Translating Across Registers: Pragmatist Inquiry in Engaged Scholarship

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Abstract

Inquiry is a central concept within pragmatism, defined generally as the process of collectively defining problematic aspects of current social practices and developing better alternatives. Translation—defined broadly as the labor of negotiating, transforming, and synthesizing diverse experiences—is a critical but understudied component of pragmatist inquiry. In this article, we articulate how translation occurred across multiple registers in a collaborative community-engaged research project involving university researchers and a regional food bank, focusing on translation as logistical, affective, and positional labor. Our analysis demonstrates how reflexive attention to various forms of translation across the research process can enrich socially engaged research.

Keywords: pragmatism, translation, food insecurity

Pragmatist inquiry has enjoyed a modest resurgence in social research over the last decade (Barnes, 2008; Biesta, 2010; Harney, McCurry, Scott, & Wills, 2016; Morgan, 2014). Rooted in community-engaged methods and anti-foundationalist approaches to knowledge production, pragmatist research focuses on provisional knowledges that are useful to a specific historical moment, rather than on comprehensive theoretical frameworks with robust metaphysical footings (Biesta, 2010). Through a process of inquiry, pragmatist research draws multiple stakeholders into conversation to develop new and more beneficial alternatives to current practices. Pragmatist inquiry brings diverse groups into conversation to develop shared understanding and new ideas.

In this article, we argue that *translation* is a central but understudied aspect of this process. Although it is invoked in related work in actor-network theory (ANT), translation is a term rarely used by Dewey, James, Rorty, or other prominent pragmatists (Barnett & Bridge, 2013). In ANT, it refers primarily to the transformation of knowledges through networks of human and nonhuman actants (Best & Walters, 2013; Callon, 1984). Our use of translation goes beyond its use in ANT, where the term foregrounds the process of scientific research, to include other registers, ranging from affective interactions between participants to logistical arrangements among geographically dispersed actors.

We examine the role of translation within pragmatist inquiry through reflection on a community-engaged research collaboration between the Atlanta Community Food Bank (referred to here as the food bank) and researchers at the University of Georgia, conducted in spring 2017. The food bank was beginning a new initiative called Stabilizing Lives intended to develop new supports to help households reach economic and social stability. Such supports included increased access to food pantries and connections to related social services around housing or health care issues for clients of those pantries/food insecure households. Food bank staff were intrigued with the housing first model of support (Tsemberis,

Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004; Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2015) and wanted to explore ways in which the food bank could play a role in reducing stressors related to food insecurity so that clients could focus attention on other pressing concerns.

In order better to understand how clients experienced various stressors, food bank staff partnered with a team of researchers at the University of Georgia (UGA) to develop a research design that involved clients at five partner food pantries. UGA researchers collaborated with food bank staff to develop a mixed-methods research project soliciting input from a group of staff, volunteers, and clients (collectively recognized as planning teams) at multiple food pantries. Planning teams used interviewing, photo-elicitation, and concept mapping to collectively identify potential new conceptual frameworks and service models for pantries within the food bank's network.

In this article, we draw on the Stabilizing Lives research project as a case study to consider the work of translation in three distinct registers: (1) translation as logistical work, (2) translation as affective work, and (3) translation as positional work. In line with the goals of pragmatist inquiry, each of these components was essential in bringing the previously marginalized voices of food pantry clients to the table and facilitating a productive conversation about new models of food assistance within their communities.

We hope that this account of a staged research process broadens the ways pragmatist inquiry is understood as a paradigm for engaged research, highlights the central role of translation in research designed for social change, and informs the design of future community-based inquiry projects. Through an exploration of the role each of these played in supporting the Stabilizing Lives research project, this article offers insight and future guidance to those pursuing engaged, pragmatist-informed research.

Pragmatism, Inquiry, and Translation

The design of our research was broadly informed by previous work in participatory action research (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007), community-engaged scholarship (Robinson, Block, & Rees, 2016; Sieber, 2006), and the culture-centered approach to health communication (Dutta, 2008, 2010).

Each of these traditions prioritizes nonhierarchical, process-focused research practices that engage participants as coinvestigators, specifically in the context of articulating and prioritizing problems and developing solutions (Dutta, 2008).

Beyond these influences, the project was conceptually grounded primarily in the pragmatist concept of *inquiry*. Within pragmatist thought, inquiry is "a process by which beliefs that have become problematic are examined and resolved through action" (Morgan, 2014, p. 1047). Staff at the food bank had recognized that the provision of emergency food to thousands of metro area clients was not meeting the clients' needs. The massive logistical work performed by the food bank was not directly assisting clients out of poverty or alleviating the need for emergency food. Thus, the very inception of the project was rooted in a pragmatist recognition of the need to look beyond existing institutional practices to find new insights into how to play a more transformative role in the lives of the clientele.

