BRIDGING THE GAP: IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BROKERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the role that immigrant children play in translating and interpreting for their parents. Research shows that children pick up language skills and culture faster than their parents do, so they are often put into the position of translating. This paper includes previous literature on the subject, and uses interviews and questionnaires conducted with adults who have had experiences in the role of culture broker as children. While many of the participants benefited by perfecting language skills and were able to assist their families, they generally did not enjoy their stressful experiences as culture brokers. Currently, Canada does not have any laws in place to govern this activity, and this research calls for the government to implement limitations to the practice of using children in such a role.

Key Words:

Immigrant children; culture brokering; language brokering; family relations; acculturation.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

The immigration officer led the refugee family into the interview room. The head of the family and his wife sat in the seats directly in front of the officer. Their ten-year-old daughter sat next to them, and her younger siblings in the seats against the wall. "When did you arrive in Toronto?" asked the officer, looking at the father. He shook his head and looked at his daughter. "Last night," replied the little girl, addressing the officer's question. "Oh? Are you going to be interpreting today?" asked the officer, somewhat surprised. The little girl nodded, and proceeded to answer the various questions directed at her parents.

I was present in that interview room, and watched as one of the children in the family nervously did her best to relay the information to her parents. She seemed worried about whether she was doing a good job, and at times remained silent, unsure of what she was supposed to say. The official insisted that she explain word-for-word the exact instructions to her parents, and she simply responded with a nod. In that situation, the girl found herself in the position of acting as the informal family interpreter—or language broker—as the role is sometimes called. Witnessing the incident gave me an insight into children's participation in their family's settlement process and made me wonder about the various dynamics involved in the role.

Situations like this one occur every day in a variety of settings, and are not out of the ordinary for immigrant families who arrive with little knowledge of the official Canadian languages. In many cases, it is often the children who have acquired some working knowledge of English or French before arriving in the country. Once in Canada, children also tend to pick up language skills and cultural norms much faster than their

parents do (Acoach and Webb, 2004; Padilla, 2006; Diaz-Lazaro, 2002). This paper will explore the role that immigrant children play in bridging the language and culture gaps between their parents and that of the receiving society.

New immigrants to Canada often experience changes to their culture and customs during their settlement process. After having severed ties with friends and families in their homeland, they often feel isolated in their new country, especially if they have no language skills with which to function (Mercado, 2004; Miller et al, 2006). With the assistance of their children, however, the settlement experience of parents, and the family as a whole, is facilitated. Children are frequently able to access services and make contact with institutions that would normally be unapproachable by immigrants with no language skills. Overall, children enable their parents to settle more comfortably, and provide a shoulder to lean on when difficulties arise.

The question that remains, however, is how this dynamic affects the settlement process and the daily lives of these children. It is important to consider how children are affected—socially and emotionally—by having to serve as interpreters or culture brokers for their parents. The specific questions that this paper will address are: firstly, how are children affected by having to take on the role of language or culture brokers for their parents? How does this shape their emotional well-being, cognitive development, academic performance, and social relations? Secondly, how does culture brokering affect the parents' acculturation and adaptation into the general society? If they depend on their children for everything, how does that affect their integration? And finally, with this dynamic in mind, I would like to explore how this process influences family structure and the parent-child relationship, and how it affects the power relations within the family.

After reviewing the existing literature on this topic and considering these questions, I will include data gathered from personal interviews and questionnaires in order to offer a more in-depth look at the experiences of children who have served as culture brokers for their parents in Canada.

I will first begin by offering definitions for the key terms used in this study. For the purpose of this paper, "children" are classified as any person under the age of eighteen years, as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Part I, Article 1). In the search for texts pertaining to this subject, certain key words were used, including: language brokering; culture brokering; immigration and family relations; acculturation of children; and other similar terms. The term "language, or linguistic, brokering" is most commonly used, but it is necessary to note that language brokering is not simply the ability of being bilingual.

Bilingualism involves learning, understanding, and speaking two or more languages, while brokering deals with the act of translating and interpreting those languages back and forth. As Tse (1995) explains, "Language brokering refers to interpretation and translation between linguistically and culturally different parties" and, most importantly, "Unlike formal interpreters and translators... language brokers influence the messages they convey and may act as a decision maker for one or both parties" (p. 180). Also, it is important to remember that brokers are persons who have not had any formal training, which is especially true in the case of immigrant children involved in the process.

The term "culture brokering", or "CB", is similarly used in the existing literature, which refers to children who mediate the new culture, as well as the language, for their

parents. As opposed to linguistic brokering, culture brokering also involves the transmission of cultural knowledge. In the context of immigration, children are exposed to both their home culture as well as that of the receiving society. When interpreting, both verbal and body language cues are laced with cultural meanings that have to be deciphered. As Williams (2006, p. iv) best explains, "Cultural brokers are people who are able to negotiate meanings of both verbal and non-verbal language in two or more cultures." Children have this ability to interpret language and cultural nuances, and their assistance is often a necessity for their immigrant parents. When interpreting languages between people of different cultural backgrounds, it is often the case that cultural cues are also transmitted. In this paper, therefore, the term "C/L brokering" (culture/language brokering) will be used to encompass any cultural or linguistic interaction that is translated or interpreted by children for their immigrant parents. The following chapter will examine the existing literature on this topic.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Although it is not a new trend that children assist their immigrant parents by interpreting language and culture, relatively little attention has been given to the phenomenon. As Weisskirch et al (2002) state, "Language brokering is a common practice, especially in minority communities; however, there is little research on how this affects children operating as language brokers... [who] may feel caught between two cultures of be forced to mediate very stressful or difficult situations" (p. 369). It is only in recent years that researchers have begun to show an interest in children taking on this responsibility. Current studies have indicated the prevalence of C/L brokering among immigrant populations, and note several universal characteristics of children who partake in the practice.

Theoretical Frameworks

First, it is important to ground this research within a theoretical framework in order to understand the implications for those involved. Previous scholars have cited the effects of acculturation and assimilation as key theories that help to explain the prevalence of C/L brokering among children of immigrants (Diaz-Lazaro, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). Also, Valenzuela (1999) addresses the concept of familism as an important one in many cultures. In familistic cultures, the wellbeing of the family unit is a priority over individual interests. Family ties and kinship networks are of great importance, and even children are expected to contribute to the functioning of the family as a whole. Adultification and familial role reversal are also concepts that have been discussed in previous literature. By being forced into mature situations, scholars have

argued, children become "adultified", or take on adult-like responsibilities and characteristics. This, it is said, contributes to the reversal of traditional roles between parent and child.

First of all, with regards to assimilation and acculturation, it is understood that the process of adapting to a new culture is usually a difficult and stressful one. Immigrants abandon close family ties, friendship networks, and cultural norms when they leave their countries of origin. As Diaz-Lazaro (2002) states, "Immigrant families arrive to this country with values, norms, and behaviors rooted in their home culture while they are expected to function within a different cultural framework in the new or host culture" (p. 2). Feelings of loss, adapting to a new environment, as well as not being proficient in the language of the receiving country are all factors that add to the stress related to immigration (Mercado, 2004). As Miller et al (2006) explain, "During the initial post-immigration absence of strong social networks, immigrants experience a period of relative social isolation and alienation from mainstream society during which family and ethnic social support networks become a central part of the acculturation process" (p. 135). Children, as part of the family network, are at times turned to as agents of social support and acculturation, especially if they possess language skills that the parents do not.

Over time, immigrants are ideally supposed to adapt to, or assimilate into, the receiving culture. In this context, assimilation, "assumes the integration of the immigrant into the new culture while relinquishing the home culture" (Diaz-Lazaro, 2002, p. 2). Newcomers are expected to integrate into the society and acculturate according to Canadian societal norms. The lack of language skills, however, as well as the lack of

cultural knowledge is often a barrier to the settlement and acculturation of many immigrants.

How this relates to C/L brokering among immigrant children is straightforward. Research has shown that children adapt to new cultures and learn new languages much faster than adults do. Developmentally, children are able to absorb language skills faster than their parents, and they are also exposed to Canadian cultural norms and customs from interacting with their friends at school (Acoach and Webb, 2004). Padilla (2006) also explains that "the school and peers are the main sources of transmission of the new culture for immigrant children and adolescents while the immigrant parents continue to maintain the cultural practices of their home country" (p. 473). Adults acquire language skills at a slower pace, and are not exposed to the language and cultural practices in the way that children are at school.

Diaz-Lazaro (2002) also states that, "children are at a developmental level in which the language of the new culture can be learned more easily... Thus, although many parents strive to learn the new language, their children are likely to acquire proficiency levels necessary for social adeptness much sooner" (p. 3). Because of this, children often become the designated interpreters for their family and facilitate the acculturation of their parents and other family members.

Children assimilate faster into the receiving culture and possess more proficient language skills, so many immigrant children are required to interpret and translate for their parents. It is interesting, however, that the assistance of children is most often necessary early in the settlement process, when children's language skills are least developed. As Jones & Trickett (2005) explain, "When a family initially moves into a

new culture, its members presumably will be less familiar with the culture and will need to rely more on others until they have been within it for several years. Thus, adolescents may be thrust into the culture broker role very early during their own acculturation process. This situation may be somewhat paradoxical, in that children may be most needed as culture brokers when they are least able to function in that role" (p. 421). This observation carries many implications, and leads to the question of how brokering affects the children's settlement process. In the research carried out for this paper, I addressed this notion by asking participants what their language proficiency was at the time of their arrival in Canada and when they began to translate or interpret. This will be further explained in a later section of this paper.

A second theoretical concept that has been discussed in previous literature is the role of familism, adultification, and familial role-reversal among immigrant families. Many immigrants are from cultures that stress the importance strong family ties and kinship networks, and emphasize the concept of familism. Familism, as Castañeda (2005) explains, "Is characterized by interdependence and is a material as well as emotional support system... Also, it is common that the family's needs are a priority over individual needs" (p. 7). This is true of many Asian cultures, as well as the Latino culture, which have been the focus of many studies dealing with child culture brokering (Weisskirch, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Families with strong kinship networks are more likely to depend on other family members for solving problems, especially during their process of adapting to the new society. Children would be expected to contribute to the well-being of the family by interpreting or translating, similar to other common household chores that would normally be their responsibility.

An opposing concept is that of adultification. Instead of viewing C/L brokering as a responsibility that children have to contribute within the household, some researchers have attributed the responsibility as the cause of adultification and the reversal of traditional family roles. By participating in situations that would normally be left to their parents, children are thrust into adult-like roles. Trickett and Curtis (2007) explain that a child, "by taking on CB roles, undermines the traditional power relationship between parents and children and increases parental dependence on their children... [and] CB is seen as perhaps a necessary evil, but an evil nonetheless" (p. 143). This suggests that C/L brokering may disrupt traditional family roles and promote family dysfunction.

These theories and concepts help to explain children's roles as interpreters for their parents. Concepts such as adultification have spurred ongoing debates about the effect that brokering may have on immigrant families and their children. This debate will be discussed later, but first it is necessary to address some of the key findings of children's C/L brokering studies.

C/L Brokering: The Fundamentals

Previous studies have shown that a large majority of immigrant children serve as C/L brokers for their parents at some point during the settlement process (Morales and Hanson, 2005; Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido, 2003). Brokering usually begins within one to five years from the moment of immigration, and the children involved may be as young as 8 or 9 years old (Morales and Hanson, 2005). With regards to gender, researchers focusing on Latino immigrant families have found that the majority of designated C/L brokers are girls (Valenzuela, 1999; Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido, 2003).

Whether this is a trend that is generalized across immigrants from other backgrounds has not been explored more deeply.

In practice, children are often asked to serve as C/L brokers by translating transactions, correspondence, contracts, and other types of sophisticated documents. They might also be asked to interpret during doctor's appointments, or simply to explain what family friends are saying. "Unlike formal interpreters and translators", explains Lucy Tse, "brokers mediate, rather than merely transmit, information" (1996, p. 485). Buriel et al. (1998) also note that C/L brokers are often placed in the position of having to make decisions that affect the entire family, which would normally be a parental responsibility.

Aside from merely mediating during C/L brokering situations, children also perform various other tasks that facilitate their parents' settlement into the receiving culture. These include not only acting as decision makers for the family, but also taking on "the role of socializing agents by conveying important cultural information" (Tse, 1995, p. 182). Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido (2003) also discovered that children are able to use their language skills as well as cultural knowledge in order to access services and resources for their families that would otherwise be inaccessible. Their research makes "clear that children are active participants in their households and in immigrant settlement processes. They do not simply animate their parents' words; they are not merely 'peripheral participants'... and they are not passive objects of adults' socialization efforts" (p. 522). Children are the "liaisons of communication" between their parents and the outside community (Weisskirch, p. 2006). In this sense, children do aid the settlement and integration of their parents into the mainstream community. Were it not for their

children, many adult immigrants would not be able to access resources that facilitate their settlement.

Orellana (2001) suggests that children are the experts when it comes to brokering situations and that "children's work facilitates families' access to information and resources; it builds bridges between home and school; and it enhances opportunities for their own and their siblings' learning and development" (p. 378-379). Most institutions and other social services only communicate in the language of the host-country, so children serve as "acculturation agents" (Tse, 1995, p. 190). Some parents may even prefer having their children interpret for them, rather than relying on a trained professional, simply because they trust their children and feel more comfortable with them.

It is evident that children are a fundamental aspect of the settlement process of their parents, who would be lost without someone to broker language and culture on a daily basis. In families in which C/L brokering does take place, however, how does the practice affect the parents' ability to settle permanently? There are very few studies that address the parents' perspective on C/L brokering done by their children. Worthy's 2006 study is one of the few that has addressed this phenomenon from the parents' perception. Undoubtedly, immigrant parents who are not able to communicate with others often feel left out, and "feel like outsiders" (p. 148). In Worthy's study, parents "were grateful for their children's help and proud of their skill in managing two languages and handling complex situations. They were also aware of the stress their children sometimes felt..." (p. 149). Parents admitted that if they could understand the language, they would not ask their children to broker. So, although research suggests that children's C/L brokering

activities are a way for families to access resources, this study also shows that parents feel segregated from the general population because of their lack of language skills. Even though children offer access to immediate resources in the short-term, it is likely that the parents' settlement-- or lack thereof-- is affected in the long run.

Also, research has shown that as well as mediating situations for their parents, children have used their language proficiency and cultural knowledge to protect their parents from embarrassment or shame. In this sense, children are "being considered the protectors or shields of the family" (Morales and Hanson, 2005, p. 495). Not only do children exchange ideas between languages, they also take part in social, economic, and administrative decisions of the family. Hall and Robinson (1999) add that, "In such situations, children are not simply constructing the world for themselves but are playing principal roles in constructing versions of the new world for other family members" (p. 4). Even so, one must keep in mind that children still remain children regardless of what their function is when facing the outside community. By being placed in positions of power and holding knowledge that traditionally belongs to parents, familial roles are challenged.

Whether it is reasonable to expect children to take on this role is a controversial topic that has raised debate amongst researchers. There are many arguments that suggest that children are often placed in situations that are not age-appropriate or may cause them discomfort. Certain situations may be traumatizing for the children who are serving as brokers. For example, Morales and Hanson (2005) quote a physician who stated, "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" (as cited in Morales and Hanson, 2005, p. 472).

Valenzuela (1999) adds that even though C/L brokering situations often cause children stress, situations "undertaken in a hospital or doctor's office seemed to be especially embarrassing, difficult, and dehumanizing for boys and girls" (p. 736-737). Also, certain social service settings are clearly inappropriate for children. Having to translate their mother's stories of domestic abuse to a social worker, for example, would be highly traumatizing (Coleman, 2003).

Some researchers have found instances when children express anxieties about translating. For example, Hedges presents an instance in which an immigrant girl explains, "There are times, especially with doctors, when I have no idea what they are talking about... but I have to translate something. My parents rely on me. I have to keep asking and asking what it means, what they are talking about. And sometimes I have my own life, my own work to do, but I have to stop to help my brother or leave to go with mother or father. It is tiring" (as cited in Hedges, 2000, p. B1). In these types of situations, children may have little knowledge of the content of which they are interpreting.

Cohen, Moran-Ellis, & Smaje (1999) researched how physicians perceive children translating for their parents during medical consultations. They found that "the use of informal interpreters for medical consultations has not shown it to be a particularly satisfactory arrangement... at least a quarter of all questions asked were mistranslated or not translated at all" (p. 165). In general, medical doctors were opposed to having children interpret during consultations, yet the practice still remains—mostly because of lack of funds to access trained professionals. Most doctors had objections to having children interpret sensitive information such as reproductive health, and would stop the

consultation if personal, inappropriate information were required (p. 176). Interestingly, doctors stated they sometimes accepted teenaged girls to interpret during sensitive topics, yet never asked teenaged sons to do so. As an informant stated, "You can't expect a 13-year-old boy, you can't really ask through him about his mother's periods. There are some subjects that I feel are taboo. You can't ask things like that it is just too embarrassing, not for me but for them, the parent and child" (p. 178). Doctors claimed they did take into account the parent's comfort with having children interpret for them, the subject matter that was to be discussed, and the gender of the child. Issues regarding errors in translation were less of a consideration.

