

Language Brokering: An Integrative Review of the Literature

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This article reviews the literature in the area of language brokering. Language brokers are children of immigrant families who translate and interpret for their parents and other individuals. Results suggest that language brokers possess unique characteristics that make them suitable for their role as the family's translator and interpreter. Parents select the child language broker based on certain personal qualities. Language brokers translate and interpret a variety of documents in a variety of settings. There is not a clear understanding of the influence of language brokering on children's academic performance. There is not a clear understanding of how language brokering experiences help or harm the parent-child relationship. Further research is needed to better understand the role that language brokering plays in the lives and well-being of children.

Keywords: *language brokering; interpreters; immigrant families*

When immigrant families first arrive in the United States, they must adapt to their new environment, learn a new language, and to some extent, become familiar with the beliefs, values, and customs of a new culture. Thus, the process of acculturation begins immediately. For many of these families, this process is stressful and difficult to handle (Baptise, 1987; Rumbaut, 1994). To help ease the burden of this transition, immigrant parents tend to rely on their children or their extended family to function effectively in American society. For example, once children become familiar with the English lan-

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guage, they often serve as translators and interpreters for their nonfluent parents and extended family. These children, commonly referred to as *language brokers*, are expected to assist their parents in very complex, “adult-like” situations—situations that may or may not be developmentally appropriate (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a; Valenzuela, 1999).

Although children have served as language brokers for centuries, relatively little empirical attention has been given to them. Only recently, for example, have social and behavioral scientists begun to seriously consider and study this important phenomenon. Reasons for this are only speculative. Perhaps it’s because, historically speaking, psychological theorizing and research has focused primarily on individuals and groups of individuals from middle-class, European American families. Fortunately, however, many fields in the social sciences (e.g., psychology) have become increasingly diverse and pluralistic and, as a result, increasingly sensitive to issues that relate directly to ethnically diverse individuals, families, and communities.

Although using children to serve as translators and interpreters has been widely accepted among immigrant communities, it is still a controversial issue. In the year 2002, California law makers introduced a bill to the state legislature prohibiting children from translating and interpreting in medical, legal, and social service settings (Coleman, 2003). They argue that (a) children are not translating information accurately, (b) translating legal and medical information may negatively affect the parent-child relationship, and (c) delivering information to a child about a serious medical condition may be traumatizing to the child. Dr. Anne Foster-Rosales, an obstetrician at the University of California–San Francisco Medical Center, explained, “I’ve been in a situation where I had to give a diagnosis of cervical cancer, and I have a 12-year-old boy in the room translating” (p. 19A). Clearly, there are multiple sides to this issue, and the extent to which language brokering should be legislated is debatable. What is less debatable, however, is the need for sound, rigorous research on this understudied topic.

Researchers define language brokers as children of immigrant families who translate and interpret for their parents, members of the family, teachers, neighbors, or other adults (McQuillan & Tse, 1995). In addition, these children also serve as mediators in a variety of situations (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Tse, 1996a). It is important to note here the distinction between translating and interpreting. Although translating and interpreting are often considered to be synonymous, or identical constructs, they are, in actuality, quite different. Translating is perhaps best associated with written work, where the translator is believed to possess exceptional understanding of multiple languages, thus having the ability and skill to translate documents, materials,

and the like. Interpretation, on the other hand, is best associated with verbal communication, where the interpreter is believed to possess exceptional understanding of potentially nuanced and circumscribed “meanings” that may be conveyed in ordinary social interactions (Westermeyer, 1989).

Language brokering is not merely bilingualism. Bialystok (2001) conceptualizes bilingualism as the ability to speak two or more languages. Others define it as absolute fluency in two languages (Bloomfield, 1933) or the ability to function in each language according to given needs (Grosjean, 1989). Clearly, bilingualism deals with the ability to learn, to understand, and to speak two or more languages, whereas language brokering deals with, as noted earlier, the practices of translating and interpreting. Bilingual individuals choose to learn a new language as part of their curriculum, whereas language brokers learn a language for their own and their family’s survival. Thus, for these reasons, the literature on the area of bilingualism was not included in this review.

That said, it is also important to note here that Tse (1996b) was the first to review the literature on language brokering using 12 studies/articles. In her review, she focused on language brokering within the context of home-school communication. Tse proposed that a potential reason teachers and immigrant parents may not have good communication is that children serve as the family’s interpreter and/or mediator. She suggested that the information being sent from the home to school may not be coming from the parent but the child. For example, the child may alter or select the information given by the parents to the teacher. Similarly, the information received from school may not be delivered accurately to parents, because the child may report selectively, reporting only information that he or she believes to be relevant. Finally, Tse proposed that language brokers may express their stress in different ways at school. For instance, child language brokers may feel overwhelmed by the different responsibilities (i.e., translating and interpreting) that they have at home, which in turn may affect their academic performance. Teachers and school administrators should make an attempt to be informed on how language brokers may experience stress differently from local, first language English-speaking students.

Little is known, at this point, about the process of language brokering and its effects on children and their families. It is imperative that social scientists, educators, and policy makers address this particular subgroup of children, especially considering the ongoing changes in demographics within the United States. Hence, the purpose of this article is to integratively review the literature in this area. It will expand on Tse’s (1996b) review, primarily by highlighting additional dimensions about the area of language brokering. To help

focus the article and to provide an organizing framework, the following research questions will be addressed: (a) What has been published on the topic of language brokering? (b) What are typical characteristics, or qualities, of the language broker? (c) How is a child's cognitive development affected by language brokering? (d) Does language brokering influence children's academic performance? (e) How does language brokering affect the parent-child relationship? To answer these questions, a comprehensive, in-depth search of the literature was conducted.

