Abstract

Students in interpreting courses often learn following a very practical approach. These types of courses usually utilize role-plays to perfect students' interpreting skills and develop the necessary terminology needed during interpreted-mediated events. Adding service-learning components to these types of courses, can provide students with tremendous opportunities to practice and improve their interpreting skills while increasing their social awareness. This article discusses a qualitative analysis of a service-learning project conducted at a non-profit clinic in Dallas, Texas. The participants were university students enrolled in a Spanish-English interpreting class who reflected on the experience through written questionnaires, guided reflections, and an oral interview. The article discusses themes that emerged using these analytical tools. It also examines the balance between service and learning during the project. In addition, the article examines what students learned through the experience that was not covered during class lectures and discussions.

Bilateral Service: An Analysis of a Direct Service-Learning Project for Healthcare Interpreting Students

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Translation and interpreting courses lend themselves almost effortlessly to service-learning projects. Many of these courses follow a very practical approach that includes considerable amounts of practice. Translation courses practice by rendering written texts from one language to another. Interpreting courses often include role-plays created to simulate oral exchanges between two languages that commonly take place during interpreter-mediated events. This article examines a service-learning project conducted at the Agape Clinic in Dallas, Texas. The non-profit clinic provides community health services to medically underserved people, most of whom are Spanish speaking and have limited English proficiency. The participants in the service-learning project were undergraduate students in a Spanish-English Interpreting in Medical Settings course taught at the University of Texas at Arlington during the Fall 2015 semester. The article discusses a qualitative analysis of the project based on the following data: pre- and post-service questionnaires, student's written reflections, and an individual oral interview conducted with participants at the end of the project. The analysis reveals themes that emerged during the pre-service questionnaires and compares them to themes in the post-service questionnaire. It also examines the balance between service and learning during the project. In addition, the article examines students' comments regarding what they learned through the experience that was not covered during class lectures and discussions.

Community Interpreting

Healthcare interpreting falls under the umbrella of community interpreting, which refers to interpreting that takes place within a community.

The purpose of this type of interpreting is to facilitate communication for people who do not speak an official or dominant language and who seek access to basic services (such as in healthcare or school settings), or that need to participate at an institutional setting (such as courts, police stations).

The major domains of community interpreting are healthcare interpreting and legal interpreting. In addition, community interpreting also includes educational interpreting, social care interpreting, and faith-related interpreting (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016, p. 6 and *passim)*. This type of interpreting is also known as "public service interpreting" (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016, pp. 5-6). Healthcare interpreting is also known as medical interpreting, and it refers to interpreting that takes place in healthcare contexts such as hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices. There are two main modes of interpreting commonly known as simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. In simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter renders words heard in one language into another almost at the same time, with a delay of just a few seconds. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter expresses short statements said in one language into another after a speaker has uttered a complete thought and stops speaking (Russell & Takeda, 2015, p. 96). The mode of interpreting most commonly used in healthcare settings is consecutive interpreting, which is also known as *bilateral interpreting* (since this mode often requires two directions [English-Spanish and Spanish-English, for example]). A useful definition of bilateral interpreting is provided by Ian Mason (1999): "interpreter-mediated communication in spontaneous face-to-face interaction" (p. 147). I will use the term *bilateral interpreting* to refer to this mode of interpreting. Bilateral interpreting is the interpreting mode recommended in healthcare settings since it follows a dialogue format and permits the interpreter to ask one of the interlocutors to stop or repeat statements whenever necessary (Rudvin & Tomassini, 2011, p. 44-58). The students who participated in the project used bilateral interpreting for all their interpretations.

