Caught in the Crosshairs: Pinpointing Child Language Brokering Across Ages A Theoretical Approach

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Abstract

Children can become "wards of the state"; however, how should one then view the parents and peers who rely on children to serve as their personal interpreters in vast arrays of situations? Could such persons be "wards of interpreter children"? Or, more accurately, do these children become "child language brokers", as they are more commonly referred to Translation Studies? Child language brokers willingly and inadvertently step in as linguistic intermediaries across a sundry assortment of situations and environments. This begs the questions: (1) are all child language brokers equally proficient in thier interpreting tasks? (2) Is there an ideal age group that should be targeted for early exposure to interpreting training? This paper explores the phenomenon of child language brokering beyond the cultural lens by proposing theoretical frameworks for investigation. It also argues for recognizing interpreting ability as an indicator of multilingual talent and competence. The proposed investigations are grounded in a Translation Studies-approach and will employ methods such as Think Aloud Protocols (TAP), interviews, and interpretation "tasks" to assess the potential for interpreting or translation competency. Further, this paper also compliments research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), demonstrating that an interdisciplinary relationship between Translation Studies and SLA could indeed be mutually meritorious.

Keywords; Bilingualism; Child Language Brokering; Interpreting; Language acquisition; Translation Studies.

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1. Introduction

Interpreting is practiced by individuals from diverse backgrounds around the world, enabling cross-cultural and linguistic contact. While some would assume that interpreting is a strictly professional domain requiring years of formal study and training, this view is overly monolithic and overlooks a quite rich, versatile, and complex practice.

Interestingly, interpreting is not limited by age or professional status, which is why we contend—both hypothetically and practically—that interpreting at will can be performed by any bilingual individual, regardless of proof of age or credentials. This means that countless children worldwide engage in (interlingual) interpreting activities daily. Sarah Crafter notes that "in 1977 Brian Harris first drew attention to the fact that translating and interpreting was not undertaken only by professionals but was also part of a bilingual's world. He discussed the case of a three-year-old in Canada with a French-speaking father and English-speaking mother, who translated sentences from one language to another" (Crafter 2020).

Harris (1974) refers to interpreting performed by children as "natural translating," stating, "let us call what untrained translators [be it adult or adolescent] do 'natural translation'(NT)" (p. 1). We find the term "natural" particularly fitting here because it reinforces the idea that translation is a natural, even integral part of the bilingual experience. We would extend the concept of "natural translating" to include "multilingual individuals" who are engaging in interpreting tasks either purposefully or in response to situational demands.

The term "child language brokering" has become an in-vogue term within the last couple of decades within the academic discourse (Crafter 2020). Even a special 2010 edition of the journal mediAzioni (titled "Child Language Brokering: Trends and Patterns in Current Research") was dedicated to this area of study. Accordingly, this article adopts the term "child language brokering" or simply "interpreting" to refer to the phenomenon of language interpreting performed by children. Worthy of note is that the term "child", as it is used here, is to be understood from a Western cultural perspective where "children" are generally considered to be persons under the age of eighteen. For the purposes of this paper, however, we primarily focus on children between the ages of eight and twelve, as this developmental stage often marks the beginning of their language brokering activities—since it is during this period that children's social and language competencies begin to emerge (Antonini, 2016; Morales and Hanson, 2005; Tse, 1995; 1996).

Child language brokering occurs in a multitude of settings, though the primary participants are typically parents and their children. Children may be called upon to interpret in hospital rooms, parent-teacher conferences, government offices, or even police stations. In such contexts, the responsibility to interpret may be imposed by parents or setting-specific agents who rely on the child to mediate messages between themselves and the parent(s)/guardian(s). However, it would be reductive to view child language brokers solely as victims of adult expectations; in many cases, children may take the initiative to act as interpreters or liaisons, driven by the desire to assist their parents or family members in navigating complex systems. Even in situations where professional interpreters (who are not children) are present, children may also intercede if they feel that the designated interpreter is interpreting in either a biased or inaccurate fashion.