Method

Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

Given that little research has been conducted in the area of language brokering, inclusion criteria were liberal, including journal articles, conference papers, unpublished manuscripts, newsletter reports, books, book chapters, and dissertations. Studies that contained the words *language broker* or *language brokering* were considered. A separate search including the words *translator*, *interpreter*, *children*, and *adolescents* was also conducted. Resources that did not address issues related to language brokers were excluded.

Literature Review

Upon entering the keywords *language broker* and *language brokering*, the PsychInfo and ERIC databases identified 38 matches. The outcome of this search led to 6 articles, 2 ERIC documents, 3 book chapters, and a dissertation. The remaining 26 resources were excluded because they did not meet the above criteria. After back checking each article, the ERIC documents, and the dissertation to identify other pertinent resources, 6 additional articles were identified. The second search using the keywords *translator*, *interpreter*, *children*, and *adolescents* led to 19 matches, but none of them met the inclusion criteria.

As an added step, three preeminent language brokering researchers were contacted. These researchers identified 3 additional journal articles and 2 unpublished manuscripts that met the inclusion criteria. Also during the peer-review process of this article, the editor of the journal provided a copy of a recent article about the area of language brokering. Thus, the total number of resources used in this review was 24. Table 1 includes a listing and summary of each of them.

Table 1 List of Sources Included in Review

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez, & Moran (1998)	122	quantitative	journal article	<p>*To examine the relation of language brokering on biculturalism, self-efficacy, and academic performance.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Language brokering was more frequent among females.</p> <p>*Language brokering, language brokering feelings were associated with academic self-efficacy.</p> <p>*Academic self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of academic performance, followed by biculturalism, and total language brokering.</p> <p>*Places of brokering were the strongest predictor on performance.</p> <p>*Translating is less likely to be performed by one child as family size increases, but it is less likely to be shared by all the siblings in the household.</p> <p>*Chinese parents are more likely to rely on one child for language brokering than are Mexican parents.</p> <p>*Translating is more frequent among the oldest and among those with higher levels of fluency in the native language and among children with prosocial behaviors.</p> <p>*Child's age was positively related to levels of translating in the past month.</p> <p>*Translating received in the past month was uncorrelated with any of the relationship variables.</p>
Chao (2002)	307	quantitative	conference paper	<p>*To expand the research on the development of immigrant children by examining acculturation issues that are most central to their experiences as immigrants, that of language acculturation.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Mandarin, Spanish, and English.</p>	

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Cohen, Moran-Ellis, & Smaje (1999)	38	qualitative	journal article	<p>*To explore the views of general practitioners about the appropriateness of children undertaking a task of interpretation between the general practitioners and an adult patient in primary care consultations.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke a variety of Asian (e.g., Mandarin), African languages (e.g., Swahili), and English.</p>	<p>*Children were used as interpreters when professional interpreters were not available.</p> <p>*Children's interpretations were used when patient needed to describe signs and/or symptoms.</p> <p>*General practitioners felt children who serve as translators may not know the correct medical terminology when translating for their parents and/or general practitioner.</p> <p>*General practitioners stated that it was unsatisfactory to use children as translators, especially when discussing sensitive information (e.g., personal or intimate problems).</p> <p>*Children serving as translators could have an effect on the normal dynamics of the parent-child relationship.</p> <p>*Children may become extremely stressed when learning about parents' health and/or sexual activities.</p> <p>*Children started brokering not very long after they arrived at the United States. They translated in different settings (e.g., making appointments with the doctor and paying bills).</p> <p>*Children reported that their parents stressed the importance of getting an education.</p> <p>*Children reported that they have a desire to help their parents. They also reported that, at times, they felt inadequate, frustrated, and upset because of brokering.</p>
Dement & Buriel (1999)	13	qualitative	unpublished manuscript	<p>*To investigate in great depth the area of language brokering using college immigrant and children of immigrant parents who recall their experiences as language brokers.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Mandarin, Vietnamese, Spanish, and English.</p>	

Diaz-Lazaro (2002)	159	quantitative	dissertation	<p>*To evaluate how language brokering, acculturation, and gender affect family authority structure, parental locus of control, and adolescents' perceptions of their solving abilities.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Children served as teachers, they introduced their parents to American holidays, culture, and values.</p> <p>*Language brokering was conceived as an obligation and as a form of not letting their parents down.</p> <p>*There was no association between language brokering, family authority, and parental locus of control.</p> <p>*There was no association between language brokering and adolescents' problem-solving abilities.</p> <p>*There were no gender differences on language brokering.</p> <p>*There was no association between language brokering and adolescents' level of acculturation.</p>
Gullingsrud (1998)	not applicable	not applicable	journal article	<p>*To discuss the challenges of being a White elementary school teacher in a class with Spanish-speaking students.</p>	<p>*Teacher recognized that she has used her students when she had a question about words in Spanish and when she writes notes to parents or needs someone to translate to Spanish-speaking-only students.</p>
Halgunseth (2003)	not applicable	not applicable	book chapter	<p>*To discuss the positive developmental effects of language brokering.</p>	<p>*Child language brokers mediate communication between parents and various English speaking professionals.</p> <p>*Child language brokers acquire school-related vocabulary that may help build their lexicons and enhance school performance.</p> <p>*Child language brokers develop strong interpersonal skills as a result of language brokering.</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Love (2003)	246	quantitative	conference paper	<p>*To study the relationship between depression, parent-child bonding, language brokering activities, and autonomy among Mexican American middle school students.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Child language brokers may benefit from household bills getting paid, and family being financially supported.</p> <p>*Children's brokering skills provide great utility and may enhance feelings of importance, self-confidence, and self-worth.</p> <p>*Child language brokers relate cultural information to their immigrant parents and acculturate at a faster rate because language brokering experiences enhance feelings of biculturalism.</p> <p>*Privileges among boys are associated with less depression and responsibilities with high depression.</p> <p>*No relationship between autonomy and depression among boys.</p> <p>*Girls reported feeling better about language brokering than boys.</p>
McQuillan & Tse (1995)	9	qualitative	journal article	<p>*To examine the context between cultural interaction, development of cognition, and language among language brokers.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Cambodian, Cantonese, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese, and English.</p>	<p>*Language brokering occurred in a variety of settings (e.g., schools, banks, stores, restaurants, and doctor's offices). Children translated for parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and administrators. Translations are either oral or written.</p> <p>*Language brokering was reported to increase independence and maturity. Language brokering helped to know more about the world, United States, and native culture. Language brokering also allowed</p>