Within the pragmatist tradition, inquiry requires active reflection to fashion new and more useful truths (Morgan, 2014). Truth, or the truthfulness of a given theory, is gauged not through its coherence with a broader framework of metaphysical thought, but through its ability to describe and usefully inform individuals' interactions with the world. For many pragmatists,

> ideas [don't] already exist in perfect form but [emerge] contingently and experimentally in response to the particular needs and practices of people as they [live] out their lives in a given place and time. Ideas [are] like knives and forks, implements to accomplish particular tasks, and not transcendent truths. (Barnes, 2008, p. 1544)

Pragmatism thus emphasizes the importance of *praxis*, the interplay of action and reflection that constitutes and revises human knowledge (Bridge, 2014).

For John Dewey, one of the major figures of early pragmatism, social practices could be separated into two broad categories: habit and inquiry. Dewey viewed habit as "the beliefs that we have acquired from previous experiences [that] can adequately handle the demands for action in our current cir-

cumstances" (Morgan, 2014, p. 1046). These established—but still fallible—truths unconsciously guide everyday human action. Inquiry begins when habit is no longer judged sufficient, whether through changing circumstances or the identification of previously unrecognized problems. Through a process of inquiry, diverse parties can collectively identify problems and develop new solutions to social problems. In Dewey's view, diverse parties included "all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for" (Dewey, 1927, p. 16–17, as cited in Barnett & Bridge, 2013, p. 1027).

If inquiry draws from diverse, collective experiences of stakeholders, then *translation* is a core part of this process. Translation is not a narrow intellectual cognitive exercise but calls on and is constituted through a set of embodied practices rooted in everyday life and practical concerns. We define translation as the labor of negotiating, transforming, and synthesizing diverse experiences and perspectives with the goal of developing shared understanding and new sets of practices. The work of translation is fundamental to bringing together diverse parties to develop new language and practices to produce more beneficial outcomes (Barnett & Bridge, 2013; Hepple, 2008). Most straightforwardly, translation involves *logistical labor*, drawing on technological tools for the representation and sharing of participants' words and experiences across media and domains, as well as tools for managing the logistics that bring stakeholders together at the table. Translation also involves *affective labor*, the work of fostering trust and mutual understanding among diverse stakeholders (Harney et al., 2016), as well as empathizing with others' experiences and backgrounds. Lastly, translation involves *positional labor*, being mindful of the institutional contexts and interests relevant to a research project and reflexively sharing past experiences and expertise. Through this article, we reflect on these various forms of translation and the ways they supported and sustained the process of pragmatist inquiry in the Stabilizing Lives research collaboration.

Methods and Context

The goal of this research was to better understand the obstacles facing clients and trade-offs made between food needs and other concerns such as housing, transportation, and/or health care. To that end, we engaged with a range of actors to identify practices and procedures that would better serve the food bank in its efforts to support its clientele. Given its emphasis on the contingent and historically situated nature of knowledge, research in a pragmatist paradigm is often a hybrid mix of discourses and methods (Feilzer, 2009; Morgan, 2007, 2014). Our hybrid mix of methods included photovoice and concept mapping (Haque & Rosas, 2010) in combination with focus group conversations and individual interviews.

A full description of our research project and results is available in a related publication (Kurtz, Borron, Shannon, & Weaver, 2019). In brief, researchers from the University of Georgia (Jerry, Abigail, and Hilda) collaborated with staff from the Atlanta Community Food Bank (Alexis, Sarah, and Vista) to better understand the factors affecting clients' daily food provisioning strategies. Working at five different agencies across Metro Atlanta, we asked clients to submit photos of their "food worlds"—the ways they procured, transported, prepared, and ate foods—and talk about these photos in one-on-one interviews. At each agency, a planning team of clients, staff, and volunteers sorted client-selected photos into groups based on themes using concept mapping methodology (Haque & Rosas, 2010), and the whole team discussed issues raised by the photos in each grouping. In a final design summit, the research team and partner agencies shared our findings and brainstormed implications for new food assistance programs.

To better understand the role of translation in the project, food bank staff and UGA researchers agreed to jointly author a methodological reflection on our work together. To accommodate professional demands on the time of the food bank staff, rather than organize a multisite writing process, we staged a research team conversation among members of the team as the basis for this methodological reflection, held soon after the conclusion of the formal study. The conversation (which was then transcribed) touched on the research process, our partnership, the collaborative processes, multidisciplinary and experiential positionalities, and observations that constituted all facets of the project. UGA researchers then

used this conversation as a foundation for collaboratively writing this article, soliciting input from food bank staff throughout the writing process.