A plethora of factors can either catalyze or hinder a child language broker's ability to interpret. When a child enters a new country with their family as immigrants, their brokering experience will be inlfuenced by the area that they enter into, the age of the child, and the degree of pre-exposure to the region's language. Bucaria and Rossato (2010), who interviewed child language

brokers from various countries living in Italy, hypothesize that "time of their arrival in Italy and whether they had attended school in this country might have had an impact on the amount of brokering they performed for their families" (p. 247). Their study also revealed a mixture of different views and emotions from the participants about child language brokering, ranging from indifferent docility to a kind of alienation of the parents. One participant, for example, "urged her parents to learn some Italian, so they could become more independent." (p. 257). This example leads to the conversation of child language brokering becoming a precursor to the phenomenon of parentification. The latter occurs when children assume responsibilities that impact their parent's well-being and begin to play a decision-making role within the household. In the context of language brokering, children can feel that they must become linguistic safeguards for their parents, and they come to see their parents as passive subjects in need of representation—subverting traditional guardian and provider roles of parenthood. The region that the child language broker finds themselves in can feel like a battleground, wherein they can not necessarily find full comfortability but are also disconnected from their place of origin and/or the parents' place of origin. Moreover, Guske (2010)'s findings also indicate parentification in child language brokering since "...the line between mediating for parents and acting as decision-makers became blurred…" (p. 334). Although children may grasp the gravity of their role—by feeling as though they are stepping into a parental role, their efforts are not always acknowledged: parents may perceive their child's language brokering rather indifferently, as a natural, even obligatory extension of filial duty. Parents may express animosity towards children who object to being used as language conduits. As Garcia- Sánchez (2010) observes in a cultural study of a Moroccan community, "rather than a reversal of family and generational hierarchy and power, Moroccan parents would complain if, after being asked, children refused to translate" (p. 202).

Regardless of the social and cultural implications of child language brokering, this phenomenon should—rightly—be of great interest to translation scholars and can serve as a bridge into the research field of SLA. Translation Studies scholars should be a part of the ongoing research investigations and conversations on bilingual language acquisition, as their linguistic aptitude is an indisputable asset to that field. Having theoretical linguistic knowledge is of course auspicious in such research; however, applied linguistic expertise and evlaulative approaches msut also be incorporated to ensure bilingual language acquisition research is more well-rounded. Importantly, the field of SLA is not the exclusive domian of any one discipline. Rather, it intersects with areas childhood education, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, translation studies, among others. Our primary interest is not so much the cultural and family ramifications of child language brokering, but the potential to prime translation and interpreting skill. Our proposed research experimentation will integrate perspectives from child language acquisition to explore this potential.

2. Child Broker Priming and Language Acquisition

We must take a step back and examine the broader picture that children possess inherent capabilities and often-unseen potential early within their development. It is astounding that children—as young as age three, as previously referenced—can develop the linguistic cognitive skills required to interpret between two languages and understand equivalent concepts, at least in a considerably elementary way. This type of ability is only possible at such an early age if the child is exposed to what Swain (1972 as cited in Diaz 2014: p. 1) referred to as "bilingualism as a first language". This simply means that the child has been exposed to two languages from the very beginning of their development, regardless of where they are exposed. Of course, the degree of dual

language exposure can vary greatly depending on the environments in which children engage, and it is extremely difficult to fully verify whether parents are consistently using their native languages with the child in equal measure. Assuming a traditional nuclear family unit with two parents in the household, several scenarios may possibly arise (though countless variations are plausible), as follows:

Scenario 1: The parents use Language A to communicate with each other but use Languages B and C with the child. This situation may occur when the parents' mother languages do not match up, though they may not necessarily be from different countries. Surprisingly, in largely diverse, densely-populated areas of the United States, it is not so uncommon for individuals to be raised in communities where English is not the primary language such as in New York where one might grow up in a Hasidic Jewish or Latino community, speaking Yiddish or Spanish as a first language. In such cases, children may be exposed to dialectical variations shaped by regional influences rather than the standardized forms regulated by the governments of the countries where the language is the primary language (i.e. Floridian Spanish vs. Mexican Spanish vs. Spain Spanish).

Scenario 2: Both the parents and children use Language B at home, but use Language A in public settings, it being the dominant language of the area in which they live.

Scenario 3: The child uses Language A with one parent and their peers, but Language B with the other parent.

From an SLA lens, one might assume the "Scenario 2" exemplifies the most immersive environment for the child to acquire a second language and its culture. However, the reality is that language development depends on not just exposure but the nature of the interaction—i.e., how communicative the parents are and whether the forms of communication that they are having with the child are either one-sided or a back-and-forth style. Sadly, heritage speakers often grow up understanding their parents' language but may not actively speak it—a pattern that warrants further emperical study to determine its generalizability). To illustrate the phenomenon with a culturally reflective example from American television, take, for instance, the show *Orange is the New Black* where the character Dayanara Diaz can understand Spanish but not speak it. The same can also be found in *Jane the Virgin*, where Jane can fully understand Spanish but rarely uses it, despite her grandmother exclusively addressing her in Spanish. These examples mirror the lived experiences of many multilingual American children, whose comfort, exposure, and proficiency in each language vary widely. All in all, any of those three scenarios may result in children becoming proficient in listening and speaking in two or even three languages (See Antonini 2016 for further scenarios that child language brokers may find themselves in).