<p>children to establish trusting relationships with parents. Language brokering was also mentioned as a stressor or burden.</p> <p>*Language brokering increased the acquisition of first and second languages. It helped to maintain and expand first language. It helped to understand more adult-level information.</p> <p>*Children who are language brokers reported being involved in more mature or adult-level problem solving and decision making. There was no mention if language brokering contributed to academic success.</p> <p>*Author discussed the frustration she experienced because her parents did not know English.</p> <p>*Author mentioned how her Chinese name had to be changed because her teacher could not pronounce it.</p> <p>*Author recognized that her native language is a form of maintaining her cultural values.</p> <p>*The majority of the participants indicated that they help their families and that they translate for other people.</p> <p>*The majority of the participants provide at least some degree of sibling care.</p> <p>*Girls generally assumed more traditional gender roles (e.g., cleaning) than boys.</p> <p>*Children considered translating as "just normal" or "just something they do."</p> <p>*Children who served as translators did significantly better on standardized tests of reading and math achievement.</p>					
<p>Ng (1998)</p>	<p>journal article</p>	<p>not applicable</p>	<p>not applicable</p>	<p>*Chinese graduate student reflects on her experiences as a language broker.</p>	
<p>Orellana (2003)</p>	<p>journal article</p>	<p>280 survey; 4 case studies</p>	<p>mixed method</p>	<p>*To examine children's contributions to households in a Mexican immigrant community in the city of Chicago.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido (2003)	236 survey; 18 case studies	mixed method	journal article	<p>*To explore in more depth the array of institutions that children help their household access and the power dimensions of this access.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*All the participants brokered for families and friends at home and on the streets. Translation happened every day and ranged from translating simple words to translating legal documents.</p> <p>*Participants brokered and/or paraphrased in a variety of domains: (a) Educational—children interpreted in parent-student conferences; translated notes from schools, and helped their siblings with homework and/or helped parents study for citizenship exam. (b) Medical/health—children scheduled appointments with family's doctor, served as translator for parents during doctor's visits. Children consulted parents in private when making medical decisions. (c) Commercial—brokers helped parents choose and use technical artifacts, whereas others have helped relatives in purchasing a car. Participants also recognized that at times translating in commercial settings caused feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, and/or shame. (d) Legal/state—brokers assisted with citizenship and legal residence, social security benefits, and public assistance. When dealing with this type of institutions, children used their power as an interpreter to protect their families from intrusive institutions. (e) Financial/employment—parents relied on their children to interpret bills and</p>

choose which to pay first, write checks, review receipts and statements, and mediate bank transactions. Brokers also helped parents fill out job applications, call about job ads, and help with the family business.

(f) Housing/residential—brokers served as the mediator when parents needed to talk with tenants or landlords or apartment building managers. (g) Cultural/entertainment—children translated and interpreted movies, television shows, and radio broadcasts. Brokers also reported that they provided a deeper understanding, so that parents knew more about the programs.

*Felt proud of being able to help parents to a degree that most children had not reached, but it was stressful at times.

*Felt like an adult when playing the role of an interpreter.

*Remembered speaking on behalf of parents to individuals of authority.

*Continues to be an interpreter for parents as an adult.

*Understood the complexity of being a child language broker as an adult.

*If proper support and guidance is not provided for child, language brokers will experience conflict associated with the duality of this role and they may not feel appreciated for the contributions they make to their families as language brokers.

Santiago (2003) not applicable not applicable book chapter *To discuss the author's personal experience as a language broker.

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Shannon (1990)	5	qualitative	journal article	<p>*To investigate the first stages that Mexican-descent children experience when using English in Latino enclaves.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Children serve as translators and interpreters for the whole family to some extent.</p> <p>*Translating and interpreting allows children to be in contact with both English and Spanish.</p> <p>*Parents examine how children translate and interpret causing the child to feel stressed.</p> <p>*Language brokering was reported by all participants.</p> <p>*All of the participants started brokering within 4 years of their arrival in the United States, and started to broker between the ages of 10 and 12.</p>
Tse (1995a)	35	quantitative	journal article	<p>*To discover the frequency of language brokering among a sample of Latino students whose native language is Spanish.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Children who perceived their fathers to know English still reported that they brokered.</p> <p>*Children mostly brokered for their parents, and at home.</p> <p>*Most of the documents children translated were notes and letters from school, and job applications.</p> <p>*At least half of the children reported that they enjoyed brokering and/or were proud of doing it, and to a certain extent helped them to learn more about their first and second language.</p>
Tse (1995b)	not applicable	not applicable	newsletter report/ERIC document	<p>*To present the effects of language brokering when students translate for their parents</p>	<p>*Children start brokering around the ages of 8 or 9.</p> <p>*Children mostly translate for their parents.</p> <p>*Children who broker translate in a variety of settings.</p>

