

Adult narratives of childhood language brokering: Learning what it means to be bilingual

Ann Phoenix¹  | Marjorie Faulstich Orellana² 

¹Thomas Coram Research Unit, Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, London, UK

²UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Correspondence

Ann Phoenix, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, 27 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0AA, UK.
Email: a.phoenix@ucl.ac.uk

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Abstract

This paper analyses the retrospective narratives of an adult language broker. Language brokering involved not only learning how to translate/interpret language for others, but also understanding the meaning that Spanish and English assumed in society and the ways in which she and her parents were socially positioned. Language brokering was both psychosocial and agentic. The participant had to align her respect for, and protectiveness of, her parents with the disrespect and harsh judgement she sensed from those with whom they sought to communicate in various sites. The paper illuminates the complexity of the processes of developing multilingual practices and identities in their intersectional and relational multisitedness.

KEYWORDS

bi-/multi-lingualism, constrained agency, intersectionality, language brokering, multisitedness, power relations, relationality

INTRODUCTION

For many years, research on bilingualism operated within a monoglossic norm, treating language forms as separated into speakers, contexts or topics/domains. The foundational scholarship on bilingualism assumed that “second” language development was layered onto “first” language development, and that there was a clear delineation between the two. It sought to identify a linear and universal path to bilingualism (Cummins, 1989), akin to that identified for general language development (e.g. Nelson, 1989). This research also treated language acquisition as separate from other aspects of psychosocial growth.

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The language socialisation paradigm (e.g. Schieffelin & Ochs, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) as well as the more recent “translingual turn” (Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia & Wei, 2014; McSwan, 2017) calls these assumptions into question. Together these frameworks reveal how people draw on and cultivate a variety of linguistic resources to speak, listen, read, write and think as they navigate everyday life. This involves the negotiation of power relations and social/cultural contexts. Yet, at the same time, the underlying presumption of monoglossia is resurgent, as Gramling and Wiggin (2018) note:

While Yildiz proposed that the age we call contemporary has been marked by the post-monolingual condition, we are also witnessing how phenomena of post*multilingualism* are becoming ever more hegemonic in matters of citizenship, public aesthetics, cybertechnology, publishers' in-house style guides and even disciplinary methodology.⁷ Monolingualism may be merely getting better, more subtle and more innovative in achieving its structural objective of managing and containing “other languages” and “others' language” in a wide range of social spaces and textual genres (Gramling & Wiggin, 2018).

Thus, while most people have moved away from notions that children should be punished for speaking minoritised languages in schools in Britain, Australia, the United States and Scandinavia (Burck, 2004), underlying ideologies of “normative” language experiences still have a pervasive hold.

In this paper, we join a growing group of scholars who recognise that for children growing up in bi- or multi-lingual communities (the majority of children in the contemporary world), translingual practices are normative, but varied: shaped by the kinds of exposure young people have to different linguistic resources, and the opportunities to use them. Language, in turn, is intimately bound up with social and cultural processes, set in relationships and enacted in configurations of power. Yet, the monolingual norm Gramling and Wiggin (2018) identify means that bilingualism is often considered non-normative within a hierarchy where languages have different statuses. One of the challenges that young people have, as they acquire language and form their identities in and through language, therefore, is to sort out the meanings these language systems have in the larger world. We ask: How do young people growing up in bi/multilingual environments become aware of differences between languages (and language forms), as marked in the larger culture, and in the valuation of those languages? How are these understandings bound up with their sense of themselves and their families in these social worlds: their intersectional social locations and emerging identities, ways of seeing and feeling, sense of belonging, agency and aspirations?

We explore these questions through a narrative analysis of an adult child of migrants who was (and still is) an active language broker in her family and community. We interviewed Luz (a pseudonym) with a view to eliciting her memories of when she first understood that there are different languages and the processes by which she came to that understanding. This paper makes a contribution to understanding the complexity of the processes involved in developing multilingual practices by in-depth engagement with her narratives. It does so, moreover, by situating Luz' stories in the contexts that were salient to her—rather than, as most work on bilingualism does, focusing only on bi/multilingualism in homes or schools.

