Reviewer's report

Title: Translating language and culture: A key issue in international public health research

Version: 1 Date: 24 November 2004

Reviewer: Jeanine Blackford

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper has the potential to have wider relevance to researchers outside the public health field but requires a clearer focus to achieve the stated aim of the paper.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Aims are stated twice in the paper but vary. This is in the 1st para and last para of background section. There is a need to ensure consistency and avoid repetition
2. Clear aim that matches content of paper: Given that the stated aim is about comparing two methods of working with interpreters it is only a minor proportion of the paper. The authors need to decide whether they are presenting a methodological paper drawing on research experience or the findings of their research. They have attempted to have presented a methods issues in the format of a research paper which may have made it difficult to present the argument.
3. Title: It does not clearly represent the content of the paper. There is no discussion of the issue of translating culture nor is any evidence provided within the paper that it is an international concern.
4. Abstract: Each of the three sentences in the background do not connect into a coherent argument given that the focus of the paper is on the two different methods of working with interpreters in cross-cultural research it is not clear how it relates to the challenges of crossing languages and cultures. The sentence (in results section of abstract) ‘The advantage was that the interpreter had greater involvement’ it is uncertain as to which model you are referring to as the previous sentence discusses the traditional model. It is unclear in the conclusion whether you are you recommending a reflexive methodology or you used one.
5. Background: The first three sentences of the background do not clearly articulate how cross-cultural research is significant to public health. Given that the focus of the paper is on working with interpreters to undertake cross-cultural research then an introduction to the issue of working with interpreters may be more useful. You suggest that there is not a great deal written about the role of interpreters in the public health arena but there are concerns. What are these concerns and how do you address them with your project. There is literature outside the public health arena that can be used.
6. Hunt and Bhopal argue that the challenge of culture and language is yet to be met in public health but what exactly do they see as the challenge?
7: Methods: From the paper it is not evident why the two models were chosen or did it develop serendipitously? Given that the focus is on working with interpreters then the discussion of the thematic analysis does not appear relevant to the paper. What would be relevant to the paper would be recruitment of the interpreter and the preparation of this person for the research, some of which appears in the discussion but actually would be better placed in the methods section. It is usual to provide socio-demographic details such as your table that appears in the discussion under research design information.
8. interview process: you indicate that the role of the interpreter in the project changed. Why did it change? Was it a part of the research plan?
9. Results: Interview process: there is no data presented to support the claim. Was this part of field notes or journal or evident in the transcripts?
10. Transcription & translation: Effect of translation on transcription appears from what you have presented significant as it changes the language of the women's experience and how they experienced health care. Can you provide clear criteria on your decision making about the accuracy of translation?

11. Discussion: In the discussion there is actually presentation of the findings or experiences of the researcher working with the interpreter. The first part in paragraph 2 indicates there was some tension, which is in fact data. How was this data captured? It would be assumed that it was part of the researcher’s field notes. Later in this paragraph the authors refer to changing to model 2 but no explanation has been provided in the methods section as to when this happened and why.

12. The relevance of the last paragraph of the discussion is unclear.

13. Conclusion: Based on your experience an important outcome for this paper would be to suggest some guidelines for public health researchers beyond the three point you identify. You also suggest the need for consideration at the outset of the study design about the degree of accuracy of interpretation. How did you plan this in your study? This needs to be addressed in the methods section.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests