Child Language Brokering: Some considerations

Nigel Hall and Frédérique Guéry, Manchester Metropolitan University

1. Introduction

As will become clear from the articles in this journal, the serious study of child language brokering began only a couple of decades ago. However, in this limited time it has emerged as a very intensely and widely studied phenomenon. The purpose of this article is not to examine child language brokering as a practice in its own right, but to consider its position in language brokering as a whole, to consider how it became an object of academic study and how the nature of this study changed over time, and to consider its relationship to other significant and recent changes in understanding the nature of childhood.

2. The range of language brokering

That children are often involved in language brokering may be relatively new to researchers, but the large number of studies now taking place is perhaps obscuring the fact that language brokering is not simply the province of children. It is also the case that virtually all articles on child language brokering are about children from families that have been immigrants or refugees from countries where the language is different from the country into which they have moved. This gives a somewhat misleading impression of language brokering, for child language brokering is a smaller part of language brokering in general and in this wider sense

24

language brokering has been around for a very long time, although not labelled as such, and is still very widespread today. Language brokering occurs in many different contexts involving people with different kinds of language experiences; it also occurs in a number of different situations and children may be involved with all of them. It is important to understand at this point that the use of the word "language" in "language brokering" does not refer only to oral language but also to written language and signed language.

2.1. Language brokering when a person neither speaks nor writes a given language

This situation is the one which has been most widely represented in the child language brokering research literature during the last two decades, and has, for better or for worse, almost come to define the contexts in which language brokering occurs. It puts an individual (and maybe through an individual a whole family) in a position of great dependency, and can put a large burden on the child language broker. It is the most common form of language and literacy brokering when people relocate from one dominant language environment into another, particularly for refugees or immigrant groups. It is often the case that such a burden often falls upon the children in such families as they are usually the quickest to learn the new language. However, and not unnaturally given the age and inexperience of children, in many cases it is adults who perform these language-brokering tasks for other community members (Baynham 1993). This kind of situation can also occur in countries that have a number of recognised languages, such as South Africa (Robins 1996) and India where movement for educational or work purposes may also result in relocating to areas in which the major language is different.

2.2. Language brokering when a person signs a language but cannot speak it or hear it

This situation includes mainly deaf adults who may or may not have a reasonable ability to read a language but cannot communicate effectively through speech and hearing. According to Buchino (1993) because of the way Deaf society structures itself ninety-five percent of British deaf adults choose deaf spouses and ninety percent of their children will be normally hearing. These children are often known as CODA children (Children of Deaf Adults) and commonly act as language brokers between their deaf, signing parents and hearing, speaking adults. While CODA children have been generally well-studied, almost no attention has been paid to their language brokering role, even though Preston, who conducted a large US survey of adults who had been CODA children concluded that "Although individual interpreting responsibilities ranged from sporadic to incessant, interpreting emerged as a seminal aspect of being the hearing child of deaf adults" (1996: 1681) and nearly half of Preston's hearing informants described sign language as their first or primary language. It is perhaps not surprising that large numbers of sign language interpreters were once CODA children. What does emerge from Preston's study is that some CODA children start language brokering from a very early age, much earlier than is usually the case with other child language brokers (Preston 1994).

2.3. Language brokering when a person speaks but does not write or read a given language

Literacy brokering for these circumstances has a long and ancient history, largely because literacy has, for much of its history, been the specialist province of relatively few, specially trained people (often scribes). Indeed for a long time, Kings of England depended on literacy brokers to administer their kingdom (Clanchy 1993); hence, for instance, the legacy of the word auditor - someone who read aloud the financial records to be audited (heard) by the King or his representative

and which still, colloquially, refers to a financial specialist who reads the books. For centuries scribes, both official and unofficial, brokered official and unofficial life, and such scribing is still common in many parts of the world where literacy levels are low, and is often formalised in the sense that such literacy mediation forms a recognised occupation (Kalman 1999). Even in modern Western countries literacy mediation still occurs often in specific situations where literacy levels are low: e.g. in prisons (Wilson 2000), in adult basic education (Moss 1995; and Mace 2002), and most obviously in early years education when teachers scribe and read for beginning readers and writers.