BACKGROUND

Research on child language development in bi- and multi-lingual contexts

Interest in language development within bi- and multilingual contexts has burgeoned over the last decade, and our understanding of how children learn about the meanings of language, and related

social norms has changed (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). So too has recognition that most children are exposed to more than one language (and many forms of that language) as they grow. Indeed, established boundaries between “languages” have been called into question, when viewed from the perspective of speakers (e.g. García, 2016). There has been considerable growth in studies of the language experiences of children living, working, studying and playing in varied bi- and multi-lingual contexts (e.g. Adair et al., 2017; Bayley & Schechter, 2003; García-Sánchez, 2014; Gort, 2012; Zentella, 1997). Presumptions of normativity and universality do, however, still predominate in public consciousness and echo through much scholarly work as well as educational practice.

In addition, research on bilingualism still mostly treats linguistic development as separate from psychosocial development. This is so despite calls from sociocultural researchers and linguistic ethnographers to see language and identity as profoundly intertwined (e.g. Gonzalez, 2006), with both involving personal, emotional and socio-structural factors. The challenge becomes how to study this enmeshment: a methodological challenge as well as a conceptual one.

Research on bilingual practices is concentrated in particular sites: homes, school and peer groups. This may be based on the assumption that these are the prime socialising spaces for children, where they spend most time. It may also be a matter of research convenience, as it is easier to observe social processes in a single site than to follow people as they move across them. This focus on unitary contexts, however, leads to a view of these as distinctly different social spheres, and as the *only* important ones for children's socialisation. This loses sight of the ways in which individuals move across these and other spaces in their everyday lives, forging linguistic, cultural and psychosocial identities as they move.

In this paper, our focus is on understanding how people growing up in bi- or multi-lingual contexts come to awareness about language, culture, identity and power relations as they move through the spatial and temporal contexts of their lives. We resist normative, universalising models of language development, with children theorised as simply learning language in an invariant process, regardless of context. We start with the assumption that languages are not bounded and fixed, and that children have to learn what boundaries matter, when, for whom, and with what impact. We contribute to research that views children (and all people) as actively making sense of languages (and languaging) within the constraints of their environments: how different language forms and practices are hierarchically organised in power relations and, hence, how they and their families are positioned. We, therefore, treat linguistic processes as psychosocial, simultaneously personal and sociostructural.

To do this, we identify iconic moments that were salient to one adult child of immigrants (Luz, a pseudonym) as she reflected on her experiences of speaking (and brokering) English and Spanish from her childhood onwards. Ours is a retrospective analysis of Luz's accounts, rather than being based on our direct contemporaneous observations; this allows us to see how these experiences were sedimented into, and helped to construct, Luz's identities and which issues, events and contexts were salient from her adult vantage point.

Language brokering research

By centring on the experiences of an adult child of immigrants who has been an active “language broker” (translator/interpreter) for others throughout her life, we connect our study of bilingualism with the rapidly proliferating body of research on language brokering. This interdisciplinary field has, somewhat surprisingly, generally had little connection with research on bilingualism, and rather little take-up within that work. In this paper, we take up López' et al. (2019) call for incorporating attention to language brokering experiences in research on bilingualism. This, López argues, would “add to our

understanding of bilingual language experiences and would allow researchers to account for greater variations across bilingual populations based on language brokering experiences” (p. 9). We suggest that research on language brokering can enrich our understandings of bilingual language development in three main ways:

1. Taking a holistic approach to the spaces where language brokering happens by helping the field to move beyond the limiting contexts of homes and schools.
2. Identifying complex interlinkages between linguistic, cultural and psychosocial processes.
3. Raising important questions about hierarchy, status and power relations, as children speak to and for adults who are differently positioned in society, and as they deploy their linguistic and cultural resources as *assets* that are often not recognised as such (illuminating racist and monoglossic norms in the larger society) (Orellana, 2009).