Interpreting Pedagogy

Language interpreting has been around since the beginning of time. (See Bowen, Bowen, Kaufmann, & Kurz, 1995 for a comprehensive account of interpreting through history.) Interpreter training, however, did not really become widespread until the use of simultaneous interpreting during the Nuremberg trials (November 1945-October 1946). The twentieth century saw an exponential growth in the need for interpreting services in communities worldwide, particularly in the legal and healthcare settings. As Chuanyun Bao (2015) indicates, interpreter training has seen quite an increase in the last two decades due to the demand for skilled interpreters (pp. 403-404). For interpreters to be competent, they need to have: fluency in two (or more) languages, a good memory, an ability to understand specific jargon, an understanding of different language registers, a familiarity of non-verbal communication, knowledge of cultural issues, and an awareness of professional codes of ethics (Rudvin & Tomassini, 2011, pp. 37-38). Knowledge of vocabulary and acquiring interpreting skills are very important and given a great deal of weight in interpreting courses. In addition, community interpreting courses stress the need for interpreters to adapt to the environment

in which the interpreting event occurs. Interpreter training often also deals at length with ethics and the role of the interpreter in specific settings. Due to space limitations, this article will not address those issues (for an in-depth look at ethical issues around interpreting, see Ozolins, 2015, Angelelli, 2004, and Kaczmarek, 2013).

Interpreting courses rely heavily on practice which is "usually used as a diagnostic tool to check student performance, identify issues, and analyze each student's strengths and weaknesses. Practice is also a means by which instructors introduce and discuss strategies and techniques of interpreting" (Bao, 2015, p. 413). In fact, role-plays are a very important part of interpreter training since they mimic the triadic interactions (between patient, healthcare provider, and interpreter) that take place in interpreting settings. In addition, role-plays serve as an assessment tool, since they provide a view into a student's performance during the interactional dynamics of an interpreting setting (Wadensjö, 2014, p. 449). A constructivist approach to learning has recently gained momentum in the fields of translation and interpreting. This approach places emphasis on the student's own experience, relies on active learning, and believes "that knowledge is constructed by learners, rather than being simply transmitted to them by their teachers" (Kiraly, 2010, p. 1). In addition, this approach also has the "goal of empowering the learner to act responsibly, autonomously and competently" (Kiraly, 2010, p. 33). Practicing in the classroom is fundamental, but may not be enough to train confident, competent interpreters: "No matter how much time is spent in class for practice, it is not sufficient for students to develop the level of speed, efficiency or automaticity as required in enhancing the capacity for information processing" (Bao, 2015, p. 413). Although students may find opportunities to practice on their own, (through volunteering or internships, for example), service-learning provides a more realistic environment where students can apply their skills and reflect about the experience. Service-learning not only provides students with an opportunity to perform in real-life scenarios; it allows its participants to observe the problems individuals face in a community, and to start developing civic responsibility through social engagement.

Service-Learning for Language and Translation/Interpreting Courses

An increasing number of language instructors are using service-learning to provide student learning languages other than English a way to acquire language skills and cultural understanding. This is particularly true with Spanish language courses. Alice Weldon and Gretchen Trautmann (2003) report that many areas in the United States have a Latino population and how a well-planned service-learning course can be extremely useful to reach standards for foreign language learning recommended by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (p. 574). Lourdes Sánchez-López (2013) proposed a service-learning project based on an existing internship course available to students in a certificate program in Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP). The course was intended to provide students with practical language experience in

the workforce, as well as to help the local community with their linguistic/cultural needs (p. 386).

Some of the service-learning research was specifically directed towards translation and interpreting. Collen Ebacher (2013) provides a guide to service-learning courses in Spanish for an upper division translation course. The scholar presents a series of steps for instructors new to service-learning. She details ways to design, implement and asses this type of course. Ebacher stresses the importance of delineating learning objectives for the translation course so that students participating in the course could be ready to "provide interpretation and translation to various stakeholders in the community, local government, and non-profit as well as for-profit business" (p. 401). C. Cecilia Tocaimaza-Hatch and Laura C. Walls (2016) discuss a service-learning course for second language and Heritage Language Learners (HLL) of Spanish. Students in that project translated into Spanish zoo signage written in English. The research "indicated that first all learners expanded their lexicon both in breadth and in depth, and second, HLLs also gained a deeper understanding of other linguistic factors including spelling, register, and linguistic variation" (p. 661). Sherry Shaw and Len Robertson analyze service-learning courses in American Sign Language (ASL)/ English interpreting. One of the main goals of the project was to connect older deaf adults with younger deaf children. The researchers discovered that deaf children at public schools "had little to no exposure to ASL using adults, much less elderly Deaf people" (p. 280). The project also utilized student journals and logs to discuss student's awareness of the deaf community (p. 282). Debra Frazer-McMahon (2013) describes a service-learning translation project for the microlending non-profit organization Kiva, which funds microentrepreneurs in Spanish speaking countries. Students, under the instructor's supervision, volunteer as online translators for Kiva for several hours per week. Students "were able to connect to individuals in need and serve them directly on a multinational and global scale" (p. 255). In addition, students interacted with different texts at diverse registers, made connections to course content, acquired a broader cultural knowledge, and served as inspiration for students to seek further service to their communities (p. 257). Talia Bugel (2013) designed a service-learning Spanish translation course. Students translated materials for Spanish-speaking families of children attending local elementary schools.

