¿Qué Dice Aquí? Building on the Translating Experiences of Immigrant Youth for Academic Literacies

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Abstract

This paper describes how translation is not as a single kind of language practice but takes many different forms. But in all its forms, translating activities are practices that focus the speaker's attention on language, and so they are ones that can serve as a rich basis for cultivating linguistic skills. This paper first describes the general patterns of translating documented among 5th and 6th grade students living in one community in Chicago, I provide some dissection of the practices and illustrate their demands. Finally, this paper probes two sets of implications for teaching and learning: (1) how adults can support children's translation work, using everyday translation opportunities to support children's language development; and (2) how teachers can build on children's translation experiences to further their literacy learning in school.

*¿Qué Dice Aquí? B*uilding on the Translating Experiences of Immigrant Youth for Academic Literacies

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2006
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When I was a student I thought language was a thing to be mastered – taught and learned in some straight-forward, fill-up-the-tank kind of way. I spoke only English growing up, but studied several "foreign" languages in high school and college. I learned something about each of these languages through studies of grammar and form; to this day I can decline verbs, recite random bits of dialogue, and occasionally parrot more useful phrases. It wasn't until I started *speaking* Spanish in the practices of my everyday life, however – with people in meaningful situations – that I began to understand language as something that I could use to *do* things, that could work *for* me. And it was only when I started *using* language in this way that I really began to "master" it.

The bilingual children of immigrants, I would argue, are unlikely to experience this kind of confusion about language. From the very beginning of their second language development, language is a palpable tool that can open or close doors for themselves and their families. In this chapter I want to examine a particular way in which the children of immigrants use language as an instrument for accomplishing things in the world, when they serve as translators or interpreters for their families. This practice – what has been called Natural Translation, language brokering, family interpreting, and para-phrasing[1]" – offers unique insights into language issues more generally, and important ones, I think, for supporting the development of academic skills.

Translating/interpreting is a specialized kind of language practice, but it is one that almost any bilingual person engages in at least sometimes. Actually, as I will describe, it is not a single kind of language practice at all – it can take many different forms. But in all its forms, translating activities are practices that focus the speaker's attention on language, and so they are ones that can serve as a rich basis for cultivating linguistic skills.

To provide some context for this discussion I will first describe general patterns of translating that I documented among 5th and 6th grade students living in one community in Chicago. Following this I will dissect the practices a bit and illustrate their demands. The final section of this chapter probes two sets of implications for teaching and learning: (1) how adults can support children's translation work, using everyday translation opportunities to support children's language development; and (2) how teachers can build on children's translation experiences to further their literacy learning in school.

Translating Everywhere, Everyday, in All Kinds of Ways

Twelve-year-old Jasmine drew a map that depicts the various places where she translates for her family. (See Figure 1). She tells of translating at the pharmacy (Walgreen's) when her mother wanted to exchange an item; at her school, for people who "needed information at the office;" at the public library, when she helped her mother fill out applications for library cards; at the supermarket (Jewel's) (where she recounts a particular time when she inquired about the kind of milk her family was entitled to through the Women and Infant Care program); and at her home, where she reads and interprets bills, school letters, and other letters. (She adds: "I can't remember what other letters I translated sorry.") All of these translation episodes are embedded within the context of

everyday activities with her family, and she suggests that her efforts are valued when she recounts how her father thanks her for helping him to spell English words: “He says thank you then I say you’re welcome.”

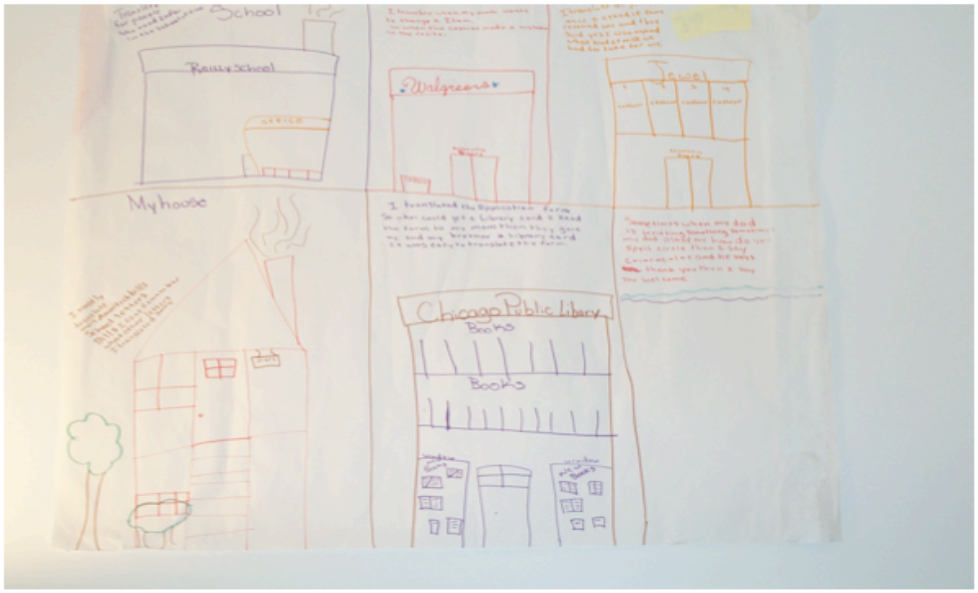


Figure 1: Jasmine’s map

Another girl from the same community, twelve-year-old Briana, describes the everyday sites for her translation activities as including the fruit market, the bank (“I go here like maybe every Friday with my dad or week-day with my mom or grandma), and home. She describes a typical summer day at home: “I wake up at 9:30. I give breakfast to my brother and sister. Then I help my mom clean and I clean my room. Sometimes I watch T.V. or hear music. Then I call my friends. I eat & go outside & come in & shower & go to sleep.” (See Figure 2.) She adds: “In the summer and school day I hang out with my friends and talk on the phone or I help my mom clean the house. I translate for my mom & Grandma

& Grandpa. I take care of my sister & brother." Thus, like Jasmine, Briana interweaves her report on translating activities with other examples of how she helps her family, and in turn presents these helping activities within a web of relationships and routine, everyday activities.

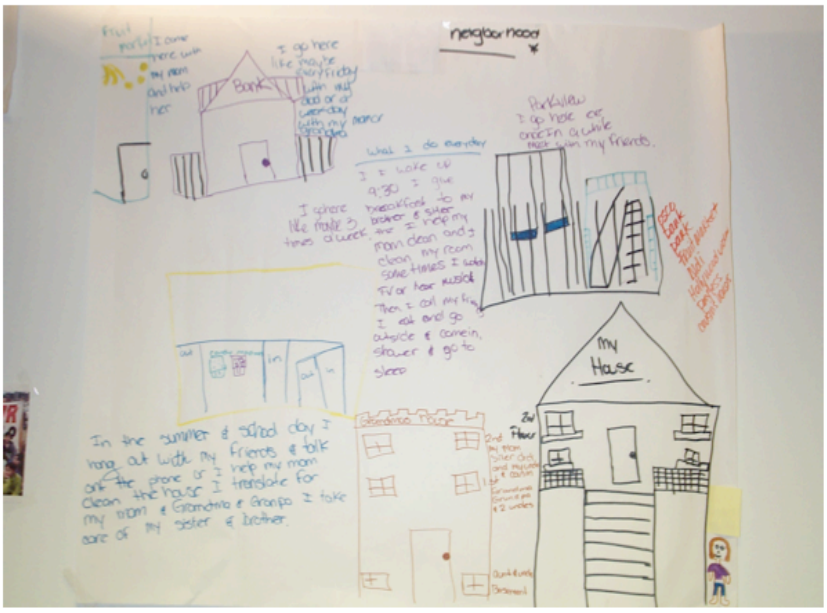


Figure 2: Briana's map

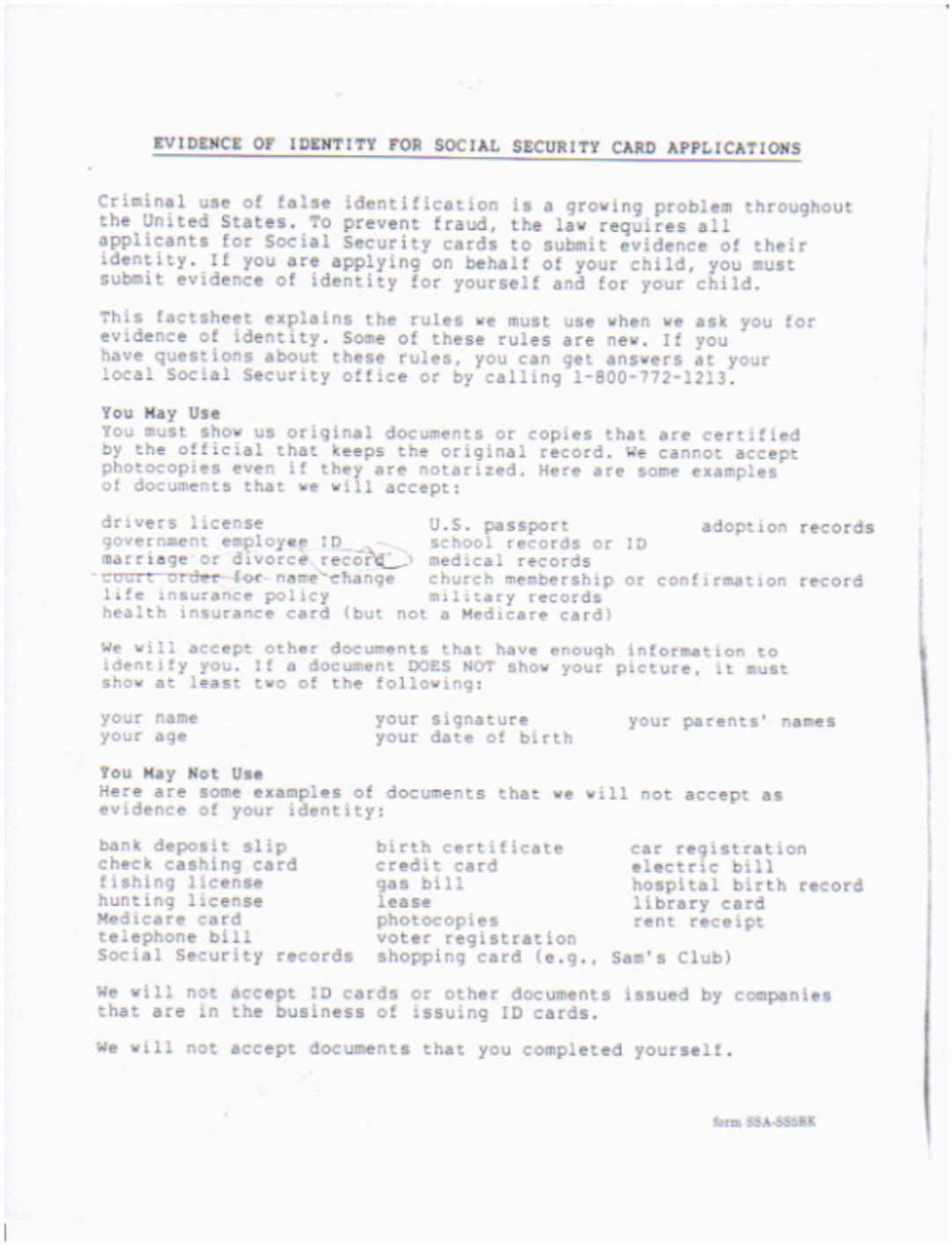
Jasmine and Briana live in a somewhat "settled" community of immigrants from Mexico (home also to a sizeable, but decreasing, number of Polish origin immigrants) on the northwest side of Chicago. Many families have lived in the United States for 15 or 20 years. Bilingual personnel can be found in local shops and restaurants, and most parents speak some English, and/or have other adult relatives who can sometimes be called on to help with English tasks. Thus, parents in this community – where I worked with a team of research assistants for several years to document children's translating practices – are not nearly as dependent on their children's English skills as the newer-immigrant parents with