<p>*Children translate from bank/credit card statements to reading correspondence from governmental offices.</p> <p>*Children who broker take on adult-level responsibilities and make many decisions for the entire family.</p> <p>*Children who broker carry out complex and challenging duties that are usually performed by parents and adults.</p>			
<p>*The majority of the participants reported that they had brokered.</p> <p>*Parents and friends reported being the most common agents of brokering.</p> <p>*Places where children brokered were at home, school, and the store.</p> <p>*At least half of the participants reported that language brokering helped them to learn more about their first and second language</p> <p>*At least half of the participants reported that they like and feel proud about language brokering.</p> <p>*Parents of children who brokered trust their children with school-related problems and sometimes do not provide any parental involvement.</p> <p>*Parents of children who brokered may feel that their limited knowledge of English may prevent them from being involved in school-related problems.</p> <p>*Children who broker often serve as the mediators between the school and parents because most of the documents they translate are notes and letters from school.</p>	<p>*To assess how common language brokering is among language minority students.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Mandarin, Vietnamese, and English.</p>	<p>journal article</p> <p>64 quantitative</p>	<p>Tse (1996a)</p>
<p>*At least half of the participants reported that language brokering helped them to learn more about their first and second language</p> <p>*At least half of the participants reported that they like and feel proud about language brokering.</p> <p>*Parents of children who brokered trust their children with school-related problems and sometimes do not provide any parental involvement.</p> <p>*Parents of children who brokered may feel that their limited knowledge of English may prevent them from being involved in school-related problems.</p> <p>*Children who broker often serve as the mediators between the school and parents because most of the documents they translate are notes and letters from school.</p>	<p>*To review the recent research on the effects of language brokering and its relation to home-school communication.</p>	<p>journal article</p> <p>not applicable literature review</p>	<p>Tse (1996b)</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Umaña-Taylor (2003)	not applicable	not applicable	book chapter	*To discuss language brokering as a stressor for immigrant children and their families.	<p>*Letters and notes from school may not reach parents or their content may be altered because children are in charge of delivering the message to their parents.</p> <p>*Information that students deliver from parents to teachers may not originate from parents.</p> <p>*Children who broker may be experiencing stress that may be manifested differently in school when compared to children whose native language is English.</p> <p>*Family relations can become strained when children broker for their parents because of the role reversals that take place when parents become dependent on their children communicating with people outside the family.</p> <p>*Parents may find it disrespectful for children to ask about adult matters such as their employment status or health concerns.</p> <p>*When translating information between parents and physicians, there is pressure for a child to correctly translate.</p> <p>*When translating, the children require a more advanced vocabulary than is developmentally appropriate for them.</p> <p>*Children who broker may be at risk for lower academic or educational outcomes.</p> <p>*Child language brokers may also limit their educational and occupational opportunities because of perceived family responsibilities to continue brokering.</p>

*To explore the circumstances that result in a need for interpreters, ways that children are drafted to assist their parents, criteria that parents use to evaluate the quality of an interpretation, criteria that young interpreters use to self-evaluate their own success, and failure and the demands made on young interpreters by the act of mediating interactions.
*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.

*Child language brokers are continually fulfilling adult tasks for their parents during their teenage years; the identity process may be compromised.
*Children translated at home, school, medical settings, stores, businesses, and legal settings.
*Parents used their children as translators even when translators were available because they trust a family member.
*Age of broker was not a negative factor according to parents.
*Using children as translators helped parents feel a sense of "confidence in their ability to survive in what is seen as a hostile environment."
*The oldest child was often chosen to be the family's translator.
*Children started translating within months of arrival in the United States.
*Child language brokers were chosen because of their proficiency in both languages, were confident, extroverted, good natured, friendly, and sociable. Parents also stated that a good child language broker was tactful, provided great detail, good listener, communicated feelings and emotions, paid attention, and emphasized when it was necessary.
*Parents reported being able to understand more English than they thought and used this knowledge to correct their interpreters when message was not properly translated.

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Valenzuela (1999)	68	qualitative	journal article	<p>*To explore the different ways Mexican immigrant boys and girls help their parents in establishing and adapting to the United States.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Child language brokers used their position as interpreters to present their family members in a positive way and protect them from embarrassment and/or humiliation.</p> <p>*The majority of the children felt proud serving as translators and it allowed them to know more people and practice both languages.</p> <p>*None of the children language brokers spoke negatively about their role as a translator.</p> <p>*The majority of the children felt competent in both English and Spanish. Some reported that speaking Spanish helped them feel more connected with their culture.</p> <p>*Children acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses as translators and reported that there were times when they could not understand what was being said to them. They also reported working on their weaknesses to become better translators.</p> <p>*Girls were more likely than boys to perform tasks that required explanation or translation.</p> <p>*Children served three roles: (a) tutors—translating, interpreting, and teaching their parents and younger siblings; (b) advocates—children intervene, advocate, mediate on behalf of their parents during complex financial and legal transactions or situations; (c) surrogate parents—babysitting, or any other type of parent-like activity such as cooking, dressing, bathing, transporting, caring, and providing for younger siblings.</p>