Although no legal measures exist in Canada at present, it is interesting to note that in California attempts have been made to limit the use of children as interpreters in certain settings. Like Canada, California is an area with high rates of immigration. Much of the literature about this topic has been based on studies done in California, which is perhaps an indication of the prevalence of children involved in C/L brokering in that area. Morales and Hanson (2005) explained that in the year 2002, a bill was introduced in California to prohibit children from translating or interpreting in legal, medical or social service situations (p. 472). The bill addressed three issues: firstly, there is concern regarding the accuracy of translations done by children. Especially when dealing in medical or legal settings, it is imperative that the information be translated accurately. Secondly, proponents of the bill argued that translating delicate information in medical or legal settings might affect the parent-child relationship. And thirdly, children might be traumatized by certain medical information that would normally not be privy to a child.

The California Bill, AB 292, prohibits agencies that receive funding from the state from, "using any child, or permitting any child to be used, as an interpreter, as defined, in any matter involving the business or function of that agency." The bill states that it has become too common for children to be used in place of professional interpreters, and that "Children should not be exposed to discussions and information that is often beyond their comprehension, or to discussions and information that are inappropriate for, or unseemly to, children" (California State Senate, Bill AB 292, Section 1B).

Although the bill was introduced in California, it has implications for other immigrant-rich nations such as Canada. In Canada, although there is no law prohibiting children from translating or interpreting for their parents, there are Child Labour laws in place that govern the types of work and hours that children are permitted to work. Minimum ages vary from province to province, but most provinces set a minimum age at fourteen, as long as the work does not interfere with school attendance (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2006). Translating and interpreting can be viewed as a type of work because of the time and effort that children have to put into the activity. Although the laws do not specify limitations on translating or interpreting done by children, the fact that a minimum age is in place for other types of labour should be extended to brokering activities as well. Furthermore, children should not be permitted to participate in translating or interpreting outside of school hours. Whether translating or interpreting by children should be prohibited in Canada altogether is a matter of much debate.

Involving the legal system in this issue has brought much criticism from opponents. If courts decide that children are not capable of translating or interpreting for

their parents, it limits immigrants' access to services and settlement. Opponents of the California bill argued that it did not address cost-effective alternatives, and without their children many immigrants would be left without access to services. Many service agencies have limited funds when it comes to hiring professional translators or interpreters, and worried about the costs of having to hire professionals. Proponents of the bill argued that agencies could turn to volunteer translators, community groups, or older friends or relatives instead (Coleman, 2003). Indeed, many immigrant communities often have strong support networks, and it could be possible for adult community members to interpret or translate for those who need assistance. What is of concern, however, is the issue of confidentiality in community-based settings. As mentioned, many settings that require interpretation or translation are often confidential in nature. Having a respected member of one's own community involved in personal matters is often an issue that would deter many immigrants from turning to community members for such purposes. Having one's own children interpret or translate reduces the likelihood that personal health or family matters might be divulged to the community.

Although the accuracy of translations performed by children has often been questioned, there have been interesting studies on the processing of languages by bilinguals referred to in studies conducted by both Tse (1995) and Acoach and Webb (2004). They cite research done by Malakoff and Hakuta (1991), which explains the skills involved in translating and interpreting between languages. The process of translation, state the researchers, is not a simple process—even if children are the ones translating. According to Malakoff and Hakuta, there are four stages of translation:

1. Comprehension of the vocabulary of the original source-language text.

2. Comprehension of the meaning of the original text.
3. Reformulation of the message of the target language.
4. Judgment of the adequacy of the target language text (qtd. in Tse, 1995, p. 181-182).

The fact that children are able to process each of these steps while brokering shows the level of cognitive ability that they possess. Even children are able to extract the meaning of the words as well as decipher the context of the situation. They

> Must not only translate words, but also identify and understand the message being transmitted. When a message is volleyed between adults, the young interpreter must translate adult conversation, and pick out the message behind the words. Therefore, it is hypothesized that young interpreters may develop a relatively sophisticated ability to read the desires, beliefs, and intentions of other people (Love, 2007, p. 3).

Even so, one must remember that children are not professionals trained in the field of translation, and concerns regarding accuracy of translations are legitimate.

Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido (2003) also addressed the fact that certain situations may be "burdensome" to children, yet they argue that "through our inductive analyses and exploration of survey results, we came to understand that children open up access to resources in multiple, quotidian ways, and that they experience much of their translating work as 'just normal'"(p. 515-516). In other words, although children may have complaints about their C/L brokering responsibilities, the activity simply falls into the category of other household chores that have to be completed, and "perceive it primarily as a positive experiences" (Trickett and Jones, 2007, p. 144).

Weisskirch et al (2002) also surveyed 36 Latino students in the United States, and questioned their attitudes toward C/L brokering for family members. Interestingly, they found that "there was an inverse relationship between amount of translating and degree of

comfort in translating. The more translating they were doing, the more uncomfortable the experience" (p. 375). This illustrates some of the stress and insecurities that children feel when brokering for others. On the other hand, other studies showed that children "reported positive results such as increased confidence, independence and maturity, acquisition of first and second cultural knowledge, and the establishment of trusting relationships with their parents" (Tse, 1996, p. 487).

Research has shown 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" (Morales and Hanson, 2005, p. 492). Buriel et al. (1998) also showed that "brokering was positively related to biculturalism, and in turn, both of these variables were positively related to academic performance" (p. 283). Also, they claimed that children who have had experience in brokering may have also gained knowledge of how to "address professionals, how to behave during professional interactions, and how to competently advocate for their parents and other family members" (p. 285). McQuillan and Tse (1995) also found that first-generation immigrants acquired language skills faster, which could be reflected in higher academic achievement. In this sense, there are certain benefits to C/L brokering.

Studies have also suggested that language acquisition and retention are aided by brokering. First-generation immigrants are able to polish their host-country's language skills, while also retaining their home language and culture. Second-generation immigrants also noted that brokering was a way of retaining their home language. Acoach and Webb (2004) stated that brokering "increases exposure to the host culture, while allowing children to maintain cultural understanding of the native culture. Thus,

such experience provides the broker with a unique opportunity to develop and practice the necessary skills to fully comprehend, interpret, and translate, using more advanced vocabulary and cognitive ability than other children of the same age who do not broker or do so infrequently" (p. 2). Also, McQuillan and Tse's 1995 study suggested that since C/L brokering increases language acquisition immigrant children might display higher academic accomplishments.

The Ongoing Debate: Role Reversal and Adultification

Researchers of this subject are divided into two fields: some maintain that C/L brokering by immigrant children is simply one of the responsibilities assigned to children. They advocate that the practice benefits the family's integration into society, and is therefore an important aspect of the settlement process. Others, however, argue that C/L brokering does affect familial relationships and thrusts children into roles that they normally would not hold. This, they claim, ultimately forces families to undergo a reversal of traditional roles (Puig, 2002).

The pressure to translate and interpret, it is argued, is a burden for children. Parents are put into a position of dependency, and require their children as a crutch to settlement. This, say some scholars, can "undermine the normative power relationship between parents and children. Children may take advantage of this role reversal by filtering information to serve their self-interest" (Jones and Trickett, 2005, p. 409). There is a danger that children have the opportunity to influence the content of what is being translated, and make independent and informed decisions without necessarily consulting with their parents. This "adultification" of children puts them in an unnatural position of

authority and gives them an influential bargaining tool to use at their convenience. In the study by Cohen, Moran-Ellis, and Smaje (1999), medical doctors also worried that children had access to their parents' personal information, "when undertaking the interpreting role by virtue of having to communicate such knowledge between adult patient and doctor. This threatens", they argue, "the innocence of childhood and children then 'grow up too quickly', and disrupts a parent-child relationship based on an uneven distribution of knowledge" (p. 180). In this sense, children's emotional well-being is negatively affected.

It is necessary to note that the child responsible for brokering for the family might also experience a shift in the power dynamic with younger siblings. One must wonder what would happen when children who act for their parents are exposed to information regarding younger siblings, such as in school settings. Although provided with confidential information, children often do not have the maturity to treat it as such. This may aggravate sibling relationships and further stratify familial roles in an unnatural manner.