Translation as Logistical Labor

Our research included multiple research sites and rounds of meetings, making this a logistically challenging project. The work of translating schedules and data to allow for the research to proceed was performed through a combination of dedicated staff time and technological tools. In the three subsections below, we discuss how translation helped us plan for and implement this research.

Meeting at a Distance

Digital technologies played pivotal roles enabling the translation of knowledges, techniques, and experiences among the research team throughout the project. The sprawling design of our project, which involved multiple stakeholders and meetings at five different sites across the metro area, complicated project planning and communication. Digital tools played a key role in translating across this distance, allowing UGA researchers and food bank staff to be present with each other, either virtually or physically.

Given that the research team was based in Athens and the food bank team partners were 80 miles away in Atlanta, it was obvious at the outset that teleconferencing technology would be essential. We came to rely on Zoom (http://zoom.us), a videoconferencing software that enables meeting participants to participate from more than two locations. The research design was crafted and refined over the course of a series of teleconferenced meetings. Once the project was under way, food bank staff and UGA researchers could meet to coevaluate progress to date, reflect on preliminary impressions and findings, and refine processes moving forward as time permitted.

Pragmatism highlights the importance of embodied research practices in supporting processes of inquiry. Teleconferencing paired with a shared Google drive created the effect of being in the same room with a shared filing cabinet during meetings actually held over a distance of 80 miles, from two or three different offices. These crucial

digital technologies translated distance into meaningful and productive copresence. When the researchers and food bank partners could not be in the same room, engaging in proximate and embodied research evaluation, videoconferencing enabled us to listen to spoken language and body language as we worked to translate between action and reflection. The visual dimension of videoconferencing seemed to strengthen the emerging research relationships.

During the reflective group conversation, we began to discuss our respective roles in the process. One of the food bank staff expressed direct empathy with food pantry clientele, signaling that she had personally experienced food insecurity as a child. She began to choke up a bit as she recounted how she felt during that time, and slid her chair to the side, off camera. Because we could see her face and her body language as she wrestled with her feelings in the moment, the UGA researchers were able to respond in a way that (we hope) showed care and concern for her well-being, as well as to reflect out loud on the ways in which her positionality was vital to the project. Hilda responded to what this staff person had shared, thanking her for sharing her experience and continuing:

> That's really powerful. This is actually a . . . really important part of what's going on in the academy that people bring a wide range of knowledge gained in different ways, and different life experiences to open up academic questions. . . . I think we're at a really important and generative kind of intersection between those two spaces.

Had we been on an audio-only call, we might not have understood the nature of the conversational interaction and would have been poorly positioned to respond as a result.

We can see embedded in this exchange one of the key premises of pragmatism: Knowledge production is a shared and embodied exercise. Relying on videoconferencing for team meetings played a role in the development of relationships of candor and trust among members of the research team who were embedded in different institutions. In this particular instance, the technology enabled a secondary line of affective communication to occur, through body language, silence,

and glances among others present. That line of communication concerned the emotional stress of going without food and how that embodied experience creates a powerful base of shared understanding between people whose current circumstances differ widely. We were also aware of the limits of this tool. Videoconferencing provided temporally bounded contact: natural social interaction taking place before or after a scheduled meeting was limited to our respective locations and immediate colleagues, rather than the collective group. Still, videoconferencing deepened the embodied and experiential knowledge being produced and relayed in this short encounter.

Collecting Participant Photographs

Teleconferencing technology and Google Drive's virtual shared filing cabinet addressed challenges common to research projects and were digital improvements on analog modes of practice. They played pivotal roles in making the project feasible from a fiscal and logistical standpoint. Managing and sharing photographs from clients was an additional challenge. Although the request to participants seemed simple—take photos of your food world and submit them to us—figuring out a way to share these photos with the project team in a timely manner was not, as we needed to collect these photos before our followup interviews. Even further, we wanted to retrieve the photos in ways that did not impose additional burdens on pantry staff or volunteers.

This problem was eventually solved by creating a project-specific Google Voice phone number. We knew that many participants had smartphones with built-in cameras, and we also knew that food bank staff had the means to provide those who did not with a digital camera. Through a Google Voice number, participants could text their photographs from their smartphones, keeping their submissions private and their contact information accessible to the research team alone. A research assistant monitored the Google Voice number and retrieved and sorted the photographs received. By acting as a medium through which photos could be created and shared with the broader research team, both the phones and the Google Voice number supported the process of translation in this project. The Google Voice number also provided a way for the research team to communicate directly with clients, as we could send text messages directly to clients or answer questions they might have. In this way, the technology allowed us to be virtually present with these clients, even as they were dispersed across the metropolitan area. This number gave these participants an outlet for sharing photos reflecting their own personal perceptions and experiences. At the same time, due to the more impersonal nature of this system, it was still difficult to build rapport or address concerns about sending something "wrong" or overly revealing, particularly as this took place after only a single in-person meeting with the research team.

Accommodating Schedules and Timelines

Getting all parties to the table is a key aspect of pragmatist inquiry, given its focus on developing shared framings of problems and collectively identified solutions. However, translating complex schedules and research timelines into operational work schedules can be complicated and time-consuming in its own right. This project called for schedule coordination with staff, volunteers, and clients at five different pantries for multiple focus groups and individual interviews, resulting in a coordination of 40+ individual schedules. Each individual had their own sets of responsibilities and time commitments. Food bank staff, particularly Sarah and Vista, were primarily responsible for coordinating these meetings, and their labor of translating complex daily schedules into potential meeting times made these conversations possible. This involved coordinating schedules with clients who had shifting availability due to work schedules (often involving multiple jobs) and childcare as well as working with pantries to schedule meetings around regular food distributions.

As Alexis stated in our conversation, the fact that our meetings took place during the workweek, and often during the daytime, made them difficult for some clients:

> We want the right clients there, and how do you work around their work schedules? At one point Melissa [a pseudonym] came back, and was like, I don't know. She felt very . . . Because she went back to work [after having a baby], and we didn't realize she was going back to work. She felt very, I don't know, excluded? Or like it wasn't worth her . . .

I don't know. There was something about, I don't know. Just because of our timeline. There were ways that we scheduled meetings that I wish we had been able to figure out better how to do more evenings, or weekends, or things that met with the clients' schedules better.

At the same time, food bank staff were also coordinating with a graduate student and Jerry to gauge availability of UGA's seven-member research team, which included faculty with regular teaching commitments and graduate and undergraduate students with their own coursework. Although technological tools assisted with this task, we had to try several options for managing these complex schedules, including listing open times from every member of the research team and creating Google Calendar invites. In the end, our most effective strategy was for the UGA research team to identify multiple available time windows that food bank staff could use to coordinate with planning team members, storing notes on this process on a Google document. Unfortunately, this often meant that the research collaborators and food bank staff schedules were prioritized over those of the clients.

Beyond times for specific meetings, this research also required translating expectations for research timelines and processes. For the food bank, past informal research with clients had operated on a timeline of weeks rather than months. This was the first time the food bank had undertaken such an extensive research endeavor. A research project that covered 6 months, though relatively short by academic standards, was thus a new experience, but one many staff found valuable. As Alexis stated,

> Internal food bank staff around them getting to hear directly from clients, and see that their work is actually . . . has a connection. But then also I think what the agency staff said in the meeting is they would never have had time to do this kind of research themselves, but they've acknowledged how important it was. For me, that was incredibly valuable. That they got to really hear, and dig deep even though they may have thought they were doing that from a completely other perspective.

For the UGA research team, the inverse was true: The process felt more rushed than a standard academic project, which would have provided more space for working with clients specifically on photo collection and interpretation. Many members of UGA's research team were also funded only for a single 16-week semester, limiting the time scale in another way and reflecting institutionally influenced boundaries around the length of the project. During our final conversation, Jerry asked whether the potential benefits of a longer project would have outweighed time costs:

> You could easily have had a whole 'nother meeting to kind of continue to develop some of this stuff that Alexis was talking about, but I felt like with the clients that we have, there would have been problems, and just the logistics involved. There would have been some point, which that was kind of too much as well. Even in the ideal world with what there had been, would you have clients do that in that many meetings, and have to come to that many things, and that would've been more intensive. The ideal world, yeah, we would've had more time at the front end and more time at the back end. But I'm not sure if that would have even worked if we had the resources and time.

The pragmatist imperative to get diverse parties to the table to collectively identify problems and develop new solutions to food insecurity created a robust set of logistical problems. We addressed these issues by using digital technologies and negotiations among stakeholders, translating our conversations, research materials, schedules, and expectations into a workable process of inquiry.

Translation as Affective Labor

In common usage, *translation* is the act of transforming written or spoken language, but in our project, it also often involved the work of identifying and representing affective elements of individuals' past and present experience. Through photos, discussion, and observation, we tried to do the affective work of incorporating these unspoken aspects of participants' experience into the research.

Photo-elicitation

Harper's (2002) overview of photo-elicitation as an interview technique highlights three interrelated ways that photos figure in interviews. Most straightforwardly, photographs serve as visual inventories of the people and things in a person's lifeworld. Photographs also capture views of social relations and events "that are a part of collective or institutional paths" (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1511). And finally, photographs offer views into intimate zones of experience that might otherwise not be surfaced in a research interview.

It is widely understood that using participant photographs as an interview prompt not only provides structure to an interview, but engages participants in a way that can build rapport across the interview encounter. The participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE) interview can be seen as an encounter of translation, from lived experience through photographs into an interview as conversational encounter and then into research insights. Clark-Ibanez (2004) notes that "photographs act as a medium of communication between researcher and participant," albeit one that does not necessarily "represent empirical truths or 'reality'" (p. 1512). In the process of pragmatist inquiry, PDPE interviews can provide new and unexpected insights generative of new theories and practices.

Despite their value, our research team negotiated varying expectations for clients' photographs throughout our project. The photos created by clients were different from what food bank staff were expecting. They had initially hoped to stage an exhibit of photographs at a later date and expected that the photographs would show obstacles to food security and situational trade-offs. Their hope was that an exhibit of such photographs could translate the lived experience of food bank clientele into prompts for institutional and broader policy discussion and change. Most of the photographs, however, were of food—food at the table, on display in a food pantry or store, food being prepared in a kitchen or served in a home. From the food bank perspective, these photos did not explicitly address some of the more complex structural factors impacting household food insecurity and raised questions about how well clients understood the expectations for the research.

Alexis: I think the first time I saw them I was a little disappointed. Just because I was expecting . . . well, I was not expecting. I was hoping for something closer with the way the Witnesses to Hunger project has done, and things like that. I think what I liked was then. . . . For me, one of the things that was compelling wasn't just what people said in the interviews about the photos that they took, but also about the photos they didn't take, and I know how you visually capture something that somebody hasn't taken a picture of, but that was really powerful for me.

Vista: Do you think they really understood [pause] the photo [pause] taking the pictures? Do you think they really grasped that at all? I'm asking a question. Honest.

Jerry: No, that's good.

Abigail: I think that they in varying degrees yes, I think that they understood. However, what I heard often, and I know you're there. I saw you shaking your head. What I heard often was almost like this being very timid, or not wanting to necessarily capture what their actual experiences, because of a sense of either stigma, or shame in what they felt like. . . . I think in many ways they thought we wanted something very perfect. They thought we were looking for something, whereas we just wanted them to share anything with us . . . they were hesitant to share certain things, because they didn't want to be judged as a result of it.

A few minutes later, Alexis and Vista clarified their expectations further.

Alexis: I was more disappointed not in the quality of the photos, but in the fact that they were all pictures of prepared food. That was my biggest disappointment. That it was actually more directly food related than non-food related. I sometimes think that some of that was the way that the setup. I know that it's helpful to look at the families with the pictures of their groceries,

but I think it also sort of set people in a particular direction that . . . it wasn't the quality of the photos. It was actually the content.

Hilda: The content. Okay.

Vista: I was looking for a photo of someone opening the refrigerator, and just taking a picture of it. It could've been bare. That would've spoke so loudly, you know? How many times have you gone to your fridge, and there's nothing in there. That's the truth.

These interactions reveal how the expectations for client photos created tension throughout the project—for clients who sought to meet institutional expectations and for food bank staff who desired wide-ranging and emotionally resonant images. The university research team, while also somewhat disappointed in the lack of variety in client photos, found them to be powerful tools for conversation during individual interviews and focus groups.

From a research perspective, conversations about participants' photographs can range widely beyond the image itself, triggering social meanings well beyond what an interviewer might have thought to ask during an interview where such photos were not present. Clark-Ibanez (2004) and Kurtz and Wood (2014), for example, demonstrate that PDPE interviews surface meanings that might have remained hidden in a more standard question-and-answer interview format. So, for example, one of the research participants' deck of photographs included many photographs of beautifully plated Latin American food—enchiladas, taquitos, and the like. The presentation of this food seemed important, so the researcher asked about the occasions for these meals. In the conversation that ensued, the participant described an extended family network in the area, and the practice of gathering at one another's homes for holiday meals and birthdays. Asked which holiday or birthday had occurred within the photographing period, the participant replied that none had occurred, but she wanted to demonstrate her ability to cook meals from her native country as part of the research project. The conversation that ensued yielded insights into some of the ways in which pride, self-esteem, and gratitude are complexly implicated in the receipt of emergency food.