whom we also worked in a neighboring, English-dominant suburb. But even so, 83 percent of the 5th and 6th graders that we surveyed indicated that they translate for someone at least sometimes. The depth and breadth of their expertise varies considerably, but nonetheless most children have at least some familiarity with using their two languages as tools for mediating other people's understandings of the world.

Some People Think it's Easy

Many people have never really thought about what is involved in translating between speakers of different languages. Some assume that if a person speaks two languages they should naturally be able to translate, and think that it's easy. Others may recognize some of the challenges inherent in translation, but think it's mostly a matter of "getting the words right." In fact, however, translating is neither natural nor easy; and it demands sophisticated linguistic, cognitive, cultural *and* social skills. It's not just a matter of "moving words" between languages, like parcels in the mail. It's not really the *words* that have to be translated at all, but the *ideas*; and if the translator's goal is to facilitate understanding, s/he has to explain the information in ways the audience will comprehend. The first thing involved in translating is *listening* (for spoken tasks), or *reading* (for text-based translations), and *understanding.* This step is often forgotten when we focus on the production end of translation. Kids have to decipher and make sense of information about a wide range of subjects, in a variety of forms. Often, these ideas are expressed by speakers and writers in convoluted or unclear ways. Some speakers may try to make things easier for children, by slowing their speech, talking in short stretches, and checking for understanding. But in other situations that we recorded in our research, speakers spoke

for long stretches without pause, and then told children to “tell your mother that.” And few of the written texts that children translate (e.g. government forms, school letters, and bills) have been prepared with the aim of easing comprehensibility. Take for example, this informational letter for securing a social security card. (See Figure 3).



EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY FOR SOCIAL SECURITY CARD APPLICATIONS

Criminal use of false identification is a growing problem throughout the United States. To prevent fraud, the law requires all applicants for Social Security cards to submit evidence of their identity. If you are applying on behalf of your child, you must submit evidence of identity for yourself and for your child.

This factsheet explains the rules we must use when we ask you for evidence of identity. Some of these rules are new. If you have questions about these rules, you can get answers at your local Social Security office or by calling 1-800-772-1213.

You May Use
You must show us original documents or copies that are certified by the official that keeps the original record. We cannot accept photocopies even if they are notarized. Here are some examples of documents that we will accept:

drivers license
government employee ID
marriage or divorce record
court order for name change
life insurance policy
health insurance card (but not a Medicare card)
U.S. passport
school records or ID
medical records
church membership or confirmation record
military records
adoption records

We will accept other documents that have enough information to identify you. If a document DOES NOT show your picture, it must show at least two of the following:

your name
your age
your signature
your date of birth
your parents' names

You May Not Use
Here are some examples of documents that we will not accept as evidence of your identity:

bank deposit slip
check cashing card
fishing license
hunting license
Medicare card
telephone bill
Social Security records
birth certificate
credit card
gas bill
lease
photocopies
voter registration
shopping card (e.g., Sam's Club)
car registration
electric bill
hospital birth record
library card
rent receipt

We will not accept ID cards or other documents issued by companies that are in the business of issuing ID cards.

We will not accept documents that you completed yourself.

form SSA-SS5BK

Figure 3: Information for requesting a social security card

Next, children need to figure out ways to convey this information to speakers of the other language. Effective translators think about what their audience knows about a subject, and choose ways to explain things that connect to and build upon those understandings. They use manners of speaking that are appropriate for their audience – selecting a particular tone or register (level of formality or informality); providing relevant background knowledge or information to contextualize the translation; and using vocabulary the speaker will understand. (Note: I am referring here to the "language brokering" notion of translating, which is driven by the goal of communication and making things happen in the world. This is different from other kinds of translations that are concerned with preserving the speaker/author's ideas, including their ambiguity or inclarity, rather than on negotiating understanding.)