Those who claim that C/L brokering is an inevitable aspect of the settlement process do acknowledge that certain situations might put children into a position that they would normally not have. They accept the argument that children may have a certain power over situations, but maintain that regardless of this, the fundamental roles in the family are not affected. In his 2006 study, Weisskirch claims that children realized that "although they were often in a higher-status teaching role with their parents, they still had to demonstrate respect and deference concordant with their role as children" (p. 334). Also, the fact that children are present and active during the family's settlement

experience might give them a "sense of adolescent fulfillment in aiding the overall family functioning... which might be manifested in increased family satisfaction" (Trickett and Jones, 2007, p. 143). This suggests that children's involvement in the family's settlement experience unifies the family during the difficult period.

Certain C/L brokering experiences may trigger emotional stress, as well as problems with friends, and disagreements at home (Jones and Trickett, 2005). Jones and Trickett found, however, no correlation between brokering and academic GPA or parental reports of family disagreements. While children attributed brokering situations to a number of family disagreements, it did not necessarily reflect on the overall cohesion of the family, suggesting that, "brokering may be an irritant but does not represent a fundamental shift in family power dynamics (2007, p. 144). Regarding the self-reporting of family disagreements, however, there may be disparities between what children choose to report, and the information that parents disclose. Even though disagreements were reported, some scholars argue that a complete reversal of family roles is not an outcome of child brokering.

Morales et al (2002) state that, "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" (p. 496). Researchers on both sides of the issue have shown evidence to support their claims, but perhaps future studies will determine whether brokering affects families in the long run. Even if families are not disrupted to the extent of reversing familial roles, perhaps longitudinal studies will show what implications C/L brokering has on the identity development of children.

It is evident from previous research that the attitudes and responses regarding C/L brokering are varied. There is evidence to show that the experiences of brokering are beneficial to children in different ways, such as fostering better language and cognitive skills or providing life experience in dealing with professionals and service providers. Children also express pride at being able to participate in and assist with the settlement experience of their families and are responsible for bridging the gap between their parents and the mainstream society. On the other hand, studies have shown that children may experience acculturative stress and discomfort when having to broker language and culture for others. Even though some researchers claim that the overall family function and traditional roles are not affected, C/L brokering experiences do place children in unnatural roles that give them limited, yet distinct, power in certain circumstances.

Chapter 3: The Study

Purpose of the Present Study

Through this study, my aim is to better understand the role that immigrant children play in bridging the culture and language gap between their parents and the mainstream Canadian society. What is particularly of interest is exploring how the family's settlement experience and parent-child relationship are affected. The material investigated in this study is based on the issues that have been raised in the preceding literature. The questions addressed the type of brokering that was performed, the emotional aspects of the experience, as well as the relationship between the broker and his or her parents.

I interviewed and surveyed four participants from different cultural backgrounds and national origins in order to find out about their personal experiences translating and interpreting for their immigrant parents when they were children. Their experiences are compared to the results found in previous studies.

Method and Procedures

This research incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods, with the aim of enriching the understanding of the subject matter. A quantitative survey was administered in order to gain a general sense of the participants' experiences, as well as demographic information. The questionnaire was followed by a more in-depth, qualitative interview that addressed the issues on a deeper level.

Participants for this study were recruited by responding to a flyer that was posted in an online forum, asking adults who had had brokering experience to contact the

researcher. The requirements were that they be over 18 years old, and have had experience translating or interpreting for their immigrant parents or family members when they were children. Additionally, participants were referred to me by snowball sampling and through a personal acquaintance that had contact with people who fit the participant requirements. Only adult participants over the age of eighteen were considered for this study because of the delicate subject matter. Also, asking adults to reflect on their own childhood experiences could offer a perspective that might not have been previously explored. Volunteers then contacted me, and we arranged to complete the survey and the interview. After the participants gave their informed consent, the questionnaires and interviews were conducted.

Participants

Four participants were surveyed and interviewed. They represented various different backgrounds, and their ages ranged from 18 years to 41 years. Three participants were female and one was male. All of them were born outside of Canada, but arrived in the country as children or adolescents. The number of years living in Canada ranged from 12 to 32 years. Aside from English, the languages that were spoken by this group of participants included Spanish, Greek, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Cantonese, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. Most of the participants listed knowledge of more than two languages.

Measures

Participants were first invited to respond to a written questionnaire (please see Appendix 3). After answering a few demographic questions related to age, gender, number of years in Canada, and languages spoken, participants were asked to answer questions that addressed C/L brokering activities. The terms "translating" and "interpreting" were used, rather than "brokering", in order to avoid confusion.

First, participants were asked at what age they started interpreting or translating. I was interested in finding out how young the participants were at the time that brokering started. Research has shown that children as young as eight or nine have been known to broker, and I wondered whether that is a common trend. Also, they were asked how long they had been in Canada when the brokering started, and after how long they were no longer requested to translate or interpret. Previous studies have noted that the first five years after immigration are when most of the brokering is required.

Then, the participants were requested to rate each experience in a Likert-type scale, similar to the survey in Tse's (1995) study. They were asked how often they brokered for different friends or family members based on a scale from 0 to 4, ranging from 0 meaning "Never", to 4 meaning "All the time". Next, they were asked how often they were asked to broker during the course of one year, ranging from once or twice, to more than 30 times.

Their Canadian language proficiency at the time of brokering was also measured. Participants were asked how proficient they were (in English or French) in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, based on a scale from 0-4 ("None at all" to "Very Proficient"). This was asked in order to find out, along with the question of when the

brokering started, if indeed these participants were asked to broker when they were least prepared to do so. This could be an indication of Jones and Trickett's (2005) finding that children often broker when they have relatively little C/L brokering skills. If thrust into such a situation, what are the settlement implications for the children?

Next, they were asked what types of situations or during what types of services they were asked to interpret, as well as what types of documents they were asked to translate. Answers were marked either "Yes" or "No". The purpose of this was to find out their level of brokering, and the types of situations they were involved in. The more personal the matter, the higher the level of participation that children were given during service situations could be regarded as indicators of role-reversal tendencies.

Finally, the last two questions of the survey asked participants to read a number of statements and rate their emotions and feelings that they had when interpreting or translating. Questions included whether they enjoyed the experience, whether they felt proud, burdened, or embarrassed. Also, they were asked to self-report whether they felt they had more responsibilities than their peers, or whether they believed their parents depended on them too much. These questions had a 5-point scale, with answers ranging from "Completely Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Number "0" on the scale signified "No opinion", offering participants a chance to avoid answering questions that might make them uncomfortable.

After completing the survey questionnaire, participants were asked to reflect on their child brokering experiences in order to answer interview-style questions, which required more in-depth answers. The questions invited participants to elaborate on their emotions and on their relationship with their parents during their brokering experience.

Questions also left room for the participant to include additional comments or experiences that had not been specifically asked in the questionnaire.

The survey questions and interview were conducted in English only, because of the assumption that participants were proficient in English after years of translating for their parents, and having grown up in Canada. The Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University approved both the research questionnaire and the interview questions.

Chapter 4: Results

The Questionnaire

Table 1 shows the ages that the participants were when they began brokering, as well as how long they had been in Canada when brokering started and stopped.

Table 1: Ages when brokering began, and time in Canada when brokering began/stopped

Participants	Age When Brokering Started	After how long in Canada did brokering begin?	After how long in Canada did brokering stop?
A	Age 5-8	0-1 years	Still translate/ interpret
B	Age 13-16	0-1 years	Still translate/ interpret
C	Age 5-8	1-3 years	Still translate/ interpret
D	Age 9-12	0-1 years	Still translate/ interpret

There are a number of interesting observations that can be made from this data. First of all, even though the participants arrived in Canada at a young age, they were still expected to translate or interpret early in their immigration experience. Most were engaged in brokering within their first year in the country, while one respondent began brokering after spending from 1 to 3 years in the Canada before taking on the role. What is most remarkable, however, is that every respondent noted that they still translate and interpret, even now as adults.

The participants were also asked to estimate how many times, during the course of one year, they were asked to translate or interpret. One participant estimated 15 to 30 instances of brokering per year, but the other three participants approximated more than 30 times.

Table 2 illustrates the average frequencies of brokering activities in which the participants were involved. Questions were answered by using a Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from 0- Never, 1- Rarely, 2-Occasionally, 3- A lot, and 4- All the time. The numbers in Table 2 are the average response given by the participants. It is interesting to note that a lot of the brokering was done to aid the mothers of the participants. Even so, both parents required brokering "a lot" of the time to "all the time". Although less frequently, participants claimed they also translated or interpreted for other relatives, friends, neighbours, and even strangers.