Research interviews between university researchers and people who are living in poverty and in need of food pantry assistance are fraught with uneven power relations and complicated orientations to hunger, frustration, and social stigma. Conventional interviews could have become mired in simplified discursive patterns related to any of these, if researchers had relied on an exogenous research literature to pose interview questions. Using photo-elicitation was vital to disrupting an uneven balance of power and privilege and inviting participants to contribute their own understandings of relying on emergency food to the research project. Using the participant's photographs as a prompt, and engaging in an open-ended conversation about where and why she took them, led to research insights about living in relation to the stigma of poverty, allowing us to translate these lived experiences to communicable findings.

In the reflective group conversation, Vista evoked some of these very strengths of photo-elicitation interviews when describing her goals for the project:

> One of the goals I have was to tap into the individual to find out how they really think. How they really feel about not having enough. Enough to eat, or the different struggles that they go through . . . how certain people can make you feel, or what will stop you from going to the pantry. Is it pride, or sometimes pride does keep you from going, because you don't want to be looked down upon, so I really wanted to tap into those people, and really get to know their hearts, and to see what we can do to help them to feel in such a way that they're not intimidated.

Vista signals her own knowledge that feelings and behaviors related to emergency food assistance are complex, social, and deeply linked to sense of self. From a pragmatist viewpoint, such affective and embodied knowledge is critical to processes of knowledge construction.

The intersection of different modes of knowledge production—disembodied and discursive in the academy and embodied and affective in this research field—calls for careful translation. Participant-driven

photo-elicitation interviews served as a key, and we would say necessary, device for effecting this translation. Operating in a slightly different register, as concerns arose over the content of clients' photographs, researchers tried to work with both food bank staff and clients to translate expectations and communicate the value we saw emerging from this process.

Observation

Observation was a critical component of translation and collaborative knowledge production, generated and shared by the collective project team (researchers and staff). During reflective group discussions, we shared observations about the participants, discussing forms of body language, types of comments, and distinct interactions. The richness and authenticity of such observations are dependent on the role of researchers who fit the model of "an engaged practitioner skilled in the art of relationship building, listening, collaborating and acting with others" (Harney et al., 2016, p. 318). Observation by itself does not equate to insider knowledge of individuals' lived experiences and held knowledge (Kaplan-Weinger & Ullman, 2015). Throughout the data collection period, we reflected on and learned from the different knowledges of pantry operations held by food bank staff, pantry personnel, and UGA researchers, all of which shaped our perceptions of behavior by pantry planning teams. Researchers triangulated observations with interviews and personal interactions to translate the lived experience of participants into sharable research findings.

For example, during the reflective group discussion, we began talking about the interactions we observed among the various participants at the interagency summit, which included approximately 75 key stakeholders—clients, staff, volunteers, community partners, and researchers. The summit was a day-long event at the conclusion of the project, and the food bank provided a breakfast and lunch to all participants. Alexis and Vista brought up a particular observation they had of a client filling his plate during breakfast:

> *Alexis:* We talked about that actually a little bit also from the perspective of how people engaged with the food at the summit. . . . I'm not saying we were doing it from

a place of malice, but there was still a judgment component of our conversation, and we had to sort of stop ourselves.

> *Vista:* My friends, and one young man came up, and it was so much food that he had like six pieces of bacon, and two sausages. I didn't mind him eating all that he wanted, but I didn't want him to waste it either. He's like, "Oh my god, there's food. Let me get all that I can right now." . . . I was about to say, why don't you go ahead, and eat that, and when you finish you can come back . . . but I've seen so many of the clients just kind of . . . It's like a squirrel. You're gathering up your nuts, 'cause you don't know what the next day gonna look like, or winter is coming, and there won't be enough. I've seen so much of that.

> *Alexis:* I think the flip side is, people who aren't experiencing that. How they observe those kinds of things happening. Good. Pretty good learning for us.

In her final comment in this part of the longer conversation, Alexis notes the importance of embodied experience for making sense of such an encounter. Vista signaled that she responded negatively to this behavior at first and wanted to signal to the man to not take so much food at once. In other words, she was responding to, and ready to reinforce, a set of social norms related to institutional practice. Then she drew on a more empathetic positionality, in which she looked at the situation from the client's perspective. From that perspective, piling a plate high with an extra helping of food on the first pass through a buffet line made quite a bit of sense. Alexis signals a recognition that persons without that embodied experience would be likely to negatively judge such behavior. Ingrained institutional perspectives on food insecurity and, more broadly, on behavior around food for food-insecure people are partial at best and arguably inadequate. The multistage research project being reported on at the summit had surfaced the complex variations in attitudes and behaviors of food-insecure people toward food that were not directly understood or appreciated by many staff in the food bank itself. In the moment, and in

the telling of the moment, Vista and Alexis effectively drew on different positional perspectives to translate their understanding of the man's encounter with the buffet line.