Research on language brokering makes evident that language learning happens in spaces beyond home, school and peer groups. Ethnographers have observed and recorded language brokering in clinics, shops, restaurants, after-school programmes, religious institutions, on public transport and in other settings (e.g. Alvarez, 2017; Gramling & Wiggin, 2018; Katz, 2020; Perry, 2014; Torto, 2010). They illuminate how the bilingual practice of language brokering takes shape in diverse contexts, relationships, tasks and practices, as for example, when children mediate in shops and other “white, public spaces” (Reynolds & Orellana, 2009), negotiating across ethnic and social class lines (Kwon, 2014), and managing their positions as children vis-a-vis adults who are differently positioned in society. This involves the complex negotiation of norms and assumptions that speakers hold about adult–child relations (what children of different ages and social positions should be allowed or expected to do) and of relationships between “majority” language speakers and speakers of non-dominant language forms.

Interviews with children and young people (e.g. Antonini, 2010; Cline et al., 2011) and with adults reflecting back on their childhood language brokering experiences (Bauer, 2016; Guan et al., 2014) further underscore the importance of language experiences beyond home and school, revealing how the sociopolitical context, and the identities of speakers within those contexts, may shape the experiences of brokering and the psychosocial meanings that are taken from them (Delgado, 2020).

In this paper, we build on López' et al. (2019) important recognition of the need to interlink research on language brokering and bilingualism. We build on an interview study of adults who had been childhood language brokers for their parents, reflecting on their language brokering experiences over their childhoods and the processes by which they came to awareness of language and their identities as speakers of particular languages (Orellana, 2009). The sections below first briefly discuss the methods that inform this study and then consider one participant's earliest memories of language awareness and the ways in which language awareness was multisited, crafted beyond home and school.

METHODS

For this study, we were concerned with processes by which children who were raised in bilingual environments came to understand themselves as bilingual and the meanings of this for them. As part of a larger study of adults reflecting on their childhood experiences in contexts of demographic change, we conducted a new interview with a participant in our earlier research on language brokering. Luz had been interviewed when she was a young adult; she was now 39 years old. We focus on Luz' story in this paper because it illuminates processes of coming to awareness of bilingualism.

The interview with Luz was part of a broader study for which ethical approval was granted by UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Informed consent was obtained by email from the adult participant since the interview was done by Zoom. This Zoom interview (conducted in the period of COVID-19), which lasted about two hours, was recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The interview considered Luz's ideas of when she understood that she spoke more than one language, and how this understanding was shaped in and through her language brokering experiences, which have continued from childhood throughout her adult life. We started by asking her to tell her story of coming to understand herself as speaking more than one language.

In keeping with emergent suggestions that there is much to be gained from slow qualitative research (Lindquist, 2012; Mountz et al., 2015; Ulmer, 2017), we then analysed the transcript jointly over a period of several months, meeting for a weekly "Zoom" meeting and working our way very slowly through the 20-page transcript. We recorded our sessions and coded the transcript as we identified the following themes: how Luz oriented to her story, the nature of the salient incidents she recalled, the network of relations that she constructed, the cast of characters that populated her stories, the values she associated with the practice and the meanings she took from her experiences. Our analyses were informed by interviews with other adult bilinguals (Phoenix, 2019) as well as by our earlier interviews with Luz (Orellana, 2009), but our focus in this paper is on how Luz narrated her experiences at this particular juncture of her life: at middle age, living in the same community where she grew up, and now acting as a broker for a wide range of others in the community.