Table 2: Average Brokering Occurrences

Relationship to the Broker	Average amount of Brokering
Mother	3.5
Father	3.0
Relatives	2.25
Friends	1.75
Neighbours	1.5
Strangers	2.5

Scale: 0- Never, 1- Rarely, 2-Occasionally, 3- A lot, and 4- All the time

Participants were also asked to self-report their Canadian language ability at the time of their arrival in Canada. It is important to remember that brokering began soon after the participants' arrival in Canada, and in most cases, within the first year. Only one participant self-reported high language proficiency. While the other participants did not rate themselves very proficient, they were, nonetheless, the designated translators for their families.

Table 3 depicts the responses that were given regarding their knowledge of Canadian languages (English/French).

Table 3: English/French Proficiency at the Time of Arrival in Canada

Participants	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
A	None at all	A little	None at all	None at all
B	A little	Somewhat Proficient	Proficient	Somewhat Proficient
C	Very Proficient	Proficient	Very Proficient	Very Proficient
D	A little	A little	A little	None at all

As noted by Jones and Trickett (2005), children are typically asked to translate or interpret early in their immigration experience. The same results are true for this sample group, and the majority reports that their English skills were not highly proficient. Not only are children put into burdensome and intimidating positions, they are also expected to assist their parents at a time when their language skills are far from perfect.

As established in previous studies, there are many different situations and types of documents that children are involved in brokering. The next table (Table 4) shows the types of situations and documents that the participants were involved in. As can be seen from the table, the participants were engaged in a majority of the situations and documents provided on the questionnaire. Medical appointments and meetings with teachers or the school are situations that have been noted in previous literature to be highly stressful and inappropriate for children. Each of the participants noted that they had taken part in both of these situations.

Table 4: Situations/Services and Types of Documents that were translated

Situations	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
Immigration Officials	Y	Y	N	N
Police	Y	N	N	Y
Lawyers	Y	N	Y	Y
Doctors/Dentists	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teachers/School	Y	Y	Y	Y
Stores/Restaurants	Y	Y	Y	Y
Banking	Y	Y	Y	Y
Business Offices	Y	Y	Y	Y
Parents' Workplace	Y	Y	Y	N
Other (Specify)	--	--	--	Social events (parties)
Documents				
Letters to/from School	Y	Y	Y	Y
Job applications	Y	Y	N	Y
Credit card/bank statements	Y	Y	Y	Y
Rental Agreements	Y	Y	N	Y
Immigration Forms	Y	Y	N	N
Insurance Policies	Y	N	Y	N
Letters to/from Work	Y	Y	Y	Y
Other (Specify)	--	--	--	Church Forms

Finally, the participants were asked to indicate their self-reported feelings, emotions, and perceptions regarding their involvement in brokering. For these questions, responses were rated with a Likert-type scale, and are presented in Table 5 as averages of the responses given by all participants.

In general, the participants claimed not to have enjoyed their C/L brokering experiences. They did, however, feel proud about their accomplishments, even though they might have felt burdened or embarrassed at times. The statement regarding feeling more independent or mature was rated high, as was the fact that brokering helped

improve Canadian language skills. Every participant strongly agreed that they had more responsibilities than their peers. Participants admitted that they thought their parents depended on them too much, and also admitted that they sometimes left out information in order to avoid offending or hurting their parents' feelings.

Table 5: Self-Reported Feelings, Emotions, and Perceptions Regarding Brokering

Statements Regarding Brokering	Mean
"I enjoyed the experience"	2.5
"I disliked the experience"	3.5
"I felt proud"	4.5
"I felt burdened"	3.5
"I felt embarrassed"	3.25
"I felt more independent/mature"	4.75
"The experience helped me to improve my Canadian language skills"	4.5
"In general, I had more responsibilities than my peers"	5.0
"When translating/interpreting, I sometimes left out information that I thought may have hurt or offended my parents"	4.25
"My parents depended on me too much"	4.5
"At times I felt I did not really understand the information I was asked to translate or interpret"	3.75

Scale: 0= No Opinion 1= Completely Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Somewhat Agree 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

The Interview Responses

After completing the written questionnaire, participants were invited to answer longer-answer interview questions. The interview consisted of seven questions that asked participants to elaborate on their experiences. Although differences exist between the participants in the ages that they arrived in Canada, as well as differences in their cultural backgrounds, there are many similar trends that are reflected in their answers.

The first question asked participants to reflect on how they felt when they were asked to interpret or translate.

Question 1: How did you feel when you were asked to interpret/translate for your parents when you were a child?

Participants	Responses
A	"When I came only words I knew were 'dog' and 'cat'. I learned English out of sheer necessity. There was no choice—someone had to read the menu. We needed gas, food, whatever... It was just practical, and out of necessity. Translating was automatic. I didn't even think about it; I just did it. I remember once, going to Quebec, and thinking, 'I am so screwed. I don't know any French!' and felt responsible for my parents. They were handicapped by the lack of incoming information. If I didn't give them the facts as truthfully and as close to what I thought it said, then we were screwed."
B	"Upon our arrival to Canada, it felt good that I could be almost equal to my parents and that they are depending on me for a change. I felt proud and adult-like, but that rapidly wore off, as responsibilities started affecting my time-- time that I could spend with my peers. It felt that my parents [were] relying too much on me and my brother, who was 18 at the time. Since we came to Canada as refugees in the midst of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we (my brother and I) had to deal a lot with immigration officials."
C	This participant expressed feeling intimidated because of the role that she was put into. She explained that the role that is expected of parents is that of caregivers and protectors of their children. "The situation that I was in created the reverse effect," she stated.
D	"I felt used and upset. I felt that it wasn't my job. It wasn't fair that my mother was not qualified enough to be able to fend for herself. I started to resent her for it."

Participant A arrived in Canada when she was eight years old, and reflected on her lack of English at the time of arrival. She was her family's means to accessing services, and there was no alternative in the matter. This participant clearly showed her feelings of responsibility towards caring for her parents. The role of translator was her job, and she indicated feeling guilty or responsible when put into a position where she

was unable to help (going to Quebec). Participant B recalled positive feelings towards translating at first, although that opinion changed as time went on and the C/L brokering began interfering with her personal time. The third participant, Participant C, mentioned feeling intimidated by having to broker. She also touched upon the fact that parent-child roles were reversed in that she had to care for, and protect, her parents. Resentment and anger were also emotions that were cited, which indicate that C/L brokering can indeed be a burden that infringes on children's emotional well-being. Social relations, or time that could have been spent with their peers, were also adversely affected.

These four participants were able to verbalize their emotions at the time of their C/L brokering experiences, and it seems that although they had to partake in translating or interpreting, none of them were particularly fond of having to do so. As the first participant made clear, children tend to have no choice in the matter—it is just something that has to be done.

The second question probed the participants' opinion of whether their translating or interpreting affected their relationship with their parents, and if so, in what ways. The question was asked specifically to try to determine the level of role-reversal and changes in power relations that might have been caused by brokering. This question resulted in interesting responses, because they were self-reported opinions that seemed to be echoed by all participants.

Question 2: Did translating/interpreting affect your relationship with your parents? If so, in what ways?

Participants	Responses
A	"In part [my parents] resented it because it made them feel dependent on me. It shifted our relationship... It went from being a linear one-way decision to being a cooperative decision-making process... I wouldn't say it put us on equal footing, but it did give me, say, leverage... although I'm not sure if that's the right word."
B	"I could see that, at times, my parents-- although highly educated-- felt embarrassed and angry for not being able to communicate and properly express their frustration of being newcomers, which meant being unemployed, trying to get on their feet, starting from scratch at age 45. Although they were proud of us for picking up the language so fast, they felt frustrated at themselves for feeling so dependent on their own children. That resulted in many quarrels, like, 'we came to this country because of you, you should be thankful for translating for us, this is for your own good anyways...' This was compounded by the fact that we all felt a bit lost as refugees/newcomers. As time went by, I felt frustrated that my parents weren't becoming 'Canadians' as fast as their kids were. My main concern was to blend in and hang out with my peers, without having to do 'parentsitting'."
C	"Translating and interpreting has affected my relationship with my parents in a profoundly positive way". This participant noted that interpreting drew her close to her parents and she appreciated the level of maturity that it built for her.
D	"At times my mother would speak to me as if I was the one telling her unpleasant things. This was completely unfair because I was not the one telling her this. I was just the messenger. When we would leave a place where she did not have a good experience, she would berate me for not having added to the value of the conversation, especially if she had left something out that would have improved the situation."