2.4. Language brokering when a person both speaks and writes a given language but lacks experience with particular written manifestations of that language

While this last variation might seem unlikely in a modern educated society, it is in fact relatively common. Manifestations in the UK include accountants taking over completion of tax forms, individuals who advertise to undertake CV writing and preparation for job applicants, the station clerk who helps someone interpret a railway timetable, or the support advice on sale to people who have recently bought a computer or piece of complex software. In such circumstances the brokering takes on a more professional component, although in most cases the people acting as brokers do so not because of brokering skills or training but because of specialist subject knowledge. Less visible brokering occurs within and between families and communities in the form of general advice and guidance, often with respect of official forms or documents (Heath 1983; Varenne and McDermott 1986; Barton and Padmore 1991). Clearly, this section also includes adults in immigrant families who have acquired some of the dominant language but not at a sufficient level to understand the complexities of many forms and documents. In these cases it is often children who broker between agencies with their many official forms and their parents, and for many child language brokers this can represent a considerable intellectual and language demands. After all,

most children growing up as native speakers would not encounter these kinds of responsibilities before adulthood.

The above is not an exhaustive list and to this could be added those who language broker for the blind, for the elderly and for people with mental disabilities. What is clear is that language brokering is very widespread and that child language brokering represents a significant part of the topic.

3. The development of child language brokering as a research topic

Next we want to consider the history of the study, and indeed the identification, of child language brokering, for the term "child language brokering" is a relatively recent piece of terminology. It is not our intention to provide a historical summary of all the research in this area but to map out the different phases in the emergence of language brokering as a field of study.

It is a moot point whether children have always been involved in language brokering; after all, if families with children move from one language community into another then, given the relative ease with which children appear to pick up second languages, why would they not become useful to their parents and other family members in situations where language mediation was required? However, while commonsense suggests that child language brokering must have been going on there is no direct evidence for it. Indeed, Orellana (2009: 148, points 4 and 5) reports examining a number of studies of early immigration to the United States as well as biographies and autobiographies of immigrants; she found that almost all aspects of childhood were widely covered except any interpretation and translation activities that might have taken place. Indeed this was also the case in academic studies covering immigrant childhood, and Hall and Sham (2007: 17) wrote that until relatively recently language brokering was "a phenomenon that gets mentioned in passing, the paragraph here and there, rather than considered as an important subject of study in its own right". There are further difficulties when

considering historical child language brokering for notions of childhood have changed dramatically across millennia (see later in this article).

Child language brokering has even been largely invisible in modern times until recently, although it is fairly certain that this relative invisibility does not reflect its absence as the activities to which it refers are clearly anything but invisible to the child and other participants in brokering events; it is from political, educational, research, policy and, inevitably, adult perspectives that they have often appeared invisible. This "invisibility" occurs in unexpected places, for when Hall was preparing for a study in the area (see Hall 2004) he approached the head teacher of a school in which 90% of the children came from Pakistani-heritage families. This white, English head teacher (principal), while interested in the proposed topic, claimed that his children did not language broker because they were second or third generation families. A few minutes later this claim was utterly refuted by an Asian member of staff with responsibility in the school for immigrant children. When the eldest classes in the school were surveyed (ages nine and ten) over a third of the children claimed to do some translation for parents and other family members, and several of these children then participated in the research project. The "invisibility" of child language brokering more likely owes much to the low status of children and immigrants in society.

It is not surprising therefore that the study of child language brokering has a short history. Harris (2008) has produced an extensive bibliography of material relating to natural translation. In this he has a section termed "Precursors" and in this list the first clear evidence of children translating, as opposed to simply being bilingual, can be found in a study of his own child by Ronjat (1913). Ronjat says of his child when four years old, "He shows remarkable skill as a translator when it comes to finding equivalents for idioms […] it is far more than everyday lexicography, it is excellent intuitive stylistics" (cited in Harris 2008: 11). This child also mediated between adults. The common characteristic of these precursors is that the studies were carried out by linguists, and the episodes in which children interpreted occurred rather incidentally within more general linguistic studies. It is also the case that the emphasis was on very young bilingual children, mostly interpreting

within the home. Harris comments (2008: 3), "the precursors made valuable and sometimes copious observations, but they did not realise the significance of what they were observing".