Our approach to analyses is inspired by the work of Martine Burgos (1991), who draws on the work of Paul Ricoeur to consider how the narrator of a story faces the difficult task of unifying heterogeneous material. It is, therefore, a struggle to start a story, particularly since locating oneself as the narrator also constructs identity positions for the teller. As a result, conflicts are often evident at the start of stories, as are the key issues that animate the life story. In addition, narrators have to take up subjective positions in relation to their stories. According to Burgos, it would be wasteful to pay attention only to explicit content, rather than also attending to how the story is told, since there is a difference between what is said and what is told. Narrative analysis is particularly suited to the study of 'non-normative' lives because there are normative stories within any culture and narratives are most likely to be developed when lives are interrupted and so do not fit with normative or ideal patterns (Riessman, 2008).

Retrospective accounts allow insights into the ways in which events and feelings may be reconsidered over time (Josselson, 2009; Orellana & Phoenix, 2017) and 'subject to ongoing revision of perception and evaluation' (Andrews, 2014, p. 4). Further, it has now become a commonplace that memory itself is a reconstruction of the past in the present, rather than an archive to be recovered (Brockmeier, 2015; Lambek & Antze, 1996). The paper does not, therefore, treat Luz's narrative of childhood experiences as transparent reflections of experiences that have fixed effects. Instead, it views her accounts as facilitating the analysis of subjective ideas about what mattered to her in her history of experiences. It is part of an ongoing process of making sense of the past in relation to the present and the imagined future (Riessman, 2008).

FINDINGS

Situating her experiences within our larger data set on child language brokering (Orellana, 2009), Luz might be considered an "active" language broker. Her experiences are not unlike those of many other language brokers we have interviewed and observed over the years. Like them, she has used her ability to speak, listen, read and write in two languages in a wide variety of contexts, tasks and situations,

for a number of different people (including her parents, teachers and community members and people she has encountered in public spaces).

Language brokering experiences were an important part of Luz' coming into awareness about her own bilingualism as well as her identity formation. She learned through these experiences how she and her family were viewed by others and how language was bound up with other aspects of their intersectional identities in those judgements. Our analyses present a complex story of Luz' growing awareness of bilingual language borders, interlinked with processes of identity formation (in cultural, linguistic, racial/ethnic and psychosocial terms). Luz' story of bilingualism is set within the dynamic contexts of her family, community and the wider social world.

Telling the tale of language awareness

We asked Luz to begin by telling us her earliest memories of being aware of language or of the difference between her languages. Following Burgos (1991), we attended to how Luz began this story—a somewhat different one than she had recounted previously (when our focus was specifically on language brokering experiences, not awareness of language writ large). As narrative analysis would predict, Luz struggled a little with how to begin a new story and, reflecting that struggle, introduced in her opening response a whole series of themes that were repeated throughout the long interview:

You know, I had been doing it [language brokering] since I was seven, I am a middle child of three. My older sister is about seven years older and she left the house at a really young age so I was pretty much like the older child. And as far as I can remember, I remember around the age of 7 is when I started translating for my parents. I was the first generation born in America so both my parents are from Mexico.

Luz then describes her parents' migration journey (which happened before her birth) and their need for language brokering, including changes over time as her father acquired some English and her mother enrolled in ESL classes (but never became "really comfortable" speaking). She set the story in the historical context of the 1980s, a time when "there weren't too many opportunities for translators to be present at doctor's visits or on the phone," in contrast with the present moment: "Like, now you just press a number and they'll connect you to somebody else in Spanish."

In struggling to start the story, then, Luz reminds us that all language development is set within temporal as well as spatial contexts and that there are different kinds of relational time scales that matter: those of the family (the movement of children across developmental time within the family, including movement in and out of the home; and language learning journeys for each household member); and those of the larger sociopolitical context, including changing ideologies and social practices. Understanding of language and positioning within it happens in different ways across these distinct spatial-temporal contexts: in moment-to-moment interactions, some of which Luz remembered as what we suggest are 'iconic moments' that typify the language brokering experiences she considers formative from her adult viewpoint. Lev Vygotsky's (1934/2012) sociocultural theory encapsulates the ways in which personal experiences arise from particular events but are always part of lifespan accretions that are situated in sociohistorical contexts. Vygotsky suggests that there are 'genetic domains' for higher cognitive processes. In Vygotsky's terms, Luz' iconic moments are 'microgenetic', being immediate events that impact on cognition. Luz' account demonstrated that such iconic moments accumulated over her life course into what Vygotsky suggests is 'ontogenetic lifespan development' and were situated in what Vygotsky called the 'cultural historical', where social and cultural changes

have, for example, made it now more commonly accepted in many societies that interpretation should be provided for those who need it.