These feelings of frustration, resentment, and anger were common amongst the participants. Interestingly, they reported that they were not the only ones to have these negative emotions—they understood that their parents felt the same way, too, at having to depend on their children. Even though they were young, they were able to perceive their parents' emotions and sympathized with the situation that they were in, as a family.

Participant A refers to the decision-making process becoming a cooperative effort in the family. In general, children do not have a say in important decisions and this participant admitted that it did shift the relationship. In contrast, Participant C stated that stated that brokering influenced her relationship with her parents in a positive way in that it drew her closer to her parents.

Third, participants were asked if they could remember any moments of feeling proud of being able to interpret or translate for their parents. Regardless of their negative experiences, they all had a positive moment that they were able to recall.

Question 3: Can you recall any moments where you felt proud of being able to interpret/translate for your parents?

Participants	Responses
A	This participant described one particular instance regarding a contract for her father's business. "My dad's business partner brought him a contract to sign and my dad brought it home to me. He didn't go to his lawyer or his accountant—he brought it to *me* because he trusted me. He valued me, and understood that no one would look at it like I would. I was about 16 at the time."
B	"About a year after our arrival, we were trying very hard to sponsor my maternal grandparents to come to Canada. At that time, Canada had a family reunion immigration policy that, in case a family had no financial means to sponsor their direct relatives, they could find five people to conduct sponsorship as a group on the family's behalf. Given that three out of five sponsors were members of a family whose children I babysat, I was literally acting as a mediator between them and my parents (my parents actually never met them), which involved practically begging them to sponsor my grandparents, who were at that time living as refugees during the war in a besieged Sarajevo, without water, electricity and proper food. After finally agreeing to it, I was responsible for delivering all of the documentation, explaining to both sides what the other side needed to do, etc. This meant literally running back and forth between my parents and my employers/sponsors, which included a lot of negotiations, talking, and frustration at the process taking so long. It took about a year, [but] my grandparents finally arrived and I felt truly proud that I had played a crucial role in bringing my family together."

C	This participant specified one time that she was translating "an insurance policy situation that involved more than a handful of different calls that stretched to about 2 weeks. I felt proud that I was able to not get frustrated and [remain patient]." Also, she mentioned having to translate at the hospital during her father's illness: "I broke down many times in front of doctors and other physicians, but I was very proud that I was able to hold myself up and do my 'job' of interpreting."
D	This participant also recalls interpreting during medical appointments and being "praised by people for being useful. I felt proud to be able to help out because I was shown appreciation."

Participant A understood the value that she had for her parents, and was able to feel appreciated in the circumstance she described. The participants also commented on feeling good about being able to help out and making life "a little easier by translating what they didn't know." All of the participants were proud of being able to aid their parents, and expressed positive feelings about have accomplished something, feeling useful, and being trusted. Also, being shown appreciation was a factor that made their experiences memorable.

In contrast to this, participants were also asked to recall negative emotions or experiences when having to translate or interpret.

Question 4: Can you recall any moments from your childhood when you felt nervous/ anxious/ stressed/ uncomfortable by having to interpret or translate for your parents?

Participants	Responses
A	This participant noted feeling insecure about interpreting during situations that she did not understand. "Especially in business situations", she recalled. "I didn't know the business, but I knew what they looked for, or liked..." Laughing at the memory of the incident, she also described another instance when she felt frustrated with her father: "I remember once, we needed to get gas. My dad needed 'unleaded', and the sign in the gas station said 'lead-free'. He would not understand that 'unleaded' and 'lead-free' meant exactly the same thing. He was set on his visual recognition, and would not accept anything else. The whole situation was very frustrating, and we ended up driving away to a different gas station."

B	This participant worried that, because her English was not perfect, she would falsely translate something that would have affected her grandparents' immigration process. She states that, "At the time, I never questioned my role during the whole process, since the situation was so dire and time was of essence. It was only years later, as I was recounting this story to others, that I realized what a huge responsibility it was for a 15 year old to go through."
C	Participant C could not recall specific situations, but remembered feeling uncomfortable when she could not fully comprehend what was being said.
D	Participant D mentioned an instance when his sister got into trouble with the police. "I felt very ashamed of my family and especially the negative attitude the police had towards us," he explained.

The participants remembered feeling nervous about misinterpreting or wrongly translating information. Even if they did not fully understand the situation or the content, they were still expected to broker for their parents. Certain situations were sensitive and required accurate translations. The grandparents' immigration process and the experience translating with the police are examples of matters in which children are not typically permitted to participate. These circumstances caused anxiety in the participants, and are specific situations that have been targeted by opponents to the practice of using children as brokers.

Next, the participants were asked whether they were ever rewarded or compensated for their help in translating or interpreting.

Question 5: Were you ever rewarded or compensated for your help in translating/interpreting (eg. gifts, money, treats, special privileges, etc.)?

Participants	Responses
A	Participant A laughed at the idea, and imagined her mother responding, "'What? You want an allowance? What about to clean this house? You'll get one the day you pay me to wash the dishes!' [Translating] would fall into the same category." In her case, translating was simply one of the chores that was part of her other household responsibilities.

B	"We had practically nothing upon our arrival. I think my parents did try to compensate by allowing me to stay longer out at night, hang out with whomever I wanted etc. They were lenient that way, given that after all I did for the family they felt that they could trust me with a lot of things. Most of the times, I was happy to be a 'dutiful', responsible daughter and help my parents, but as I was growing older I was at times rebelling against that. I felt I wanted to be acting my age, be a teenager, and be worry-free."
C	Participant C stated that she was not rewarded in terms of tangible items, but rather by gaining the appreciation of others and experiencing gratitude.
D	Participant D explained that teachers at school would also ask him, "to interpret for them and other parents that had children that spoke no English. I was usually treated with more respect and became more sure of myself because I felt more useful."

Although these participants were not offered financial or tangible compensation for their role in C/L brokering, they did express feeling rewarded in other ways. In the case of the first participant, her role as family translator was seen as an obligation and not something that had to be rewarded. This correlates with the notion of familism that has been cited in other research and explains that children are expected to aid their parents. In the cases of the other participants, however, parents might have attempted to compensate their children by being more lenient and treating their children as more grown-up. This is an example, perhaps, of the adultification of the children who tend to be considered more responsible and mature than their peers.

I was curious as to whether the participants, who had all experienced having to interpret and translate for their parents when they were children, would ever consider asking their own children to do the same for them.

Question 6: Now as an adult, imagine that you are a newcomer in Canada, with little or no language skills. Would you ask your children to interpret/translate for you? Why or why not?

Participants	Responses
A	Interestingly, this is actually the case for Participant A. Her son has now taken on translating responsibilities for his grandparents. "He does interpret," she says, "but his Greek is not as proficient, and he breaks words apart."
B	"Looking back, I think my parents had no other choice but to ask us to translate for them. If I were a newcomer, I think I would still ask my children to help out, but as minimally as possible. I would try hard to find other ways to get help, via newcomer centres. I would especially try to avoid asking my kids to translate during doctor's appointments and meetings with immigration officials. That is too much pressure and information is way too specific and sensitive for a child to absorb."
C	This participant stated that if she were a new immigrant, she would ask her children to interpret because their English would be better. She added that, "It did not matter to me, as a child, that I was the sole interpreter for my family despite of any factors and so I would expect the same of my child."
D	This participant said he would do so only, "if it was absolutely necessary." He stated that, "The psychological burden and skill that proper interpretation entails is just too much for a child to handle properly." As a final note, he added, "Personally, I don't think this should be allowed. Children are not employees to be used at will. They need to be children."

It is interesting to note the responses to this question. Most of the participants understood the situation that their families were in, and when asked to imagine themselves in a similar situation they stated that they would ask their children to do the same. Only one participant was strongly opposed to the practice, yet did accept to involve children if a situation were absolutely necessary.

Finally, Question 7 asked participants whether they had any additional comments or experiences that they would like to share:

Participants	Responses
A	"I can see where the skills that I've gained from doing it [brokering] have paid off. It seems to be what I do for a living, in a way– facilitating. I do typical administrative stuff, but fact gathering, and information gathering skills are skills that I have perfected. I seem to have an engrained ability to gather information according to what people need... I have to be intuitive about what type of information needs to be researched, and I am able to sort through that information. In a sense, I've had years of training in gathering and prioritizing information."
B	Participant B mentioned the frustration and burden she felt by having so much responsibility delegated to her. She concludes by saying, "It took me a while to realize how difficult it must have been for my parents to swallow their pride and in a way lose their parental authority, because they had to depend on their children. It was a very difficult time for us, arriving as refugees to Canada and lack of language was also compounded by the fact that we lost everything during the war. What my parents lacked was access to information, they didn't really know what was available to them, including interpreting services. In retrospect, I realize now that that was a time of survival, and we as a family had to fight the best way we could."
C	"The way I view translating for others is a way that I am able to bond and connect with others in a small time of need for them. At the same time, keeping in mind that one needs to stay compassionate and understanding with respect to whatever matters you are dealing/translating for."
D	This participant explained that he is now a professional interpreter and realizes that at times, when children interpret, serious errors in communication can occur. "It's difficult to say who would be found liable for that."

