

“IF WE DON’T DO IT FOR OUR PARENTS, THEN WHO WILL?” AFGHAN
YOUTH AS CULTURAL/LANGUAGE BROKERS

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Shabnam Sarwary, BA, York University, 2010.

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the role that immigrant adolescents play as cultural/language brokers for their families. Research shows that immigrant adolescents play exceptionally supportive roles as cultural/language brokers for their families during the early years of settlement. There is limited research examining this phenomenon of cultural brokering by immigrant adolescents in Canada, and perhaps no particular research focusing on Afghan youth. The paper presents insights from nine Afghan youth who through their cultural/language brokering are important sources of support for their families during settlement. It will also include a compilation of previous literature on this area. Despite the struggles of negotiating with their role as cultural/language brokers in the early years, the youth generally shared positive experiences of being able to be a source of assistance for their families. Additionally, the participants viewed their role as a cultural/language broker to be a part of their familial responsibility.

Key words:

Immigrant adolescents; Afghan youth; cultural brokering; language brokering; family relations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The speaker went around the room and asked everyone present to introduce themselves and state the reason why they were at the event. There were four adolescents at the event, accompanying their parent(s). Each one of them gave the following as the reason for their attendance at the event: "I am here to help translate for my mom/dad." It became clear that each youth was acting as a cultural/language broker. The event was a workshop on Bullying and Safe Schools, designed as an information session for Afghan parents in the community.

*June 22, 2011
Valley Park Middle School*

I was an attendee at this event and witnessed each youth engage in cultural/language brokering for their parents. It became evident that their attendance at the event as a cultural/language broker was not a one-time occurrence, but rather a role they had embraced and engaged in often. Despite language accommodation being available for those attending the event, the youths' presence demonstrated the importance in understanding the extent of the role that Afghan children play as cultural/language brokers for their families during settlement. As an observer at the event, I was made to recall my own experiences as a cultural/language broker for my parents during my adolescence. Accompanying my parents to teacher-parent nights, information sessions, and doctors' appointments was a regular part of my daily schedule. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that children of immigrants, regardless of nationality, often assume the role of cultural/language broker for their families. Given that children tend to become

attuned to the cultural setting and learn the new language at a much faster pace than their parents, they often become a source of linguistic assistance for their families.

Immigrant children play important roles during the settlement of their families, roles that were often overlooked in literature. Children are known to have a greater ability to acquire the language and cultural settings of the new society at a much faster pace than their parents (Acoach and Webb, 2004; Padilla, 2006; Orellana, 2009). Essentially, these children become important contributors in building their family capital. However, settlement services typically focus on the adults during the migration process, often neglecting the fundamental role that children play in their families' integration to the new society (Ngo, 2009). Furthermore, the vast array of research on new immigrants in Canada facing marginalization focuses extensively on the adult experience, with little coverage or attention to immigrant children and youth (Anisef and Kilbride, 2000; Anisef and Kilbride, 2003; Anisef, Baichman-Anisef and Siemiatycki, 2004). When studies began focusing on immigrant children, it was primarily focused on the developmental, psychological, and mental health issues and effects of migration. More recent research on immigrant children and youth has centered on issues of identity, culture, and racialization (Anisef and Kilbride, 2000; Anisef, Baichman-Anisef and Siemiatycki, 2004; Ngo, 2009).

In earlier studies, cultural brokering was used to refer to the practices of translation, interpretation, and paraphrasing between two different languages (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Tse, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). In the bulk of the literature, these discursive terminologies are often used interchangeably, referring to the many ways in which immigrant children negotiate and broker for their families. More specifically, the process

of children contributing to the integration of their families through cultural/language brokering has been termed: “natural translation” (Harris and Sherwood, 1978), “language brokering” (Tse, 1995; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994), “interpreting” (Valdes, 2003), and “para-phrasing” (Orellana, 2003). Tse (1995) defines language brokering as “interpret [ing] and translate [ing] between culturally and linguistically different people” (p.226). Williams (2006) describes culture brokers as “...people who are able to negotiate meanings of both verbal and non-verbal language in two or more cultures” (p. 4). This paper will be using the terms “language brokering” and “cultural brokering” interchangeably to refer to all the aforementioned activities. Indeed the role of cultural broker becomes crucial in the initial years of settlement, but it is a continuous role that proceeds through subsequent years, when child brokers become adolescents. This paper will therefore explore the role of Afghan youth as cultural/language brokers for their families during settlement, and the years that follow.

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development (2000), youth immigrants between the ages of 15-25 are one of the fastest growing populations in Canada. The majority of these youth came from Asia and Pacific, Africa, Middle East, and Central America. Afghanistan is considered among the top-ten source countries of immigration to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004). More importantly, the majority of Afghans in Canada migrate to Canada by way of a third country, and not directly from Afghanistan (Norquay, 2004). For the majority of Afghan refugees displaced due to the on-going political conflict, those third countries include Iran, Pakistan, and India (Khanlou, Koh, and Mill, 2008). The Afghan community in Canada primarily comprises first-generation immigrants; however, there is a small percentage of

second-generation Afghan youth (Norquay, 2004). In light of these statistics, it is important to address the issues facing Afghan newcomer youth in Canada. According to a study conducted by Khanlou, Koh, and Mill (2008), challenges facing Afghan newcomer youth include prejudice and discrimination with regards to their cultural identity. Further, research by Quirke (2011) has indicated that Afghan youth face many challenges upon arrival in Canada including family separation and difficulty learning English. Despite these studies, there is still scarce information about the Afghan community, and studies on Afghan youth are virtually non-existent.

With this in mind, the following paper hopes to fill that gap. The intention of the proposed research was to develop a study that will identify the various types of cultural/language brokering that Afghan youth participate in, as well as identifying the positive aspects of cultural/language brokering for Afghan youth. In doing so, this paper will shed light on an issue and population that is under researched. The findings of this study include recognition of the scope and significance of this issue within the Canadian context as well as within the Afghan community. The objective of the interviews was to learn about the positive aspects of cultural/language brokering for immigrant youth, specifically Afghan youth. Although there are challenges associated with cultural/language brokering, which will be included in the research, the main focus was on the positive reflections on their experience of cultural/language brokering by the youth. It is important to capture the positive experiences related to immigrant youth's roles as cultural/language brokers, as these experiences highlight the youth's sense of their role in the years following settlement. Furthermore, understanding the positive experiences of cultural/language brokering can potentially lead to recognizing the

importance of immigrant youth in contributing to their families' settlement and integration. Previous literature on the cultural/language brokering has almost exclusively focused on negative experiences and outcomes for immigrant children and youth. This research will include contributions that enrich previous literature and existing knowledge of the experiences of immigrant youth as cultural/language brokers. Given that limited research has been conducted on this phenomenon in the Canadian context, and that there are no studies focusing principally on Afghan youth, this paper will be a first in examining this overlooked area of these immigrant adolescents' experiences as contributors to their families' integration and settlement.

The following chapter will be a literature review illuminating what is already known about cultural/language brokering and what some of the issues are that have been raised in past research on immigrant youth. It will provide the context and an important starting point for this study's exploration of the positive experiences of cultural/language brokering for Afghan youth.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Immigrant children are often called on to serve in the role of cultural/language broker for their families during the early years of settlement. However, these roles, to a lesser extent, also continue during adolescence in the years following settlement. Until recently, relatively little attention was paid to this area. More importantly, there was a shortage of research pertaining to the experiences of children and youth who assume the role of cultural/language broker. The available literature thus provides an overview of the current knowledge regarding the different aspects of this phenomenon, as it pertains to immigrant children and the settlement and integration of their families.

Given that no studies have been conducted on Afghan youth as cultural/language brokers in Canada, the literature reviewed includes studies conducted with immigrant groups in the United States. This literature focused primarily on immigrant children and adolescents from Latin American communities as well as a few studies on Asian American children. Nonetheless, the findings within the current literature assisted tremendously in understanding the core facets of cultural/language brokering, and indicated what should be the distinctive contribution of the present study to this area of knowledge, while also shedding light on key concepts, theories, and frameworks necessary in order to continue further research in this much overlooked area in immigration and settlement.

Development

Research on language brokering generally focuses on the psychological and developmental issues that arise as a result of such practice amongst immigrant children. It is said that language brokering takes place in a variety of institutions such as schools,

doctors' offices, medical institutions, government institutions, and legal/commercial institutions (Cohen et. al, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999; Valdes et al., 2003; Umana-Taylor, 2003; Tse, 1995; Tse, 1996; Orellana et al., 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995). According to various scholars, language brokering may cause detrimental stress for the children performing these tasks, thereby affecting their development (Buriel et al., 1998; Cohen et al., 1999; Love, 2003; Umana-Taylor, 2003; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002; Shannon, 1990). Given that children perform such tasks as translating and interpreting in institutions outside their domain and are in the constant presence of adults, this can lead to feelings of embarrassment, intimidation, and increased pressure to translate properly (Dement & Buriel, 1999; Love, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). In contrast, Orellana and Dorner (2008) take a more constructive approach in analyzing development. The authors argue "...psychological research that does address nondominant groups often begins with assumptions about development that are based on White, middle-class, American norms" (p.519), therefore suggesting that there needs to be an expansion of developmental frameworks that address the complexity of immigrant adolescence. Orellana and Dorner (2008) refer to the cultural brokering of immigrant children as interdependence, a process and form of development that can have positive implications for the adolescents. Their study explored the relationship between language brokering and interdependence that is developed through familial relations through children's continuing role as language brokers. The authors reiterate the importance of distinguishing between different types of development scripts, including the social and relational contexts in which children and youth broker for their families.

