey said that, “Many adults would also comment on my ability to stay calm, focused and quiet (when appropriate) throughout a conversation even when I was pre-school aged, a time when my peers were impulsive and egocentric. I was aware and sensitive of different cultures and open-minded towards learning new beliefs” (E-mail Follow-Up, January 16, 2013, Question #13). Mendo Jean also said, “Interpreting has helped me build connections and also helped me meet very important people. For example, when I was in high school, I got an opportunity to meet with the NH State governor” (Facebook Follow-Up, January 8, 2013, Question #11). The other four participants mentioned similar experiences to the ones I gave examples of. McQuillan and Tse (1995) also found that language brokering helped their participants be socially mature.

The last theme that was found was loss of time at school. Amy Casey, Iris Khuyen, Aminah Saib, and Nhu Huyen (4 out of the 7 respondents) mentioned that they had lost some time at school because of having to interpret. For example, Iris Khuyen said, “I interpreted in high school as well and when I sometimes was bored in class, they called me down to interpret and it got me out of class a few times” (Facebook Follow-Up, January 14, 2013, Question #11). Also, Amy Casey said, “Until the age of nine, my dad would take me out of school and I would go on business trips to Brazil with him and sit in on meetings and occasionally translate something, but I found this all very exciting” (E-mail Follow-Up, January 16, 2013, Question #11). The other two participants who mentioned this as well had similar experiences. Morales and Hanson (2005) also mention in



their article how loss of time at school may be an aspect that is seen in the youth's role as language broker.

Overall, the participants felt more positively about their experience as an interpreter for their family than negatively. Some of the positive aspects that the participants mentioned were traveling with their parents, building connections with people, learning more vocabulary, learning about society and their community, feelings of accomplishment, cross-cultural awareness, and better reading comprehension. Some of the negatives they mentioned were too much responsibility (especially for the oldest), stress/anxiety, less time with friends/playing around, having to make up class work if they had to miss a school day, their family being so reliant on them, feeling pressure to interpret perfectly/understand all words, and loss of time at school.

Something striking was that 4 of the 7 participants stated that the pressure that they received from their family (more specifically their parents) to interpret perfectly and to know how to interpret everything was very stressful. Nhu Huyen was one of the participants that mentioned this. She said, "they are not just asking you to interpret, they are also asking you to help them solve the problem. They also think that you have to know everything since you have an education (Interview, October 26, 2012, Question #5). In this study, most of the participants (5 out of 7) stated that the doctor's is the most stressful setting to interpret in. The other two participants stated that the most stressful settings are in financial, welfare, and insurance company settings. All of these findings are important in understanding the experiences of youth that are informal interpreters for their families.



## Limitations

Some limitations in this study are the small number of participants that were interviewed and the use of snowball sampling to find the participants. This was due to limited access to the desired population, timing and travel constraints. Another limitation was not interviewing New Hampshire stakeholders at hospitals, law firms, and other places that provide public services to immigrants who may be limited in their English proficiency. Not understanding some of what the participants said during the phone interviews sometimes was also a limitation. I attempted to avoid missing information by asking the participant to repeat what they said. Further research on this topic in the state of NH and a focus on the parent's perspectives might be helpful, as well as more interviews/conversations with NH health care organizations and doctors.

## Conclusion

Many studies have been done about youth interpreting in states with a high amount of newcomers, but with NH just starting to see changing demographics there have not been studies completed. In this study, 18-25 year old young adults were interviewed on what they identify as the benefits and challenges of being informal language interpreters for their families. Their perspectives could inform the policy development regarding language brokering and language assistance in the state. The purpose of this research project was to understand immigrant young adults experiences as informal interpreters and to understand what NH's guidelines about youth being used as interpreters and/or having mandatory professional interpreters are. When the seven young adults were asked what they thought about the decision to have laws or not about the age of interpreters, 6 out of 7



participants stated that they think guidelines on this are needed. The 7<sup>th</sup> participant said, “I think a child can interpret if they know the language and can communicate even though it might be a bit more difficult for them” (Interview, October 24, 2012, Question #17). 4 out of the 7 participants explicitly stated that guidelines are necessary at the doctor’s. The five main themes that were found in this study are important in understanding youth’s experiences. The immigrant young adults’ vocabulary increasing, having a sense of efficacy, becoming more socially mature (social skills), experiencing stress/anxiety in certain situations, and loss of time at school are the main aspects/findings of this research project. This information can be the beginning of NH better understanding which settings necessitate guidelines and can provide more of an understanding for NH leaders and providers that will influence the lives of youth who interpret and their families. Further research on the interpreting experiences of youth, the experiences of parents in New Hampshire, interviews with healthcare providers and a larger sample would also allow more understanding of this topic. These youth and parents could possibly recommend ways in which any issues of providing language services at agencies can be overcome and how they feel about this topic. All of these findings would be helpful to understand what the right guidelines/solutions could be.