The casual identification of children as translators changed in 1973 when Harris clearly identified the significance of child translation, and he conceptualised the phenomenon giving it both a specific title and a more theoretical perspective. In this paper he introduced the notion of "traduction naturelle" (natural translation), a concept that was developed in several later papers (particularly, Harris, 1976; Harris and Sherwood, 1978; Harris, 1978). Harris defined "natural translation" as

> the translation done in everyday circumstances by bilinguals who have had no special training for it. (Harris 1976: 96)

He argued powerfully that not only natural translation was an innate skill that emerged in bilinguals, but claimed, rather unsuccessfully, that "translatologists should first study *natural* translation" (Harris 1975: 99), as opposed to professional translation, the latter an activity which both then and now dominates translatology research.

The Harris and Sherwood paper is particularly interesting because they offer quite a few examples of children as natural translators. Some of these have been elicited by experimental procedures or games played by parents to encourage their children's bilingualism, but others contain clear examples of children not simply being bilingual, or engaging in mechanical translation, but actually operating as linguistic intermediaries, although most of these are within the home (and these mostly involve very young children). There are though some clear examples of children mediating between family and the outside world. They write of B.S. (1978: 156), who "translated orally or in writing, phone calls, messages, conversations with visitors, mail, newspaper articles, etc". and who "was filling out forms, composing business letters, etc". She also operated as a diplomat, translating her father's outbursts in transactions into politer and more appropriate language.

Harris and Sherwood, while focusing primarily on the textual and developmental aspects of child natural translators, nevertheless did briefly refer to social aspects of the activity. They write (1978:156) about B.S. being "more conscious of *culture switching* than of language switching", how her "understanding of Canadian attitudes and mores bestowed upon her important *expert power* as an interpreter" and that "decidedly her translating was socially functional". Despite the fact that Harris's work predated a more socially-oriented approach to translation and interpretation, he did identify one aspect which would subsequently become very important. Whereas much emphasis is put by professional translators on remaining absolutely faithful to the grammatical and syntactical structure of utterances during translated events, Harris argued that "in natural translation, transmission of information is the prime aim and criterion of success, linguistic expression is relatively unimportant so long as it does not interfere with information" (Harris 1978: 105). In other words, what really mattered was not the form but rather the content of oral and written translations.

Despite this very interesting start, Harris's work appeared to remain unnoticed by those outside the area of translatology, even when researchers from other disciplines began to examine children as translators. As a consequence, the next major reconceptualisation of the topic came independently from another discipline, and Harris is not even mentioned in the bibliography of this study by Shannon (1987). Unlike all previous researchers who were all linguists or translatologists, Shannon came from a background in education and anthropology and while the child's texts were still important to her, so was the social context in which the child "translated". In fact the term "translation", widely used by earlier researchers mostly disappears, mainly because it became clear that a child's work in mediating between different language speakers usually involved much more than simply moving between languages; it was inevitably a movement between cultures. Shannon introduced the term "language brokering", something that reflected this wider and more complex social role. It is not clear from where Shannon drew this term but it may be significant that around the same time as she was working on her thesis the term "cultural brokering" begins to appear in the research literature.

Szasz (2001 p17) writes that an article by Richter (1998) "alerted American and Canadian historians to the importance of the intermediary and, incidentally, provided a convenient term *cultural broker".* The notion of brokering derives from anthropology, for instance Bailey (1969) gives a "broker" a stronger role, performing in complex ways, and having both an overview and influence in a mediation activity, and for Paine (1971), a broker operates with more independence in initiating or promoting negotiation.

In her two-year ethnographic study on the everyday language use of five Latino schoolchildren living in California, Shannon (1987) observed these bilinguals translating and interpreting between their family and community members and officials, on an ad hoc and often daily basis. What began to emerge from Shannon's work was that children did more than simply interpret; they mediated all aspects of a relationship between two or more speakers in dynamic social events. She indeed identified various situations in which they acted as language brokers, as she labelled it, and revealed the large diversity of contexts in which children operated: medical, legal, administrative, financial, housing or commercial. Performing that role was also coupled with prestige and trust within the family.