In terms of development, Umana-Taylor (2003) studied language brokering as an area of stress for both immigrant children and their families. Through her research, she suggests that there is increased pressure for children to develop advanced vocabulary that may lead to detrimental stress particularly in circumstances where they relay information from high authoritative figures. Similarly, Cohen et al. (1999) support the assertion that immigrant children being used as interpreters during a doctors' consultation with adults may lead to children having feelings of extreme stress. These stress-related situations caused by language brokering can eventually lead to depression for adolescents acting in these roles (Umana-Taylor, 2003; Weisskirch, 2007; Buriel et al., 1998; Batista, 1993; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Perhaps the most significant study on this topic was conducted observing the depression level of immigrant children with regards to the frequency of language brokering performed. In it, Martinez et al. (2009) focused on Mexican American adolescents. The authors found that adolescents reported higher feelings of depression when they had the least amount of familial support for the task.

Orellana et al. (2009) argue that it is dominant institutions and structures in society, referred to as "white public space," that project negative stereotypes and perceptions towards immigrant children who engage in brokering activities. Her research with Latin American children indicated that the child broker's negative experience was attributed to the way they were treated by figures in high authority, with whom they were negotiating for their families.

Research has also found that there are slight gender differences between levels of depression and the performance of language/cultural brokering. In their study of Latino adolescents from immigrant families, Buriel et al. (1998) found that language brokering

among females was correlated with higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression. However, in the same study, males were reported to have higher levels of depression connected primarily to the different contexts in which they had to broker (Buriel et al., 1998). Love (2003) has similar findings, illustrating that the majority of females within her study reported positive feelings about language brokering, whereas males with higher language brokering responsibilities reported higher levels of feelings of depression. Valenzuela (1999) and Weisskirch (2007) contend that girls were more likely to perform tasks such as translation and interpretation because they felt a higher obligation towards the family unit, though this is not to suggest that males do not contribute to the family as well. Indeed, it is crucial to contextualize these gender differences that transpire during language/cultural brokering. Depending on the functioning and structure of the family unit, male and female children are positioned differently, thus affecting their language brokering roles and their respective feelings towards them.

Familial Relations

Certainly language/cultural brokering cannot be simply viewed as an individual process; rather there should be acknowledgment that the family unit participates jointly in the process. Research has found that when immigrant children assume the role of cultural/language broker, their families instantly become dependent upon their skills, thus creating an imbalance and strained familial relations (Dement & Buriel, 1999; Love, 2003; Tse, 1996; Umana-Taylor, 2003; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). The most common strain develops within the parent-child bond (Chao, 2006; Buriel et al., 1998; Martinez et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2005). The concept of 'role-reversal' is used in many scholarly

works, focusing on the negative effects of cultural/language brokering on familial relations, particularly the child-parent relationship (Buriel et al., 1998, Umana-Taylor, 2003; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Essentially speaking, 'role-reversal' is used in reference to the shifting of parental authority to the children who undertake the various decision-making tasks associated with language brokering (Buriel & DeMent, 1999). For instance, in the study conducted by Cohen et al. (1999), children were very prominent actors within appointments with doctors and patients (often parents), giving children a certain form of authority that is often reserved for parents, particularly with issues such as health. Additionally, Umana-Taylor (2003) asserts that parents may often feel a loss of authority and feel a sense of disrespect when children are involved in the questioning of personal issues such as health, employment, etc. Suarez-Orasco and Suarez-Orasco (2001) argue that the normative power relationship between child-parents may be negatively affected by immigrant children's increased cultural/language brokering because parents would become the dependents of the children for access to essential needs. In other studies conducted, there were concerns raised about children taking advantage of their powerful roles by transmitting filtered information to their parents, particularly in situations such as parent-teacher conferences (Suarez-Orasco & Suarez-Orasco, 2001; Tse, 1995; Umana-Taylor, 2003; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).

On the other hand, there is also a growing body of research available that would suggest that there are positive implications for familial relations, particularly parent-child bonds. Several studies have indicated that children who broker for their parents and other family members develop strong familial ties, given the importance of their responsibilities. McQuillan and Tse (1995) contend that language brokering allowed the

children to forge a trusting and strong bond with their parents because of the level of importance of the task that they performed for their families. Chao (2006) suggests that increased respect for parents was developed within immigrant families where children served as cultural/language brokers. Additionally, Orellana et al. (2003) explored the various ways in which children participate in advocacy at different institutions through their language brokering skills that would ensure the defense of their parents/families. The children in their study reported feelings of pride and happiness in serving their parents through advocacy for their rights. In more recent studies, researchers have acknowledged that children who assume the role of cultural/language broker become the defenders of their families through their negotiation and advocacy skills (DeMent and Buriel, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999; Orellana et al., 2003; Orellana, 2009). The children who serve as cultural/language brokers actively promote the lines of communication between their parents and the larger society, thus bonding and creating a bridge of trust for their parents. Santiago (2003) further reiterates that as a language broker, he felt proud to be able to serve his parents, allowing him to assume a responsibility that other children did not. More importantly, children who engage in cultural/language brokering often regard their roles as an extension of familial obligations, not necessarily as something unique (Orellana et al., 2003). Further research conducted by DeMent and Buriel (1999) also indicates that children perceived their language brokering roles as a commitment to their parents, rather than something falling outside their familial roles. In other words, the participants of the study viewed their roles as cultural/language brokers to be a part of their familial obligation, essentially out of a desire to help their parents. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of cultural/language brokers does not see their roles as

something special or out of the ordinary, as illustrated continuously throughout Orellana's (2003) detailed accounts of immigrant children's perceptions of themselves and their roles.

Love and Buriel's (2007) study found that adolescents who assumed the role of language broker reported positive feelings about their role, which was correlated to a strong parent-child bond. The adolescents felt empathy for their parents as they witnessed their daily struggles, thereby feeling compelled to embrace their roles. Del Carpio's (2007) study also supports this literature, wherein all the participants of the study indicated positive feelings about being able to serve as cultural/language brokers for their parents during difficult situations in the early years of their families' settlement. There are also accounts of parents feeling pride in their children's abilities and skills as bicultural assets who fulfill many of the duties that they are not otherwise able to do (Valdes et al., 2003). In their study, Valdes et al. (2003) interviewed parents of young interpreters, who contended that they did not feel a role reversal; instead their children worked collaboratively with them to help translate.

Biculturalism and Acculturative Success

Biculturalism and acculturative success have been noted as developed through the precursor of cultural/language brokering (Jones et al., 2005; Walinchowski, 2001; Weisskirch, 2005; Halgunseth, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Shannon, 1990; Buriel et al., 1998). As children interact in spaces that require them to translate/interpret between the official language and their mother language, they develop bicultural skills that may have long-term positive implications for the children (Buriel et al., 1998; Love & Buriel, 2007; Halgunseth, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Acoach & Webb, 2004). Halgunseth's

(2003) research evaluated the positive developmental effects of language brokering, which indicted a strong correlation between child language brokering and faster acculturation, given enhanced feelings of biculturalism.

Language brokering can also cause children to feel a sense of pride and ignite closer connections with native culture as suggested by Walinchowski (2003). Walinchowski's (2003) study found that there were causal connections for the participants who through their language brokering were able to become successfully bilingual, giving value to their native language. For Weisskirch (2005) cultural/language brokering ignited feelings of ethnic identity among adolescents who performed various levels of brokering throughout their lives. Participants from the study reported a closer connection with their Latin American identity given their roles as language brokers, which obligated them to be closer to their home culture.

Furthermore, research conducted by Buriel et al. (1998) reports that there is a strong positive correlation between cultural/language brokering related to academic performance, biculturalism, and social self-efficacy. In other words, interpersonal skills that are gained from language brokering between two languages and cultures may inform positive feelings of "self-confidence in social interactions" (Buriel et al., p. 293). Additionally, other studies suggest that biculturalism can lead to academic success as the children develop sophisticated language skills, higher vocabulary, etc (Buriel et al., 1998; Orellana, 2003; Halgunseth, 2003; McQuillan & Tse, 1995). According to the study conducted with Latino immigrant children in the United States, Orellana (2003) found that children who engage in translating and interpreting often do significantly better on standardized tests of reading and math. Valdes et al. (2003) argue that advanced linguistic

and cognitive skills developed through language brokering can be seen as a ability or skill that can lead to higher academic aspirations. However, earlier studies present contrasting views suggesting that there is no correlation between language brokering and successful academic performance (Tse, 1995). Furthermore, there are studies which suggest a negative impact on academic performance for children who act as cultural/language brokers (Umana-Taylor, 2003). These researchers argue that language brokering may place the children at risk of academic failure, because their role as a broker becomes a continuous duty (Umana-Taylor, 2003), thereby taking time away from their own school work. However, these studies are in the minority, and further research is required to support this. On the contrary, there are mixed method studies that report a relationship between language brokering and successful academic performance (Buriel et al., 1998; Orellana, 2003).

Immigrant adolescents foster the integration of their families through their on-going roles as cultural/language brokers. As translators and interpreters, these young adults become important assets during the settlement process. However, it is important to acknowledge that the complexity of each task does differ to a certain extent, given the cultural/language broker's specific context.

The present literature review covers areas that have been addressed in previous studies, analyzing the phenomenon of cultural/language brokering prevalent among immigrant families. After reviewing the existing literature, it was evident that the area of immigrant adolescents as cultural/language brokers requires additional research. More importantly, there was a lack of studies examining the prevalence of this phenomenon among ethnic communities other than Latino families in the U.S. It is with this in mind

that this study on Afghan adolescents as cultural/language brokers will contribute to an under-studied area of immigrant children and the settlement process of their families thereby creating a platform to better understand the contributions of these adolescents in the integration and settlement of their families.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is qualitative and exploratory, with the intention of contributing to an underdeveloped area of research. The study was approached from a qualitative social research orientation, which takes an interpretive approach with emphasis on social action, socially constructed meaning, and value relativism (Neuman, 2011). The interpretive approach takes into account people's experiences, and how individuals construct meaning through these experiences in their general environment (Neuman, 2011). As such, the use of qualitative research analysis for this study allowed for the consideration of the youths' social contexts in which they acted as cultural/language brokers. Additionally, the interpretive approach enabled the experiences of the youth as cultural/language brokers to be presented in a way that would encompass their understanding of their roles as well as the meanings they created for it in relation to their social setting and environment. Qualitative research studies also take into the account the specific position of the researcher. According to Haraway (1991), an aspect of objectivity requires the recognition that knowledge is partial and situated, and must adequately take into account the effects of the positioned researcher. As a first-generation Afghan Canadian, I am personally connected to this study, as my own experiences as a cultural/language broker informed my decision to embark on this project.

Sample

This study explored the experience of nine youth as cultural/language brokers for their families during settlement. Given the focus of the study, the sample consisted exclusively of Afghan youth residing in Toronto, Ontario. The sample was not equally balanced in terms of gender representation, as five of the participants interviewed were

female, and four were male. The ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 23 years of age. Limiting the sample to the age range selected was meant to consider the wide range of issues faced by Afghan adolescents during their families' settlement in Canada as well as their role as cultural/language brokers. All the participants had been born outside of Canada, and had resided in third countries such as Iran and Pakistan before migrating to Canada. The participants' age at the time of migration varied greatly. Seven of the participants arrived as children to Canada, under the age of 13. Two of the participants arrived as young adults, over the age of 16. Although this research had initially searched for participants who had migrated to Canada in the past five to ten years, the majority of the participants had been in Canada for less than 10 years. However, three of the participants had been in the country for less than five years. All but one of the participants were sponsored with their families by immediate or extended relatives. One participant and her family migrated to Canada through the Ontario Provincial Nominee Program. Three of the participants were enrolled in high school, while six were attending post-secondary education. It is important to keep in mind that the findings of this study are specific to this sample, and therefore they do not offer insights generalizable to other groups of immigrant youth or even the larger Afghan community of adolescents.

Recruitment

Recruitment of the youth was carried out in two ways. First, I used a purposive sampling to gain access to participants who fit the criteria of the study. Neuman defines purposive sampling as "A nonrandom sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population" (Neuman, 2006, p. 222). Therefore, given that the research was exclusively

geared towards Afghan youth, who are neither widely found nor concentrated in an easily identifiable location, this type of sampling seemed the most appropriate. More specifically, participants were recruited through organizations, service providers, and youth settlement workers who were in contact with Afghan youth. I had originally contacted the organizations by sending an email as well as a recruitment poster for my research. Agreeable service providers, youth workers, and organizations contacted me about potential participants who were interested in the study. The youth who were interested then contacted me directly, and I was able to provide them with additional information about the study. The second form of sampling used was snowball sampling, more specifically or what is referred to as *network chain referral*, whereby a researcher relies on a network of individuals to recruit additional participants (Neuman, 2006). In other words, youth who had already been recruited were asked to inform and invite their friends who might be interested in participating in the research.

Data Collection

In order to explore the experiences of Afghan youth as cultural/language brokers in the settlement of their families, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each youth. The interviews were conducted in locations suggested by each youth as convenient to them. The objective was to find a location that was safe, both physically and psychologically, for the youth. The interviews were semi-structured; each was recorded and lasted about 45 minutes. The interview consisted of open-ended questions with inquiries that allowed for the youth to engage in the study without being limited to the researcher's desired outcomes or interests. The interview was designed with the intention of exploring the respondent's experiences and positive reflections as a cultural/language

broker for his/her family. However, as the interviews progressed, the interview questions expanded with the insights of each youth, continuously taking into account the respondents' experiences and expansion of the research.

As mentioned earlier, my own personal experiences as an Afghan youth, who, like the participants, often acted in the role of cultural/language broker for my family, informed the purpose of this study. Therefore, I felt it was necessary to share my own immigrant experience as well as shed light on my own role as cultural/language broker for my family during settlement. However, I was careful about the type and quantity of personal information to share so as not to display my research biases and influences or in any way shape their answers. At the beginning of each interview, I asked the youth to speak about their migration history including residing in other countries prior to their arrival to Canada. It was during this portion of the interview, I was compelled to speak about my own journey to Canada, and some of my earlier experiences as a cultural/language broker for my family. In setting the tone of the interview through the sharing of experiences, the participants seemed less hesitant once I began with the formal interview questions. Interestingly, some of the participants frequently used Farsi/Dari words and phrases to describe a particular experience.

As each interview was conducted, new ideas and questions emerged from the experiences that each participant shared. These questions and ideas directed me to be critical of my own understanding, assumptions, and thoughts about this research. I had not anticipated that the youth would be as open with their experiences, often reflecting on other issues that immigrant youth face during their immigration and settlement to a new country. The depth of information that was gained from each interview led to a reflection

of my own experiences, and in some moments the youth's experiences served as comfort for me, knowing that I was not alone in my feelings as a cultural/language broker. Preliminary findings from the early interviews revealed that the youth's experiences as cultural/language broker were not independent from their understanding and experiences of their families, particularly during settlement. Many of the participants seemed to not only witness but also understand the struggles of settlement and integration in a new country. For the youth, it seemed that the struggles of settlement led to a sense of responsibility when carrying out roles such as cultural/language broker. These struggles of settlement seemed to be prominent among all the respondents, and were discussed extensively during the interviews. In some ways, this served as an eye-opener for the remainder of the research, that adolescents need to be given a voice, a space, and recognition during the settlement of their families since they play extraordinary roles in such.

Limitations

There are several potential limitations of this research that need to be addressed. To begin, given the small sample of the study, the findings are to a certain extent limited to only those youth who were interviewed. This study is thus not generalizable, as mentioned above. More specifically, I had anticipated an easy recruitment of the adolescents given my personal background as an Afghan; however, it proved to be very difficult to obtain interested participants. In the early stages of recruitment many youth contacted me directly to participate in the study; however, scheduling an appropriate time and location was a challenge given that many of the youth were employed in summer positions. In other words, the period in which this study was conducted provided a

challenge given that many students are frequently occupied with summer employment as well as familial commitments. Furthermore, I came across many barriers in attracting young male adolescents to participate in the research; hence, the imbalance in gender representation. The male participants who were interviewed for the study were recruited through a network chain referral. The unavailability or disinterest of male participants may be attributed to the fact that more often females are the ones who act as cultural/language for their families. In the preliminary findings of the interviews, some female participants acknowledged that their brothers were frequently occupied with work, or school, or other activities; thus, they had to assume the responsibilities of cultural/language brokering much more frequently. However, these findings are only preliminary in nature, and no final conclusions can be drawn.

The fact that this study was exclusive to the exploration of Afghan adolescents' experiences of cultural/language brokering presents a limitation in itself. During the interviews, many respondents often reflected on the struggles of their migration, more specifically having resided in third countries of asylum, which greatly impacted their perceptions of belonging and home. However, again, due to the design of a short study, it was difficult to include and discuss all the issues that emerged during the interviews. Doubtless a larger-scale and longer study focusing on the settlement issues of Afghan youth in Canada is required to address some of the issues raised in this study, which were not able to be appropriately developed. The wealth of knowledge gained from the interviews showed me the importance of including participants as a part of the research, rather than just being seen as respondents.

Introducing the Youth

Leyla¹ is 16 years old. Leyla and her family migrated from Afghanistan to Pakistan when she was a young child. Through the provincial nominee program, Leyla's family was sponsored to Canada when she was 11 years old. As the eldest child, Leyla assumed the role of a cultural/language broker for her family during the early years of settlement. She often acted as a translator for her parents at the doctor's office, parent-teacher nights, and at the bank.

Elias is 23 years old. As a young child, his family migrated to Iran from Afghanistan. About three years ago, his older brother sponsored Elias and his mother to come to Canada. Since their arrival to Canada, Elias's mother has been highly dependent on him to help her with daily activities of settlement. He often accompanies his mother to the doctor's office and bank, for grocery shopping, and with telephone calls.

About five years ago, Haseeb moved to Canada with his mother, his sisters, and younger brother. Upon arrival, his family resided in London, Ontario, before settling in Toronto after one year. As the second eldest, Haseeb often acts as a cultural/language broker for his family. However, he shares the translating and interpreting responsibilities with his older sister. Haseeb often answers phone calls from banks, phone services, and telemarketers, while his sister assumes cultural/brokering activities outside the home including taking their mother to the doctors. Haseeb is now 17 years old.

Arezo's family migrated to Canada two years ago. As a young child, Arezo and her brothers had moved to Iran from Afghanistan. She is now 18 years old. As the second eldest child in her family, Arezo often acts as a translator and interpreter for her parents,

¹ To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, all the names used are pseudonyms.

mostly for her mother. Her older brother acts in the role of cultural/language broker, more often than Arezo.

Nargis' family was sponsored to Canada approximately 10 years ago by her uncle. She was 10 years old at the time. As the second eldest in her family, Nargis upheld the responsibility of acting as a cultural/language broker. This role has been continuous throughout her adolescence. In the early years of settlement, her older brother shared the responsibilities of the role; however, he has since been preoccupied with school and work. Therefore, cultural/language brokering activities have since become a part of her daily activities. She is now 21 years old.

Fereshta's family came to Canada from Pakistan when she was nine years old. Upon arrival, her older sister was responsible for helping her family with the duties related to cultural/language brokering. However, as her older sister became occupied with school and work, Fereshta filled in the role of as a cultural/language broker much more than before. Her role as a cultural/language broker became interwoven into her daily life throughout her adolescence, from answering phone calls to interpreting bank statements and important documents. Fereshta is now 19 years old.

Sadaf is 22 years old. Sadaf's family was sponsored 10 years ago by a relative of her father. Sadaf is the oldest child in her family; therefore, she often acted as a cultural/language broker for her family during the early years of settlement. Today, she continues to act as a cultural/language broker, though to a much lesser extent than before. However, when she does engage in translating and interpretation, it is usually for her father, whereas in the past it was for her mother. She has also recently shared the responsibilities of cultural/language brokering with her younger brother.

Meelad's father arrived to Canada as a refugee. Two years later, he sponsored the rest of the family including Meelad, his mother, and his siblings. As the eldest son (he is 21 years old), Meelad expressed his view of cultural/language-brokering role as an extended responsibility he had to fulfill for his family. His role as a cultural/language broker often required him to act as a translator to his parents in matters of legal documents, phone bills, banking statements, and at the doctor's office.

Ramin was 12 years old when his family migrated to Canada. Ramin is the oldest child, with a younger sister and a brother. During the early years of settlement, his family relied on Ramin extensively to act as a translator and interpreter for them. Ramin saw his role as a cultural/language broker as merely an extension of his familial responsibilities, a duty he had to fulfill to help his parents settle into a new country. Today, Ramin (he is now 22 years old) continues in his role as a cultural/language broker by addressing the linguistic barriers his parents face when reading an important document, understanding a bank statement, and even answering government-related phone calls.

In the following section, the major themes of the study will be discussed. The three main themes that emerged from the findings were: 1) *Youth articulated a sense of responsibility when discussing their role as a cultural/language broker for their families;* 2) *Youth generally reported positive feelings about their roles as a cultural/language broker for their families;* and 3) *Youth's greatest challenges encountered as a cultural/language broker was frequently as a result of technical vocabulary and being in the presence of individuals with high authority.* The themes will be discussed in further detail, along with the findings from the interviews conducted with the youth.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overall, the participants displayed a high level of interest in articulating their experiences as cultural/language brokers for their families. The findings below represent a variety of issues that emerged across all the one-on-one interviews with the youth. It is important to keep in mind that the issues represent a relation to each other. Also, even within each issue there are several themes that arose, which further highlight the importance of understanding the role of immigrant youth in the settlement process of their families. Generally speaking, the findings offer a look into the lives of immigrant youth as cultural/language brokers, a role that defines their lives and in which they define themselves. Throughout the findings, it was evident that immigrant adolescents, in this case Afghan youth, are active participants in the settlement of their families, and view their role as a part of a team rather than as separate from their familial responsibilities. Furthermore, it was prevalent throughout each youth's interview that Afghan adolescents have a particular understanding of their roles as cultural/language brokers. This understanding is consistent with the notion of familial responsibilities.

1. Youth articulated a sense of responsibility when discussing their role as a cultural/language broker for their families.

All the youth who participated in the interview noted that their role as a cultural/language broker was a part of their responsibility to their families. Each participant viewed this role as falling within the domains of their family dynamic. According to the participants, being a part of their family meant that they had specific duties to fulfill. Despite the fact that some of the activities as a cultural/language broker were not necessarily appropriate considering their age, nonetheless, they viewed it as an

obligation to their parents and necessary for their families' settlement in the new country.

Two respondents note that:

Ramin: I am obligated to take responsibility for my family, especially because I am the eldest son. I view my role as a language broker to my family as something I have to do...because you know...my parents needed my help, so I had to do it...yeah.

Meelad: To be honest, I don't feel much aside from the feeling of responsibility I guess...our parents brought us here, so I have to help them as well, and even more so because I am the son in the family.

Both Meelad and Ramin indicated their role as a cultural/language broker was something they had to do for their families, not only because they were expected to do so but this sense of responsibility was expected because of their gender. It is within this understanding of their gender role that the two participants negotiated their role as a cultural/language broker. It is important to keep in mind that there was a strong sense of responsibility by both genders interviewed. However, as pointed out by the male participants, this responsibility was perceived to be twice as much because they were the sons of the family. In the case of the two participants quoted above, Ramin and Meelad pointed out their order as the oldest in the family as having contributed to their responsibility. Younger male participants who were not the oldest in their families also suggested that because of their perceived gender role, they had a greater obligation towards their families. For example:

Haseeb: It's my mom...and I'm like her son, I want to help her because if my mom needs me...because she doesn't know how to speak English, I am going to help her.

Elias: Like when I go to doctor, I have to go to the doctor with my mom because there is no one else to go with her. Since I come to Canada, I go to the doctors 100 times because my mom needed me. It's not forced, because she is my mom, we need to help moms, that's my responsibility. If I don't do it, it's going to be very bad.

Although Haseeb was not the oldest in his family, he still felt that he had a duty to help his mother because he was “her son”. Furthermore, this notion of responsibility was not limited to the participants’ length of migration, as both Haseeb and Elias have been in Canada for about five years. The other two male participants, Ramin and Meelad migrated with their families 10 years ago. Thus, all the male participants despite their various ages at the time of migration observed their role as a cultural/language broker to be as a responsibility given their perception of gender as being a greater reason to help their families.

Although there was no emphasis on their gender as being a reason to help their families, female participants also acknowledged their role as a cultural/language brokering to be an extension of their familial responsibility.

Fereshta: I think it is my responsibility because I grew up in this country that is foreign to my parents...and you know, I am more aware of its social environment. With my knowledge, it is only right to pass it on to my parents in order for them to improve theirs.

Arezo: Bale, chura kumak nakunem²? It’s a duty for us, you know ...coming to a new country to help mom and dad...as children, we shouldn’t think it is wrong...why would you not want to help parents with it? It is our job.

Nargis: Obviously, if my mom needs my help to do something, I have to assist her...and because they raised me as a child and taught me how to speak my language. Then, I also believe that it is part of the obligation to help them as well, like explain to them how things are, this is what the letter says, or this is what the doctor is saying.

Sadaf: Like honestly, it’s a part of my chore, so if I don’t do it, then like who will? You know being a part of the family; it’s just like doing a task around the house kinda thing. I think it helped to see other Afghan kids doing it as well, like when I would take my dad to the clinic, I see the other kids there with their parents as well...so I knew it was something that had to be done.

² English translation: “Yes, why shouldn’t we help?”

This sense of responsibility as noted by the participants can be representative of the notion of collectivism within the family unit. The youth reinforced this notion of collective responsibility when they spoke about their role as a cultural/language broker to be an aspect of their familial obligations. In other words, the collective nature of their families contributed to the participants' perception of their role as a responsibility. This collective trait of the family as team rather than composed of individuals acting for themselves was evident throughout the interviews with the participants.

An element of gender difference that spoke to the experiences of Afghan youth as cultural/language broker was that the role was more frequent among the female participants. Although the ratio of female participants is higher in this study, the male respondents discussed the role of their sisters within the context of cultural/language brokering. Also, due to the small sample of male respondents, these are only preliminary insights. With the exception of Elias who did not have any siblings, the other three male respondents acknowledged the role of their sisters as cultural/language brokers.

Haseeb: Sometimes I'm gonna be busy, like I don't go so she, my mom take my sister with her...like a doctor, my sister go with her. I take care of the phone, like when Rogers call, but it's my sister like to do it, she go out with my mom.

Meelad: Yes, it is very common for my sisters to help with translating for my parents. For example, I don't like reading long documents/ letters, so my sisters would do it, and like going to the doctors with my parents. I would be the one talking on the phone resolving whatever issue or concern, stuff like that.

In both instances above, the respondents not only referred to the role of their sisters as cultural/language brokers, but emphasized that certain activities of cultural/language brokering such as going to the doctors was often carried out by their sisters. The reasons for this differed for each respondent. For Haseeb, it was largely due to his commitment to work or hanging out with friends that restricted his availability, therefore, his sisters were

there to fulfill the role for their mom. On the other hand, Meelad discussed not enjoying certain forms of cultural/language brokering but also due to time restrictions now as he is occupied with university and work. Instead, his sisters were expected to undertake those activities, again going to the doctors with their parents, particularly with their mother. It was also a common thread in the female respondents' revelations of their experiences as a cultural/language brokers to emphasize the frequency and the prevalence of certain types of brokering that they performed for their families. Most of the female respondents acknowledged that they were more likely to act in the role of a cultural/language broker than their brothers. However, this can also be attributed to the birth order of the children in the family. As studies suggest, the oldest child is usually the one to be acting as a cultural/language broker for their families during settlement. However, the young female respondents who were not the oldest in their families still brokered much more than their older brothers, particularly when their brothers became preoccupied with school and work.

Nargis: Even though I did some translating in the beginning, my older brother usually did the majority of the translating because, like I said, he was the oldest. But I was usually the one going with my parents to parent-teacher night and to the doctors. Now, I am just doing it all the time...since my brother started working and so most of the time he's either busy working or with his friends or his fiancé...my mom and dad depend on me because my other brother doesn't want to be tied into going places with them like the doctors or wherever and like my sister is still young.

Sadaf: Well as the oldest, I have two younger brothers, I was always helping my parents with translation, because they didn't know how to speak the language at the time. So I would answer the phone when like Rogers or Bell would call, help my dad with writing the rent cheques, and taking my mom to the doctor. Like it was like this all the time for me...now my brothers are older, like they help, but its only with small stuff like reading a document or sometimes they would call Rogers about a billing issue. But I am still helping my dad with you know the major stuff.

Arezo: My brother talk to my mom about translation, like he help her. I am, I do too...when I am outside with my mom, shopping or sometimes at the doctors. I am with her...so I help her all the time. If someone calls, my brother pick up to speak.

Leyla: For my mom, it was usually me taking her to the doctors and grocery shopping. And like when it was parent-teacher night, I would go with her to like explain to her what my brother's teacher was saying...but I know it was hard for my parents to learn English so I didn't care so much about it. And now my brother helps out a bit here and there, like when bills come home and he takes on the responsibility.

As the eldest child in the family, Leyla and Sadaf's roles as a cultural/language broker were much more demanding. Although both girls had younger brothers who did take on the responsibility of a cultural/language broker to a certain extent, the girls reiterated that they were mainly responsible for the majority of the cultural/language brokering tasks, particularly in the event where they had to accompany their parents to the doctors. Interestingly, all the female participants' experiences included accompanying their parents to the doctors, which was perceived by them as a "part of their role."

The notion of shared responsibility was frequently raised during the one-on-one interviews with the youth. This is a key observation within this study, as usually the role of cultural/language brokering is passed down from eldest child to youngest. However, many of the participants shared experiences where siblings would work together to help translate important documents or fill out forms for their parents. These joint collaborations between siblings were common across most of the participants' interviews.

Consider these reflections by some of the participants:

Leyla: Now that my brother can help because he's older...he helps me with some stuff, like together we do some stuff to help our parents. There was a time where my dad's insurance policy came in the mail, and at first I tried to read it but it was so hard...so my brother helped me and together we understood it better and were able to tell my dad what it means...this way helps a lot, it makes it easier you know...to just translate it.

Nargis: Yeah...like we help each other out a lot, like taking turns sharing the role. There is more interaction now between us than before...like when complicated letters that like came, like personally I would never read it properly because I know I wouldn't understand cause of the words they would use in the letter, so I would give it to my brother to try and understand. Like my sister even helps...so we ask each other you know like "What does this word mean?" or like "What Farsi word should we use to explain this to mom or dad?"

Haseeb: I take help from my sisters...and they take help from me when I help my mom with the doctor or like on the phone when someone calls...we help each other.

Ramin: I think it is very common to help each other, you know, because we are doing it all for our parents. So when I need help with something like with a letter or like... yeah it's usually important documents, my sister helps me too so we then are able to help our parents with trying to understand it.

Again for the youth, this shared sense of responsibility was not something out of the ordinary. It was merely another form of siblings sharing a chore, in this case translating documents. There was a strong indication by respondents that they frequently required the assistance of their siblings and vice versa. However, working together went beyond just a sense of responsibility, rather it could be seen as a form of joint collaboration. It was a form of understanding between siblings, in which they were required "...to work together to help their parents for a better life" as Meelad referred to it.

A sense that emerged from speaking with each youth was that their responsibility was connected to their inclusion in the family. They viewed their families as a team, acknowledging their parents' role in raising them as young children and bringing them to a new country, which motivated them to understand the importance of their roles in the settlement of their families. Researchers have described this sense of responsibility as a form of interdependence for adolescents who act as cultural/language brokers. Orellana and Dorner (2008) argue that children, who act as language brokers for their families as

children and later into their adolescence, develop an interdependence notion of their role. For many of the participants in their study, their role as a language broker was interwoven into their daily life, therefore perceived as a shared normal activity within families. Similarly, the majority of the participants in this study also indicated the normalcy of their role as a cultural/language broker to be related to their shared sense of responsibility to their families.

Meelad: At one point, it felt like a burden, to be honest. But now, mostly it is something I have become used to. After having done it for 9 years now, it has become a way of life, a norm.

Fereshta: I would say that now, I like being a cultural broker for my parents because it's just a normal thing...like you know, doing chores around the house...normal stuff like that.

Leyla: It was something new in the beginning, but now I'm just used to it even though I don't do it as much as before...it's just a part of my life and I accept it.

Sadaf: I stopped, you know, like thinking about myself, and started thinking about my family. They still didn't know the language properly so they asked me to help. And then like, yeah, it just started becoming a habit to help my family...like it's just a habit now.

Moreover, given their specific immigration context, children and adolescents who act as cultural/language brokers for their families are inclined to perceive their roles as necessary to ensure their families' integration and settlement. Participants acknowledged witnessing the difficulties that their parents had to endure during the early years of settlement, which served as a reflection for their children to feel motivated to help with this transition. The settlement process is not an easy one for newly arrived immigrants as it requires them to adjust to the new society, including accessing orientation services which are essential to addressing their immediate needs. Moreover, the road to settlement may take months or years, and is dependent "...on the context in which it is used"

(Quirke, 2011). Linguistic barriers are one of the most prominent issues that newcomers face, particularly if they are not fluent in the official languages of the new country. The majority of Afghans who migrate to Canada resided on the way in third countries where neither English nor French are the official languages taught or spoken. Moreover, the participants did not assume the role of a cultural/language broker in other contexts such as the third countries which they resided in prior to their arrival to Canada. The participants' families were well acquainted with the language and culture of the third countries, therefore not requiring the assistance of their children. Given the close proximity of the third countries to Afghanistan, the languages spoken were similar to the native language(s) of the participants. Thus, the role of a cultural/language broker was necessitated only upon arrival to Canada. During the interviews with the participants, the youth discussed witnessing their families struggle during settlement, particularly given the language barriers that their parents faced. For many of the participants, these struggles contributed to their understanding of their roles as cultural/language brokers and their commitment to their families.

Fereshta: I think growing up helping my parents with translation and interpreting, helped me learn about the struggle of cultural shock...seeing my parents on a daily basis struggling with the language, you know, that motivated me further to help them.

Meelad: I think it is both an obligation and a responsibility. Obligation because if you don't do it then who will? And at the same time responsibility to show that you care for your family and are there whenever you are needed and not needed. You know they brought us to this country for a better life, so it's important to help them as well.

Nargis: As I got older, I understand more, it's the fact that I can tell myself that you know they (parents) did so and so for me when I was younger, so now it's my turn to help them, especially because they don't know how to speak the language...you know I could relate to them, to their hardships because I was older, so I understood it better.

Ramin: I feel good to translate for my parents because they need that help...you know like reading the document or phone calls, and its good to know I can provide them with that. I learned English quickly because of school but my parents didn't have that chance so I mean like it made sense to help them while they [would] struggle...this was in the beginning you know.

Elias: Everything I do for my mom ...because she has a lot of problems when we first come to Canada, like she can't say anything in English, that's my responsibility, because my mom grow up me and she take care of me. And I am her son so I have to do it.

Leyla: It was really hard at first because you know my parents didn't know anything or anyone, like what to do, what we shouldn't do or should do. For us, it was easy to learn English because we were like kids; TV was the most helpful and school too. It was harder for my parents because my dad had to go to work and my mom had to watch my baby brother.

Sadaf: You know it was really hard for my parents. Like my dad had to actually find a job to support us. So basically, I felt like bad for my dad, since we were like alone because at that point all the other Afghan families moved out, so we were still the only Afghan family who lived in that building. And then I realized that my dad actually needs my help...like my family needed me.

It is because of these existing language barriers for the parents during settlement that immigrant children and adolescents often undertake roles such as cultural/language broker for their families. According to Orellana (2009), "Language brokering is a cultural practice that is shaped by the experience of being an immigrant. It is a practice in which children take the lead...it is invented by necessity in the immigrant context" (p. 3). The youth comprehended the various struggles that their families had to endure during settlement, therefore, increasing their perception of their role as a form of responsibility.

A significant insight that arose during the one-on-one interviews was that all participants disregarded the importance of being rewarded for their roles as cultural/language brokers. The respondents' reasons were similar in that their perception of their role was linked to the notion of responsibility to their families. In the discussion

of rewards for helping their families as translators and interpreters, the youth reinforced the notion of familial responsibility as a reason to not be expecting rewards. There was no indication of a gender difference in the discussion of rewards. All participants agreed that they did not expect a reward of any kind from their parents because it was a duty that they had to perform for their families, especially given their immigration context.

Meelad: I always got a “shah bash bachem”³ but nothing more than that. And it was something expected of me to fulfill, so my parents would say like “yaqa ta yee mumlakat awordemat, bayad yee kara anjam betey”⁴. Afghan parents, what can you do [Laughs].

Fereshta: I was not rewarded. To be honest, I didn’t expect to be rewarded because I volunteered to help my parents...’cause they needed my help, so it was something I had to fulfill.

When asked if he was ever rewarded for helping his family with translation and/or interpretation, Ramin was quick to provide a simple answer:

Ramin: No, it is my obligation to help my parents so I don’t expect anything in return.

Similarly, the other respondents in the study also pointed to their role as children in the family, again the notion of responsibility as exempting them from expecting or receiving a reward for their cultural/language brokering.

Arezo: A reward? Magum ba chee?⁵ It’s good to help your parents with this, to make difficulties easy for them. It’s good a thing for children to do it.

Nargis: Umm...with my mom, she would be thankful and appreciative by saying you know, thanks but nothing more than that. And with my dad, I guess when I was younger...it was like buying me ice cream, but I guess as I got older, I realized my role was necessary so I didn’t expect anything.

³ A saying in Farsi that is often used by parents, translated into “Good job, my child.”

⁴ English translation: “I brought you to this country, you have to get some of these tasks done for us.”

⁵ English translation: “But for what?”-The respondent was quite surprised that I had asked this question.

For Nargis, being a cultural/language broker at a young age allowed her to receive some sort of reward, in this case a treat like ice cream. However, Nargis was quick to add that as she got older, she realized the importance of the responsibilities attached to her role, and she no longer felt it was necessary to be rewarded.

Sadaf: Honestly, my parents never rewarded me for this...but the only things they would tell me is like “tashakor”⁶ or like say you know “agar tu namekhadi, khy ki mekad”⁷. I don’t know, does that count as a reward? Like they appreciated my help, but I mean...I am a part of the family so I should help them any way I can.

Leyla: Well, usually they don’t say thank you or anything but like I could sense it, that they liked what I did, like helping them. But it doesn’t bother me...because I think it will change in the future, they won’t need me as much...I think.

Haseeb: Like my mom, she’s happy when I help her...so she don’t say thank you...but that’s still a thank you...because I am her son.

For the youth who perceived their role as a cultural/language broker as being within the domain of their familial obligations such as Sadaf and Haseeb did not expect a reward. Generally speaking, most of the youth referenced this familial responsibility within their response when questioned about rewards. In fact, some of the participants were surprised that a question about rewards was even raised in the interview because to them, their role as a cultural/language brokering was always performed out of responsibility, therefore, a reward was not seen as necessary. For example, both Arezo and Elias thought that all youth should perform duties related to cultural/language brokering without hesitation because it’s a form of assistance to the parents.

2. Youth generally reported positive feelings about their roles as a cultural/language broker for their families.

⁶ English translation: “Thank you.”

⁷ English translation: “If you didn’t do it, then who would?”

The youth's experiences and some of their reflections as cultural/language brokers for their families revealed positive feelings about their roles. The participants reflected on their role as a cultural/language broker to be fairly positive, and at times even rewarding as reported by some of the respondents. The positive feelings for each respondent varied, however. In general the feelings were based on the fact that they perceived themselves as contributing to their families' settlement. In other words, they viewed it as more than just a form of assistance rather as a real contribution to their families' integration in their new country settlement.

Meelad: I think positive feelings occurs more when you are doing it in the beginning because you know like that's when you see how much your helping you parents, helped the family...I'm talking like translating important documents and filling out school forms...like basically, all the stuff you need to do in the beginning when you first move to a new country, to Canada.

Ramin: You know, like you get a good feeling knowing you're the reason behind helping your family, especially when you see them struggling to get things done ...so yeah you do get positive feelings and do feel like you're helping achieve something...in your family, for your family, so yeah.

Arezo: Agar kumak meytanem, besayaar yak jahai khoshi ast⁸...for my mother and father to do things...and I help them to do it in this new country, it's good.

Elias: My mom learn English when I translate in front of her...so now when someone calls and ask for me, she can answer the phone and can say for example "Hello, Elias is not home," or she can say "Hi, how are?" when she go outside now. So I get so happy now.

For Meelad and Ramin who have both resided in Canada for about 10 years, their responses during the interview reflected their earlier experiences as cultural/language brokers for their families. Thus, for both of them the early struggles of their families and their contribution to ease the difficulties resulted in positive feelings of cultural/language brokering. Similarly, Arezo and Ramin who have been in Canada for less than five years

⁸ English translation: "If we can help, it is a moment of joy."

base their reflections of positive experiences in helping their parents adjust to the cultural and linguistic settings of the new country. This would indicate that despite their varied length of time in Canada, the respondents had similar positive reflections of their role as cultural/language brokers, particularly because they were aware of their contributions to their families' early years of settlement.

Leyla: When I was younger, it was always necessary to help my parents ...like mostly when we first came to Canada because they both didn't know how to speak English...and like because it was harder for them, to like pick it up and understand what people were saying or even like reading a form. So like I helped them a lot in the beginning with that stuff.

Nargis: Like I remember this one time, where I knew how much I helped my parents ...well in this case, my mom. It was like at the doctor's office, and she had to fill out a form for the specialist...and like the only thing she knew was where to put her name. Everything else on that form, I did for her ...and you know afterwards, she was able to get the help she needed for her health. So yeah, like looking back now, what I did was important ...because how would my mom get health attention? Would she have been ok? I don't know. I am happy now, you know, to know I did that.

Sadaf: In the beginning, like when we first came to Canada from Pakistan, my parents needed me...like I would be out with my parents all the time, going from place to place, trying to get things done. And my dad would tell me things like you know "Bachem⁹, your mom and dad need you at this time"...and you know as I said before, I am the oldest, so he would tell me that I am like a "son" to them. It felt good to know how much I meant to them...like what I was doing, like the translation and stuff.

As discussed earlier, the frequency of cultural/language brokering was high amongst the female respondents; the reflections above speak to these experiences. For cultural/language brokers like Sadaf, Leyla, and Nargis who have all assumed their roles at a young age, positive feelings related to brokering was attributed to their realization of the importance of the roles they played for their families, quite often during the initial years of settlement. Here, the respondents address the issue of how much they were

⁹ English translation: "My child."

required to help their families, from filling out forms at the doctor's office in the case of Nargis to constantly running errands with her parents that Sadaf spoke about during the interview. For each of these young females, the realization of their contributions to their families' settlement helped them come to terms with their roles, and thus, accumulate positive feelings when reflecting back. For Sadaf, as the oldest child, she was constantly accompanying her parents after their arrival to Canada, so much so that her father even referred to her as a "son," meaning her responsibilities amounted to a great deal. Sadaf's reflection is representative of the strong correlation that exists in many contexts and across many cultures between birth order and gender. Often responsibilities which are deemed to be of great nature for families are allocated to the eldest child, and this responsibility is seen as greater when the oldest child is a male. Therefore, the participant's father demonstrated in this case that his daughter's responsibilities amounted to the same, as if this eldest child were a male. Furthermore, this gender dynamic was presented in the earlier findings, addressed by some of the male respondents who identified their gender as greater reason for assisting their families as cultural/language brokers.

For many of the respondents, feelings of pride and happiness often occurred when they believed they were successful in their cultural/language brokering tasks. These feelings of pride were present among both genders, and emphasized in the one-on-one interviews.

Fereshta: I do recall many moments when I was proud of my role, especially when I got older...and saw how much I did for my family. Like you know helping out with billing issues or understanding insurance policies so that my dad would be in the loop about this stuff.

Ramin: I usually feel good when I help my parents in any circumstance especially when it comes to making things easier for them. Now especially when it comes to arguing or trying to deal with a problem, for example, with billing if they over charge us I will usually step in at this time to support my parents.

Arezo: The feeling of happiness comes for me when I help my mom first time in Canada...downstairs of our building, some lady was asking my mom questions and I answered for her, now that lady is her friend. For my dad, at the doctors I help tell the doctor about my dad's pain...and he felt better after because doctor give him the medication he need.

Sadaf: Umm well now that I am older, looking back I do feel proud of myself for helping my parents...especially during periods of difficulty for them, especially for my dad. Like there was a time where my dad wrote a cheque for the rent but he didn't write it properly so I had to go to the landlord's office, downstairs of the building. I was able to show my dad how to write a new cheque, and now he knows...so everything was fine then.

Meelad: I mean when you reduce a bill from \$200 to \$100, then for sure pride kicks in and you feel important. We sometimes don't realize but resolving small things (Rogers charged too much) mean the world to the family, perhaps because you fulfilled the expectation they hold.

For the respondents, feelings of pride were correlated to easing the difficulties of their parents; the reflections above speak to this as illustrated by Ramin and Arezo. In their particular cases, they each referred to their positive feelings being the result of their families' issue(s) being resolved. In other words, the respondents demonstrated a level of awareness about their families' struggles. Therefore, the resolution of these issues for them meant moments of happiness. It was also common among a significant number of the respondents who pointed out the fact that resolving billing issues was an area of the most pleasure they gained as a cultural/language broker. Meelad, who often language brokered on the phone with telecommunication service providers, emphasized his feelings of joy when he resolved an "on-going" billing issue as he discussed referring to the reduction in the bill. Meelad also pointed out that resolving bills is a minor issue that is often not realized as a "big deal" for many youth who broker; however, recognizing the

importance of the task for his family and what it meant to them further contributed to feelings of pride. Moreover, the respondents' ability to successfully resolve their families' issues can be seen as a form of advocacy on the part of the youth. Past literature reveals that children who act as cultural/language brokers frequently use their position of power to protect their families' during settlement and the years that follow (Valenzuela, 1999; Orellana et al., 2003; Valdes et al., 2002). The youth in this study used their linguistic and cultural advantage to resolve their families' difficulties, which was often related to daily tasks like billing, writing cheques, and more importantly addressing their parents' health issues.

In their discussions of moments of pride and happiness in their role as cultural/language brokers, the youth acknowledged that their sense of achievement and accomplishment was based on witnessing their families' happiness. More specifically, the respondents suggested that feeling accomplished as a cultural/language broker would mean that your parents are satisfied with the fulfillment of their expectations. Consider the following:

Ramin: I do feel a sense of achievement because I am helping my parents out. I am happy to see my parents happy after many years of struggle...and now like they are doing some of the communication in English by themselves...so again, I guess it does help knowing that I helped them then so that now they can do it by themselves, sorta.

Elias: I feel happy...I don't know to explain it you...like sometimes I teach her English because she is there with me when I talk on the phone so she learn words and next time she says it to me. I feel good to know I explain to her English.

Nargis: I did feel like accomplished something but now that I think about it, I wish I did more...I would probably be more pleased with myself ...I would hope that I did more, because I would feel that I did pay my parents back in some way...and that would be an accomplishment on its own. I am sad now looking back because I didn't do enough but I have sorta of been making up for it now...like I like doing it, feels good to help.

Meelad: I still am a cultural and language broker but from the past I do get a sense of achievement because of living up to the expectations of my parents and or family...and now they can do some minor stuff that I did for them back then, so that's something to be feeling accomplished about.

A significant observation within these reflections is the fact that the respondents' sense of accomplishment as a cultural/language broker was also determined by their families' progress. In particular, the youth discussed moments of joy when their parents would pick up English words from them while they were translating or interpreting. For some of the respondents, part of their role as a cultural/language broker was to also assist their parents in learning the language. Both Fereshta and Nargis often translated school documents to their mothers, frequently pronouncing certain terminologies. For example, Fereshta recalled helping her mom by "...reading out loud labels, or newsletters...like even some T.V. shows I would watch when I was home." It cannot be determined from the interviews and the small size of the study as to the extent of the adolescents' role in the language acquisition of their parents. Nonetheless, it is an important consideration given that the respondents' sense of accomplishment was related to their parents' happiness in their settlement progress.

Feelings of pride were also related to the benefits that the respondents believed they acquired as a result of their roles as cultural/language brokers. For example, many of the participants suggested that their communication skills in their first language improved as a result of their constant translating and interpreting between two languages. Scholars have argued that language brokering often contributes to stronger bilingual skills for adolescents who act in such roles as they gain stronger language acquisition in both the first language and second language (Krashen, 1985; Buriel et al., 1998). For Afghan

youth, their role as a cultural/language broker helped with their communication skills in both their first language of Farsi/Dari¹⁰ or Pashtu¹¹ and their second language as English.

Consider the following reflections provided by some of the youth:

Nargis: Yes, definitely, my Farsi skills has improved a lot...like in the beginning I used to struggle when speaking Farsi because I was becoming much more fluent in English but like as I started helping with translation more because my brother wasn't around much, I picked up on my Farsi again...actually, my language on both sides got better, now some words that I get stuck on...I usually find another word that I have picked up or is related to the word to explain it better. It was like a teacher for me, like it taught me how to speak in better in both languages.