As well as being an event and temporal story, Luz' is a relational story where she does different work for her mother and for her father and in which different characters populate her narrative. This includes the sister who is introduced in her opening sequence but then rarely mentioned; the doctors that Luz brokered for as her mother struggled with her health; and "a lot of adults" who trusted her "to communicate between both worlds." This sense of being trusted led Luz to tremendous feelings of pride, a theme that is also introduced in her opening turn of talk and that she returns to many times: "So I remember feeling really very proud. I was very proud of being a translator, being a kid I felt really responsible, you know at the information that I was speaking back and forth." Pride in successful and competent language brokering constitutes a 'key narrative' for Luz, helping to organise recurrent content in her stories and the way her life story is told (McAdams, 1993; Plummer, 2001) and developed as a result of important events in her life (Boenisch-Brednick, 2002).

Luz' story is further a spatialised account in that particular events are only possible within particular spaces. We turn to this next, considering how the movement across spaces became key to Luz' retrospective understanding of coming to awareness about language. In her opening turn, for example, Luz situates herself relationally and in space and time, taking up identities as an educated person who is familiar with one of the researchers and academic work on language brokering as well as someone who can take pride in her language brokering work within her family.

Separate spheres?

In some ways, Luz' recounting of her awareness about language posits English and Spanish in "separate spheres" of home and school, as much research on bilingualism has assumed. Luz explained that her parents insisted that Spanish be spoken at home but sent her to an all-English classroom because they considered that it would improve her life chances.

All my cousins were in bilingual classes but I had older cousins that hadn't done well in school and my parents heard that it was because they were in a bilingual program that didn't prepare them to be able to take tests or answer things in English. With me and with my sister they put us in all English classes. So very early on, I think as early as kindergarten, I already knew that at home you could only speak Spanish and at school I could only speak English. So I was very aware of that early on, as soon as I got into school. At home, there was nothing but Spanish until I got into school and I had an older sister who did speak English to me once in a while, um because she was like seven years older and she was like a teen when I was a kid. And, um she'd like to speak in English more but my dad was very strict. If he would hear us speaking in English, he would call us on it and he thought it was disrespectful so in my home it was taught that if you speak English at home, that's disrespectful, um and so very early on, I would say since kindergarten. As soon as I went to school, I became aware that I speak two languages.

In this narration, Luz' entry into school seemed to demarcate a border between her "Spanish" and "English" worlds. But the borders are somewhat permeable, in that her older sister breaches the divide by speaking English with her. As she continues her story, the border between the languages seems even more permeable, as the very act of language brokering brings the two languages together at home, at school and in various public spaces. Indeed, most of Luz' account suggests that "home"

and “school” are not tightly bounded linguistic spaces (either in her mind or in practice); nor are they the only contexts that are salient to Luz in relation to language. Her earliest memories of language brokering, detailed in the extract below (which comes a couple of minutes into her answer to the first question), mixes memories of translation work done at home, at school and in other public settings such as medical appointments: “When I was a kid, having to negotiate things with an electricity company or helping my dad fill out job applications even. Going to doctors with my mom, mostly with my mom... Um, I remember translating my own parents’ teacher conferences.”

Even at school, the notion that it is an “all-English” program does not mean that no other languages are spoken in that some children arrived from other countries. Luz tells us about being designated by her teacher to translate for a new student who arrived from Mexico.

Q: About Spanish speaking. What about school and kindergarten? Could you for example mix languages? Were there others who spoke Spanish that were there?