From her sociolinguistic point of view, there was more to interpreting than its linguistic aspect. Here is how she describes Adán, a boy who significantly brokered for his family and relatives:

> Although Adán was between the ages of 11 and 13 during the time of the study, he handled himself with a great deal of confidence. His behaviour demonstrated that he not only knew what to say in both English and Spanish, translating in both directions, but also that he understood how to speak in each situation, how to address a professional, how to behave during professional interactions, and how to be an advocate for his relatives while preserving their dignity and assuring respect for himself. (Shannon 1990: 264)

For Shannon, language brokering also led to the acquisition of high social and cognitive skills. She revealed that language brokers do not only have to mediate linguistically between parties that do not speak the same language, but that they

also have to negotiate meanings so they can be understood by both parties, whilst defending their and their family's interests in the process.

Another significant difference between the way Harris wrote about natural translation and how Shannon explored it lies in the greater interest in the cultural resources which underpins children's language brokering. Indeed Vasquez et al argue (1994: 96):

> Translation or interpreting events fit our definition of intercultural transactions because translating involves recourse to multiple sources of linguistic and cultural knowledge in order to create meaning, negotiate a task, or solve a problem.

To some extent this awaits fuller exploration, but in many families with several children it may be that a kind of apprenticeship model operates. In this the eldest child is the first to take the role and as the younger children grow up they watch and learn and maybe even take over the main responsibility for a family. However this does not really answer the question of how the eldest child acquires the cultural and social capital necessary to carry out the language-brokering task successfully. This question is even more critical in families with only one or two children (as in the Chinese families in Hall and Sham's study, 2007).

Although Shannon made groundbreaking discoveries with regard to child language brokering, her thesis and articles did not immediately generate research interest, perhaps because the major article was published in a journal with a very specific and localised title. It was an article by McQuillan and Tse (1995) in a major international journal that seems to have acted as a catalyst. Since then a large number of studies and two books have been published. Interest in the topic is coming from different disciplines, but the main emphasis remains on studying child language brokering as a sociocultural activity. The term "language brokering" has been the most commonly used description although variations of this can be found in the research literature.

Even with the move from a linguistic approach to a more social one, there are still areas that perhaps need more exploration, in particular how children handle the

complexities of being engaged in some brokering events. Just how complex some language brokering situations can be is gradually becoming clearer. In 1991 Malakoff and Hakuta argued that a bilingual translator is faced with a fourfold problem. The translator must comprehend the vocabulary, comprehend the message, reformulate the message and judge the reformulation's accuracy. However, this formulation considerably underestimates the complexity of the child language broker's task. While these complexities will vary enormously, consider these children's experiences:

> One afternoon, a big tall man came to our take-away shop and showed his identity card and said that he came from the Health and Safety Environment Department to do the inspection. My dad and mum could not understand what he was going on about because they could not speak English. The man talked to me instead of my dad. He asked me to interpret between them. I was shaking with fright. My dad told me, "Don't answer his questions because we can lose our shop and business". Every time it's something like this. I could not sleep for nearly a week for worrying about what the report would be. (Hall and Sham 2007: 23)

> One time he (*the father*) was just furious at this (*store*) clerk. My dad told me (*using sign language*) to tell the guy to shove it up his arse! I remember saying something like, "Well, my father doesn't think this is a good idea. (Preston 1994: 54)

Hall (2004: 294) suggests that for the children in his study "moving from one language to another in a brokering event was a relatively minor part of the process; choosing what to say was a much more complex process than simply translating what had been said". In the three events above it is not the translation that is an issue for the children. By focussing purely on the mechanics of the move from one language to another one misses so much else that children are doing. Yes, children do have to communicate the sense of what is being said, but they also have to be responding to the power relationships, the cultural backgrounds, the ages and experiences of the other speakers, as well as many wider contextual issues such as the degree of trust by the adults in the child, the short, medium and long-term consequences of what is brokered, the number of other speakers involved. In Hall's study (2004) ten-year-old language brokers were posed

particular challenges within a simulation of a brokering event. They were faced with attempts at enlistment by one of the speakers and decisions about whether to translate negative comments by one of the speakers. It was clear that some children were taken aback when these things happened but without exception they all found ways of handling them that displayed great diplomacy and tact. Hall wrote (2004: 295):

> The behaviour of the children in this study demonstrated the complexities of the social context for the child language brokers, the social and practical dilemmas they face when asked to broker between adults, and highly subtle and strategic responses generated when negotiating a pathway through these complexities.