Nevertheless, "in terms of proficiency in learning two languages, equal proficiency in both the native and second language is relatively uncommon" (Wallner 2016, 2). A reductionist interpretation of this claim might suggest that children's interpreting abilities are inherently questionable. However, we contend that this argument conflates the requirements of interpreting, which should not be viewed as a task that requires full, balanced proficiency or complete vocabulary equivalence in both languages. Rather, interpretation can occur as soon as a thought, action, or command is conveyed from one language into another. For example, a child attending a banquet

might still refer to it as a "party", associating the event with food and gathering of people among other familiar elements. This illustrates the cognitive strategies children use to understand, explain, process, conceptualize and relay complex scenarios in eloquent speech. Consequently, we hypothesize that equal proficiency in both the native and second language is not a prerequisite for child language brokering—which, of course, warrants further empirical investigation.

In a notable study of bilingnual language development, Volterra and Taescher (1977) documented the language ability progression of "two sisters (Lisa and Guiulia) living in Rome, who had been exposed to two languages since birth; their father always spoke Italian to them while their mother spoke only German" (Volterra and Taescher 1977, p. 312). This familial setup corresponds to what we previously identified as "Scenario 3". Volterra and Taescher's obersvations led to a three-stage model of bilingual language development; they noted that "a word in one language almost always does not have a corresponding word with the same meaning in the other language" (ibid), which led to sentences that had "words from both languages" (ibid.). Their findings indicate that, at early stages, children may intially lack the cognitive organization to differentiate and compartmentalize vocabulary into distinct linguistic systems. While this idea is not necessarily novel, it is properly reinforced by the study. Yet, the question remains about whether the sample size was sufficient, and whether other children of the same ages as the experiment subjects can deposit words that they learn into the proper mental storehouses in their first stage of the "gradual learning process" (Volterra and Taescher, 1977, p. 312). One particulary salient observation from the study is the role of syntax for it is indicative of influences from either the L1 or L2 language. In the first two phases of language development, Lisa employed "two lexicons but one and only one syntax" (Volterra and Taescher 1977, p. 324), suggesting that syntactic structure may be more resistant to the change and more refelective of the dominant or more familiar language. Such findings are relevant to the child language brokering phenomenon, which similarly involves inter interlanguage interference, which is "particularly observed when the child is put into a situation of conflict" (Volterra and Taescher 1977, p. 324). As an internal communication defense mechanism or strategy, Lisa also "must try to keep the two languages separate as far as possible" (Volterra and Taescher 1977, p. 325). Although this strategy is cited as evidence of bilingualism or active purposeful bilingualism, it is paramount to acknowledge that bilingual children and their communicative partners (be that their parents or peers) will often intermix languages due to natural interference. These behaviors, we argue, should not be interpreted as diminishing the child's bilingual status to that of a monolingual or that of a "subpar bilingual" individual. Lindholm and Padilla, in their (1977) paper *Language mixing in bilingual children*,' explore language mixing amongst bilingual children further and emphasize that "it is evident that mixing occurs predominantly at the lexical level" (Lindhom and Padilla 1977, 329).

We do not wish to imply that bilingual or multilingual children are inherently superior to monolingual children. Rather, we aim to present data that reflect an ever-diversifying global reality. Multilingualism is not only a byproduct or a side effect of globalization, migration, mutual partnership, or collaboration between countries; it is a longstanding feature of human society. in the context of Native American tribes who have always spoken different languages on the North American land, multilingual capabilities may be seen as a kind of a birthright. It is therefore lamentable when children are only raised monolingually in contexts where exposure to multiple languages is possible and beneficial.

3. Research Potentiality and Research Question

It is the best foundation for conducting research into child language brokering to focus upon one specific culture, language, and region. However, one of our sub-questions will relate to language pairs, which needs to be more of a focal point within interpreting research in general, because not all language pairs are equal in terms of transferability, ease, or even in speech output. Our principal research question would be as follows:

Principal Question: *"At what stage of human development (or age) does a bilingual child become able and adept in the child language brokering practice (interpreting)?"*
>
> Sub-question A: Does language pair hasten or delay acquisition of this ability?
>
> Sub-question B: Are bilingual children translating speech and text actively whether it is intentional or not?
>
> Sub-question C: Does a specific gender possess a predisposition towards language brokering capabilities?