### **Suggestions/Recommendations For NH**

As NH considers whether to establish guidelines for language brokering in light of its increasing linguistic diversity in schools, it may look to a successful program in the neighboring state of Massachusetts for help with the lack of trained bilingual interpreters, such as the Medical Translation and Interpretation Program at Brockton High School. This program trains bilingual students for a transition between school and a “career in Medical Interpretation” (Rizzitano, 2008)





for after they turn 18 years old. Rizzitano (2008) also stated that, “The course itself is highly interdisciplinary, combining language skills with health and science skills”, which can help these students acquire skills that can help with their educational goals and using their native language (Rizzitano, 2008). Borrero (2011) also found in his study that inner city K-8 students got higher scores in reading comprehension, acquired better skills of paraphrasing, and a higher sense of efficacy due to serving as on-site interpreters at their school in conversations between teachers and parents. There are about 3,800 limited English proficient students in the K-12 schools in New Hampshire (ED Data Express, 2010-11) of which a portion might benefit from a course like this.

### References

- Betancourt, J.R., Green, A.R., & Carrillo, J.E. (2002). Cultural competence in health care: Emerging frameworks and practical approaches. *The Commonwealth Fund*
- Borrero, N. (2011). Nurturing students’ strengths: the impact of a school-based student interpreter program on Latino/a students’ reading comprehension and English language development. *Urban Education, 46* (1), 663-688.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition, Interpreters and Translators, retrieved at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos175.htm>
- Chao, R.K. (2002). *The role of children’s linguistic brokering among immigrant Chinese and Mexican families*. Paper presented during the Families of Color: Developmental Issues in



Contemporary Sociohistorical Contexts, a symposium conducted at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN.

Chen, A.H., Youdelman, M.K., & Brooks, J. (2007). The legal framework for language access in healthcare settings: Title VI and beyond. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 22 (2), 362-367.

City of Nashua: (2011). *Creating a healthier community: Nashua community health assessment, Chapter 1: Demographics* Retrieved from <http://www.gonashua.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=JXaG2LH6MBM%3D&tabid=10>  
34

Cohen, S., Moran-Ellis, J., & Smaje, C. (1999). Children as informal interpreters in GP consultations: Pragmatics and ideology. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 21, 163-186.

Destine, J., Patrick, D.L., Murray, T.P., Bigby, J.B., Auerbach, J., & Simpson May, G.M. (2008) Interpreter services in Massachusetts acute care hospitals. Department of Public Health, Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Dorner, L.M., Orellana, M.F., & Jimenez, R. (2008). It's one of those things that you do to help the family: Language brokering and the development of immigrant adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 23 (5), 515-543.



Halgunseth, L. C. (2003). Language brokering: Positive developmental outcomes. In M. Coleman & L. Ganong (Eds.), *Points and counterpoints: Controversial relationship and family issues in the 21st century*, 154- 156.

Hopstock, P.J. & Stephenson, T.G. (2003). *Native Languages of LEP students* (Descriptive study of services to LEP students and LEP students with disabilities, Special Topic Report No. 1). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Jordan, S.M. (2009). The demographic imperative. *Trusteeship*, 17 (2), 24-29.