Walinchowski (2001)	4	qualitative	conference paper/ERIC document	<p>*To gain insights of the child as a language broker and to establish whether there are significant or casual connections between bilingual brokering and becoming bilingual and successful.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Brokering facilitates effective communication and provides sense of enjoyment and confidence.</p> <p>*Some sense of frustration was involved with participants used this having to broker and frustration as a way to continue improving.</p> <p>*Language brokering helped improved problem-solving abilities.</p> <p>*Becoming bilingual and successful caused feelings of pride.</p> <p>*When brokering, children were expected to be adults.</p> <p>*Language brokering allows valuing new and native culture and feeling strong ties.</p> <p>*Advice for other language brokers, "hang in there."</p> <p>*For the most part, language brokering was a positive experience.</p>
Weisskirch (2005)	55	quantitative	journal article	<p>*To examine the relationship of language brokering on ethnic identity.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Girls translated more often than boys.</p> <p>*Girls had more positive feelings about brokering than boys.</p> <p>*Low acculturation adolescents engaged in more brokering than high acculturation adolescents.</p> <p>*Feelings about language brokering predicted ethnic identity.</p> <p>*Combined subscales of language brokering, gender, and acculturation predicted ethnic identity.</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors	N	Methodology	Type	Purpose	Summary of Major Findings
Weisskirch & Alva (2002)	36	quantitative	journal article	<p>*To examine children's feelings on their roles as language brokers and the conditions in where they translate.</p> <p>*This study focused on participants who spoke Spanish and English.</p>	<p>*Children were most likely to translate notes and/or letters from school.</p> <p>*Children mostly translated for parents and least translated at government offices.</p> <p>*Most children indicated that language brokering experiences were neither helpful nor enjoyable. Also, the children reported that translating did not make them feel good about themselves.</p> <p>*Translating a lot was associated with feeling uncomfortable.</p>

Results

What Has Been Published on the Topic of Language Brokering?

The literature in the area of language brokering is, generally speaking, scarce. Fifty-seven percent of the available research is published in peer-reviewed journals, 17% is published as book chapters, and 26% are conference papers, dissertations, or ERIC documents. Language brokering is a common phenomenon among children of immigrant parents (Orellana, 2003). For example, in a study by Tse (1995b), 100% of Latino/Hispanic children reported serving as language brokers for their parents and translated and interpreted in a variety of settings. Despite this common phenomenon in immigrant families, studies on language brokers or language brokering did not emerge in earnest in the literature until the mid-1990s. Early studies investigated the prevalence of language brokering among children of immigrant families. Instruments to measure this construct were also developed during this time frame (Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez, & Moran, 1998; Tse, 1996a). These studies revealed the following:

1. The majority of immigrant children and adolescents perform as language brokers (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana, 2003; Tse, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a).
2. Children may start brokering within 1 to 5 years of their arrival in the United States and may start brokering as young as 8 or 9 years of age (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a, 1996b).
3. Language brokers translate in a variety of settings, such as school, home, and the streets and they translate and interpret for their parents, other members of their family, and sometimes for school administrators (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Gullingsrud, 1998; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana, Dornier, & Pulido, 2003; Shannon, 1990; Tse, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch, 2005; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).
4. Documents that language brokers usually translate and interpret include notes and letters from school, bank/credit card statements, immigration forms, and job applications (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana, 2003; Tse, 1995a, 1995b; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch, 2005; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).

It is apparent that language brokers encounter a variety of situations where they are required to take the role of an adult. Given that these children are taking on such roles, one question that comes to mind is, "How do these children feel about their role as the family's translator and interpreter?" Studies on the feelings children have about language brokering report mixed results. Some of the research reveals that brokers see translating as something normal, something they do. These studies have also shown that children enjoy trans-

lating because it gives them feelings of pride and allows them to learn more about their first and second languages, as well as their culture (Orellana, 2003; Santiago, 2003; Shannon, 1990; Tse, 1995a, 1996b; Valdes, Chavez, & Angelelli, 2003; Walinchowski, 2001; Weisskirch, 2005).

Other studies have reported findings that contradict those mentioned above. These studies have reported that language brokers experience feelings of frustration, embarrassment, or pressure to translate accurately (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Love, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Ng, 1998; Tse, 1995a; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Consequently, some researchers argue that using children as translators and interpreters may affect the development of these children negatively. For example, Umaña-Taylor (2003) argues that language brokers take on adult roles during their adolescence and these experiences could have negative implications for their identity development. Others argue that language brokers do not find their experiences helpful or enjoyable, and for the majority of the time, they did not feel good about translating and interpreting (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).

The literature presented in this section provides an introductory discussion of the different situations children experience when they serve as the family's translator and interpreter. It is evident that these children help their parents and other adults to understand a great variety of written documents and social interactions. Although these practices may be considered by some researchers as very positive or as a normative part of what these children are expected to do, others do not. It appears, then, that the area of language brokering is divided into two different camps. One camp believes that children serving as language brokers find the experience enjoyable and that it helps them learn more about their first and second languages. The other camp believes, in contrast, that children serving as language brokers find translating and interpreting stressful and a burden.

It is too early to decide which camp is correct, given that the majority of the studies presented in this section were more descriptive and did not include a large number of children of diverse backgrounds. For example, Orellana (2003) used survey data and case studies, but all of the participants were Spanish-speaking children. Another example is Weisskirch and Alva (2002), who based their results on a sample of 36 children of Latino/Hispanic descent.

What Are Typical Characteristics, or Qualities, of the Language Broker?

There are very few published studies that have attempted to clearly or fully describe the typical language broker. Thus, this section will aim to high-

light characteristics of the language broker. Recent studies have used quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods to answer this question. These studies reveal that children of immigrant families start their role as translator and interpreter shortly after their arrival in the United States (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Valdes et al., 2003) and that they broker regardless of their place of birth (Tse, 1995a). The research shows (a) that these children usually start brokering between the ages of 8 and 12 (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a), (b) that they are usually the oldest child (Chao, 2002; Valdes et al., 2003), and (c) that brokers are predominantly female (Buriel et al., 1998; Love, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch, 2005). These studies provide useful information on the characteristics of the children, yet there may be other qualities that language brokers have developed that influence their parents to choose them for this important role. The few studies that have investigated such qualities suggest that these children tend to be fluent in English and Spanish, confident, extroverted, good natured, friendly, sociable, good listeners, able to provide great detail, and able to emphasize feelings and emotions when translating (Chao, 2002; DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Valdes et al., 2003; Valenzuela, 1999).