As remuneration for establishing the general stage of development that is most opportune or ripe for child language brokering to take place, researchers will be able to affirm an ideal starting age to introduce translation and interpreting activities in language learning environments. The following sections will disclose our proposal for a theoretical experiment to investigate research questions such as the ones previously stated.

4. Exploratory Methodologies

We postulate that variance in language knowledge and usability amongst bilingual children is influenced by their degree of language exposure, frequency of use, and the depth of their interconnectedness to the culture of their languages. Cultural context knowledge factors into this because "culture is related to pragmatics. The people involved in the conversation need to be aware of the rules of society so they can understand when and how it is acceptable to interact with and speak with others" (Wallner, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, it is not sufficient to merely observe how a child language broker utilizes the languages they are proficient in. Researchers should also interview the child to see if they have been exposed to minor or major cultural material or tradition. In the case of an American child, for example, the researcher could ask if the child knows lullabies or nursery rhymes such as "If You're Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands", patriotic anthems and songs such as "The Star-Spangled Banner" or "This Land is Our Land". Follow-up questions could explore whether the child knows equivalent lullabies in their other languages. The frequency and depth of cultural exposure should be considered in the overall duration period of second or first language exposure in order for full fluency to be achieved. The more the child understands cultural context, the more the child would be able to understand idioms and other forms of figurative speech, which in turn may result in their being able to produce richer interpretations during the child's language brokering event.

For our proposed study, we recommend a three-phase experiment approach to collect the necessary data and information to address the research questions at hand. This design is inspired by Volterra and Taescher 1977, whose observations and data were collected through mid-range techniques (such as through audio recording transcription and behavior observation analysis).

However, we propose a more interactive approach for future research, one that involves directly dealing with the children participants to test their bilingual abilities and interpreting skills, which will be discussed further. Even if the participants terminate their progression, data revealing trends in second language exposure and second language utilization will be extracted.

4.1 Location

This research could hypothetically be conducted in any multilingual community. However, to ensure a robust and reliable sample of bilingual or multilingual children, it would be most efefctive to recruit participants through the public school system. Schools with a high percentage of bilingual students, particularly those who speak Arabic or Spanish, would offer ideal conditions for participant selection. Arabic and Spanish are particularly mentioned because of their growing prevalence within American public-schools. The National Center for Education Statistics reported the following regarding the number of English learner students recently in May of 2023: "Spanish was the most commonly reported home language of EL [English Learners] public school students in fall 2020 (3.7 million students), representing 75.5 percent of all ELs and 7.8 percent of all public-school students. Arabic was the second most commonly reported home language (128,600 students)" ("English Learners in Public Schools"). Thus, selecting a city with a higher density of EL students would be appropriate for the aims of this investigation. A possible candidate location could be the Dearborn school districts in Wayne County, Michigan. According to recent US Census Bureau data, it appears that "for the first time, people of Middle Eastern or North African ancestry make up the majority of Dearborn's population, 54.5%." (Jones 2023). This is indicative of the presence of numerous bilingual children in this area.

4.2 Participants

The study would involve groups across mutiple age ranges and grade levels within the public school system. A proposed distribution might include fifty 1st-3rd graders, fifty 6th-8th graders, and fifty 9th-11th graders. This stratified sampling would represent students at different development phases throughout their lives who also have disparate cognitive and motor skills. Because of the bilingual proficiency in the participants' understanding and production skills through the auditory mode, the investigation would be able to recruit children who have not fully mastered how to read. In striving for inclusivity and balance, this study aims to achieve gender diversity across three self-identified categories: "female", "male", and "gender-nonconforming". To do so, participants would be asked to self-identify their gender, and the "gender-nonconforming" category would include non-binary, transgender, gender fluid, etc. This inclusive approach also demonstrates that "the rising visibility of nonbinary and transgender people reflects the nation's growing acceptance of gender fluidity, especially among the young" (deVisè 2023). Taking gender into consideration could also yeild valuable insights into whether and how gender identity may influence bilingual language acquisition and use. Of course, cultural considerations will be taken into account when determining the appropriateness of demographic categories based on the location of the study.