The participants, although most agreed that C/L brokering was a tiresome burden, all realized the importance of their role in helping their parents. Even though they were children at the time, they understood the barriers that their parents faced and accepted their role in making the settlement process easier for their families as a whole.

Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusion

Summary of the Findings of the Study

The data collected from this study is similar to the results of previous studies in many ways. First, Valenzuela, (1999) and Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido (2003) noted that the majority of C/L brokers are female. Although this study consisted of a small number of participants, three out of the four were female. Whether this validates previous research or whether it simply reflects the make-up of volunteers who were willing to come forward to participate, however, is debatable.

What is certain is that most of the participants began C/L brokering at an early age, and almost immediately after arriving in Canada. This confirms Jones and Trickett (2005) study that states that children are put into the C/L brokering role early in their immigration process. Also, only one of the participants claimed that they were proficient in English when they arrived in Canada. This certainly affects the children's immigration and settlement experience from the beginning, and places them in a role of responsibility at a time that they are not prepared for it.

Interestingly, each participant stated that they still continue to interpret or translate, so the practice is an ongoing one. One can make the assumption that the parents never became proficient in English, having their children serve as C/L brokers. One of the participants mentioned that her father, to this day, would not speak in English. "He understands more than he lets on", she said, "but has a fear of sounding stupid." Similar to Tse's (1996) study, the participants agreed that their brokering helped them perfect their Canadian language skills. Their parents, however, did not. The participant's father, although understands a lot of English, refuses to speak and still depends on others for

help. This indicates that the parents' long-term settlement and integration into Canadian society is affected. If parents depend on their children at all times when dealing with the outside community, they are not given an opportunity to practice their language skills and become fully independent and integrated.

While some researchers (Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido, 2003) have argued that children are able to access services for their parents-- and indeed, the data from this study confirmed it-- the question remains about how the parents' acculturation and language skills are affected by having their children broker during most situations. Although the family benefits as a whole by having a designated interpreter, parents might never be faced with the necessity of becoming fully integrated into the mainstream society. Children do access services that meet the family's immediate needs, but these are advantages that help immigrant families in the short-term.

The participants' self-reported feelings regarding their C/L brokering experiences also echo the results in previous studies. They claimed to have felt proud at being able to help out, even though they may have felt burdened or embarrassed at times. Also, Hedges (2000) noted children were worried about not interpreting the material accurately as they were not familiar with the subject matter. Many of the participants noted feeling unsure, at times, about what they were interpreting or translating. This was especially true in immigration or police settings in which the information was sensitive.

Participants also stated having felt resentment about not being able to spend time with friends, and noted that they had more responsibilities than their peers. Social relations, therefore, were affected by brokering activities. Morales and Hanson (2005) did note, however, that child brokers often develop linguistic abilities superior to those of

their peers, which led to a higher level of maturity and adultification. Many participants noted feeling more mature than their peers, even though they had more responsibilities.

Morales and Hanson, (2005) also described C/L brokers as being the "protectors or shields of the family". While the participants reported that they felt their parents depended on them too much, they still admitted to protecting their parents from information that may have hurt or offended them. One participant, in particular, expressed feeling responsible for her parents when she was not able to help. In the survey questionnaire, the question regarding whether the participants left out information that might have hurt or offended their parents scored 4.25. This signifies that the participants "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement. It appears that children do feel responsible for their parents and take on the role of family protector.

With regards to the role-reversal, all of the participants indicated that they felt a noticeable change in their relationship with their parents. Many realized, also, that their parents felt frustrated by their dependent role. Family decision-making also turned into a collaborative effort. Ultimately, the participants in this study brokered out of family necessity, and children were expected to participate in it as one of the normal household chores. For one participant, however, the experience drew her closer to her parents and she was able to appreciate the level of maturity that she gained from it. As stated by Jones and Trickett (2007), brokering appeared to be "an irritant", but ultimately did not cause a long-lasting or profound change family dynamics (p. 144).

In general, the participants indicated feeling proud of being able to assist their parents. They felt useful, respected, and realized they were more mature because of their responsibilities. Their C/L brokering experiences affected their settlement process in a

positive way, as their language proficiency was clearly high. In contrast, many participants realized, even though they were young at the time, that their parents lacked access to information and to services. They realized, therefore, that they were their parents' bridges to receiving those services and communicating with the outside community. Regardless of this, however, it is clear that these children who served as C/L brokers for their parents were placed in situations that made them uncomfortable.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of participants. While their accounts of their C/L brokering experiences were valuable in order to better illustrate what immigrant children often go through, their experiences are not necessarily universal and do not represent every child who has brokered for their parents.

Additionally, the participants in this study are now adults. Their C/L brokering experiences happened when they were children, so it is possible that their perceptions have become altered over time. Initial assumptions were that, as adults, participants might be able to better articulate their feelings and emotions at the time of brokering. This, however, turns out not to be necessarily true. There are limitations in using retrospective data. While many of the participants were eager to share their experiences, at times certain responses seemed toned down. At the time of brokering, emotions and opinions may have been strong, yet it is possible that those emotions have become softened or altered over time. Even though experiences may not have been unbearable or burdensome, perhaps the extent of negative emotions was downgraded subconsciously in order to protect their parents from critique or scrutiny. Although there is no way to test

the accuracy of retrospective data, previous psychological studies on witness testimony, for example, have offered an insight into how memories tend to fade over time.

Another limitation that should be considered is that participants often arrive with preconceived notions regarding the topic of study. Information offered to the researcher might at times be altered based on what the participant assumes the researcher wants to hear. Although this discrepancy is difficult to test or control, it is something that should be kept in mind when reading into participants' responses.

Furthermore, to better understand this issue, it would have been helpful to interview children who are currently engaged in C/L brokering. Because of research ethics constraints, however, children were not interviewed or surveyed in this study. Also, had there been a lengthier timeframe to conduct this research, it would have been beneficial to interview doctors, lawyers, and other service providers in the community who have had situations in which children have had to interpret.

One aspect that could be further addressed is the participants' relationship with their parents. If this study were to be redone, a question that should be asked is how the relationship is at present. Previous literature has shown that roles can be reversed between parent and child, and the participants in this study certainly implied that the relationship was affected. Whether it is just a temporary setback or whether it distorts the familial relationship in the long-term is something that should be further analyzed.

Directions for Future Research

Because of the fact that there are few studies on this topic, the possibilities for future research are numerous. One aspect of this phenomenon that has not been covered

in previous studies, or in this one to a great extent, is the perceptions of immigrant parents who use their children as C/L brokers.

It is necessary to further assess how this phenomenon hinders the parents' settlement process. In his 2006 study, Weisskirch stated that "parents learnt English slower because of the translating, and that [they] knew less about [the culture] because of the brokering" (p. 335). Does the fact that children broker language and culture really impede parents' language and cultural acquisition? Learning language skills is an essential part of becoming fully integrated into society. More research is needed in this field in order to better address the implications that this has on the parents' settlement and integration. Also, it would be useful to understand the parents' feelings about having to depend on their children. This study sets the stage for further work that could focus on the parent/child relationship during C/L brokering experiences. Interviewing parents of C/L brokers would provide a valuable insight into this phenomenon.

Finally, Morales and Hanson (2005) stated that, "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" (p. 473). Scholars have argued about how brokering might affect traditional familial roles and whether it causes role reversal. Even though studies have suggested that roles are challenged, there is no definitive evidence that clarifies whether C/L brokering causes long-term damages in the parent-child relationship.

Conclusion

Children's involvement in C/L brokering for their immigrant families is a common occurrence. Childre bridge the gap between their parents and the mainstream society, and are keys to accessing community services and information. Immigration to Canada continues each year, and families continue to arrive with little knowledge of the official Canadian languages and with little familiarity of the culture. Children remain the family's access to services and communication. Because of this, it is likely that the practice of using children as interpreters and translators will continue into the future.