In sum, the research presented in this section highlights the characteristics of children who play the role of their family's interpreter and translator. We may conclude, based on this research, that language brokers possess qualities that allow them to interact in a variety of settings with different types of people. Still, discrepancies and limitations exist in this literature. For example, a number of studies argue that language brokering is a female-dominated activity, whereas other studies have not found gender differences (Diaz-Lazaro, 2002). Moreover, the few qualitative and mixed methods studies that have been conducted failed to include more representative samples of children of immigrant families. The majority of the studies have been conducted with Latino/Hispanic children, and only a few studies have included Vietnamese and Chinese children, thus severely limiting the applicability of the findings to the larger immigrant population in the United States.

How Is a Child's Cognitive Development Affected by Brokering?

Studies on translation have reported that children who speak two or more languages may translate and interpret information accurately (Harris & Sharewood, 1978). Language brokers tend to translate documents that require a high level of understanding, such as notes and letters from school, bank/credit card statements, job applications, and government and insurance forms (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; McQuillan & Tse, 1995). There are researchers who argue that language brokers may, as a result, develop a more

sophisticated vocabulary that could help them build their lexicons (Halgunseth, 2003). Furthermore, studies have shown that language brokers use higher cognitive abilities and problem-solving abilities to comprehend and interpret these types of documents (Walinchowski, 2001). Children not only translate documents but they also serve as mediators in conversations between their parents and first-language English speakers, such as at parent-teacher conferences and when paying utility bills, making doctor's appointments, visiting hospitals, and making trips to the post office (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Halgunseth, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a, 1996a). It is evident that language brokers act as translators and interpreters in a variety of settings—settings in which they must switch from being a child to assuming the role of the adult in order to translate and interpret for their parents or elders.

The research suggests that language brokers develop linguistic abilities that monolingual children do not acquire, which may potentially help the child interact in a more mature and adult manner (Diaz-Lazaro, 2002; Shannon, 1990). The few qualitative studies that have been conducted report that language brokers feel that translating and interpreting for their parents has allowed them to be more mature and independent, meet more people, and increase their proficiency in both languages (Halgunseth, 2003; Valdes et al., 2003). Given that language brokers are translating and interpreting a variety of documents in different settings, they may also develop higher decision-making strategies. These children not only develop higher cognitive abilities, but their decision making may be considered more adultlike. Several researchers argue that language brokers are considered the decision maker not only for their parents but also for the entire family (Diaz-Lazaro, 2002; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995b; Valenzuela, 1999).

It is interesting that research has shown that language brokers may be selective about the information they translate, especially for their parents. For example, a number of children who translated notes from school for their parents often omitted information that was negative (DeMent & Buriel, 1999). Although this finding may call into question the accuracy of language brokers, we can only speculate that children are omitting this type of information because they do not want to hurt or cause shame to their parents. In certain communal cultures, children's poor behavior is often interpreted by parents as dishonorable (Comas-Diaz, 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990).

The literature presented in this section highlights how child language brokers may acquire higher cognitive and decision-making abilities due to their brokering experiences. Although these studies highlight the benefits of brokering, they are still far from being widely accepted or definitive. There is simply not enough evidence to support the hypothesis that translating and

interpreting enhances cognitive development and decision-making abilities. More of these studies are needed to determine the nature of the relationship between language brokering and cognitive development and decision-making abilities.

*Does Language Brokering Influence
Children's Academic Performance?*

It is a common belief in the United States that children of immigrant families do not perform well in academia due to a lack of encouragement from parents (Evans & Anderson, 1973). Researchers who have studied the academic performance of children of immigrants have reported that individual and institutional factors are the primary reasons for dropping out or performing poorly—not parents' lack of encouragement (Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002). The literature in the area of language brokering and academic performance provides mixed results. Earlier studies suggest that language brokering is not significantly correlated with academic performance. For example, using a sample of 35 Latino/Hispanic students, Tse (1995a) reported that there was no association between academic performance and language brokering. Similarly, in other studies, children have stated that they did not associate their language brokering experiences with their academic performance. Furthermore, there are researchers who argue that language brokering may put children at risk for academic failure or may limit the child's academic and occupational opportunities because the family expects them to continue brokering (Umaña-Taylor, 2003).

Recently, mixed methods studies have been published with larger samples. These studies have started to look at the possible relationship between language brokering and academic performance. For example, Buriel et al. (1998) reported that language brokering was a strong predictor of academic performance. They also reported that language brokering scores and feelings about brokering were associated with academic self-efficacy. Similarly, in a study by Orellana (2003), children who have served as language brokers did significantly better in standardized tests of reading and math achievement. In another study by Walinchowski (2001), participants stated that although they felt frustrated about brokering, they used these experiences as tools for self-improvement.

In sum, the available literature informs us that there is no consensus on how language brokering experiences affect the academic performance of those who do it. Researchers are still debating about the positive or negative influences of language brokering on academic performance. The studies presented do provide important information that could be further investigated. A

reliable approach for understanding this issue is to include mixed methodologies, as well as large and more diverse samples of children who are serving as language brokers.

*How Does Language Brokering
Affect the Parent-Child Relationship?*

Research studies that have investigated the parent-child relationship of language brokers have been the sources of much controversy. Mental health professionals, social science scientists, legislators, policy makers, professionals in the medical field, and educators have all been discussing how children who serve as translators and interpreters may be potentially harmed or benefited by these experiences. Currently, there are two persistent perspectives on this issue. The first are those who are against children serving as translators and interpreters, stating that this type of experience negatively affects the normal dynamics of the parent-child relationship. Cohen, Moran-Ellis, and Smaje (1999) conducted a study with general practitioners whose patients requested to have their children translate. In their study, the general practitioners reported being against using children in their consultations. The general practitioners strongly believed that having children serve as translators and interpreters when discussing their parents' health concerns could harm the parent-child relationship. Other researchers argue that having children translate and interpret for their parents led to unhealthy role reversals within the family, forcing the parents to become dependent on their children (Umaña-Taylor, 2003).