Loeser, S., Erskine, E., & McShane, J. (2008, July 22). Mayor Bloomberg signs Executive Order 120 requiring citywide language access. *News from the Blue Room*. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.c0935b9a57bb4ef3daf2f1c701c789a0/index.jsp?pageID=mayor\\_press\\_release&catID=1194&doc\\_name=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nyc.gov%2Fhtml%2Fom%2Fhtml%2F2008b%2Fpr282-08.html&cc=unused1978&rc=1194&ndi=1](http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.c0935b9a57bb4ef3daf2f1c701c789a0/index.jsp?pageID=mayor_press_release&catID=1194&doc_name=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nyc.gov%2Fhtml%2Fom%2Fhtml%2F2008b%2Fpr282-08.html&cc=unused1978&rc=1194&ndi=1)

Lutheran Social Services: New Americans. (2012). About languagebank. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.lssne.org/Services-New-Americans/LanguageBank/About-LanguageBank.aspx>

Martinez, C.R. Jr., McClure H.H., & Eddy J.M. (2009). Language brokering contexts and behavioral and emotional adjustment among Latino parents and adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 29 (1), 71-98.



McQuillan, J., & Tse, L. (1995). Child language brokering in linguistic minority communities: Effects of cultural interaction, cognition, and literacy. *Language and Education*, 9, 195-215.

Migration Policy Institute. (2011). Migration Information Source- New Hampshire: social & demographic characteristics. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state.cfm?ID=NH>

Morales, A., & Hanson W.E. (2005). Language brokering: an integrative review of the literature. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 27 (1), 471-502.

New Hampshire Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2005). *Language and access to health care: Easing barriers in New Hampshire*. Retrieved from: <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/languhealthcareinNH.pdf>

New Hampshire Department of Education. (2012). *English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program, K-12* Retrieved from [http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/integrated/title\\_iii.htm](http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/integrated/title_iii.htm)

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. (2011). 2011 New Hampshire state health profile: Improving health, preventing disease, reducing costs for all. Retrieved from: <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/documents/2011statehealthprofile.pdf>

Orellana, M.F. (2003). *In other words: learning from bilingual kids' translating and interpreting experiences*. Evanston, IL: School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University.



- Orellana, M.F., Dorner, L., & Pulido, L. (2003). Accessing assets: Immigrant youth's work as family translators or "para-phrasers". *Social Problems*, 50 (4), 505-524.
- Reynolds, J.F., & Orellana, M.F. (2009). New immigrant youth interpreting in white public space. *American Anthropologist*, 111 (2), 211-223.
- Rizzitano J.E. (2008). Medical interpretation and translation at Brockton High School. Retrieved from: [http://www.brocktonpublicschools.com/cf\\_news/view.cfm?newsid=86](http://www.brocktonpublicschools.com/cf_news/view.cfm?newsid=86)
- Sadler, G.R., Lee, H., Lim, R.S., & Fullerton, J. (2010). Recruitment of hard-to-reach population subgroups via adaptations of the snowball sampling strategy. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 12 (3), 369-374.
- Schroeder, D. (2009). Language assistance programs: a guide to understanding California Senate Bill 853. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR08000/pdf/thoughtLeadership/drtango/CASB853-DrTango\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR08000/pdf/thoughtLeadership/drtango/CASB853-DrTango_White_Paper.pdf)
- Southern New Hampshire Area Health Education Center. (2006). *Interpretation training programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.snhahec.org/flmi.cfm>
- Stake, R.E. (1995). The art of case study research. *California: Sage Publications, Inc.*
- Suarez-Orozco, M.M. (2001). Global shifts: U.S. immigration and the cultural impact of demographic change. *Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Journal Conference Series*.



The United States Department of Health & Human Services. (2002). *Guidance to federal financial assistance recipients regarding Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting limited English proficient persons*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/laws/revisedlep.html>

The United States Department of Justice. (2000). *Federal coordination and compliance section: Executive order 13166* (August 11, 2000). Washington, DC: U.S.

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: (2007). Retrieved from:

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/ACS-12.pdf>

U.S. Census Bureau, Population estimates program: 2009 population estimates, Retrieved from:

[www.census.gov/popest/estimates.html](http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.html)

U.S. Department of Commerce: United States Census Bureau. (2012). *The foreign-born populations in the United States: 2010- American Community Survey*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about\\_the\\_survey/survey\\_is\\_legitimate/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/survey_is_legitimate/)

U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express. (2010-11) *Data about elementary & secondary schools in the U.S.* (Data file). Retrieved from: [http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-](http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-report.cfm/state/NH/)

[report.cfm/state/NH/](http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-report.cfm/state/NH/).

Valdez, G. (2003). *Expanding the definition of giftedness: The case of young interpreters from immigrant communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.



