



Re-interpreting: Narratives of childhood language brokering over time

Childhood
2017, Vol. 24(2) 183–196
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0907568216671178
journals.sagepub.com/home/chd



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Abstract

This article probes how childhood experiences are actively taken into adult lives and thus challenges the unwitting and unintentional reproduction of an adult–child binary in childhood studies. We do this by analyzing interviews with one adult daughter of immigrants from Mexico to the United States at four points in time (ages 19, 26, 27, and 33). Using narrative analysis to examine the mutability of memory, we consider how Eva oriented herself to her childhood story, what was salient and invisible in each recount, the values she associated with the practice, and the meanings she took from her experiences. We show how Eva re-interpreted her experiences as an immigrant child language broker in relation to unfolding life events, showing her childhood to be very much alive in her adult life. Language brokering serves as one way in which to examine the interpenetration of childhood into adulthood, rather than being the focus per se.

Keywords

Child language brokering, memory, narrative analysis

One of the major contributions of the “new sociology of childhood” is that it has provided a welcome attention to childhood for its own sake, rather than as a transitory period of becoming. This shift away from an unthinking developmentalism (Burman, 2008) has produced exciting work, showing the complexities of childhoods in diverse contexts,

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situations, activities, and relationships (Alanen et al., 2013; James, 2010). In this, childhood is treated as a time of *being*, not *becoming*.

Nevertheless, the act of severing childhood from its tether to “development” may at times implicitly and unwittingly reproduce the binary between adulthood and childhood (despite recognition that these are constructed categories with messy and inchoate boundaries; Valentine, 2003). Childhood is viewed in its own right, but then seen as something that is left behind when childhood ends, wherever that boundary is marked.

Certainly, the *impact* of childhood experiences on adult functioning has been a large focus of work ushered in by Freud and the burgeoning area of psychosocial studies. Scholars have considered both continuities and discontinuities in childhood and adult experiences (Rutter, 2013; Rutter et al., 2006). But the focus here is on the *impact* of childhood experiences, as events that took place in a time constructed as separate from adulthood, on adult narratives and experiences, and on how these narratives change as life circumstances change.

Our article illuminates ways in which childhood experiences are integrally bound up in adulthood by analyzing narrative interviews at four points with the adult daughter of immigrants from Mexico to the United States. We consider how the meanings of childhood experiences get re-interpreted in relation to unfolding life events—not as episodes that are simply reworked in the service of adult themes, but actively taken along into adult lives. In this way, temporality is not linear; rather, we see simultaneous and continuing traces of the past (“childhood”) in the present (“adulthood”).

“Non-normative” childhoods: Child language brokering

We center our analyses around a particular set of childhood experiences, one that may be seen as “non-normative” in that it diverges from mainstream, Western, middle-class notions of what children should be allowed or expected to do: child language brokering. This practice, like other kinds of care work done by children (Becker and Becker, 2008; Sempik and Becker, 2013; Yeandle and Buckner, 2007), counters normative models of adult–child relations in modern Western society. While language brokering is for the most part seen by immigrant families as “just normal” and part of intergenerational family solidarity (Bauer, 2015; Orellana, 2009), it remains largely invisible (Kwon, 2014) and, when brought to public attention, is often met with alarm.

Much research has examined language brokering with an eye to how it affects child development (see, for example, Buriel et al., 2006; Chao, 2006; Dorner et al., 2007; Hua and Costigan, 2012; Orellana, 2009). This work makes clear the anxiety the practice provokes for adults about children somehow being “out of place,” in danger of being exposed to things beyond their years, and carrying burdens that children presumably should not assume. Perhaps because of *adults’* anxious feelings about the practice, much research has focused on how children feel about the work, finding mixed results (Kam, 2011; Weisskirch, 2007; Wu and Kim, 2009). There is also an implicit blaming of parents for putting children into such positions, evident in the labeling of the practice as a form of “adultification” or “parentification.”

Our focus is not on the phenomenon of language brokering per se. Rather, it is on the *meanings* that get attached to this “non-normative” childhood experience in adult

narratives. It is precisely the non-normativity of the practice (in the dominant culture) that begs explanation and that can be fruitfully examined for *how* explanations vary over time. Narrative interviews and analyses provide a key means of gaining insights into adults' (re-)interpretive processes of childhood experiences, helping us to see the often taken-for-granted, yet illusory nature of borders between socially constructed stages of life.