Arezo: I got better English now because I learn new words to use ...and like when I am at the doctors or bank with my mom, the doctor say something I didn't know before so now I know, and know when to use it.

Ramin: Actually, you know I probably did benefit from the translating I did, especially in terms of my English speaking skills. I had to figure out how to explain things from one language to the other and this would help my communication as well...it's funny because my parents would be really happy when they saw me speaking both languages so well.

Sadaf: You know there was a time where I thought I wouldn't be able to speak in Pashtu anymore, like when my brothers and I started school...we would come home and speak English so we would speak it [Pashtu] less. Like when I first came here, my Pashtu was really great but then it was becoming less and less...but like when I had to help my dad more with interpretation and stuff, I picked up on the language again. Now it's good because I have both languages...like I mean I can speak both languages fluently.

Here, the respondents acknowledge the role that cultural/language brokering had on improving their fluency in both the languages spoken at home such as Farsi/Dari or Pashtu and English. It is not surprising that communication skills on both sides would improve as the adolescents are frequently in the presence of adults and various settings, which exposes them to different terminologies and ways of speaking. As Arezo

¹⁰ Farsi/Dari: Commonly referred to as Afghan Persian, is one of the official languages of Afghanistan.

¹¹ Pashtu: One of the official languages of Afghanistan.

suggested, being in the presence of the doctor allowed her to pick up certain terms that she did not know before; being exposed to these new terms gave her a sense of advantage in communication. Moreover, many of the respondents also touched on the “learning experiences” that they gained from their roles as cultural/language brokers for their families.

Nargis: Even like it was a learning experience for me, because I would go to places I never been, and see things I wouldn't see otherwise. Like there were times when I would go to downtown with my father, and I would really like that because I get to see things and places that were nice ...and because I liked it so much I would go back by myself next time. And I got to do this because of my dad, because of his help...well no, because he needed my help but still...like I said, there's things that I don't know and I can actually learn by going with them [parents] or by helping them, so like in that sense I like it.

In other words, for Nargis, her role as a cultural/language brokering presented her with many learning experiences that gave her positive feelings about performing such tasks for her parents. Indeed, the youth discussed these positive feelings throughout the interview discussions, particularly citing rewarding moments and senses of achievement to their roles as cultural/language brokers for their families during settlement.

3. Youth's greatest challenges encountered as a cultural/language broker was frequently as a result of technical vocabulary and being in the presence of individuals with high authority.

In their discussion of the challenges faced as cultural/language brokers, participants articulated that their greatest challenge was the difficulty they encountered with technical vocabulary, in other words, the struggle to find certain words or phrases in the languages they were translating.

Meelad: Sometimes the parent would expect too much. For example, talking to the lawyer about a certain issue or trying to fix a deal with a company is hard when you don't know what they are saying sometimes...like my dad would ask

me what the lawyer is saying, and I would have to stand there for awhile to think about how and like which words to use so my dad would get it.

Fereshta: I found it hard at times to relay the information to my parents just because I thought they would not understand what I was saying...like I didn't know if I was using the right words or not...and then they would ask me to repeat it, again, and again...like that's really frustrating, you know.

Sadaf: So it was pretty hard for me to find the right words to translate from Pashtu into English or like English into Pashtu...so um yeah, like I still translated for my dad but it wasn't as good as like my dad's cousins who knew Pashtu better so they could help more.

Nargis: It was hard for me to sit there and think about, like you know I would ask myself "how should I say this?" or "What's the easiest word in Farsi to use?" so um...that they can understand as well. Sometimes I find it easier to use gestures or point to things ...and like use other words that relate to what I am trying to explain.

Leyla: It has its difficulties right now with major stuff, like for example, like if...if my mom has some back problems or leg problems, like the doctor would use words that I can't translate at all because it's either I don't know the words or I have never even heard it before...so it's like, it's these terminologies that are like scientific, or like even terminologies that other people use. So I'm thinking to myself, like even if I have an idea of this word, how am I going to translate it to my parents? To tell them like ok, this is what the problem is and this is how it should be fixed.

A significant observation here is that despite the difficulties the youth encountered with confusion over the use or definition of a particular term, they still managed to broker using whatever knowledge they had of that term. More precisely, the youth were able to pay attention closely enough and find words that were similar in translation to explain the matter to their families. Orellana et al., (2003) uses the term "para-phrasing" to address the ways in which adolescent use their linguistic knowledge of the English language as well as their first language to speak for others, particularly for their families. Similarly, the participants in this study responded to their families' needs by accessing information, resources, and even addressing issues with medical personnel. The youth's experiences in

overcoming particular challenges as cultural/language brokers demonstrate their resilience towards aiding in their families' settlement. It is important to note that participants who were newcomers to Canada (migrated less than five years ago) experienced similar challenges in trying to translate between their native language and English, particularly given that their English vocabulary was minimal. The respondents expressed this challenge by addressing the difficulty in acting as a language broker when they were not yet fluent in English to begin with. The following examples illustrate these experiences:

Arezo: I still find it hard sometimes, because my English is not so, so good. In the early days, I find it much more hard because I couldn't pick up some words that these people would say...the talking was very fast so I forgot some words they said and like I don't know those words so I didn't know what to tell my mom.

Elias: I knew little English when my mom and me first come to Canada, now it's more. So I know more words to use when I'm talking with the doctor about my mom and her pains...now I even understand some things the doctor say so it's easier now, for me and my mom.

Both Arezo and Elias migrated to Canada less than five years ago. During the interview, both participants acknowledged their minimal English and the difficulties involved when they had to act as a cultural/language broker for their family. Nonetheless, the youth did not allow for these difficulties to compromise what they viewed as a responsibility in their role as cultural/language broker.

The youth also expressed their frustration when dealing with personnel in highly authoritative institutions such as government offices, banking personnel, and legal institutions. For many of the participants, the encounters with these institutions were perceived to be one of the greatest challenges in their role as cultural/language brokers. The reflections below speak to these challenges that the youth encountered:

Haseeb: Sometimes when bills come...I get confused, some stuff on the bill is hard to know what it's saying...like I talk on the phone with the company...they don't listen to me when I say my mom don't know to speak English...they say "We have to talk to your mom," and I say "My mom can't speak English, I'm gonna be translating for her," after they ask for my age and all these other questions.

Ramin: When dealing with government offices that deal with such high volume of clients, it can get really upsetting because the quality of service can get really bad. In these situations it is upsetting when your parents are having difficulty communicating on one hand and the employee is not co-operating or being impatient on the other. For example, dealing with passport applications and mistakes on the form can get more complicated than it is because of miscommunication.

Sadaf: Yeah, definitely, there was a couple of times...like the situation at the bank, where my dad needed help with his account so we were at the bank and the teller was talking to him about the accounts, and I was so confused because what my dad was telling me was no where close to what the teller was saying...so I didn't know who to translate for first. Like the teller wasn't getting what my dad was saying and I wasn't getting what the teller was saying! You could tell the teller was getting impatient because she wasn't even listening to me...It was just such a mess...that day I'll never forget it. And because I don't understand the bank system, like I didn't even have my own bank account so I didn't know what a chequing or savings account was...that made it so much harder.

Here the youth reflect on the challenges of being in spaces of high authority where the personnel are not used to or trained in speaking with adolescents about issues that do not pertain to them. As noted above, participants had a hard time trying to convey to the personnel in these institutions about their role, to be taken seriously, and in some cases even being listened to. According to Orellana and Reynolds (2009), immigrant children are often placed at the intersections of particular adult spaces, where they are required to serve as both linguistic and cultural mediators. Certainly, the participants of this study can attest to being positioned in situations and spaces where they are not necessarily accustomed to; nevertheless, these youth still engage in the brokering to help their families.

Interestingly, it also appeared in the interviews that the negative perceptions of their role as cultural/language brokers for the participants was triggered by challenges during their early years in Canada as a child. However, the participants described that when they entered adolescence they become much more aware of the importance of their roles in their families, therefore, embracing their role as cultural/language brokers. Consider the following examples:

Sadaf: Yeah, like in the beginning because I was like younger and I didn't like it much because I felt like I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't like it, like I felt like I was being put on the spot, like I felt alone. You know... like I would say you know how come no one else is doing it? But then as I grew up, I noticed other people doing it for their parents as well, like mostly when I went to the doctors...I would see other guys and girls with their parents. Like in the beginning I wasn't even doing it properly, and now I take my time with it, like explaining everything to my parents because I see the importance of it for them. And you know, afterwards, I felt bad for my parents and realized that they needed my help.

Meelad: Honestly, I think parents asked for too much...in the beginning that's how I felt. At 21, it is now ok but when I was younger I felt that was too much...like tasks that can only be done when you have matured. Instead parents would involve their children in things, which I feel they need an adult broker for. Like now it's different because...um, I have responsibility to them, to fulfill their expectations.

Nargis: In the beginning I didn't like it, because I don't know what it was ...like if, maybe it was because I didn't understand. Or whatever the reason was, but in the beginning I didn't like it at all. I didn't want to be put in the spot of being able to tell my mom or dad...like translate and be the middleman...translating from one person to another. But as I grew up, I understood more...like my role, and it was easier to find words between the two languages because I could speak them fluently. When I say I understand...it's the fact that I could tell myself about my parents struggles and relate to them...and know what they are going through.