Choosing the right words can be especially challenging when the audience includes speakers from very different backgrounds and worldviews. One boy that we worked with, Sammy, was quite articulate in describing how it can be hard to choose words that work for these different audiences simultaneously. He detailed how he translated between a rich woman for whom he worked as a caddy, and the gardeners who worked at the golf course. He selected colloquial Mexican words when he spoke to them (like "chiro," slang for cool); while for the woman he used polite (and seemingly more bland) words like "nice." Most of the kids that we worked were younger than Sammy, however, and did not show his level of metalinguistic awareness when they discussed their translation strategies with us. But if teachers use children's translating experiences as a base for discussing issues of audience – as I will detail in this chapter – this may stimulate their metalinguistic

awareness.

Sammy's report reveals an additional challenge of language brokering. Translating is not just a matter of moving words between speakers across languages. Children must engage in these linguistic and mental feats while also assuming appropriate social roles in these interactions. That is, they are children speaking to and for adults. They are representing their immigrant families to a "mainstream," English- speaking world. They must establish their own relationships with each speaker even as they also facilitate communication between these adults.

What Kids Learn from Translating

Translation situations offer rich opportunities for children to learn. When children translate, they are exposed to a wide range of subject matter, including home economics, health, medicine, finances, government/legal information, and education. As a group, the kids we worked with had translated in restaurants, stores, government offices, doctor's offices, schools, bus stations, and many other places. They had helped their families to purchase clothes, shoes, cars, and homes, as well as to make decisions about securing such things as long distance phone service, welfare benefits, citizenship, and credit cars. They read and interpreted written material in many different genres, designed for varied purposes – to inform, entertain, convince, request, and demand. This represents a much wider range of language and literacy experiences than many children are exposed to during their childhood years.

But child language brokers are not merely "exposed" to such subject matter and literacy

forms. They actively engage in them – making sense of the information for themselves, and helping others to engage with the material. Sometimes they act mostly as helpers or facilitators – filling in with words here and there. But other times they are the main actors, filling out forms, making phone calls, and doing things in English for their families. They also act as tutors, guiding others in reading, writing, talking, and, spelling (as Jasmine did for her father).

We can speculate on the language and literacy skills that children acquire from these interactions: vocabulary growth; audience awareness; understanding of genres; awareness that *how* one says something matters for *what* one says. We can also listen to kids to see what they think they learn themselves. Here is what a few of the kids that we worked with had to say when we asked them how they felt about translating:

"I feel like I'm at a higher level...Translating makes me feel good, wanted, and noticed. I feel that I am smart sometimes." (Cindy, age 14)

"I feel good because you learn more by translating" (Perla, age 10) "(It makes you) feel like a mature person, especially if you're a kid." (Mario, age 11) The parents that we talked with also commented on how translating helps their children. Some especially valued translation as a way to help their children retain and develop their native Spanish abilities. As Jasmine's mother put it: "Ya cuando empieza hablar con las gentes, se desenvuelve más." *("Now when she starts to talk with people, she grows more.")* Miguel's mother noted similarly:

Yo pienso que a él le sirve mucho eso, porque si él no me tuviera que...traducirle a nadie

yo pienso que se quedaría no más con el puro ingles...Palabras que a él no sabe decirme en español, allí yo también trato de ayudar, que significa. Él ya va también aprendiendo también, que es lo que significa en español. Y ya es como si estuviera sabiendo las dos, por que no sabe bien el español todavía."

("I believe that it helps him a lot, because if he didn't...have to translate to anyone I think that he would talk only in English...Words that he doesn't know how to tell me in Spanish I also try to help with what they mean. He also learns what they mean in Spanish. And it's as if he is learning the two, because he still doesn't know Spanish well.")

With this statement, Miguel's mother also acknowledges the roles that parents can play in supporting their children's understanding, and facilitating their home language development, a point I will return to below.

Arguably, if translating helps kids to retain their home language, it also facilitates the development of their second. Children are exposed to a much wider range of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and varied ways of putting information together than most ESL textbooks offer, as they work with different domains and genres of writing. And again, because translating demands that kids make sense of these language forms enough to explain them to others, this forces an active form of learning, not just passive exposure. Finally, translators are put into many different kinds of social interactions in which they are expected to orient to others and negotiate understandings. Over and over again, we were struck by the fact that the children we worked with seemed so attentive to the needs of others around them, and primed to offer their services – to neighbors, friends, family, as

well as total strangers. Kids made many references to "feeling good" for helping others. Estela, for example, said: "The part that I like is helping my dad, or anyone which actually needs it. I mean, I feel great when, they're like 'oh, thank you!' You've really helped me out." This may also lead to tremendous social maturity. Fourteen-year-old Cindy compared herself to her peers: "I'm not just trodding down people of my own age, but some people they just ask for things, like 'can I have a bike, can I go swimming, can I have a new pair of Nikes?'...Their parents keep saying, 'Do you know how hard I work for the money to pay the bills?' They don't know exactly how much is in their bank deposits, the bills and stuff. But I know personally because I write the bills. I write the checks."