4.3 Phases
4.3.1. Phase 1

"Phase 1" includes participant recruitment and screening, contingent upon both parental consent and school district approval. The investigators will conduct a pre-interview with each child before administering any interpreting activities with them. We need to stress our usage of the word "activities" here: the purpose of this research project is not to bombard the participants with

interpreting tests and evaluations, but rather to gently encourage them to reveal their linguistic capabilities through alternative tasks (more will be explained in "Phase 2"). The initial interview would consist of both an in-person oral interview and a brief, age-appropriate survey. For younger participants who cannot yet read, images may be substituted for text to ensure proper representation and accessibility. Walter Parker said (of interviewing children) that "properly managed, it can be a sensitive and revealing tool in building our understanding of children; recklessly managed, it contributes to the collection of spurious labels in which too many school children are already confined" (1984, p. 18). The pre-screening interviews would iterate questions about the child's language exposure, language utilization, and comfortability with the languages they know (i.e. Spanish and English). The following are sample questions that would be good indicators of the three aforementioned aspects:

- ❖ Who do you use the language with? Do you use that language more with one parent?
- ❖ Where do you use the language (perhaps the child may only use the language at their religious institution etc. and not in the home. They may use it in other homes of friends and family)?
- ❖ What T.V. shows do you watch? What language do you watch it in? How often?
- ❖ Do you listen more to one language or speak more in one language (this question would reveal if the child is more of a consumer of a language rather than an active user of the language)?

These questions would of course have to be tailored to suit a particpant's register and developmental level. When feasible, parental interviews may also be conducted to corroborate or supplement the child particpant's answers, though this may expand the scope of the study.

"Phase 1" will establish the child's awareness and functional understanding of their primary and secondary languages. Acceptance of a second language is not automatic; children who have no to limited exposure to multicultural environments may be resistant to new languages or even dimiss them as an advantageous communication code. An initial interview with the suggested questions will help identify the age at which children were introduced to the second language, when full understanding was achieved or apparent, and when the child was able to use the language as a tool to receive food, attention, affection, or even as a tool for survival. Additionally, investigators will be able to learn who the child's primary language partners were/are in their second language—an inisght that might generate further sub-questions about family dynamics, roles, and how the second language is deliberately used and intersects with those dynamics.

4.3.2 Phase 2

"Phase 2" involves engaging children particpants with light—and hopefully stimulating—interpreting activities designed to assess their ability to transfer content between their two languages. A sample experiment might involve playing a short clip from a children's television show followed by questions like, "what did they say?" or "what are the characters doing/up to?". This setup introduces a form of consecutive interpreting with minimal lag time as the children will have just seconds of pause time between information intake (character's dialogue) and questioning from the experiment investigator(s). This approach could be less intimidating to the than direct requests for to simultaneous verbatim interpreting, though this type of task could also be inroduced optionally. To assess linguistic transfer and comprehension more concretely, investigators could ask the child to do a simple task in both languages to see what kind of response they give. It will then become clear if a significant difference exists in response time or understanding of the command. To determine if a

child is ready to advance to the third phase, the investigator could introduce a brief sight translation task (to have the child interpret a short script of a scene from an age-appropriate movie that is read aloud by the investigator). To meliorate the study, a third person who can speak the child's L1 or L2 could act as a mock client, giving participants a real interlocutor to interpret for. Another possible activity for "Phase 2" could be to have the participant listen to phrases said in both languages and then press a button or initiate some kind of signal when they believe that the phrases no longer align in meaning (essentially identifying mistranslation or misinterpretation). Phase 2 can also incorporate think-aloud protocols (TAP); during interpreting activities, a child could be prompted to reflect on their feelings. This data provides valuable insight into the participant's emotional engagement with the task and their perception of interpreting as a communicative act. Likewise, the participant can also be asked about which parts of the dialogue are particularly difficult to interpret.

4.3.3 Phase 3

The final phase would involve mock interpreting sessions in whcih participants serve as the interpreters between two persons (i.e. an investigator and a volunteer who speaks the "opposing language/target language"). The topic would vary in theme and difficulty so as to determine the elasticity of the children's bilingual capabilities and interpreting talent. Duration manipulation would also be warranted in order to simulate actual spontaneity in real-life scenarios. While child language brokers are assuredly never given breaks during their interpretative tasks, the participants would be allowed breaks between mock interpreting sessions. It may be conducive to have one group of participants receive no break so as to see the differences in interpreting. Still, there are many different parameters that can be strategically altered in order to make the experiment stimulate the varying dynamics involved with the practice of interpreting (speed, vernacular difficulty, cue, understanding, etc.). Participants would primarily be asked to perform consecutive interpreting, though simultaneous interpreting may be performed if there are willing participants.