Whether the practice affects children's emotional and social development, however, is something that has to be addressed. C/L brokering seems to put a large amount of pressure on children, who become more mature and adult-like in many ways. Perhaps this topic is a responsibility that the government should look at, much like what has been done in California, in order to limit children's involvement in brokering situations. Cost-effective alternatives to using children should be considered, including paraprofessional interpreters or translators in the community, volunteers, and adult friends or family members.

Although children will undoubtedly continue to be used as C/L brokers, there should be limitations regarding certain settings, such as medical or legal situations. Also, an age limit should be implemented, similar to the labour laws that govern children's employment throughout Canada. Not only will this benefit the settlement and development of the children, it will also encourage parents to become more actively involved in their integration into Canadian society.

The involvement of immigrant children in C/L brokering is an important topic that has largely been neglected in scholarly research until recent years. It is a relevant topic that needs to be studied more closely. Also, because previous studies have only focused on specific immigrant groups, there is a need for a cross-cultural investigation from a Canadian immigration perspective. C/L brokering is a widespread phenomenon, yet there is no information available on the exact numbers of immigrant children who are involved in it, nor on the direct implications that this may cause for immigrant families in the long run. This study represents a first step in talking to Canadian immigrants who have been involved in C/L brokering. More is needed in upcoming years in order to gain a fuller understanding into this issue.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Flyer

Graduate Program in Immigration and Settlement Studies, Ryerson University

When you were a child, were you asked to translate or interpret the official Canadian language(s) or culture for your parents or other relatives?

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON CHILDREN IN THE ROLE OF CULTURE/LANGUAGE BROKERS

I am looking for adult volunteers who, as children, were involved in language or culture brokering. Participants will be asked to take part in a written survey and a short interview, and will be asked to recall some experiences you may have of interpreting/translating for your parents or relatives as a child.

The study will take approximately half an hour of your time. If you are interested, please contact Leena del Carpio at:

Thank you!

This study has been reviewed by, and has received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University.

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Agreement

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

Title of the Project: "The Role of Children as Culture Brokers"

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Researcher:

This study is being conducted by Leena del Carpio, a candidate towards the Master of Arts degree in the Immigration and Settlement Studies Program at Ryerson University. It will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Francis Hare.

Project Objectives:

To better understand the role that children play in interpreting or translating the Canadian language(s) and culture for their parents.
My project explores the role of children who serve as language or culture brokers for their parents or other family members. My aim is to better understand the role that they play in bridging the culture and language gaps between their parents and the mainstream Canadian society, and how this responsibility may affect the settlement experiences of the children themselves. Also, I would like to explore how the parent-child relationship might be affected during this process.

Description of the Study:

You are being invited to participate in this research study, which involves interviews and questionnaires. If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview session, which will be conducted as a conversation and will include one questionnaire that you will be asked to respond to by selecting given multiple-choice answers. Each session is expected to take no more than half an hour in length.

None of the procedures or questionnaires used in this study are experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis. Because of the personal nature of the questions asked, you may reflect on unpleasant memories or experiences while responding to a questionnaire or interview. If, however, you begin to feel uncomfortable, you may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

I cannot guarantee that you will receive any personal benefits from participating in this study. There are no financial or material gains from participating. The information obtained from this research, however, will be used to enrich the existing knowledge on this subject.

I will answer any questions you may have about the procedures and objectives of the project. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or any other

institutions. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

You are also free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time, without any consequences. If you decide to leave the project, all data of your participation will be destroyed. You are also free to refuse to answer specific questions.

You are permitted access to any information collected from this interview/conversation and have the right to view the completed project. All information derived from this interview/conversation will be kept confidential with the researcher; and your anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym. Your name will not appear in any report, publication or presentation resulting from this study.

Data Collection and Storage:

The data collected from the interviews and questionnaires will be accessible only by the researcher, but may be provided to the research supervisor upon request. The data will be kept in the researcher's personal possession (in files at home and transcribed into a password-protected personal computer) until after the project is finalized and presented. Estimated date of completion: September 2007. After presenting this project, the data will be destroyed.

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the research at this time, please ask. If you have questions later, you may contact me directly:
Leena del Carpio at [redacted]

You may also contact my faculty supervisor:
Professor Francis Hare
School of Child and Youth Care- Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5000 ex. 6200 or email him at: fhare@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.
Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

_____

Name of Participant (please print)

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix 3: Research Questionnaire

Children as Culture/Language Brokers:
Research Questionnaire to be Completed by the Participants

Background Information

Age: a) 18-25 b) 26-33 c) 34-41 d) 42-49 c) 50+

Gender (please circle): Male Female

Were you born outside of Canada? Yes No

Number of Years Residing in Canada: _____

What languages do you speak? _____

Brokering Experience

1. At what age did you begin to assist with interpreting and/or translating?

a) 5-8 b) 9-12 c) 13-16 d) 17+

2. How long had you been in Canada when you began brokering Canadian language/culture?

a) 0-1 years b) 1-3 years c) 4-6 years d) More than 6 years

3. How long had you been in Canada when you were no longer asked to interpret/translate for others?

a) 0-1 years b) 1-3 years c) 4-6 years d) 6+ years e) I still translate/interpret

4. How often did you translate or interpret for the following people:

Mother: 0) Never	1) Rarely	2) Occasionally	3) A lot	4) All the time
Father: 0) Never	1) Rarely	2) Occasionally	3) A lot	4) All the time
Relatives: 0) Never	1) Rarely	2) Occasionally	3) A lot	4) All the time
Friends: 0) Never	1) Rarely	2) Occasionally	3) A lot	4) All the time
Neighbours: 0) Never	1) Rarely	2) Occasionally	3) A lot	4) All the time
Strangers: 0) Never	1) Rarely	2) Occasionally	3) A lot	4) All the time

5. During the course of one year, approximately how many times were you asked to translate/interpret?

0) 1 or 2 times 1) 5-10 times 2) 11-15 times 3) 15-30 times 4) More than 30

6. When you started to interpret or translate for others, what was your Canadian language (English/French) proficiency?

Speaking: 0) None at all 1) A little 2) Somewhat Proficient 3) Proficient 4) Very Proficient

Listening: 0) None at all 1) A little 2) Somewhat Proficient 3) Proficient 4) Very Proficient

Reading: 0) None at all 1) A little 2) Somewhat Proficient 3) Proficient 4) Very Proficient

Writing: 0) None at all 1) A little 2) Somewhat Proficient 3) Proficient 4) Very Proficient

7. What types of situations or services were you asked to interpret?

Meetings with Immigration Officials-	YES	NO
Police-	YES	NO
Lawyers-	YES	NO
Doctors/Dentists/Other health practitioners-	YES	NO
Teachers/School Meetings-	YES	NO
Stores/Restaurants-	YES	NO
Banking Services-	YES	NO
Business Offices-	YES	NO
Parents' Workplace-	YES	NO
Other- _____	YES	NO

8. What types of documents were you asked to help translate?

Letters To/from School-	YES	NO
Job applications-	YES	NO
Credit card/Bank statements-	YES	NO
Rental agreements-	YES	NO
Immigration forms-	YES	NO
Insurance policies-	YES	NO
Letters To/From work-	YES	NO
Other-_____	YES	NO

9. How did you feel when translating/interpreting for your parents?

Please use the following scale:

0= No Opinion 1= Completely Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Somewhat Agree
4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

a) I enjoyed the experience:	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) I disliked the experience:	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) I felt proud:	0	1	2	3	4	5

d) I felt burdened:	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) I felt embarrassed:	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) I felt more independent/mature:	0	1	2	3	4	5
g) The experienced helped me to Improve my Canadian language skills:	0	1	2	3	4	5
i) Other _____:	0	1	2	3	4	5

10. Please rate the following statements, using the same scale:

0= No Opinion 1= Completely Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Somewhat Agree
4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

a) In general, I had more responsibilities than my peers:	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) When translating/interpreting, I sometimes Left out information that I thought may have Hurt or offended my parents:	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) My parents depended on me too much:	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) At times I felt I did not really understand The information I was asked to translate Or interpret:	0	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

1. How did you feel when you were asked to interpret/translate for your parents when you were a child?

2. Did translating/interpreting affect your relationship with your parents? If so, in what ways?

3. Can you recall any moments where you felt proud of being able to interpret/translate for your parents?

4. Can you recall any moments from your childhood when you felt nervous/ anxious/ stressed/ uncomfortable by having to interpret or translate for your parents?

5. Were you ever rewarded or compensated for your help in translating/interpreting (eg. gifts, money, treats, special privileges, etc.)?

6. Now as an adult, imagine that you are a newcomer in Canada, with little or no language skills. Would you ask your children to interpret/translate for you? Why or why not?

7. Do you have any additional comments or experiences that you would like to share?