The course introduced students to basic history and theories of translation, discussed the roles translators play in contemporary society, and allowed students to practice translation and interpreting (p. 374). The researched noted that "[t]he collaborative nature of our translation projects allowed students to not only translate and interpret, but also to serve in the community and realize the potential benefit of their bilingualism in the lives of others" (p. 380). [Author] (2014) showcases ways to create a service-learning course for the translation and interpreting classroom. He discusses in detail the importance of having a Service-Learning Center at participating universities. At his university, students provided services for an Immigration Counseling Service. Students used translation to provide information regarding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and interpreted interviews with clients regarding family petitions.

The service-learning project at this university served to motivate students to learn more about translation and interpreting, to develop responsibility and work ethics, to better interact with adults and improve translation and interpreting skills (p. 274). The article also mentions an oft-forgotten benefit of service-learning for participants in such projects since faculty and institutions: “are seen in a much more favorable light since they increase the participation in the community” (p. 276).

The current article contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding service-learning projects in translation and interpreting courses. More details will be provided later, but basically the investigation served to examine detail preparation of syllabus to anticipate vocabulary, the creation of more realistic role-plays to familiarize students with different medical settings, incorporating scenarios from multiple medical domains, and ways to reduce the imbalance between the “service” and “learning” aspects of the project.

Agape Service-Learning Project

A great deal of planning goes into creating a service-learning course, or a course with a service learning component, and the Agape project was no exception. It was important for students to perceive the service-learning project as structured and well- planned so they felt they were participating in a professional endeavor. Many of the items discussed below as part of the structure and planning of the course would apply to service-learning courses in other disciplines as well. The Interpreting in Medical Settings course syllabus included an explanation of the service-learning component. Students in the class, had the option of participating in the service-learning component. Those that did not participate in the project had to take 2 additional quizzes. In addition, non-participants learned about the experience through class discussion with participants in the project. Participants were to serve as Spanish-English interpreters at the Agape Clinic, a non-for-profit clinic in Dallas, Texas. The first week of classes included a presentation about service-learning and how it integrates academic learning and relevant service to the community. The presentation also stressed the importance of civic engagement. Participants in the project were exempt from taking the quizzes in the class but had to fill out written material that served as reflections (see Methodology) and participated in an oral interview with the professor. The project did not start until the middle of the course to discuss different medical specialties and to permit time for students to acquire the necessary vocabulary.

The director of the Agape Clinic came to speak to the class and expressed the mission of the clinic: “to improve the health of medically underserved people by providing quality community health services.” The Director also discussed the services the clinic provided such as routine physicals, specialty services (such as dermatology and pediatrics, women’s health), and patient advocacy and assistance.

Each participant in the project read and signed a Student/Agency Agreement Form, which detailed the expectations from the student, the agency

and the instructor. Also, since the project took place outside of campus, the participants filled out a short Release and Indemnification Agreement Form.

Methodology

Participants

There were 20 students in the class and 11 students participated in the service-learning component of the course (55% of the class). As mentioned, participation in the service-learning project was voluntary. Participants were junior or senior undergraduate students enrolled the Interpreting in Medical Settings at the University of Texas at Arlington during the Fall semester 2015. Nine participants were female (82%) and two were male (18%). The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 43. Students completed a range of 5-9 hours of service in a maximum of two-hour increments Although originally students were to do 15-20 hours of service, several issues came up and that proved be unrealistic. In many cases participants were commuter students, who had scheduling conflicts, worked many hours, had children and/or served as caregivers for family members. All participants were bilingual in Spanish and English and had previously taken the Introduction to Interpreting course and passed with a grade of B or better. Students shadowed in-house interpreters at the non-profit for a few sessions before they interpreted on their own.

Materials

Four sets of data were analyzed: pre-service and post-service written questionnaires, three guided reflections and a semi structured oral interview. The pre- and post-service questionnaires were designed to elicit student's experience with service to their community and to assess to what degree the experience helped with course objectives. The pre-service questionnaire was given before the service-learning project started and the post-service questionnaire was given after the project had ended. The three guided reflections were scaffolded during the course. Students' reflections were designed to examine links between classroom training and their interpreting at the clinic. An oral interview was also used. Oral interviews are often seen as useful since they are often combined with other methods to obtain more information about answers provided by students initially (Jacoby, 2015). The oral interview was conducted at the end of the course and examined the experience as a whole, as well as what students had learned outside of the classroom during the experience. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data from the reflections and the oral interview also served to examine issues that students believed they learned from the experience outside the classroom.

Analysis

The study included the analysis of qualitative data and the use of multiple methods of data collection (written questionnaires, reflections and an oral interview). The multiple sources of data compared the data collected and identified participants' perspectives about the project itself and their interpreting abilities throughout the duration of the project.

Pre- and Post-service Questionnaires

The questionnaires proved to be a rich source of information. The common themes that emerged from both questionnaires were*: practical experience, community awareness, career reassurance* and *skills development.* Students were keenly aware that practice was to be part of the service-learning experience and they used several terms and phrases to describe its practicality. Before the project students felt that they would be able to "put into practice," what they had learned, in the classroom and they expressed their willingness to experience "hands-on learning" and were thrilled to have the opportunity to work in real world settings. While these comments are common in a project of this kind, what was remarkable, however, was the enthusiasm the students communicated. The post-questionnaire supported the fact that students believed to have learned from the experience and that the material covered in class was useful in the clinic. One student commented that the experience was "an excellent way to put your interpretation skills into practice."

The idea that students would learn about the community surfaced on several occasions as students initially discussed the experience as a possibility to "relate and learn about the community and give back to the community." Many students, although part of the same community, belonged to a different socio-economic status and were unaware of the difficulties that some individuals encountered to obtain medical attention due to patient's limited English proficiency. Participants mentioned that the experience made them take a closer look at "those that really need the help," and the fact that the service-learning component added "a necessary service to people in my community." The project also brought an appreciation for the "struggle that most Hispanics face in most places they go, whether is a clinic, court, food store and/or schools."

Many students initially saw service-learning as an opportunity to confirm/reassure their intentions to become interpreters or consider interpreting in healthcare settings as a career. The project provided a way to "test the waters" and corroborate whether they felt they were ready to become future professional interpreters. Service-learning courses provide this unique opportunity for students to consider a field of interest in real life and away from a university environment.

The notion that the service would serve to reassure a student's career choice was also present in the post-service questionnaire. One student expressed that, although interpreting was a career she was considering, the healthcare setting was not her first choice: "I don't like the sight of blood or cuts or anything of the sort, so I'm more interested in volunteering and working in the legal sector." Other students expressed that the experience provided information to decide whether interpreting was a career path they were willing to follow. Often this type of experience also serves to dissuade students from entering a career; something useful for students to determine before committing to a profession. Answers given, seem to reflect how project of this nature can offer students a window into a world they seek to join.

The idea that the project would help students develop their skills was another issue that frequently surfaced. Students were hoping that the experience would enhance and/or test their skills, as they interpreted. A chance to develop skills matched the answers given in the pre-service and post-service questionnaires. Students described that the experience provided an avenue to apply interpreting skills, while also testing their interpreting abilities in a real-world situation.