In addition to the linguistic, cognitive and social knowledge demonstrated by child language brokers, there is often also an emotional demand given the responsibility involved.

> One of the striking and persistent themes raised in interviews with these young people was they grew up with a great deal of responsibility. According to Wong, whose parents relied upon him and his brother for 'everything', "we are our parents guide dogs to the world". (Song 1996: 104)

In many language brokering events the child is literally in the middle, and the "middle" can be an emotionally lonely place with little support from the adults involved.

> I remember that it was not long ago, I went to the bank with my parents. They tried to explain to a counter assistant. He turned to me asking me what my mum and dad wanted to say in front off all the customers in the bank. I just felt so embarrassed because people in our queue were getting angry with us. It took so long to sort things out. At first I tried to understand what were my dad's problems and then to explain them to the counter assistant. He tried to make me understand that there was no mistake in my dad's bank statement, so in a situation like that it was so confusing and I felt I needed to give up explaining between them both. I wish I could walk away from it. (Hall and Sham 2007: 23)

Some children cope easily with this, some find it highly stressful. As a consequence, while a child broker may be the eldest child in a family, on many occasions it is the child who feels most comfortable with the role or one who

actively seeks this kind of role. One adult female who did all the language brokering for her parents told the first author of this paper that her male twin brother absolutely hated the role and refused to carry it out. She on the other hand loved doing it.

The term "language brokering" while widespread is not the only term used by researchers, and it is probably the case that ultimately it will be replaced by yet another term. However, it does at least give prominence to the full extent of the children's work in these situations.

4. The implications of child language brokering for conceptualisations of childhood.

Earlier in this paper we wrote about how for a long time child language brokering had been relatively invisible; it was not alone, for many aspects of children's lives have long been ignored, neglected and undervalued. For much of the twentieth century there was an implicit belief that full participation in society arrives only in adulthood at which point people are mature, rational and socially competent. By default children therefore are "immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial" (MacKay 1973: 28). In the West, by the beginning of the twentieth century child labour had been largely outlawed, most children were in schooling for many years, a length of time which grew steadily throughout the twentieth century so that children were eventually spending the years from three to sixteen in full-time schooling, while others were doing even more than this. Perceptions of children as immature people who need protection from the dangers of the adult world resulted in claims that children need a long apprenticeship (mainly through education and family life) before they could be seen as people capable of accepting major responsibility for their actions. Morrow (1995: 217) claimed that

> Responsibility is a rather nebulous concept and has different meanings in
> different contexts. Being responsible involves being accountable, answerable,
> capable, competent, dependent reliable, trustworthy and so on. These are not

36

qualities that are usually associated with older children or teenagers because as already discussed, childhood is defined and constructed, at least in the industrialised West, as a period of incompetence, of freedom from the responsibilities of work.

The twentieth century also witnessed huge changes in the degree of protection believed to be necessary for children, with a large number of laws developed and agencies formed to provide this protection. Rose (1989: 121) claimed that:

> The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual, and moral danger, to ensure its "normal" development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability, and emotional stability.

It is also the case that children, no matter their emotional importance to parents, have usually been viewed as a financial liability for parents. Popular newspapers in the UK regularly carry articles about how much it costs to raise a child. *The Telegraph*, on January 23rd, 2009 carried a news item about a recent survey:

> […] the average parent will now pay £193,772 bringing up one child - from birth until the age of 21. This compares to £186,032 a year earlier and £140,398 when the research was first carried out in 2003.

In recent years there has been a substantial shift in the way children and the nature of childhood are perceived. The recognition that childhood is a social construct has led to a huge amount of study and publication on numerous aspects of childhood, accounts which qualify as "reconstructing childhood" (James and Prout 1990). This area has become widely known as the "new childhood studies. This involves a recognition that children are not simply *becomings*, children who will be something in the future, but are "beings" people who are active agents in everyday life and who make powerful contributions their own daily lives as well as the everyday lives of their families. As Morrow (1995: 208) put it, "Children are social actors in their own right, their activities having implications for the here and now rather than merely for the future". The nature of these contributions has often been relatively invisible and this is particularly so when children's work are considered.