This phase's purpose is to establish trends in interpreting ability as well as the level, accuracy and speed exhibited by the participants. It would also reveal degrees of affinity and acceptance towards interpreting. We posit that a noticeable percentage of the participants may not proceed to this phase: some may experience stage fright, anxiety, or pressure to perform, leading to withdarwal from the study either before or during the final stage. Using purposeful unvestigative questioning, "Phase 3" is also an opportunity to explore cultural understanding and applicability amongst participants. Experiment investigators can ask participants follow-up questions such as: "why did you choose certain words?" or "did that phrase have any cultural importance or relevance?" Moreover, the participants' behavior during the interpreting tasks may strongly vary depending on the participants' cultural traditions. In other words, the cultural traditions and expectations may have conditioned the participant to act differently with other interlocutors' age or gender. Cultural knowledge may be more pronounced and may also be more of an interference in the interpreting task (versus adults who perform interpretative tasks).

4.4 Variables

Translation Studies scholars are aware of the countless variables at play within the child language brokering phenomena, and we acknowledge that children will have differing levels of skill and talent before participating in the experiment. However, we encourage investigators to observe unexpected displays of interpreting proficiency as some participants' interpreting may improve over

the phases of the study. While it is ideal for all of the participants to complete all the phases, we recognize potential limitations. Participants' moods and feelings towards interpreting may fluctuate as they progress through the phases. Therefore, we propose that participation in all three phases should not be mandatory and that an adaptive approach may be appropriate. Is this flexibility not already unconsciously a part of any empirical investigation—especially when working with young participants? While the data obtained from participants who complete all three phases of the experiment will be invaluable, the data from those who only complete one or two of the phases will also contribute meaningfully to the study's conclusions. Below is a list of potential key variables to conisder:

❖ Age of Language Exposure
❖ Interpreting Mode (Consecutive or Simultaneous)
❖ Percentage of Language Utilization in Daily Life
❖ Gender
❖ Deverbalization Proficiency
❖ Language Pair

A possible seventh variable may be "Socioeconomic Status", though including this may cause turbulence in the study. We wish to avoid making participants feel uncomfortable by probing into such a sensitive topic. Further elaboration is warranted for the first variable ("Age of Language Exposure"). This includes the age at which participants learned or were consistently—for these purposes meaning daily—exposed to the languages. It also extends to the age and time period (the country's era) when the participants entered a country that had a primary language different from their mother tongue.

5. Expected Findings

Investigators should not fall prey to the age-old belief that early language exposure propels language fluency and utility in a manner that later age learning cannot compete with, but the results of such a study may indeed corroborate such a common belief. "In part, age owes its special status to its role as a 'macro-variable': like other ID [individual differences] variables, age has a way of interacting with external variables, thus creating a joint impact on the outcome variable" (Pfenninger and Singleton, 2021, p. 53). In the context of our proposed investigation, age could emerge as a leading factor inluencing the interpreting event. However, there is hope for a different variable to steal the spotlight. In Pfenninger and Singleton's pleasantly shocking (in terms of myth-busting) chapter within *Debates in Second Language Education* (2021), they argue "that age as a predictor of L2 learning outcomes is not the silver bullet it was formerly deemed to be" (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2021, 54). These researchers also pointed out an interesting finding from a prior study done by Pfenninger in 2020 and 2021 (where they investigated elementary-aged children learning a second language) in which showed that "the L2 [second language] development rate was fastest towards the end of primary school for all participants…" (Pfenninger & Singleton 2021, 59). This signifies that even the middle school or high school-aged participants may outperform their elementary-aged counterparts in the three-phase experimentation. Thus, each age group established by developmental stages could present common trends amongst interpreting capabilities. The findings of the theorized investigation may inform investigators about which stage of human develop do children begin to exhibit interpreting proficiency in addition to providing answers to the before mentioned research

question. We believe the findings will help in at least tipping the scales of uncertainty into a more generalizable assertion into interpreting skill acquisition.

6. Discussion

Debating the morality and ethics of whether children *should* interpret is almost futile given the relaity that children are regularly interpreting between other interlocutors tin their daily lives. No researcher or translation/language instructor is arguing for the creation of what could be perceived as a "language sweat-shop" where children are forced to serve as interpreters and translators because of their advantageous positions as heritage or bilingual speakers. The phases analysis described in (4.3.1-4.3.3) offers a pathway for identifying when interpreting ability, which is an extension of child oral communication, manifests amongst children. Including children in this study is justified and ethical because language and communication originate during childhood development. Testing cildren solely through written translation (as a means to reduce participant "un-comfortability") is not methodologically sufficient enough to establish a consistent understanding as children learn how to read and write at different stages in their development. Their writing ability may not reflect their actual oral communication ability. Superior skill in either speaking or writing ability is foreseeable.

