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### **Access Services Proposal for Linguistic Minorities**

To improve access services for linguistic minorities in libraries, I propose improving written and visual communication, as well as connecting with communities and promoting specialized services. Overcoming communication barriers is an important first step, as a lack of confidence in English may reduce the likelihood that a linguistic minority will visit the library (Burke, 2008, p. 166). Improving written and visual communication with linguistic minorities can both improve their relationship with libraries and facilitate literacy (Jules, n.d.). Improved communication can also help when connecting with linguistic minority communities, which is a vital component of assessing their needs and gaining their input (Fisher & Naumer, 2006). Connecting with linguistic minority communities also offers the opportunity of advertising the library, which is important as libraries may be a new concept to some (Lynch, 2017), and the specialized services offered may benefit them greatly.

Taking extra time to assist linguistic minorities and specialize services for them is important because the first goal of library service is to provide access to information (Evans, Saponaro, Christie, & Sinwell, 2015, p. 12), and providing such access cannot happen if communication is poor. Indeed, a lack of communication can be seen as an inherent power imbalance (Chu, 1999, p. 342), which library management must counteract in order to provide service to this underrepresented user group.

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### **Print/Media Collection Maintenance**

Collection maintenance is focused on maintaining the order of library materials, the goal of which is to smooth collection navigability and library operations (Evans et al., 2015, p. 133). Two key elements of effective collection maintenance are organizing and maintaining materials. Organizing materials involves grouping by title, a special subject collection, or a classification system (Evans et al., 2015, p. 161, 135). Maintaining materials includes shelving, shelf-reading, weeding, and re-housing collections (Evans et al., 2015, p. 136-7, 160-1). Other tasks, such as

adding security measures or preparing for a wide variety of disasters, may fall under materials maintenance as well (Evans et al., 2015, p. 399-404).

Many key collection and stack maintenance procedures affect the value that the library has for linguistic minorities, such as classification systems, signage, and displays. Classification systems are notoriously difficult for patrons to navigate (Evans et al., 2015, p. 135), and as such, signage to help navigate the collection becomes vital. However, linguistic minorities may not understand English signs, so options such as bilingual signage may make the library more user-friendly (Burke, 2008, p. 166). Visuals, such as representative images or prominent displays, may also help linguistic minorities navigate the collection, because they can be more universally understood (Gyongyi, Komlodi, & Chu, 2015; Jules, n.d.).

Thus, to better meet the needs of linguistic minorities, I suggest improving signage and visual communication. First, by including visual representations on signs. Second, by updating the “Foreign Language” sign to display multiple languages. And third, by using displays that do not rely on words to communicate their themes.

My suggestions are based on addressing the unspoken assumption that linguistic minorities are familiar with the Roman alphabet. In Sinhalese, a language spoken in Sri Lanka, the word for “restroom” is written like this: විවේකාගාරය. For someone who speaks Sinhalese, “restroom” looks similar to “baño,” “badkamer” or “salle de bains.” This means that signage featuring roman characters, even ones that include other languages, are difficult to comprehend. A sign that shows a picture of a toilet would be much more helpful for linguistic minorities, for, not only are visuals easier to understand, they are also a preferred way for linguistic minorities to navigate information (Gyongyi, Komlodi, & Chu, 2015, p. 3). Assumptions about the Roman alphabet also affect the signage for foreign language sections. “Japanese,” in Japanese, is written like this: 日本語. Thus, again, a section titled “Foreign Languages” may mean little to linguistic minorities, and thus cannot help them navigate to it. A better option would be to have the sign written in a variety of languages, or make a prominent display of foreign language materials to give an impression of the section (Jules, n.d.).

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### **Circulation and Borrower Registration**

Circulation and borrower registration services are designed to give qualifying patrons equal access to materials, however, this goal requires specific personal contact information, and necessitates limited loan periods and penalties to ensure equal access (Evans et al., 2015, p. 15). In many cases, borrower registration secures this contact information, as well as demographic data, and provides patrons with library cards (Evans et al., 2015, p. 125). Circulation services encompasses the loaning and returning of materials in the ILS, notifying patrons about holds and fines, overseeing reserves, and more (Evans et al., 2015, p. 122-24, 129-31, 139-41).

While circulation and borrower registration tasks must be applied to patrons equally, certain tasks are crucial when trying to best serving linguistic minorities. These crucial tasks are often communication-based, such as obtaining contact information or sending fine notices, and may require translation services. Other tasks which can aid linguistic minorities are data-based, and involve analyzing demographic data or collection statistics to plan services or make acquisition selections.

Some of these tasks, especially the data-driven ones, do not require special procedures. However, communication-based tasks should be adapted for linguistic minorities in order to best serve them. One adaptation could be to have a “Welcome” sign written in a variety of languages, on which patrons could point out their language, thus making them feel welcome and smoothing communication at the same time. Another way to adapt circulation and borrower registration tasks for linguistic minorities is to provide pre-translated pamphlets of instructions (Burke, 2008, p. 166), or to have translation programs or devices on hand. One of

the best ways to communicate effectively with linguistic minorities during circulation or borrower registration tasks, however, is simply to hire multilingual staff (Lynch, 2017).