Qvortrup (1994: 21) has argued that "children are often marginalised from our system of remuneration and distribution in the sense that their activities are often not thought of as having economic worth". Solberg (1994) has argued that children's work is often relatively invisible to adults and in her study uncovered a wide range of housework behaviours that could certainly be counted as having economic worth, and Morrow (1995) under the heading *Invisible children* identified a range of types of work carried out by children which were on the whole unrecognised as such by both research and social agencies. It appears that children, popularly seen as an economic liability within a family, may actually in many households be making a significant contribution to the economy of the family. The "invisibility" of these behaviours is partly because of the way that work is conventionally defined, usually in terms of adult wage-earning. However, if one considers child work as being activities that contribute to the administrative, social and financial well-being of a family, then while unwaged, children's work certainly can make an economic contribution to family life. Nowhere is this clearer than in child language brokering, an activity that was not considered by Morrow, Solberg and Qvortrup, yet perhaps represents greater economically valuable work much more than most of the activities they do consider.

The settings in which child language brokers operate are very varied. McQuillan and Tse (1995) looked at only nine subjects but found them brokering in schools, banks, government offices, stores and restaurants, doctors offices. Subsequent research studies have massively extended this list, with Hall and Sham (2007) finding children brokering between their parents and for restaurant customers, health and safety inspectors, doctors and nurses in hospitals, Post Office officials, tax officials, gas and electricity officials, insurance sellers, bank personnel, doorstop salespeople, religious groups, and lawyers. The work of Orellana (2009) has added considerably to these lists, particularly the range of reading material mediated by the children. This all constitutes the work of child language brokers.

The range of situations in which child language brokers operate is huge, and are often those which would cause difficulties for parents if a child broker was not available. In many Western countries there is access to freely provided local or

national translating services. However, these are limited and may involve booking ahead, as well as causing problems for parents who are sensitive about revealing personal information to non-family members. In other circumstances other adult members of a language community might be able to broker for parents. Parents may be able to pay for a translator, although the families who have the greatest need are often those with the least financial resources. It is also the case that in some countries, particularly the UK, the easy access to translators is being questioned, ostensibly on the grounds that relying on translators prevents parents from learning English; it seems much more likely that it is an attempt to save money. If such a course was followed then the language-brokering burden is likely to fall even more heavily on a family's children. However, such attempts at least begin to indicate that there is a very real cost to the employment of professional interpreters and translators, and begins to suggest how high would be the financial burden to families if children were not able to do it. Although no-one has done the calculation, it is clear that the economic input into families by children who language broker is massive.

In this article the term language brokering has been used to represent both oral language brokering and literacy brokering. However, literacy brokering has a distinctive contribution to make in what has often been termed the "new literacy studies". This represents a revaluation of children's literacy competencies particularly in relation to the literacies of schooling, a process that began with Street's reconceptualisation of literacy itself (Street 1984). Literacy in schooling is often marked:

- by being imposed upon children and forcing them to be responders and seldom initiators;
- by seldom being used to make things happen in the world - exercises are treated as ends in themselves, as here and now activities - and success is measured by performance on the task;
- is usually experienced within exercises which focus upon narrow aspects of curriculum, involve a limited range of specially privileged academic

purposes and audiences, and makes relatively constant demands upon users;

- is usually experienced as individual practice; is defined in narrow and decontextualised ways which govern interpretations, choices and modes of practice, and assessment.

- As a consequence of the above, literacy in schooling is seldom meaningful and relevant to children's lives as people, and represents what Street (1994) terms autonomous literacy practices, practices which take literacy out of everyday life and transform it into a set of discrete literacy skills.

- Compare this with children's experiences of literacy when engaged in literacy brokering:

- these experiences are always highly meaningful to the family's lives and are intimately associated with their personal lifestyles. This literacy is located in a family's social past and future; it comes out of their prior experience and connects to their future experience.

- the children use their literacy knowledge to make things happen for their family. Literacy is for them a means to an end, embedded in wider events, and success is measured by whether it achieves these ends. It is not an abstract practice carried out in exercise books and on whiteboards. Within family life literacy really makes things happen.

- children use their literacy for a very wide range of purposes; it also involves a wide range of users and audiences and varies in the demands that it makes upon users.

- while children often mediate a family's responses to externally imposed literacy demands, they are often involved in literacy activities that are initiated within the family, because literacy enables people to achieve things in their lives that are of personal or familial significance.