Supporting and Building on Children's Translating Skills

But we can't just assume that children reap the benefits of translating from mere exposure. And simply throwing children into translation settings is surely not the best way to facilitate their growth – even if the ones who do not sink learn to swim reasonably well. While translation activities *can* be powerful sites for learning language and developing skills, they can also be frightening, overwhelming, burdensome, and potentially destructive for children's developing sense of their own competencies. Thus, one reason for understanding more about what is involved in translating is to identify ways in which we can support kids in work that they do every day, and that their families *need* them to do. We can also identify ways to further their language growth in and through these activities.

In the rest of this chapter, I will first consider how adults can scaffold actual translation situations, and contribute to making these valuable learning opportunities. I will then contemplate how teachers can leverage children's general knowledge of translating and use this as a basis for advancing their literacy learning in school.

Suggestions for Adults Who Solicit Children's Help with Translating

When adults solicit children's help with translating, we can make it easier, more of a learning experience, and potentially more rewarding to the child, if we provide some supports. The suggestions I will make may seem obvious, but the adults that we observed in translation situations with youth translators did not always do these things, and so I believe they are worth detailing. The suggestions are directed toward *any* adult who works with youth translators – teachers, administrators, parents, or others. They are generic suggestions that should be tailored for particular situations, but I have tried to account for tasks that include both oral transactions and the interpretation of written texts.

First, and perhaps most importantly both in terms of supporting children's translation work *and* modeling good learning processes, it helps to explain as much background information as you can to orient the translator to the translation task. This includes anything that you know about the topic or text that will be translated, the people that it will be translated for, and the situation that frames the translation event. You can explain that you are providing the same kind of information that is also useful for readers when they encounter a new text – modeling for them that translation situations are not unlike other literacy events, and that there are things one can do to make them easier.

For live translations, the speaker should speak in short stretches, but whole thoughts.

(Parsing information by phrases does not necessarily help the translator, who needs to understand the bigger *ideas*, not just the words.) You can also use body language and gestures, and explain things in more than one way. Just as repetition in texts makes stories more comprehensible to readers, so too can it ease understanding of translation "texts." Redundancy also helps for understanding the ideas, as well as for acquiring new vocabulary and expressions. But keep in mind that even though body language and gestures can facilitate understanding, they can sometimes interfere as well. Indeed, both the translator and the person(s) s/he is translating for are likely to read your body language and tone of voice, and this will influence how your message is understood – sometimes in ways you may not intend.

Checking for understanding is another step the adult can take, to help focus the translator on the ideas rather than the words. Again, this models good strategies for literacy engagements as well. You can remind the translator that s/he can ask you about anything s/he doesn't understand – and validate him or her when s/he does so. (For example, you can say: "That's great that you asked me to clarify that. I realize I probably wasn't clear.") Without such encouragement, children may be reluctant to display to adults that they don't understand something. You can point out that it's a sign of a good reader (or translator) when they know what they don't know, and solicit clarification.

Another way to assist translators is to help them to identify strategies for making sense of material that they don't understand. At the word level, you can help them search for cognates by asking if they know a word in the other language that looks or sounds like the

one they are translating. If they identify one, ask them if that word helps them to figure out the meaning of the text to be translated. Just make sure to check for meaning, because false cognates – words that look or sound alike across languages, but that mean different things – can add a level of confusion. For example, one girl that we observed translated "policy" as "police" – a reasonable potential cognate, but one that distorted the meaning of the text. Keep in mind, however, that rarely does the translation of a single word throw off the meaning of the entire text, especially if translators are encouraged to focus on meaning, and check for inconsistencies.

Just as good readers often skip over words they don't understand, and focus on larger meanings, you can remind translators that they can do the same. Especially when translating written texts, they can skip over entire sections and come back to them later. Indeed, just as in any text engagement, it's often smart to get a sense of the whole text, and read selectively, not necessarily from start to finish. I watched one girl work through two dense pages of a jury summons – a text written in bureaucratic, authoritative, and convoluted prose – only to find on the second page a few questions for the reader. If the reader answered negatively to either of those questions (Do you speak English? Are you a U.S. citizen?) s/he did not need to fill out the form. Reading those questions first might have saved this girl a good deal of effort. (Of course, the person who designed the form might also have put those questions right up front...)

If you have trouble understanding what children are telling you when they translate, asking for clarification further models good literacy practices for kids. You can encourage

them to explain things to you in several different ways, and voice back to them what you take the meaning to be. Just remind them not to make up information;
otherwise, as 14-year-old Sammy warns, “it might end up blowing the whole conversation out of proportion.”

Most importantly, be patient with the translator, and remember that translating is not as easy as it may seem. You may need to give the translator time to gather his/her thoughts, and to think about the best way to explain things. Finally, it’s nice if you recognize the translator’s talents, and thank him/her for the services s/he provided. Too often the work of translators (of all ages) is taken for granted; a simple “thank you” can go a long way, and many of the kids that we worked with spoke proudly of times when people thanked them for their translation work.

Applications to School Literacies

The next suggestions are intended for teachers who want to build on children’s translating experiences and use them for furthering their literacy development. First, I outline ways in which teachers can learn about children’s translating experiences – drawing here from activities we used in our research. Learning about the specific kinds of translating that children in your classroom engage in provides an important base for the suggestions that follow, which are focused on helping kids to recognize what they do when they translate and then apply those same kinds of strategies to literacy tasks. The overall aim of these suggestions is to validate kids’ everyday experiences and show them ways to expand their skills and to apply them to academic tasks.

Learn more about kids' translation experiences. In our research efforts, we used a number of techniques to learn about kids' translating experiences. We started by asking kids where they translate, for whom they do so, how often, and how they feel about this work. We also asked them to tell us about times they felt challenged in translating –when they didn't understand the material, or didn't know how to make it make sense for their audiences. We invited them to tell us about specific strategies they used to deal with these challenges. We learned a great deal from talking with children, but we also found that they didn't always remember times they had translated. This may be because these activities were so much a natural part of everyday life. Sometimes it helped to invite youth to act out situations in which they had translated, and use those re-enactments to stimulate conversation with the rest of the group.

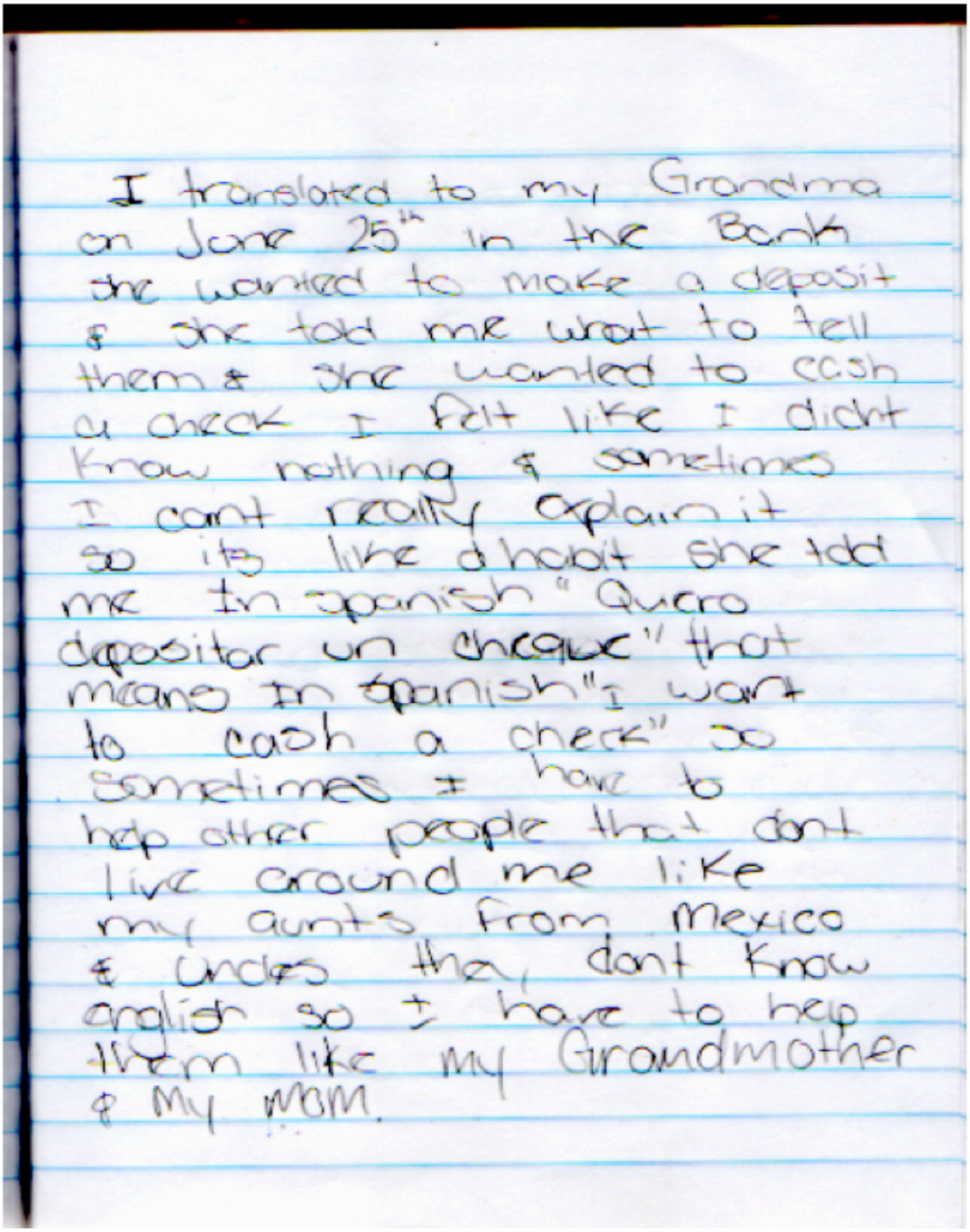
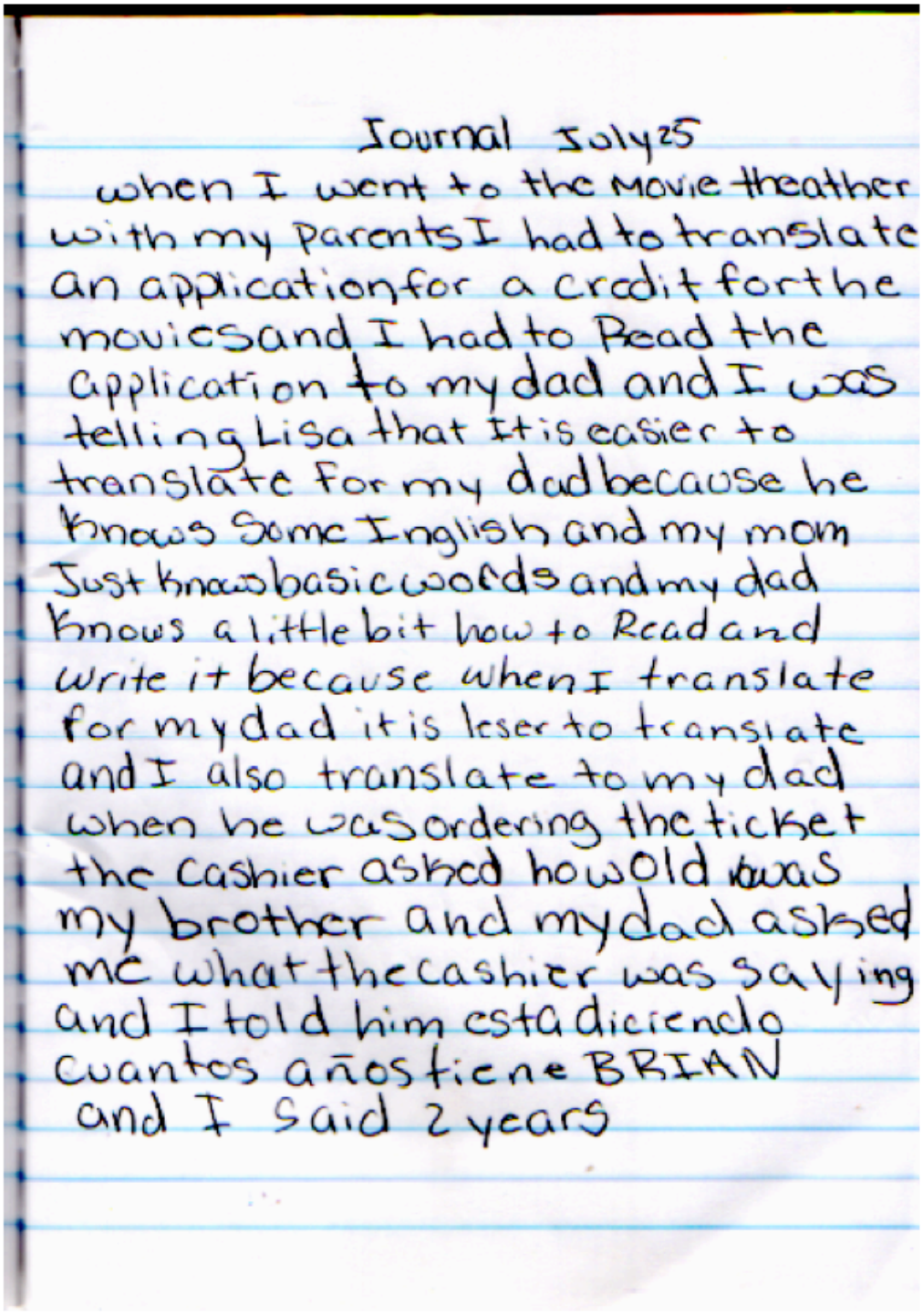