These suggestions would improve the patron satisfaction of linguistic minorities by first addressing their basic communication needs, which can then open the door to addressing their information needs. This is vitally important because linguistic minorities may require specific information on transportation, employment, medical services, or recreational activities (Chung & Yoon, 2015, p. 44; Machet & Govender, 2012, p. 31). However, none of these information needs can be met if linguistic minorities and library staff cannot communicate with each other.

One area that might affect communication at circulation and borrower registration tasks is the assumption that patrons understand the function of a library, when, in fact, linguistic minorities may not have anything like libraries in their native lands (Chu, 1999, p. 340). Even the concept of borrowing may not translate well, a fact I recently discovered with a linguistic minority friend. Another common assumption that may affect linguistic minorities at circulation and borrower registration is that people have the proper identification needed to register for a library card or to check out materials. The identification rules may seem complicated or arbitrary, or they simply may not have the documentation that others take for granted.

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### **Document Delivery or Interlibrary Loan**

Document delivery and interlibrary loan are processes by which library staff bring difficult-to-access materials to a patron. Document delivery can consist of off-site materials, or materials that are available for purchase, and are delivered to patrons physically or electronically (Evans et al., 2015, p. 106-7). Interlibrary loan refers to the reciprocal borrowing systems that libraries have with each other, with varying costs based on shipping prices, and varying policies based on legal issues (Evans et al., 2015, p. 102-3, 113-15). The goals of document delivery and interlibrary loan are to expand access to resources without having to incur the cost or maintenance of keeping the items in the collection, particularly if they do not fit the collection or community on the whole (Evans et al., 2015, p. 101-2). Key elements of effective document delivery and interlibrary loan are verifying the correct item, following proper ILS protocol when requesting and loaning, and assessing the condition of materials upon receipt and arrival (Evans et al., 2015, p. 115-16).

Document delivery and interlibrary loan offer a lot of value to linguistic minorities, however, they may also require more service assistance. The value of document delivery and interlibrary loan to linguistic minorities is that it significantly widens the potential to find works in other languages. Yet this service is again affected by communication and cultural barriers. First, as mentioned above, linguistic minorities need to understand what public libraries are, which is not a given (Lynch, 2015). Second, they must know that interlibrary loan services exist. Third, they must communicate which materials they desire. All three areas require more work for library staff than is typically required. However, the result is increased literacy for traditionally underserved members of the community, which makes the work extremely important.

In order to design these services to meet the needs of linguistic minorities I propose advertising library services to linguistic minority communities, highlighting the library's ability to provide materials in native languages, and utilizing communication aids. Linguistic minorities are likely to have specific information grounds, or areas where they gather communally and share information, such as churches, schools, or stores (Fisher & Naumer, 2006, p. 94-5). These areas are ideal locations to advertise the library and highlight how interlibrary loan could benefit their community. They are also prime locations for discovering the information that the community shares and values, and for identifying community-specific information needs (Burke, 2008, p. 166; Fisher & Naumer, 2006). Communication aids such as language translators, pamphlets explaining circulation policies, and lists of libraries which collect specific languages, can all help library staff assist linguistic minorities with interlibrary loans.

These suggestions to encourage linguistic minorities to use interlibrary loan can improve their library satisfaction and literacy skills, while also addressing their information needs. Increased access to texts in their native languages encourages the native literacy of linguistic minorities and also allows them to access their traditional knowledge (Chu, 1999, p. 342). Demonstrating that the library values their cultural heritage improves a linguistic minority patron's sense of belonging within the library community (Jules, n.d.). Adapting interlibrary loan and document delivery services for linguistic minorities also fulfills the first mission of library service, as mentioned above, by providing access to information, especially information which the patron can understand.

Unspoken assumptions about document delivery and interlibrary loan that affect linguistic minorities are many. One important group of assumptions centers on the idea that patrons will go through the extra steps these services require, which includes asking for assistance in the first place. Some users see interlibrary loan as too laborious, and may resort to it only if there are no other options (Evans et al., 2015, p. 103). This perceived difficulty can be compounded by the potential for library anxiety, that can affect all user groups (Evans et al., 2015, 36-7), and may be heightened if there is a language barrier. Thus, while library staff may assume document delivery and interlibrary loan services are simple and helpful, it must be remembered that not all users see them in these terms.

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### **Evaluation and Assessment**

The question of how best to help linguistic minorities must be predicated by the question of how we communicate with them. Thus, my proposals are centered around communication, and can best be assessed through interviews and surveys (Evans et al., 2015, p. 420), and the overall effect evaluated through circulation statistics.

For the proposal affecting collection maintenance, namely including visuals and other languages on signage, I would assess the effect on the user-group by conducting interviews and comparing circulation statistics at three-month intervals.

For the proposal affecting circulation, namely introducing a multi-language welcome sign, I would assess the effect by surveying and interviewing staff and linguistic minority patrons. Both assessment methods would be necessary, as surveys can give broad data about a population, yet interviews can provide deeper insight (Evans et al., 2015, p. 420).

For the proposal affecting document delivery and interlibrary loan, namely advertising the services to linguistic minority communities, I would assess interlibrary loan statistics at monthly intervals. I would also conduct surveys and interviews at community functions in quarterly intervals.

Many studies have assessed linguistic minorities in regards to library or information services (Chung & Yoon, 2015; Gyongyi, Komlodi, & Chu, 2015; Machet & Govender, 2012), These assessments are all based heavily on outcomes, particularly of improved circulation of library resources and achievement of the library's mission to serve its community (Evans et al., 2015, p. 417).

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