Clearly the everyday life experiences of child literacy brokers can be very different from their experiences in school, and this is true for language and literacy brokering children in many cultures. Wagner (1993) came across some child language brokering in his study of literacy in Morocco (although he did not label

them in this way) and he wrote (Wagner: 188), "Literacy skills taught in school may bear only a partial resemblance to the kinds of abilities and knowledge utilised in the performance of literacy tasks in everyday life". However, because schooled literacies carry immense prestige and are backed up by their consequences for future employment and economic success, they have a status much higher than everyday literacies. Street and Street (1991: 143) wrote, "Nonschool literacies have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling".

In fact, the challenges for children of both oral language and literacy brokering for other family members suggest that child language brokers are often operating a much high level than ever required in their school-based activities. Clearly the demands made upon children when literacy brokering can range from the relatively trivial, maybe just writing out a note for the milkman, to the massively complex, like helping a father fill out a tax form, but at the higher level the children are responding challenges that their fellow students are unlikely to meet until they are adults. Orellana (2009: 61) wrote about the non-school-related texts brokered by the children she studied:

> They covered a wide range of domains, topics and genres […] instructions for medicines and vitamins, manuals for small machinery, greetings cards, medical forms, jury summons, email, storybooks, homework, product labels, receipts, library card application forms, information solicited from the internet, (usually with the children taking the lead in the search for this information) letters from insurance companies, receipts and advertisements.

She comments, "This was a much wider range of texts than children read in school or for the school-based homework assignments". Solberg (1990) uses the interesting notion of children growing or shrinking in age as negotiations take place within families about roles and rights, suggesting that for some children social age can exceed chronological age and this certainly seems to be the case for many child literacy and language brokers.

5. Conclusion

The study of child language brokering is still a relatively new phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is very clear that children are deeply implicated in the social transactions that affect the lives of parents and other family members who find themselves in new language environments. The evidence suggests both a considerable contribution to the economic life of the family by many child language brokers as well as a high level of intellectual and social competence. It suggests a high degree of positive agency on the part of children as well as a lot of trust invested in them by parents. Far from being an economic drain on their parents, these children provide an input into family life that has both economic and social value.

Works Cited

Bailey, F. G. (1969) *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Barton, D. and S. Padmore (1991) "Roles, networks and values in everyday writing", in D. Barton and R. Ivanic (eds) *Writing in the Community*, London: Sage Publications, 58-77.

Baynham, M. (1993) "Code-switching and mode-switching: community interpreters and mediators of literacy", in B. Street (ed) *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 294-314.

Buchino, M. A. (1993) "Perceptions of the oldest hearing child of deaf parents: on interpreting, communication, feelings and role reversal", *American Annuals of the Deaf* 138 (1): 40-45.

Clanchy, M. (1993) *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Clifton, J. (ed) (1989) *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers*, Chicago: Dorsey Press.

Hagedorn, N. (1988) "'A friend to go between them': The interpreter as cultural broker during Anglo-Iroquois councils. 1740-1770", *Ethnohistory* 35: 60-80.

Hall, N. (2004) "The child in the middle: agency and diplomacy in language brokering events", in G. Hansen, K. G Malmkaer and D. Gile (eds) *Claims, Changes and Challenges in Translation Studies*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 285-296.

----- and S. Sham (2007) "Language brokering as young people's work: evidence from Chinese Adolescents in England", *Language and Education* 21 (1): 16-30.

Harris, B. (1973) "La traductologie, la traduction naturelle, la traduction automatique et la sémantique", in J. McA'Nulty *et al.* (eds) *Problèmes de sémantique* (Cahier de linguistique 3), Montreal : Presses de l'Université du Québec, 133-146.

----- (1976) "The importance of natural translation", revised version of a paper presented at the AILA World Congress (Stuttgart, August 1975), *Working Papers in Bilingualism* 12: 96-114. Reprinted as *Working Papers in Translatology* 2, Ottawa, School of Translators and Interpreters, University of Ottawa.

----- (1978) "The difference between natural and professional translation", *Canadian Modern Language Review / Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 34: 417-427.

----- (2008) *An annotated Chronological Bibliography of A Century of Natural Translation Studies 1908-2008*, http://www3.uva.es/uvalal/Enlaces/B_Harris-Natural_Translation.pdf.