I translated to my Grandma on June 25th in the Bank she wanted to make a deposit & she told me what to tell them & she wanted to cash a check I felt like I dicht know nothing & sometimes I cant really explain it so its like a habit she told me in spanish "Quero depositar un cheque" that means in spanish "I want to cash a check" so sometimes I have to help other people that dont live around me like my aunts from Mexico & uncles tha, dont know english so I have to help them like my Grandmother & My MOM.

Figure 4: Sample journal entries



Journal July 25

when I went to the Movie theather with my parents I had to translate an application for a credit for the movies and I had to Read the application to my dad and I was telling Lisa that It is easier to translate for my dad because he knows Some Inglish and my mom Just knows basic words and my dad knows a little bit how to Read and write it because when I translate for my dad it is leser to translate and I also translate to my dad when he was ordering the ticket the cashier asked how old was my brother and my dad asked me what the cashier was saying and I told him esta diciendo cuantos años tiene BRIAN and I said 2 years

Another way to log kids' translation activities involved giving kids journals in which to record their translations in an ongoing way. This method seems quite adaptable to classrooms; this could be part of students' regular homework assignments, or accorded "extra credit." Some guidance for the entries is probably useful; for our research purposes, we suggested that they record when, where, what and for whom they had translated and how they felt about the transactions. We also asked them to think about any challenges they faced, and how they dealt with these. For pedagogical purposes, asking kids to reflect on their strategies seems very useful. See Figure 4 for sample journal entries from our research project.

In addition to reflecting on their experiences, students can bring in copies of any written texts that they have translated. Perhaps a bulletin board display of "Things we have translated" will motivate students, and help to validate their work. You can also pool the samples, make copies, and have students work in pairs or small groups to practice their translation skills. They can challenge each other to come up with better, more precise, or more meaningful translations, and identify the strategies that they use.

But kids may need assistance to articulate the strategies they use in translating. This is where teachers can play a key role – helping students to recognize what they do naturally in translation activities, and, perhaps, to expand the range of strategies each deploys. They can also be helped to see how complex good translating really is – to recognize some of the paradoxes (e.g. that some things simply can't be translated), and to acknowledge their own positions in translation encounters (e.g. as children speaking to and for adults).

