INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Found in Interpretation: The Role of Brazilian Medical Interpreters in Mediated Medical Encounters

by

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The Broader Context of our Research

• This study derives from an on-going research project on *Latino Narratives of Health and Illness: Voices from the Brazilian Community* (See handout).

• The research project includes:
  – The voice of the community
  – The voice of the clinic
  – The voice of the interpreter/translator
The Broader Context of Our Research

• Our concern derives from *studies in doctor patient communication* attesting to the complexities of the clinical encounter and research in cultural competence that shows that lack of sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural and language needs impact quality, safety, and patient satisfaction.

• The clinical encounter gets further complicated when added to the traumatic circumstances often related to migration.
The Broader Context of the Research

• Our ultimate goal is to arrive at useful results for the care of this immigrant population which could be generalized to Latino and other immigrant populations.
The role of Brazilian medical interpreters: 3 cases

*Research questions:*

- How do interpreters perceive their roles?
- What type of training do these professionals receive in their field of expertise?
- Are they more concerned with linguistic accuracy or with cultural understanding?
The data

• We interviewed two females (Bianca and Silvia) and one male (Lucas).
• They had been in the profession for at least 10 years.
• None had had a formal training prior to starting the profession.
• Two became adjunct Instructors in two colleges in the region to train medical interpreters.
• They are in their late 30s and early 40s.
• One of them was a medical doctor in Brazil.
The data

• The interviews are based on qualitative in-depth interviews

• We analyzed the data in terms of “agency”: “Agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 1001:112).

• **Why this profession?** “pure chance”
  - an accomplished musician becomes an interpreter (excerpt 1)
  - A medical doctor becomes an interpreter to have a more significant experience abroad. (excerpt 3)
The excerpts illustrate how a career change may happen to an immigrant because of a systemic social problem related to the lack of credentials to perform more profitable and professional jobs (the Brazilian doctor, the biologist, the musician).

Each professional displays some form of agency in choosing their new career in the US.
What is the trajectory of the interpreter?

• A professional or a gifted individual? The three professionals all said that their training as an interpreter had been chaotic and informal. See excerpts 3-7 as examples.
Learning the Interpreter’s Role:
Issues of Visibility and Agency

- Debate on literary translation
The role of the Interpreter

- Field of interpretation claims that the translator should be just a “conduit”
- Conduit metaphor
- Studies in sociolinguistics
- In our own research, our interpreters indicate that they cannot be invisible
The Interpreter’s Role

• In excerpt 8, it is clear that Bianca doesn’t perceive the interpreters’ role as only a “conduit.” She argues that just the fact of having a third person in the doctor’s room will necessarily have some kind of impact on the whole conversation.
The Role of the Interpreter

• In excerpt 9, Silvia expresses her preference for the conduit metaphor and at the same time acknowledges that language is immersed in culture and issues of identity. One could argue that is a case among other marginalized groups. Lucas also, to a certain degree, is ambivalent towards this sacred rule of neutrality/invisibility as he states in excerpt 10.
Conclusion: Making Sense of Health Related Experiences in the US

- Medical interpreters vary in the different roles they take as they mediate communication in clinical settings.
- In their professional training, they are expected to be invisible - and most are aware of such expectations.
- However, our research indicate that face-to-face interactions in such complex interactions, often require interpreters to play the role of cultural brokers and advocates.
Conclusion

• What is at stake here?
  – What is expected?
  – What type of training interpreters should receive?
  – What should research in interpretation show?
Conclusion

- It is imperative to approach interpreter’s studies in a descriptive rather than normative fashion-

- Instead of imposing a specific type of training, one needs to observe what works best to serve patients and HCPs in such complex interactions.
References


Works Cited


Works Cited


New York Times “California Seeks to Stop the Use of Child Medical Interpreters Published: October 30, 2005