Earlier studies have shown that the experiences associated with language brokering help them develop a stronger bond to their parents. In a study by DeMent and Buriel (1999), (a) participants commented that brokering was a form of commitment to not disappoint their parents because they made a sacrifice in bringing the entire family to the United States, (b) other participants stated that they were concerned about finances and the health status of parents, (c) it was reported that parents developed a certain dependency on the language broker with regard to handling documents, and (d) the brokering experiences elicited feelings of compassion and helped them understand their parents' struggles. Language brokers are also considered active advocates of their parents' rights during complex situations (e.g., legal, financial). A qualitative study by Valenzuela (1999) reported that children inform their parents about their rights in the United States and educate them about the legal system. Some participants even helped their parents to hire a lawyer, if they believed that it was necessary.

More recent studies have revealed important information about how language brokers use their position of power to protect the welfare of their parents and other family members. Studies conducted by Orellana et al. (2003) and Valdes et al. (2002) reported that language brokers have stated that they use their position of power to protect their parents from embarrassment and humiliation. Some of the participants in their studies mentioned that they could not let employers, doctors, or other individuals embarrass their parents or other family members. These findings add new knowledge to this body of literature, where language brokers are now being considered the protectors or shields of the family.

In summary, there is no clear-cut answer to the question of whether language brokering has a positive or negative effect on the child-parent relationship. Furthermore, new research is suggesting how language brokers use their power to protect the well-being of the family. The research presented in this section provides promising, albeit somewhat limited, insights concerning the characteristics and role of language brokers in the family. However, more research is still needed. Past studies have not used participants of diverse backgrounds, which limit the generalizability of the results to larger groups of children. More studies are needed where more representative samples are used, as well as the inclusion of more sound, rigorous methodologies.

Discussion

In this article, information has been presented that describes the qualities of the language broker, the different situations language brokers experience, the types of documents they translate, the role language brokering plays in the child's cognitive development, the association between language brokering and academic success, and the role language brokering plays within the parent-child relationship. Taken together, results of this review suggest the following:

1. Language brokering is very common among children of immigrant parents (Orellana, 2003). Children start brokering at an early age (8 to 9 years), regardless of their place of birth or order of birth (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a, 1996b). Language brokering is often a female-dominated activity (Buriel et al., 1998; Love, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch, 2005). The broker is not selected at random; parents base their selection on various qualities that language brokers possess (Chao, 2002; DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Valdes et al., 2003; Valenzuela, 1999).
2. Brokers may develop higher levels of cognitive ability, given the types of documents (e.g., bank/credit card statements) they translate and interpret for their

parents. In addition, the situations where they translate or interpret (e.g., doctor's office, banks, government offices) highlight their adult-level cognitive capability (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Halgunseth, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a, 1996a; Walinchowski, 2001).

3. Although earlier studies reported that there was not a strong relationship between language brokering and academic performance (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995a), recent research has started to detect a positive relationship between these two constructs (Orellana, 2003).
4. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that language brokering has a positive or negative effect on the parent-child relationship. Scholars have not yet reached consensus on this issue. There are those, for example, who believe language brokering has negative consequences on the parent-child relationship and, likewise, there are those who believe it plays a positive role.

Based on the literature presented, it is safe to conclude that language brokers are unique children with qualities and skills that help them interact in two different worlds. On one hand, these children interact with other children their age through play and other types of activities. However, when necessary, language brokers assume their adultlike roles when they need to be the family's translator and interpreter. It is still unclear, though, whether children of immigrant families develop these qualities due to their brokering experiences or other environmental or biological factors.

Children who serve as translators and interpreters are active participants in a number of demanding situations. The literature suggests that language brokers develop higher cognitive abilities that allow them to be more knowledgeable of their first and second languages. Krashen (1985) stated that children who translate and interpret for their parents are being exposed to a variety of settings that, in the end, enhance their language acquisition. The literature reviewed demonstrates that language brokers translate immediately on arrival in the United States. Cummins (1989) affirmed that it takes 5 to 7 years for immigrant students to develop academic level accuracy. As mentioned, this is not the case for language brokers, because some broker within 1 to 5 years of their arrival in the United States. It appears, then, that language brokers must try to learn English at a much faster rate.

Although there is not a clear-cut relationship between language brokering and academic performance, researchers have argued that it is possible that the traditional educational assessment instruments used in school districts fail to capture the real abilities of language brokers. Oftentimes, the instruments used may be potentially biased, given the characteristics of the samples in which they were normed. Tse (1995b) acknowledged that school districts should develop appropriate and more relevant assessment instruments for children who are language brokers.

Language brokering serves as a bridge of communication and understanding between parents and children. In some instances, translating and interpreting may help a child feel more connected to his or her parents. Children may then be seen as their parents' "right hand," because they are required to make, or help make, decisions for the entire family. These activities allow the child to be more informed about different family concerns and to think and behave in a more adultlike manner. At the same time, this type of experience may have negative implications for the parent-child relationship, causing the parents to become dependent on the child, and the child to possibly feel overwhelmed by his or her role as the family's translator and interpreter.