Translation as Positional Labor

Each member of our research team has a unique background with respect to food insecurity, and we are all also embedded in specific institutional contexts. Doing the reflexive work of identifying and articulating our positionality was thus a key part of this process.

Forms of Expertise and Partnership

The UGA research faculty in this project—Abigail, Hilda, and Jerry—have been involved in previous projects that revolved around various aspects of food insecurity and food accessibility. As a result, they brought expertise to this project based on theoretical frameworks, empirical understanding, and observations. Although this was valuable in the development of the research design, the ongoing dialogue within the team revealed the valuable cultural and social capital of the food bank staff, who better understood the everyday workings of the food bank and partner pantries. The complementary forms of expertise helped the team gel into a research partnership, rather than a client–funder relationship, one which required the translation of knowledge and experience into a form that others could understand. As one example, we came to see Vista in her community outreach capacity as playing an essential role translating between domains of knowledge across the project:

> *Jerry:* So, from our perspective we don't know kind of the whole layout of the day-to-day how these agencies are operating. Kind of what's possible, what's not possible. Providing some perspective on what the different policies might be about how often people can come to these kinds of things . . .

> *Vista:* I think one of the roles I felt [I had] was to come in and make sure the clients felt comfortable in sharing. That was one of my main things I wanted them to be able to feel relaxed. It was okay to share, so that's one of the reasons why I wanted to be there. To make sure

they see that face, and they would open up, and give me the information that you need to be able to do the research for to help us do our part . . .

> *Hilda:* Vista, what you were saying, I think that was really, really key. Because we're a bunch of outsiders, you know? Driving from Athens, and they don't know us from Adam, so it was really, really vital. It couldn't have moved forward without you doing that, you know what I mean? That kind of bow between the two of you interpreting the site, the field site if you will for us, and then giving us entrée, and reaching out in this authentic and authenticating way to the research participants. That's a really vital role that only so many people are positioned to play, so I'd like to say that's a real key factor from my perspective.

> *Abigail:* There are unique personalities that have a lot of credibility, have a lot of sensitivity to understanding what the needs are at very much of that local level . . .

Beyond issues of expertise, the balanced nature of this project made defining our working relationship difficult at times. The food bank provided funding to UGA for this research project, primarily to cover the cost of two graduate research assistants who helped with interviewing, prepared materials for each meeting, and assisted in analysis. For UGA researchers, this was an unusual model because the research was neither funded by an outside third party (e.g., federal agency or foundation), nor was it a project where we acted as a consultant completing a preidentified analysis for the food bank as a client. From the food bank's perspective, collaboration with academic researchers was also a new experience. Although our shared goal was a working relationship as coresearchers, receiving funding from the food bank produced some anxiety for UGA researchers about ensuring that the research process and outcomes met the food bank's expectations. Jerry voiced this concern in our conversation:

> *Jerry:* We weren't just coming in to have you tell us what to do, and we do work for you. It felt more col-

laborative than that, but I felt a lot of pressure to make sure that at the end of this process you felt like you were getting your money's worth. That was the question I was putting in the back of my mind.

Although Alexis quickly replied that she "wrote the check and forgot about it," translating expectations for roles and responsibilities, along with research outcomes, was a consistent component of this research process.

Positionalities

As Vista continually negotiated dialogue and activities with food pantry clients throughout the duration of the project, she and Alexis both translated the projects' goals and findings into a form that could transform the food bank as an institution as well as partner food pantries. The food bank staff thus occupied multiple positionalities, which included representing the institution itself to outside pantries, as well as seeking to effect change within it. For example, Alexis described the pressures of the food bank to raise support and funding:

> At the institutional level . . . there's [the] marketing communications department, or developmental department [saying], "Oh, we need a client story. We need it right now." So then it's like calling an agency, and doing an interview, and it's felt like taking a story to go get money. . . . We only tell the stories that have a good bow at the end . . . "We had a hard time, we came through the bank, and, yay, we love the food bank!"

The goal of pragmatist inquiry is to create new habits that address problematic situations, but, as the quote above illustrates, this creates tensions for those who must convince others of the value of current practices while also seeking to reform them. In this sense, translation was needed between the mission and goals of a nonprofit organization and the potentially more critical perspective of social science research.