Although themes such as practice and community awareness usually surface in projects of this nature, the answers provided by students indicate more emphasis on issues associated with learning than with the ones associated with service and social awareness. Themes that associated with the learning aspect of the project (*practical experience, career reassurance, skill development),* appear regularly in the answers provided on the pre- and post-service questionnaires. The themes associated with the service aspect of the project (*community awareness, good citizenship, learning from other cultures, patient gratitude)* did not appear as often. The experiential learning proposed by John Dewey (1900), which has served as a theoretical background on which to build service-learning, included a connection to society. The philosopher/educator explained:

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him [sic] with the spirit of service, and providing him [sic] with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious. (p. 44)

The students' responses tip the balance in favor of learning. Faculty developing service-learning projects have the challenging responsibility of ensuring a balance between service and learning. Although service was a big part of the project, students' answers seemed to concentrate much more on their own benefits than on those they may provide to the community. Understandably, students put more emphasis on the learning aspect of the project than on the service part. Current generations of university students in the United States show great concern with their grades and constantly receive pressure from parents, siblings, friends, and career counselors to perform well in school in order to obtain a good paying job. For this project, as in many service-learning projects, supplementary exercises may help promote a deeper reflection on the experience and stress the importance of service, so students can engage their communities in the future.

Reflections and Oral Interview

The reflections and oral interview also provided a mountain of information. An important aspect of the investigation examined what the students believed they had learned during the service-learning project outside of the classroom. Students reflected in writing through guided reflections and an individual oral interview. Some of the expected responses included learning vocabulary and

new terminology. Although the course covered a wide range of vocabulary and terminology in different healthcare settings, some students did not expect the frequency of usage of certain terminology. A curious anecdote that casts light on the vocabulary learned in class surfaced. Students had gone over certain terminology and medications dealing with psychiatric settings. Students knew that *clorhidrato de fluoxetina* (fluoxetine hydrochloride) was Prozac, but they did not expect to have to use the chemical name of the medication: “I was surprised that it actually comes up more often than not.”

There were, other interesting issues revealed. Although students had abundant practice in class through role-plays, they soon became familiar with each other while reading from a script. Many times, role-plays used in interpreting courses use preexisting scripts read from some of the existing manuals (such as the one by Holly Mikkelson [1994]). Scripted role-plays have the advantage of concentrating on specific terminology and settings, and following a logical development of an interpreter-mediated event. Although useful, these scripts do not often showcase emotions that may surface during an interpreter-mediated event (there are also unscripted role-plays where students create a situation and improvise a dialogue set up as a medical encounter). Students were aware that they were interacting with real people that display different feelings and understood that patients may be emotional due to physical or mental problems they may be facing. Participants also noticed how their own emotions come into play in the interpreted event. Students new to interpreting often come to interpreting courses having a traditional idea of interpreters as being emotionless “interlingual” repeaters; they soon learn that this is not always the case. There were many occasions where students sympathized with the patient. One student pointed out “my family is at really high risk for diabetes and I noticed that a lot of people were going through it, a lot of people are depressed, going through divorce and stuff”. The fact that she had family members with the same condition and that she was also going through a divorce made it difficult to maintain her composure. A student mentioned that often patients “are embarrassed or they are self-conscious, and you know, really, you can get that out of the books, you have to be there and realize that in person.” Students also discovered that mental illness was more prevalent than they thought. As in many other courses with service-learning components, students experienced unpredictable situations. Another student pointed out how she felt about the expectations of some doctors and patients and how she often felt self-conscious “I think the biggest challenge will probably be the doctor and the patient being patient with you, understand that you can’t interpret everything really fast like a machine you know.” One student mentioned how she managed to deal with her nervousness “in my head I was like, what if I mess up a word? What if I don’t know how to do it or how I forget and then you know… and then kind of slow me down, but once I got into the flow…, OK, I can do this, there is no problem, I know the terminology, I know the vocabulary, I studied for this so, it’s going to be OK.” One of the many benefits of reflections is the surfacing of this type of issues, which can serve to prepare students for future service-learning projects.