Luz: I didn’t really become aware of like speaking a different language in the classroom, um until I would say... it had to be around first or second grade. Because a very close friend of mine, who’s still a close friend of mine came from Mexico and so, she was new and she did not know any English at all. And the teacher, because I was always a very helpful kid. I was always very, you know... I’m so used to talking to a lot of people. I think it’s because of all the translating honestly. Being the middle kid in my house, I was kinda like the older one so I always took on that role. So, I was very comfortable talking to people so I was always very helpful and I did really well in school so I always helped other kids. That was like my thing. I think I was born to be a teacher. So, I’m proud of that. So, when this kid came in from Mexico, the teacher asked me to kind of help her out. So that’s when I would speak Spanish in the classroom, but other than that I always focused on speaking English because my parents always wanted us to speak really good Spanish, never to lose that. But, my mom especially, she always wanted to be educated... She would always tell us to try our best and you know, in school pay attention to the teacher, speak English.

The act of language brokering brings the languages together in the school context just as it did at home, when she brokered for her parents or her older sister spoke English. These acts effectively become “translanguaging spaces” (Wei, 2011) where the interaction of multilingual individuals “breaks down the artificial dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psycho in studies of bilingualism and multilingualism” (p. 1234). A translanguaging space allows multilingual individuals to integrate social spaces. In these translanguaging spaces, Luz can integrate her linguistic repertoire and, crucially, use it in the service of others and as a point of pride.

The recurrent theme of pride in her language brokering is personal, canonical and evaluative.

Luz’ emblematic ‘small stories’ are well-worn narratives because she constructs them as foundational to what she considers central in her life, her commitment to her understanding of herself as a helper: “So I remember feeling really very proud. I was very proud of being a translator, being a kid I felt really responsible, you know at the information that I was speaking back and forth. I felt really important but at times it was also very stressful.”

Beyond home and school

Of significance for the arguments we are developing in this paper, Luz anchored some of her most powerful experiences of language learning and metalinguistic/metacultural experiences outside *both*

home and school. She recounted a particularly searing incident that seemed central to her language identities and her protective feelings towards her parents.

For example, the doctor's visits, or I remember at some point, we ended up going to the public aid office and it was very tough. That's one of the tougher memories I have, because already my mom was full of shame and embarrassment, you know at the time, my dad had left us and he was the primary earner of the home. And she didn't have any friends in America, she didn't know English, you know she had to start over. And we ended up homeless, so it was a very tough personal situation as a kid, to understand but then to go into an office and ask for help. We lived on the south side of Chicago in a really poor neighbourhood and the office that we had to go to, the employees were very rude. You know, they looked us up and down, I felt um, some racism too, you know. Just the way people talk to you, like not understanding what it was early on being so young, but knowing that somebody... there's a bad feeling about the way somebody speaks to you.

This incident, which Luz also recounted in her first interview with the second author, some 20 years before, is part of Luz' retrospective account of her awareness at a young age of how her family was viewed, treated and spoken to in public spaces. She is not just "reading the world" in the Freirean sense of critically analysing relations of power; she is effectively *hearing* those power relations through a raciolinguistic framework (Alim et al., 2016). She is aware of her subaltern status but as a language broker she *must* speak from that subaltern position (Roy, 2011), to and for people who have more power over her (in her family) and over her family (in the world).

At various other points in her narrative, Luz reflects on her awareness of when, where, why and for whom she should offer translation, and how she could expect to be treated for stepping into that role. In the extract below, it is striking that Luz leaves unnamed the characters for whom she was interpreting her parents' words, leaving them as impersonal positions reacting negatively to her parents who are brought to life as persons. Luz' account is both relational and imbued with the power relations that were an inherent part of Spanish–English language brokering outside the home and her psychosocial positioning within them.