As research in the area of language brokering grows, social scientists need to continue thinking critically about this topic. Some critical questions that remain unanswered include, Under what circumstances should children serve as interpreters and translators? The literature suggests that language brokering happens in various settings (e.g., home, school, government, and medical), yet it is unclear whether these are acceptable settings to have a child serve as a translator or interpreter. It is possible that parents prefer their child's assistance, over that of a trained, adult interpreter, because they feel more comfortable with them and trust them more. It is also possible that most service providers do not have the funds to hire trained interpreters and may believe that it is acceptable to have a family member translate. Another critical question is, Who should be responsible for making this decision? The parents? The service provider? The child? In addition, should it be legislated, so as to standardize the process for people? To begin answering these questions, more research is clearly needed.

Limitations

One limitation of this review is the number of resources included. Although 24 resources including journal articles, newsletter reports, conference papers, book chapters, ERIC documents, and dissertations are a fair amount of resources, more are needed to better understand the phenomenon of language brokering. It is imperative that further research be conducted to expand our knowledge base in this area. Another limitation is the type of studies used in this review. The majority of them were merely descriptive.

Implications for Theory

Language brokering is a relatively new area of study in the social sciences. This has caused those interested in it to use different theoretical frameworks to guide their work. Currently, there is no language brokering theory per se,

but researchers have used three widely accepted theories to conduct their research. These theories include Acculturation theory, Family Systems theory, and contextual theories of cognitive development. These theoretical frameworks have guided the different research conducted with language brokers. We believe that a grounded theory approach is needed to develop a data-based theory that will better capture the experiences of language brokers and the nuances of the language brokering process.

Implications for Further Research

Language brokering is an open area that needs to be further explored. The majority of research studies on language brokering have been descriptive in nature. This may be interpreted as a call to researchers, educators, and policy makers to pay attention to this neglected area of research. Some recommendations for further research include the following: (a) scale development studies, (b) developmental studies, (c) studies of psychosocial variables associated with language brokering, (d) accuracy in translation, and (e) the characteristics of the language broker. No studies have evaluated the psychometric properties of the existing language brokering scales. This would be a good starting point, given that language brokering scales are already being used with children in different settings.

Developmental studies are needed given the lack of developmental data on language brokering. In this review, several of the studies were retrospective in nature, thus limiting our understanding of language brokering (Buriel et al., 1998; DeMent & Buriel, 1999; McQuillan & Tse, 1995). The results of such studies were based on participants' memories. A study by DeMent and Buriel (1999) suggests that language brokering happens in a developmental fashion. A number of researchers have proposed that developmental studies could provide answers to the many questions that currently remain unanswered. Furthermore, new research using mixed methods has provided insightful information about the language brokering phenomenon (Orellana, 2003; Orellana et al., 2003). Thus, further research should consider adopting such methodologies.

Psychosocial variables need to be included in further research. For example, variables such as ethnic identity have been associated with native language use with ethnic minority adolescents (Heller, 1987; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). Recently, Weisskirch (2005) studied this relationship among Latino adolescents. In his study, he found that feelings about language brokering predicted ethnic identity, and combined subscales of language brokering, gender, and acculturation predicted ethnic identity. Other variables, such as language preference, immigration status, psychological

distress, and self-esteem, are important constructs to consider when conducting research with these groups of children. Researching the interaction of these variables with language brokering will provide a better understanding of how children who serve as translators and interpreters are being affected by these experiences.

A critically important issue that has not yet been investigated concerns the accuracy and proficiency of the language broker. Language brokers are playing important roles in society, and they are transferring delicate information that, if done inaccurately or incorrectly, could harm the well-being of the family and those around them. Yet, to date, no studies have examined how proficient a child must be to translate or interpret for their parents. This is perhaps the greatest weakness, or limitation, of the extant research. Further research should, therefore, start to assess the accuracy and proficiency of these children and use this research to develop programs at the schools where children who serve in these roles are instructed in how to master these two important skills. First, research needs to develop methodologies that will allow us to investigate the accuracy and proficiency of language brokers. At this time, there is a deficiency in the availability of psychometrically sound instruments that may help measure these two skills. The need for such instruments is necessary, as we are not only dealing with children who come from different parts of the world but also children who will become part of mainstream U.S. society. These instruments need to consider worldview, family values, and acculturation. As the number of language minority students is increasing, schools are trying new methods to help them become bilingual. Until we have empirical evidence that informs us on the proficiency and accuracy of language brokers, we will not be able to clearly understand this phenomenon.

Language brokering is a common practice among children of immigrant families. The published studies suggest that parents carefully select the child who will serve as the language broker, yet these studies fail to investigate the characteristics parents look for or what their process is for selecting the broker. It is recommended that more qualitative studies be conducted with immigrant parents to address this issue. It is also important to conduct developmental studies observing how language brokers evolve to discover the specific qualities that best characterize the language broker.

Implications for Practice

Mental health researchers have argued that using children as translators and interpreters has negative consequences on the mental health of children (Umaña-Taylor, 2003; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). This is a call to those

working in the mental health field to further investigate the implications of language brokering on children's mental health. Further research would also afford mental health professionals with greater insight into the unique issues they face. It is also important that mental health professionals be aware of the different roles children take and explore how language brokering experiences are affecting them.

Conclusion

This review presents the most current literature in the area of language brokering and introduces the reader to some of the most salient issues in this area. It is evident that this line of research still has a long way to go. Many questions remain unanswered. Language brokering continues to be a form of adaptation and survival among immigrant families. Research clearly needs to include language brokers from the full spectrum of immigrant families, as it is not a uniquely Latino phenomenon. This is a serious omission; children from all backgrounds engage in it. More research is needed to be able to answer the questions social scientists, educators, and policy makers have with regard to children who serve as translators and interpreters. Research of this nature will help social scientists and policy makers develop better, more appropriate services for those who need them.

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