Villanueva, C.M., & Buriel R. (2010). Speaking on behalf of others: a qualitative study of the perceptions and feelings of adolescent Latina brokers. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66 (1), 197-210.

Wu, N.H., & Kim S.Y. (2008). Chinese American adolescents' perceptions of the language brokering experience as a sense of burden and sense of efficacy. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 38 (1), 703-718.

Danelis Alejo\*

Danelis Alejo is a senior Dominican American psychology major at the University of New Hampshire in Durham who speaks fluent Spanish. She completed a research project through the McNair Scholars Program that focused on NH young adult immigrants' experiences as language brokers for their families. Her career aspirations are to work in an urban community helping low-income students of color and immigrants with their educational attainment and life goals. She also plans on starting a Ph.D. program this coming fall 2013 at Syracuse University in Sociology conducting research pertaining to these topics.

### **Appendix: Demographic Questions For Interviews**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ (optional)



1.  Female  Male
2. How old are you?  18  19  20  21  
 22  23  24  25
3. Are you a first or second-generation immigrant? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many brothers do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many sisters do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you the:  First born  Second born  Third born  Fourth born  
 Fifth born  Last Born Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. What do you self-identify as?
- White American  Black/African American  European American  
 Asian: (specifically:) \_\_\_\_\_  American Indian
- Middle Eastern  Native American  Pacific Islander or Alaskan Native  
 Caribbean  Hispanic: (specifically :) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other race: \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is/are your native language(s):
- Spanish  French  Portuguese  English





Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Any other additional languages: \_\_\_\_\_

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how fluent are you in your native language? \_\_\_\_\_

11. On a scale of 1 to 5, how fluent are you in the English language? \_\_\_\_\_

12. At what age was your first experience interpreting for your family/community: \_\_\_\_\_. What was the context or place of the first time you remember interpreting

\_\_\_\_\_ (for example, school, church, hospital, doctor's office, grocery store, etc)

### **End of Demographic Questions For Interviews**

THANK YOU

### **Appendix: Sample Discussion Questions for Interviews**

**Note:** I have approximately 4 main questions and series of follow up probes. The probes will only be used if the participants need assistance in generating their ideas, opinions.

#### Introduction

Welcome, greetings and thank you for participating.

Consent to continue with interview

#### Present agenda

Explanation of Terms: interpreting, translating and "language brokering"



**Main question:** Tell me about your experiences interpreting?

Follow up probes:

- Describe a particular time when you played the role of interpreter for your family members.
- What was that experience like? (How did you feel?)
- Were you ever asked to interpret something you did not understand? If so, what did you do?
- What situations do you find to be more difficult? Think about doctor's office, bank, school, grocery store, etc.
- What situations do you find to be the easiest? Think about doctor's office, bank, at school, the grocery store, etc.

**Main question:** I've heard and read positives and negatives about youth serving as interpreters for their families. What do you think? When is it a good experience? When is it a negative experience?

Follow up probes:

- Do you believe that interpreting for your parents was an opportunity or a burden? Why?
  - When was it an opportunity? –What did it get you? (Out of school, into a cool place?)
  - When was it a burden? (Missed a party, a school event, etc)
- What are some positive side effects? Did it help you at school? (I read it helps some students improve their reading and grades—was that true for you?)
- Were there more benefits or more drawbacks/disadvantages (positive or negative experiences)? How so?

**Beginning Explanation (so that the participant understands what I am trying to say):** I've heard and read that the expectations for interpreting is different based on culture, gender, etc. For example, maybe in some cultures, girls are expected to be the interpreter or maybe boys are. In other cultures, young people feel honored to do this but in other cultural groups, young people don't want to do it.

**Questions:**

- In your opinion, what gender interprets more?
- In a family of 6, with there being 2 parents and 4 kids, what individual would interpret more among the kids? (Is it the youngest or eldest's responsibility?) Why do you think this is?

**Main question:** Many states and cities do not have any guidelines for the age of interpreters. What are your thoughts about the decision to have laws or not about the age of interpreters?

Follow up probes:

- What do you think about there being guidelines about certain topics or places? E.g., Grocery store ok, doctor's office, no way.



**Main question:** Thank you so much. I really appreciate your time and sharing your experiences with me. Is there anything I missed?

Follow up probes:

- What did I forget to ask?
- Was there anything that I said that made you think of something to add?