Effectually, this research would take place within public schools, a fascinating terrain, filled with copious dynamics to be researched. In well-funded, resource-rich schools, there are hired professional interpreters who serve as both cultural liaisons and cultural transitions for new students. Ideally, this would be the case; however, it is also both common knowledge and a terribly kept secret that plenty of public schools across the United States face significant and overwhelming funding plights, causing them to rely on their multilingual students to act as informal interpreters.

In many school districts, a substantial percentage of students are ESL (English as a second language) students, whether recent immigrants or children that were raised in homes where a language other than English (LOTE) is spoken. What would be a good way to initiate immersion with the students of foreign language backgrounds? One common method is the traditional educational approaches towards ESL students or immigrant students such as the "…'integrative model' according to which they [students] are left in their ordinary class" (Bullock and Harris 1997: 4).Unfortunately, this approach may not be fruitful for a myriad of reasons, including how it can inadvertently alienate children, prompting them to decrease their native language usage by replacing it with the primary language of the community as a passive form of defeat or surrender.

Conversely, when the child may find themselves amongst others who speak their native language or come from the same background, they might choose to use the language of the group as the primary source of communication. Reverting to English may result in their dismissal from the friend group that is connected to their own culture. Bullock & Harris (1997) describe, in detail, the approach that Carolyn Bullock took with her school community, which was inspired by the work of another ESL teacher named Mary Meyers. Bullock "founded a group of immigrant children to welcome newcomers and help them out in the classroom, and she called her group 'Ambassadors'" (Bullock and Harris, 1997, 3). These children would go on to perform interpretative duties in and out of the classroom for their new child comrades. Who is to dispute that such communal advocacy and interaction is not a direct form of community interpreting? Would such a naysayer claim it be because their ages were twelve and not sixty-two? Age and job title do not validate whether language mediation is considered interpreting or not.

Interpretative talent ends up being noticed by the children's peers, and "one positive aspect was that students who were not shining academically were still able to gain recognition for their

language abilities" (Bullock and Harris 1997: 4). Here, interpreting serves not only as a mode for mediation, but also as a vessel of visibility. Children may be impressed when their fellow classmates can suddenly code switch at the drop of a hat, which most likely seems more like a superpower to them rather than an innate skill (to which Harris & Sherwood 1978 asserts and expands upon). They state, "if all bilinguals, even nascent ones, can translate, and since the onset of bilingualism often occurs in infancy, we ought, so our postulate predicts, to find young children translating" (Harris and Sherwood, 1978, p. 1). In accordance with the Harris & Sherwood paper, we hypothesize that all bilinguals have some form of translating capability, even if it is no more than that of a mustard seed.

It is also noteworthy that the composition of the population of the ambassadors mentioned earlier featured a roughly equal distribution of boys and girls, described as "approximately equal" (Bullock and Harris 1997, 4). In primary or elementary school settings, children may naturally separate themselves by gender, though of course there are many students who do not subscribe to this pattern. having a balanced gender representation in such support initiatives may have fostered greater comfort among participants and helped mitigate gender dominance (i.e. girls having to communicate solely through boys who could possibly manipulate speech or vice versa).

perhaps even more stirking is the age of the youngest ambassadors who were first graders, typically 6–7-years old in Canada (where this study took place). These ages align with the early stages of language brokering identified in Section 1 of this study. While interpreting is often abstracted and defined in grandiose ways, it may be seen through this real-life example of child interpreting that even the most innocent and youthfully naive person can serve as an interpreter. To be clear, we are not suggesting that these children are candidates for high-stakes diploamtic interpretaion such as at the United Nations. Importantly, the parents of the "Ambassadors" were "proud of their children's participation and have been known to insist on it" (Bullock & Harris 1996, 4). These positive sentiments resonate with a parental expectation of duty and cultural representation upon the children of which García-Sánchez 2010 underscores in their research. Not only did Moroccan parents expect their children to translate for them, but Latino parents "encourage and expect their contributions as normal and as critical to their children's moral, social, and civic development" (García-Sánchez, 2010, p. 187).