Students mentioned the fast-paced environment that takes place in a clinic; something that examined in the course, but perhaps not to the degree that occurs in real-life situations. Students expressed surprise by “the fast-paced environment the volunteer staff works” and the few moments they had between patients. One student described situations where she had “a second to catch your breath between flying into different rooms on the other side of the hall with different doctors.”

The protocol taught in the class suggested students do a pre-session before interpreting, whenever possible, with both the medical provider and the patient. The pre-session is a brief introduction to the two parties participating in the interpreter-mediated event (medical provider and patient) to request the mode of interpreting (bilateral) and to ask the patient and the provider to address each other directly (for a brief description and a sample pre-session see Roat 2010, p. 15.) Some students felt that the lack of a pre-session was odd since they were “trained to use a pre-session in class.” Doctors not trained in the use of interpreters often see pre-sessions as taking away time that they feel they do not have. Although mentioned in class that a pre-session was not always possible, many students showed concern when they were unable to conduct it. Protocols are a large part of many disciplines that participate in service-learning projects. Students often are very adamant about following protocols and frequently demonstrate little flexibility in this matter. Service-learning, with its real-life experiences, offers instances when a need to change or adapt certain protocols surfaces.

One important issue that came out during this aspect of the investigation, was the range of vocabulary needed when interpreting even for just one interpreted event. One student expressed “I went to the dermatology clinic but they do everything there, so the patient I had was getting treatment for some skin condition but at the same time he was also getting treatment for schizophrenia.” In the classroom, role-plays, lectures and readings introduce new vocabulary from a certain area in medicine (dermatology, psychiatry, neurology, etc.). The medical interpreting course explains the possible combinations of certain areas, but perhaps not to the extent that can happen in the real encounters between patients and providers.

Conclusion

The experiential education that service-learning provides is essential to engage students, particularly in the translation and interpreting fields where students already learn through practice. The results shown here, suggest that a well-organized service-learning experience provides students with a unique real-world experience where they can learn about the issues in their communities and enhance skills learned in the classroom. In addition, service-learning for students in community interpreting courses, as well as in other fields, provides an opportunity for hands-on experience while helping students determine if they would like to pursue a career in a specific setting.

This study pointed to the imbalance between the “service” and the “learning” aspects of the project. Although students are excited about the

possibility of service-learning and are eager to learn and apply their skills, they may often lose sight of the importance of serving the community and the idea of citizenship that Dewey was championing more than a century ago. Perhaps, adding more information about the “service” aspect can stress the importance of developing social awareness through service-learning without minimizing the importance of the learning aspect. This would help students realize the fact that service often sheds light on possible inequalities existing in a specific community and provides opportunities for students to grow as citizens. The co-curricular experiences that service-learning provides not only educates students academically, but also helps develop good citizens while providing a unique opportunity for students to cultivate civic responsibility through social engagement.

The invaluable interpreting experience that the project provided showcased important aspects of interpreting itself. Students were able to experience the fast-pace environment that takes place in interpreting mediated events as well as the emotions that often surface in medical settings. The occurrence of multiple medical terminology and vocabulary from different fields of medicine during an interpreter-mediated event, is an aspect that, although addressed in the classroom, needed more attention. Future role-plays and exercises involving terminology and vocabulary in community interpreting (particularly in interpreting in healthcare settings) could make note of this fact discovered by the student interpreters.

Some of the best practices recommended for interpreting service-learning projects could include designing a detailed syllabus (that contains detailed information on the course and the agency being served), combining the necessary vocabulary (in medical settings dermatology, psychiatry, pediatrics, neurology, etc.) mimicking occurrences in real-life situations, establishing frequent communication with the non-profit (to check on students and any particular needs from the non-profit), providing students an avenue to reflect on the service-learning experience (through questionnaires, reflections, interviews), and emphasizing the civic aspect of the project (using presentations and discussions by students to address community needs).

Finally, it would be beneficial to conduct further research on the impact of service-learning projects to the non-profit organizations served. This will further address reciprocity between non-profits organizations and universities. This type of research could also examine the additional resources that can be provided to communities through student service, particularly through translation and interpreting; two disciplines that provide excellent opportunities for service in our communities.

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