Narrative analyses

Analyzing narratives told by one person over a span of 13 years allows rare insight into the reconceptualization of childhood experiences over time. This process is central to narrative theory since one of the key features of narrative is its mutability—the fact that the past is subject to change and re-interpretation as people's life circumstances change. One reason that narrative research has proliferated in recent years is that it draws on the everyday practice of meaning-making in which almost all humans engage. The task for speakers telling stories about their lives is to select what they want to say from elements that are not in themselves meaningful, but given significance through interpretation and presentation in a particular sequence for particular audiences (Bruner, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Since any story could be told in different ways, and many are told differently to different audiences, narratives are stories of experience, rather than transparent, accurate representations of events. They are constructed in particular personal, social, and historical contexts. Squire (2013) explains, "They may seem to be 'personal', but they enact personhood as a changing social strategy, rather than as a single, stable formation" (p. 40). One of the functions of narrative is, therefore, "to 'make present' life experience and interpretations of life in a particular time and space" (Schiff, 2012). The "making present" of past experiences is crucial to narrative processes. Since people tell, and re-tell, autobiographical stories throughout their lives, the stories themselves change as the process of telling comes to be located in what was the future. A further, crucial part of narrative theory is, thus, that everybody reconceptualizes the past over time in a process of narrative transformation. Molly Andrews suggests that

Even our senses of objects and space are inflected with an ongoing revision of perception and evaluation ... When we revisit the past, as we do when we tell stories about our lives, it is our imaginative urge which gives us the ability to contemplate a world that might have been, as well as one which might still be. (p. 4)

Memory

Recent work on memory indicates that remembered events can impact adult lives in contrary ways, suggesting that while some things are forgotten over time, others are reconstructed and gain fresh salience. For example, Loftus' (2005) pivotal work on cognitive memory processes shows that memories can be suggested to adults because they are constructed and open to collective influence. In keeping with earlier work by Nelson (1993) and others, Thompson et al. (1996) draw on a longitudinal study of autobiographical memory to suggest that childhood amnesia for events before about 3 years of age occurs because children in early childhood have not yet learned how to tell their life

stories as narratives; it is narrative that allows children to retain their memories in a recoverable form. It remains to be established, however, how the deployment of memories in narratives affects the childhood memories taken into adulthood and how particular ways of remembering and narrating them change over time and affect how childhood experiences are re-constructed and experienced in adulthood.

A few studies contribute to thinking about how childhood experiences feature in adult narratives and memories. For example, two longitudinal studies tracing children's lives to adulthood have examined shifts in identities over time and how young people engage with reflexive projects of self-making (e.g. Henderson et al., 2007; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Their primary concerns are not, however, with how meanings of earlier experiences are reworked over time.

Frances Waksler (1996) invited students to write accounts of "little trials" they experienced in childhood. She found that adults commonly remembered episodes that they as children found difficult but adults found amusing or trivial. Some revised their views on such episodes and now made light of them. However, Waksler's focus is on adult misrecognition of children's emotions, rather than the ways in which childhood becomes part of adulthood. Ruthellen Josselson's (2009) longitudinal study of "Maria" (from 21 to 56 years) has so far recorded four times her account of a particular relationship in her teenage years:

... we can see in this longitudinal accounting the many uses to which a single autobiographical episode can be put. This episode holds various, shifting aspects of self. Like a kaleidoscope, the same elements are recombined to show a different pattern, all in the service of the dominant selves of the moment. The story ... is differently used to help her define her relationship with her husband, then her daughter, then with herself ... her remembered self evolves along with her. (pp. 661–662)

Josselson's analysis helpfully illuminates that the same episode can hold different meanings for a participant depending on which aspects of her identity are currently of importance in her life.

This article aims to complement Josselson's analysis. We look beyond the recount of a single episode, instead considering what aspects of the multi-dimensional practice of language brokering were salient and what meanings were ascribed to them at different points in one woman's life.