And again, some situations were more intimidating than others, especially when it came to like legal terminology or medical terminology. Or you know, situations where I felt like adults were looking at me funny, or I never wanted people to judge my parents as ignorant or uneducated because they were not educated but they were very, they were very respectful people, very caring, very hardworking people. I respect them so much and I never wanted to make them feel like they were being, like they were less valuable in society because they had a kid talking for them, you know? Or if somebody asks questions in a certain way, like sometimes I remember you know having to soften what I tell my mom because I didn't want her to feel bad like I could tell this person was saying something that was a little bit, you know degrading at the time. I didn't know these words, but I could feel it and I would try to explain it to my mom in a way or my dad who had a lot less patience. My dad was very impatient. My mom is a lot more patient, very nurturing, but my dad just needed an answer right away, yes or no. And you know, sometimes you get answers from people that you had to decode yourself before you explain it, you know in like basic terms. And my dad would be like [Yo, no?], you know he's just that kind of person. He didn't have as much patience. So I had to also learn how to communicate with

different people, different styles of people. You know some people have tons of follow up questions in situations, and others just need a yes or no answer.

The above example shows how bilingualism is not just about language itself. The devaluing of Spanish speakers who do not speak English is recounted by the adult Luz, as deeply painful in childhood. She remembers wanting to defend her parents from the harsh, judgmental gaze of unidentified workers in various formal institutions. Her language brokering was, therefore, not just about interpreting, but recognising the emotional tone of what was being said, even if she did not thoroughly understand it and attempting to soften it so that her parents did not feel degraded. Her narrative is one of agentic negotiations of a bilingual situation.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have analysed the processes by which Luz, a woman raised in bilingual Spanish/English environments, retrospectively discusses coming to consciousness of becoming bilingual in childhood.

In keeping with the accounts of other language brokers we have studied over the last few decades, Luz explained that she actively interpreted and translated for many people in different contexts. Her story foregrounds the ways in which becoming conscious of her bilingualism was inextricably linked with learning to do language brokering and coming to understand her identities. Her consciousness of identities was both intersectional and relationally psychosocial in that her learning of language brokering also entailed learning that she and her parents were devalued and pejoratively treated by officials because they did not speak English. Looking back on various emblematic memories of her early language brokering, Luz highlighted that she negotiated her interpretations of what her parents and officials said to present her parents in what she considered the best possible light and to defend them from being viewed pejoratively. This protective impetus seems to have impelled Luz to work hard at language brokering and, in consequence, to gain confidence that she was good at language brokering and take pride in doing it. Since these identities, of helping and protecting her parents (and later other Spanish speakers needing language brokering) and of being an excellent language broker doing a professional job, are 'key narratives', central to Luz' identity, it is perhaps not surprising that they are foregrounded in her memories of coming to language brokering.

The picture is, however, more complex than simply taking up identities as a proficient language broker and a protective, dutiful daughter. Luz' accounts of her parents being judged for not speaking English illustrated that she also learned that there are boundaries between different languages that are spatiotemporal. For example, her earliest memories are of her parents' preferences for their children to speak Spanish at home and English at school and elsewhere (even though phone calls and letters in English were received at home and required language brokering). That division was sometimes breached in that Luz reports that her older sister did not like to speak Spanish and resisted her parents' strictures. She also recounts an experience of being asked to speak with a new classmate in Spanish, an episode that was somewhat surprising to her. Her burgeoning awareness of bilingualism was, therefore, spatialised within the dynamic contexts of her family, school, community and the wider social context. It was also temporal in that her iconic narratives were of individual events that accumulated over time and were situated in the changing sociocultural context and relational.

In becoming the language broker for her parents, Luz learned not just how to translate/interpret between Spanish and English, but about boundaries between the two languages and the meanings of

each in society more generally. To some extent, this is not surprising since social models of language learning have now found evidence.

that children start to learn the communicative norms of their community before they learn their first word. Even very young children are learning to use different varieties and mixtures of language to express their identities and achieve their goals, both as members of social groups and as individuals. From a very early age, they become aware of the social significance of different varieties of English, and learn how to vary their own language according to the perceived context and the desired outcomes, thus developing a repertoire of linguistic behaviour (Mayor, 2010, 228).