Draw connections to school literacies. Translating events are different from school literacy events in some important ways: in the nature of the relationships between co-participants; the kinds of supports that are available or expected; and the goals and purposes of the activities. One of the most important differences is undoubtedly the *purposes* of the tasks. At home, children have to help families to figure out the meaning of the texts they encounter, because those meanings may really matter for their families' health, well-being, safety, and access to resources. The strategies that children adopt are shaped by these goals, then, and are generally focused on meaning making.

The same is not always true in school academic work, but *good* readers and writers do focus on meaning. It may help students to be reminded of this, and to identify their own meaning-making strategies in translating tasks. For example, they can notice where they provide close ("literal") translations of particular texts, where they summarize, what they skip over, and what they do when they don't understand the material. (See below for consideration of the various strategies they may deploy.)

We can bridge from translating texts to school literacies by building in more "real-world" purposes into school literacy tasks. For example, we can ask students to approach school texts as if they were going to have to translate them for someone else. What would they explain in full detail? What might they skip over or summarize? What would be most important for their reader to understand?

In their pursuit of meaning, the youth we observed generally used a mix of social and

language-based strategies. Some had a wider range of tools in their linguistic tool kits than others, however, and all students can benefit from being reminded of the range of strategies that they can facilitate their meaning-making processes. This can include:

(1) Soliciting background information on the material. Where does this text come from? What is it about, in general terms? Activating background information – encouraging students to think about what they know about this topic, genre, and form – can make comprehension of any text much easier. So too can an understanding of how texts are produced, and why. Encourage students to stop to think about who produced the text and for what purposes. What does the author presume about the reader? (Note that for school texts such questions are rarely asked, because school texts do not represent the array of purposes and audiences involved in real-world literacies.)

(2) Scanning the text. Most of the kids we observed translating written texts began at the beginning and continued line-by-line or section-by-section to the end. As noted above, this was not always the most effective approach, however. Thus, for both translations and school tasks, students may need to be reminded that they don't necessarily have to read from start to finish, and that it is good practice to scan a text first and get a sense of how it is organized, before deciding what and how to read (or translate) it.

(3) Word-level strategies. When we asked kids about challenges they faced in translating texts, most talked about difficult *words*. Having watched kids in action, we do not believe that the greatest challenge they faced was in translating words at all; complicated syntax, forms of expression, ambiguous or convoluted phrasing, and lack of appropriate contextual or background knowledge posed much greater challenges. At the same time, words certainly can set up stumbling blocks for readers, and so having well- developed

strategies for tackling challenging words is essential for good reading. Most reading teachers know this, and train students to use context cues, parse words into morphemes, and sound them out, as well as sometimes to skip over them, coming back as necessary after reading on for context. But bilingualism offers real power to students, especially when the languages they know are from the same language family. Teachers can encourage students to activate their dual language skills by considering whether the words they encounter look or sound like words they know in their home language. Students should be aware that some words may be false cognates, however, and that identifying cognates is just one step along the meaning-making path.

(4) Social strategies: In addition to using these sorts of language-based strategies, good readers also rely on social skills. They know when and how to ask for help; they solicit clarification when they don't understand something; and they may work collaboratively with others to figure out the meaning of a text. But of course, teachers must then accommodate such social strategies in their classrooms, allowing students to solicit help when they need it, and not viewing such collaboration as "cheating."

(5) Audience awareness: The practice of translating continuously presents youth with the challenge of making texts comprehensible *to particular audiences*. This includes taking information that was prepared with one audience in mind (usually a "mainstream," American, English-speaking one) and making it comprehensible for their immigrant parents. The young people we observed were generally quite sensitive to their audiences, and delivered their messages in appropriate ways. This is a skill that should be capitalized on for the development of academic literacies; students can be encouraged to apply what they do when translating to academic tasks. For example, they can be encouraged to write

for particular audiences, and to shape their message accordingly. Some assignments could involve preparing an essay or a speech on the same topic for two distinct, specified audiences (such as their mother and a friend; a teacher and a neighbor; a cousin living in Mexico and the mayor of their city). To facilitate this, teachers can encourage students to approach these tasks as they might if they had to *translate* their ideas for those two audiences. They can think about: What do they assume that their audience knows about the subject? What values, beliefs, or opinions might their audience hold that they might want to evoke, reinforce, or challenge? What aspects of this topic might they highlight for each audience? What different kinds of background information might they need to provide? They can then write the two essays and work with their peers to consider how effectively they tailored their message for each audience.

Conclusion

The children of immigrants engage in a rich repertoire of language practices when they translate and interpret information for their parents, and they deploy and develop potentially powerful skills from these processes of linguistic and cultural mediation. Rather than focusing on the "burdens" that translating may impose on youth, I have posed ways for parents and educators to capitalize on the rich potential of such practices for the cultivation of academic literacies.

Notes

[1]For a discussion of the various terms that have been used to describe this work, see Orellana, M. F., Reynolds, J. F., Dorner, L. M., & Meza, M. (2003). In other words: Translating or "para-phrasing" as a family literacy practice in immigrant households. *Reading Research Quarterly, 38*(1), 12-34.