Methodology

We focus here on transcripts of four interviews with one person ("Eva") over a span of 13 years. We have, in previous work, examined the practice of language brokering, including dimensions such as how family care work is distributed among siblings (Phoenix and Bauer, 2012). These issues are not the focus of this article. Instead, our focus is on the narratives themselves, hence our selection of a single participant: the eldest of four siblings in a family that migrated from Mexico to Chicago in the early 1980s, who was active as a language broker for her family for much of her life. Our aim is not to locate the "truth" of Eva's narratives, but to analyze her narratives as practices.

The first interview took place when Eva was 19 years old and enrolled in a university located an hour from her family home. She participated in a mixed-methods study examining language brokering (Orellana, 2009). The second interview took place 8 years later and 2000 miles away, when Eva had relocated to California, and was recruited for an interview as part of a study of adult recollections of child language brokering (Phoenix and Brannen, 2014). Eva had married a native English speaker and was the mother of three children. She had completed a Masters' degree in public policy and worked part time as an independent contractor, often using her bilingual, bicultural, and translation/interpretation skills in her work. A few months after that, Eva participated in a third interview in a related study (Dorner et al., forthcoming), looking at how language brokering was implicated in emerging senses of identity especially around notions of "citizenship" and belonging. Five years later, we contacted Eva once again and conducted a third joint interview focusing on her understandings of how language brokering had shaped her life.

All four interviews entered the topic of language brokering with an open-ended question, inviting Eva to share her reflections, recollections, and feelings. In the first two, she was asked to recall early memories; the third and fourth focused on her reflections on the practice. In each, she produced narrative accounts of specific language brokering events, including recounts of salient memories. All four interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Our analyses centered on how Eva conceptualized and reconceptualized child language brokering practices over her life course. This includes how she oriented to her story, what was salient and invisible in each version, 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. We then analyzed transformations and reconceptualizations in the stories over this time period. What continuities and discontinuities were evident? How did Eva make sense of her childhood language brokering experiences in relation to her unfolding life? How did she see her life at that time in relation to these experiences?

Our approach involved a close reading of the opening narrative in the four interviews. Martine Burgos (1991) draws on the work of Paul Ricoeur to emphasize that the narrator of a story has the difficult task of unifying heterogeneous material. It is, therefore, a struggle to start telling 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 therefore 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.

Narratives of language brokering

Across all four interviews, Eva told a similar story; we found nothing contradictory in the overall meanings she ascribed to language brokering in her life at these different points in time. The central story was for the most part a positive one: of feeling needed, especially by her mother, and gaining a sense of importance and competency through this work.

Even as the overarching arc of Eva's stories did not change, some of the details did. She remembered things in slightly different ways; different events were salient in each account; and while a similar cast of characters appeared in all of the stories (her mother, father, and three siblings), different ones entered into the spotlight and faded from view across renditions. The overall valence that Eva attached to the practice also shifted, as did the salience of particular memories.

First account—Age 19

The first interview began with Eva telling the story of her family's move to Chicago. She offered background information about her family and their early experiences as immigrants: her parents' work, the opening of a family restaurant, and their later purchase of an apartment building. Eva talked for 41 minutes before the interviewer (a graduate student on the first author's study) asked her to speak specifically about language brokering: "So then, can you remember when you started translating—for your mom?"

This may be the first time Eva had been asked about her earliest memories of language brokering. She seemed to search her memory, reconstructing her family history, and locating herself within this family history as language broker, presumably because we had highlighted that identity for her:

Well, I don't remember, like the *first* time I ever had to do it, but I remember when we used to live in the first building, when we first came back from Mexico after having lived there for a bit. I remember having to go to the store with my mom, and having to look for certain items ... She would say, "okay, um, go to, go get a pound of cheese" or "Go get a pound of ground beef" or something. So I remember having to do that, but I don't remember what exactly was involved. I'm assuming I had to use English (laughs), because they spoke English at these stores. But that wasn't very frequent because most of the time we did our shopping in the community.