Kwon (2014) illustrates that language brokering often involves negotiation of matters that are highly inflected by families' socioeconomic positioning. While Luz does not mention this, it is likely that her racialisation and social class positioning are important social categories intersecting with the language brokering situation. Some of what Luz experienced as negative judgment of her parents is likely to result from the intersections of their poverty, racialisation and migrant status which positioned them as less powerful than the people they faced in the legal and medical processes. Luz does mention differences between her mother and father's reactions, which are both individual and gendered. For Luz, these complex, contradictory relational experiences, while 'intimidating' in early childhood helped to build her confidence and pride in her skills in ways that would not have been possible if bilingualism was practiced only within her home.

In learning to broker between her two languages, Luz also learned a variety of communicative and wider social norms and their social significance. Her narratives show that she remembers the work and dilemmas involved in positioning herself in relation to these norms and to the unnamed people who populate her accounts and often constituted hostile presences. Luz' language brokering meant that she constantly created translanguaging spaces which allowed her as a multilingual child to bring together social spaces and linguistic repertoires (Wei, 2011) in the service of others and as a point of pride. It must be remembered, however, that this translanguaging was complex. It helped her to develop linguistic, social and practical skills and take pride in assisting her parents through doing an excellent job in interpreting and softening what is said to protect them. This was, however, at the emotional cost of absorbing the negative responses she frequently received from adults. Luz' narratives illustrate that language brokering is not just about interpreting, but about understanding and negotiating the emotional tone of what is said. Her narrative is one of agentic negotiations of sometimes difficult bilingual situations. She shows that translanguaging is not an unalloyed benefit.

As the examples above make clear, Luz' iconic memories of childhood include ones where Spanish, and more particularly, her parents as Spanish speakers are evidently devalued. In consequence, Luz' language brokering is inextricably linked to learning about how she and her parents are socially positioned. This has also been reported by adults in London who are 'living life in more than one language', some of whom found that their first language gave them high status in English, while others found that their first language gave them devalued status in English (Burck, 2004, 2011). Luz' retrospective accounts indicate that her childhood experiences of language brokering were often exercises of negotiating the lack of belonging that the officials for whom she negotiated made evident outside her home. For Luz, the situatedness of these experiences produced nuanced, intersectional understandings of social locations, identities and sense of belonging.

Luz recounts her language brokering as psychosocial and agentic. She negotiated her identities as she learned the skill of language brokering and how to align her respect for, and protectiveness of, her parents with the disrespect and harsh judgement she sensed from her interlocutors. The narrative

analysis of her memories of first coming to understand that there are different languages highlights the complexity of the processes of developing multilingual practices and its multisitedness. It shows how language brokering has to be understood as agentially negotiated, relational, intersectional and spatiotemporally located. It is perhaps not surprising that those experiences led Luz to develop a professional language brokering identity, showing that she excelled at the very practice that was denigrated in the wider society. As with Eva Hoffman's account of moving from Poland to the USA knowing no English (Phoenix & Slavova, 2011), Luz' story was linked to emotionally marked events that, for her, have become relationally emblematic signifiers of how other people responded to, and engaged with, her language brokering and her family's differential positioning in language. Not surprisingly then, Luz' retrospective narratives foreground these issues as she discusses becoming bilingual in childhood. Her narrative illuminates the ways in which bilingualism is complex, multilevel, relational and intersectional.

ETHICAL APPROVAL STATEMENT

The interview that informs this paper was part of a broader study that received university ethical approval from UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Informed consent was obtained by email from the adult participant since the interview was done by Zoom. All names and other identifying features were removed from the research material and a pseudonym has been used.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest for either author.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The audio recording and transcript are both available to the authors, stored securely on password protected computers without identifying details. They will not be made available or lodged in data archive in order to avoid identification of the single participant.

ORCID

Ann Phoenix  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5382-8918>

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2921-5892>

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