The descriptions above by the youth suggest that negative feelings associated with cultural/language broker were much more prevalent at a young age, particularly for those who migrated to Canada as children. Past studies have found that there have been negative correlations between cultural/language brokering and the effects on children

who perform these roles (DeMent & Buriel, 1999; Umana-Taylor, 2003). These studies report that children have negative feelings towards language brokering as it places them in stressful situations, which significantly affects their development (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002; Umana-Taylor, 2003). However, as the youth reflected when they “grew up” or “matured,” they embraced their role in a positive way, by perceiving themselves as important contributors to the settlement of their families. During their adolescence, the youth revealed positive experiences associated with cultural/language brokering. For participants who had arrived to Canada as adolescents, feelings of struggling with their role as cultural/language broker was not common. On the contrary, those participants who had recently arrived to Canada, as young adults were more inclined to report feelings of responsibility and understanding of their roles was more closely tied to their perception of familial obligations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences and positive reflections of Afghan youth as cultural/language brokers in the settlement of their families. The issues and themes that emerged from the interviews with the youth offer insight into the important roles that immigrant adolescents perform and the contributions that they make to their families' settlement.

To begin with, this study's findings are consistent with past studies, which suggest that females are more likely to act as cultural/language brokers for their families (Del Carpio, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999; Orellana et al., 2003). Although the sample size of this research was relatively smaller compared to those of other studies, nonetheless, five out of the nine participants were female. An interesting analysis that emerged from the findings of the study was the frequency of tasks related to cultural/language brokering, which were performed by females. In other words, female participants in this study recounted their experiences as cultural/language brokers outside of the home, often accompanying their parents to various institutions. The most common task performed by female participants was accompanying their parents to doctor's appointments. On the other hand, male respondents' tasks varied, but they were commonly performing duties within the home such as answering phone calls dealing with billing issues, and translating important documents. Moreover, male respondents who had sisters discussed the differences in tasks performed as cultural/language brokers, and again their stories suggested that females are more likely to be performing the role of a cultural/language broker. It is important to keep in mind that these are only preliminary insights, and further research on this phenomenon is necessary prior to making any conclusions.

More important is the finding of the correlation that exists between cultural/language brokering and familial responsibility. What is certain is that all participants perceived their role as a cultural/language broker to be a part of their familial obligation and responsibility. Past studies acknowledge that adolescents who act as cultural/language brokers view their roles as a part of their daily chores, and a normal activity in their life (Orellana & Dorner, 2008; Orellana, 2009). However, Orellana also points out the fact that cultural/language brokers are roles that are necessitated by the immigrant experience. This resonates in the findings of this study as all the participants were born outside of Canada and migrated either as children or as young adults. For many of the participants, their role as cultural/language brokers was seen as a 'duty', something which they had to do in order to help their families. This sense of responsibility was articulated significantly when the youth recounted their families' early struggles of settlement. Perhaps it can be said that because these youth were a witness to the various struggles of settlement, they were much more inclined to view their roles as a responsibility to help and protect their families. Indeed scholarly research confirms that children and adolescents who act as cultural/language brokers use their cultural/linguistic advantage to protect their families from "...embarrassment and humiliation" (Orellana et al., 2003; Valdes et al., 2002). Similarly, the participants in this study acknowledged their desire to continue helping their families, and even raising the question of who would help their parents, if not them?

It is also important to note that although it is widely accepted that young children act as cultural/language brokers during settlement; however, as the findings of this study and other studies suggest, acting as a cultural/language broker is continuous throughout

adolescence. Many of the participants in this study began their role as cultural/language brokers when they first arrived to Canada as children, and today all of them continue to a lesser extent in their roles. Del Carpio (2007) raises an important issue, making the argument that because the parents rely so extensively on the children to speak on behalf of them, that it hinders the parents' ability to learn the language and thus delays integration. This cannot be seen as conclusive, given that researchers have not explored it extensively.

With respect to the more general issue in the literature regarding the challenges adolescents face as cultural/language brokers, and the negative feelings that this causes, the data in this study suggests that there were particular challenges encountered by the youth such as understanding technical vocabulary in the two languages that they brokered in, as well as their brokering in various institutions such as legal offices, doctors, government offices, and schools. The youth in this study reported having difficulties comprehending certain terminologies either used by their parents in the first language or by personnel such as doctors, lawyers, or teachers. Other studies also found similar data whereby adolescents were often worried or nervous about whether or not they were translating/interpreting the right information because they had difficulty understanding certain matters (Del Carpio, 2007; Hedges, 2000). Moreover, participants had difficulty conveying their roles to personnel in institutions such as banks, government offices, legal offices, and at times even doctors. Perhaps the lack of serious response from personnel in these institutions intimidates the adolescents, placing additional pressure on them to be heard while acting as cultural/language brokers for their families. This assertion has some base in existing literature. For example, Orellana and Reynolds (2009) report that

children who broker for their families are positioned in certain spaces [such as government offices or at the bank] where their voices for others often reproduce “authoritative discourse”.

Afghan adolescents in this study generally reported positive feelings about their role as cultural/language brokers. Given their parents lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge during settlement, adolescents perceived their role as an important form of support and guidance for their families. The youth believed they were contributors in their families’ settlement, as they were able to use their position to access services and resolve many of their families’ issues. Significantly the findings also showed that positive reflections about their roles were closely associated to feelings of pride and accomplishment when they were successful in their brokering. In past studies, children reported feelings of pride when they were able to resolve an issue for their family (Dement & Buriel, 1999; Santiago, 2003; Tse, 1995; Walinchowski, 2001). Moreover, participants correlated their positive feelings with cultural/language brokering to the bilingual benefits that they received through this role. It is well known that children acquire language at a faster pace than adults, especially during settlement. Many of the youth reported losing their fluency in their first language; however, as they more frequently performed the role of a cultural/language broker, they were able to acquire knowledge of both languages. McQuillan and Tse (1995) found that language brokering increases the acquisition of first and second languages, and that it also expands the first language of the brokers. Similarly, the participants in this study note that their role as cultural/language brokers helped them to become more fluent in their first language, acquiring a more varied vocabulary and phrases that they were not familiar with before.

Generally speaking, the findings of this study illustrate the importance of acknowledging the role of adolescents in the settlement of their families. Moreover, additional research is required to cover the issues surrounding immigrant youth as cultural/language brokers. Many of the issues were touched on lightly in this study; however, a broader and more extensive study is required to address what this research was not able to do.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

What emerged from this preliminary exploration of Afghan adolescents' experiences as cultural/language brokers was a sense that despite the challenges encountered, the youth continued to view their role in a positive light and perceived themselves as contributors to their families' settlement. Immigrant adolescents' involvement as cultural/language brokers will continue to be an increasingly important issue in the discourse and practice of immigration and settlement in the future. It is well known that children are likely to acquire the cultural settings and language of a new country at a much faster pace than their parents. Thus, their assistance as cultural/language brokers becomes a necessity in the early years of settlement. Adolescents who act as cultural/language brokers are the bridge of communication between their families and the mainstream society.

Although this study was focused exclusively on Afghan youth as cultural/language brokers, the findings raised a few issues on this underdeveloped and overlooked area in immigration and settlement. To begin, Afghan adolescents act as cultural/language brokers throughout their childhood and into their adolescence, given that their families migrate to Canada from non-English/non-French speaking countries. Therefore, acting as cultural/language brokers is necessary given their immigrant experience. With that being said, it is very important to recognize the role of immigrant children as cultural/language brokers, and their presence should be accepted as legitimate source of assistance for their families. However, the difficulties encountered by this group of adolescents are found with other groups of youth as addressed by past studies. It is thus of great importance for service providers, school boards, researchers,

governments, and various institutions such as the medical profession, legal offices, and banks to not only be aware of this phenomenon by acknowledging the role of immigrant adolescents as brokers for their families and if applicable, provide services so these adolescents do not have to be placed in inappropriate spaces. Below is a list of recommendations on what roles institutions such as school boards, governments, and researchers can play with regards to the issue of immigrant adolescents as cultural/language brokers. It is important to keep in mind that these recommendations are to be seen as in line with the perception of Canada as a welcoming home for newcomers who require various services to orient immigrant families to the new culture, language, and society. Therefore, Canada has a responsibility to ensure that immigrants are provided with these services, including linguistic assistance to meet the standards set by its intention to welcome newcomers.

Researchers

The generalizability of this study's current findings is constrained by the relatively small scale and specific scope of the paper. However, future research is required in this field to address the role of other immigrant youth who also act in the role of cultural/language broker for their families. Moreover, further studies are required to address the Canadian experience of children and youth as cultural/language brokers, given that the majority of the past studies are international; therefore, comparisons can vary. An area that requires further research would be looking at the perspectives of the parents who rely on their children as translators and interpreters. How do they feel about the role their children play? Do they believe their children are contributors to their families' settlement?

Government Institutions

As one participant pointed out towards the end of the interview,

It would be great if they could have certain resources provided for them in their mother language...this should something provided by the government more often as this is a country of diversity. This should be addressed because not all children help or are able to help the way I have been able to... this can create difficulties.

Although there are certain services provided which offer translators and interpreters, nonetheless, access to such is limited. Newly arrived immigrant families require linguistic support to access services, particularly orientation services, tools which are necessary for settlement and integration. As the youth point out there are families whose children are not able to act as cultural/language brokers; therefore, another means should be available.

School Boards

The majority of the participants in this study reported to have brokered within school settings or about school-related information. To help alleviate the responsibility of children and adolescents or misinformed parents, school boards should provide services that will address school-related issues to newly arrived immigrant families. A first step would be to send forms or important letters in the first languages of the newly arrived students' families. Although this may not be viewed as realistic, given the diversity of newcomers, nonetheless, school administration can work with school settlement workers to find a student or family to pair with the newly arrived immigrant family.

Other institutions (Doctors, legal clinics, banks, etc)

To avoid placing children and young adults in situations which may both intimidate them as well as be the source of confusion or deep embarrassment, given the content of what they have to translate or interpret, it is important for institutions such as

the bank, legal clinics, and doctors' offices to provide necessary interpreters or translators. Moreover, in minor matters where adolescents are merely transmitting information that may not be of great importance, personnel within these institutions should acknowledge the presence of the cultural/language broker, rather than dismiss him or her or exhibit impatience, as this will be counterproductive for both the families and the institutions.

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