----- and S. Bianca (1978) "Translating as an innate skill", in D. Gerver and W. H. Sinaiko (eds) *Language Interpretation and Communication* (Proceedings of the NATO Symposium on Language Interpretation and Communication, Giorgio Cini

Foundation, Venice, 1977), NATO Conference Series, Series III (Human Factors), 6, Oxford and New York: Plenum, 155-170.

Heath, S. (1983) *Ways with Words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

James, A. and A. Prout (eds) (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Falmer Press.

Kalman, J. (1999) *Writing On the Plaza: Mediated Literacy Practices Among Scribes and Clients in Mexico City*, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

Mace, J. (2002) *The Give and Take of Writing: Scribes, Literacy and Everyday Life*, National Institute of Adult Continuing Adult Education.

MacKay, R. (1973) "Conceptions of children and models of socialisation", in R. Turner (ed) *Ethnomethodology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 180-193

Malakoff, M. and K. Hakuta (1991) "Translation skills and metalinguistic awareness in bilinguals", in E. Bialystok (ed) *Language Processing in Bilingual Children*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 141-167.

McQuillan, J. and L. Tse (1995) "Child language brokering in linguistic minority communities: effects on cultural interaction, cognition, and literacy", *Language and Education* 9*:* 195-215.

Morrow, V. (1995) "Invisible children? Towards a reconceptualisation of childhood", *Sociological Studies of Children* 7: 207-230.

Moss, W. (1995) "Controlling or empowering? Writing through a scribe in adult basic education", in J. Mace (ed) *Literacy, Language and Community Publishing: Essays in Adult Education*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 145-170.

Orellana, M. (2009) *Translating Childhood: Immigrant Youth, Language and Culture*, New Brunswick (New Jersey): Rutgers University Press.

Paine, R. (ed) (1971) *Patrons and Brokers in the East Artic*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Preston, P. (1994) *Mother Father Deaf: Living Between Sound and Silence*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press.

----- (1996) "Chameleon voices: interpreting for deaf parents", *Social Science and Medicine* 42(12): 1681-1690.

Qvortrup, J. (1994) "Childhood Matters: An introduction", in J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta and H. Wintersberger (eds) *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*, Aldershot: Avebury Press, 1-27.

Richter, D. (1988) "Cultural brokers and intercultural politics: New York-Iroquois relations 1664-1701", *Journal of American History* 75: 40-67.

Robins, S. (1996) "Cultural brokers and bricoleurs of modern and traditional literacies: land struggles in Mamaqualand's coloured reserves", in M. Prinsloo and M. Breier (eds) *The Social Uses of Literacy*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 123-141.

Rose, N. (1989*) Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self,* London: Routledge.

Shannon, S. (1987) *English in el Barrio: A Sociolinguistic Study of Second Language Contact*, Ph.D. Dissertation. Stanford University, USA.

----- (1990) "English in the Barrio: the quality of contact among immigrant children", *Hispanic Journal of Behavioural Sciences* 12 (3): 256-276.

Solberg, A. (1990) "Negotiating childhood: changing construction of age for Norwegian children", in A. James and A. Prout (eds) *Constructing and*

Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood, London: Falmer Press, 118-137.

----- (1994) *Negotiating Childhood*, Stockholm: Nordplan.

Street, B. (1984) *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

----- and J. Street (1991) "The Schooling of Literacy", in D. Barton and R. Ivanic (eds) *Writing in the Community*, London: Sage Publications, 143-166.

Szasz, M. (2001) *Between Indian and White Worlds: the Cultural broker*, Norman (Oklahoma): University of Oklahoma Press.

Varenne, H. and R. McDermott (1986) "Why Sheila can read: structure and determinancy in the reproduction of familial literacy", in B. Schieffelin (ed) *The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives*, New Jersey: Ablex, 188-212.

Vasquez, O., L. Pease-Alvarez and S. Shannon (1994) *Pushing Boundaries: Language and Culture in a Mexicano Community*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wagner, D. (1993) *Literacy, Culture and Development: Becoming Literate in Morocco*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, A. (2000) "'Absolutely truly brill to see you': Visuality and prisoners' letters", in Barton, D. and N. Hall (eds) *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 179-198.