Nonetheless, our intention in highlight in narratives is not to invalidate the tumultuous experiences of child language brokers who felt overburdened and unfairly pressed to perform interpreting duties by highlighting the honor and privilege expressed by family and community members towards the child language brokers serving in their communities. Time after time, children have been placed in unfair positions where what was at stake should not have been left to a child. Child brokering can also impose stress upon children as reported by Crafter and Iqbal 2020. They report that "a number of brokers talked about situations that grew stressful because the adults were talking over each other and not giving space or time for the brokering to occur easily" (Crafter and Iqbal, 2020, p. 38). Nothing is without its faults and tribulations, and child language brokering is no exception to this universal law. Such children should be commended for their service to community interpreting as the "Ambassadors" when "they were the guests of honour at the annual convention of the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario in 1993" (Bullock & Harris, 1997, p. 4).

7. Limitations

One foreseeable limitation is the potential difficulty in recruiting sufficient numbers of child participants who share same language pair. This issue may be overcome by targeting popultaions with the highest concentrations of bilingual speakers within a given geographic territory. while public schools remain a logical starting point for participant recruitment, other terrains such as religious institutions (i.e. Catholic parishes or Islamic mosques) should be considered. These institutions may be spaces for children where multilingual usage is expected and respected by members. Yet, the setting of participation matters. In certain environments, children may hesitate to exhibit their multilingual and cultural identities out of fear of their peers' responses. Another potential challenge is that the findings may not be generalizable and only specific to set language pairs and culture pairs, though this may also be seen as more interesting for researchers. It is important to stress that this theoretical paper is an exploratory proposal that seeks to investigate the early manifestations of bilingualism through interpreting skill auditing. A child's language proficiency and ability should not be accepted at face value based solely upon the child's self-declared level or their involvement in multilingual spaces (familial, religious, educational etc.). While those spaces are the settings for bilingual development, the true test of their actual proficiency in language application must include interpreting activities. The proposed methodologies have not been conducted but have been generated from the prior multilingual investigative research efforts that used child participants. An additional obstacle may be that children are more impressionable and spontaneous than adults, which could complicate the investigation. They may feel they are before an intimidating inquisition. We acknowledge these challenges, but the proposed methodologies pose little risks, and the risk of self-confidence reduction is mendable. Who is to say that the participation will not lead to a newfound excitement and intrigue throughout the participants? The participants may enjoy the challenge and attention it brings to their linguistic talents.

8. Benefits

Findings from the proposed research may be of great intrigue to different interest groups. Prospective colleges and universities can model parts of the experiments to test the variance in ability amongst their applications. They can also tailor their language courses or create advanced translation or interpreting courses. Early learning centers such as public schools or tutoring services can begin to engage in more interpreting and translation activities with young learners if they know that they are up for the task and that it stimulates their learning. In addition, if multilingual usage and interpreting were to be encouraged more throughout the phases of early development, it would aid in decreasing discrimination and resentment (be it external or internal) against multilingual persons.

9. Conclusion

The debate regarding the very nature of child language brokering as being "good" or "bad" is a heated one consisting of players on all different spectrums. Some may think that the phenomenon harms the children's relational upbringing with their family or even cuts their childhood short due to increased parental reliance upon the child. Others believe that it is a normative practice to be justifiably expected. Then, there is a third group of those who believe that the phenomenon is particularly worthy of further research and investigation because of the phenomena's connections to

various different disciplines of knowledge mentioned previously. The authors of this paper are seated in the bleachers amongst this throng of believers.

Janna Degener 2010 writes that "not only is child language brokering judged to be a very problematic phenomenon by German and English-speaking scientists, but also by many of my adult subjects. A recurrent argument for criticism is that the translation and interpreting provided by untrained children and youth may be incorrect" (p. 353). We do not agree with the notion that child

brokering is inherently "problematic". Also, in discussions of translation and interpreting, "mistranslation " is a word equivalent to the "boogeyman" or "Voldemort". Translation students and scholars tend to invoke it conveniently to support their arguments. In many cases, mistranslation can be rectified. Our field of Translation Studies understands that interpreting doesn't just have to serve corporate or diplomatic interests. Interpreting can serve the interests of the common persons and the daily interactions they have which naturally include persons of various ages and backgrounds. We reject the notion that child language brokering unavoidably exploits children's linguistic talents. In addition, "few people appreciate the range and skill they [children] exhibit" (Bullock & Harris 1996, p. 1). What interests us more is how the phenomenon of child language brokering impacts their own linguistic developments and their respective communities on a micro-scale. With this, we ask our fellow researchers in the field of Translation Studies to allow us to take a step forward and claim that interpretation is not only an act that bilingual children are doing externally with interlocutors, but one that is also ongoing within their minds. Child language brokering is a phenomenon that exists organically, and we should continue to study it and explore what it reveals about interpreting and language acquisition.

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