Vista, who readily acknowledged this challenge, described her desire to reintroduce the client back to the organization to address the "silent" stigma that continues to persist—helping to clarify who they are,

what they experience, and what they need:

> I kind of want to reintroduce the client back to the organization. I think our focus has gone off a little bit, and if that's what we're really here to do is to serve the people, then they really need to get to be reintroduced to the clients, the people, again.

Alexis also described her surprise at the stereotypes and disparity of perceptions toward clients on the part of staff and volunteers within the food bank:

> When we started doing some presentations to the food banks back in the fall about the work we were trying to do . . . we were shocked to find that the people who were working in the organization with us had the same stereotypes and impressions about people in need, and so it was still this very "the person is broken." It's not thinking about things that like the system side, but, "It's your own fault if you've gotten into this situation." Or "If you have a job you won't need to use a food pantry." That stuff came up over, and over again from staff, and we were sort of shocked that we also work at the food bank and don't have that opinion. Another goal for me was to basically show people how hard people are working who are using the food pantry, but it's not some . . . fighting that large stereotype. I think we have gotten so removed to this point from the core work of what we do that we all fall into those same stereotypes that are out in the community. . . . So, for us, this is even newer work than we realized that it was.

Alexis and Vista were thus both insiders representing the food bank but also outsiders to parts of the organization they sought to influence. By managing this insider/outsider status, both worked to translate the stories, images, and ideas from this research in ways that could develop new sets of practices for the food bank and its partner pantries. In their paper on process pragmatism, Harney et al. (2016) explain that inquiry "becomes part of an ongoing process of sustaining a local alliance of organizations working together for the

common good. . . . Pragmatism is a philosophy focused on practice" (p. 318). That is, inquiry is an approach that challenges us to think about our epistemological and political practice as researchers and staff. Here Alexis and Vista point to a necessary shift that must take place in the nonprofit culture in order for this process to work: The organization must acquire the ability to translate between its own multiple and sometimes competing goals.

Concluding Reflection

Pragmatist inquiry has significant potential as a framework for community-engaged research, due to its focus both on bringing diverse voices to the table and on the key role of praxis in creating relevant, actionable research. In this article, we argue that translation is a crucial but understudied aspect of this process. We use the musical metaphor of registers to describe the ways that translation was interwoven throughout our research process, incorporating various types of labor but also combining to sustain our larger project. The three registers we identified in this study are summarized in Table 1, and are by no means exclusive. First, translation was aided by technological tools that allowed us to be virtually present with one another, share and respond to photographs, and negotiate complex schedules and timelines. In other cases, translation was personal and affective, helping construct meaning from conversations and photos in interviews and focus groups and reflexively observing the behaviors of

others involved in this research. Lastly, translation often required members of the research team to recognize and communicate the role of personal expertise as well as each person's positionality relative to their institutional context. In all cases, translation meant grappling with differences in position, background, expectations, and experience that complicated efforts to jointly develop new models for the food bank and its partner pantries. Reflexive attention to the process of translation across these registers allowed us to identify areas where we were more or less successful at bridging divides within our research team.

Our case study provides one model of the role of translation in pragmatist inquiry, and additional examples may be found in other research contexts. For example, in many projects, the process of data preparation and analysis is a form of translation, whether deciding how to structure quantitative analyses or coding qualitative data. The composition of the research team, founded on UGA's partnership with the food bank and covering multiple food pantries across a large metropolitan area, influenced our research project in multiple ways. The registers of translation we identify in this project are applicable to a wide variety of research settings, but the specifics of their articulation will likely vary by time and place.

When seeking to involve diverse community stakeholders in engaged, actionable research, the labor of translation is a fundamental component of the research

Table 1. Summary of the Three Registers of Translation Identified in This Article		
Register	**Summary**	**Examples**
Logistical	Coordinating research details among researchers and facilitating communication.	Video conferences; photo submission by clients; scheduling research team meetings, interviews, and focus groups
Affective	Understanding and representing affective elements of clients' and researchers' shared experiences	Sharing and collectively interpreting photos; observing and interacting with others in focus groups and the concluding design summit
Positional	Recognizing researchers' varied forms of expertise and their institutional contexts	Communicating research expectations with planning teams; discussing institutional expectations and constraints

process. Through this article, we argue that attending to this process—identifying how and where translation occurs and identifying strategies to do it more effectively—is a critical component of the research process and can empower diverse groups to more effectively develop collective solutions to social problems.

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