Rather than speaking specifically about language brokering, Eva told a story about her family and her place in it. She highlighted her role as a helpmate to her mother, speaking in generalities about the kinds of things she did rather than recalling specific incidents. The most salient memories in this iteration seemed to take place out in public spaces, specifically grocery stores. Eva signaled uncertainty about these memories when she said that she didn't remember "exactly what was involved" and when she acknowledged that her family shopped mostly within their community, where there would presumably be no need for language brokering. She guessed that she was "about four and a half" when "once or twice we did venture out to Dominick's or Jewel" (chain grocery stores outside her community) where she "did have to do that." The fact that Eva remembered these particular stores, and the buying of cheese, bears consideration because these may be inter-textual references to an account by another adult language broker that was reported in Orellana's (2009) publication and that Eva may have read. This points to the fact that memories are reshaped by ongoing life experiences, including exposure to others' life stories, a point that we will return to later in the article.

Eva then homed in on a second early memory. Again she was at her mother's side, but sharing a child-centered experience with her at home, not in public: watching

Sesame Street on television. Eva explained that sometimes her mom would watch the show and

ask my sister and me what the cartoon characters were saying, or what the people on the TV show were saying. So I would tell my mom what it is that they were doing. Or what activity they had asked the children to do at home.

In a similar early memory, Eva recalled making signs with her mom for their restaurant: “I remember she had bought these bright construction paper and lots of thick, permanent markers.” The details that Eva named—bright paper and thick markers—again suggest this was a pleasant, non-threatening memory of being safe in her home and at her mother’s side, with a sense of importance to the task: Eva was helping to make signs that would be displayed in public in the family business.

Later in this first interview, Eva did talk about translating in some difficult situations. Both involved her sister: a trip to the emergency room after her sister cut her thumb and a parent–teacher conference when it became clear that her sister was being held back a grade. The story of that parent–teacher conference also appears in a later interview that we examine in more detail below. But these were not the most salient memories in the first interview and they were not at the heart of the story that she told.

Overall, in her interview at age 19—just after she has left home for the first time to attend college—Eva’s earliest memories of language brokering seemed largely untroubled. They were mostly set in the safety of home and community, with a generalized recollection of ventures into the English-speaking world that lay beyond home and community (at grocery stores). In this first narrative, Eva presented herself as having taken up a language brokering role early and feeling secure in her role as the family language broker (a position that she held through high school and even into college). She suggested that this gave her a sense of identity as a helper to others, particularly her parents—an identity that was evident at each of the four interviews.

Eva at 27

Eva’s second interview, at age 27, took place at a restaurant near her home. Eva managed to escape for a few hours from her responsibilities as the mother of three young children. Both authors were present as an audience for Eva’s story, although Ann took the lead in the interview. In this second interview, Eva retold her story of life as a language broker—framed clearly as a story of brokering (unlike in her first account), no doubt because she was aware of the two authors’ interest in this topic. This time, she did not begin with any specific memories. She said that she remembered translating at a “very early age” and gave a general gloss to these early experiences. In seeming contrast with her first interview, this gloss was largely negative:

Um, yeah, well, I remember doing it a lot. I remember translating for my parents at a very early age. I have memories of things that were pretty si-significant experiences, usually (.) in the bad light [laughs]. And in terms of having positive experience with translating, well, everything else that I did for them, I think, outside the uh, those experiences that (.) they (.) they didn’t

traumatize me [laughs], but the ones that are very significant that stand out, are the ones where I had a very difficult time dealing with or they were things that I considered very important or significant. Like I said, not traumatizing, just significant because I remember that they were very important, and outside of that, everything I think for the most part, was pretty positive.

In this narration, Eva seemed to be searching for an overall evaluation of her language brokering experiences and struggling to find a positive story to tell. The troubling memories that briefly entered into Eva's story late in the first interview (at age 19) have superseded the cozy memories of helping her mother as some of her earliest memories of language brokering. Eva began by calling these experiences "significant," adding, seemingly a bit nervously, "usually (.) in the bad light." She later used the word "traumatizing" (ostensibly claiming she was *not* traumatized, but belying that claim with the word and some nervous laughter).

In her earlier interview, stories of language brokering had to be drawn out; they were not what were uppermost in Eva's mind when she reflected on her childhood experiences at that point in time. In contrast, Eva introduced her second narrative with memories of these difficult encounters and giving them a negative valence: "the ones that are very significant, that stand out, are the ones where I had a very difficult time."

The reason for this discontinuity may be illuminated by what Eva told us in the rest of this second interview. She recounted in considerable detail some *recent* work she had done helping her father with his retirement plans and both parents with a serious case of identity theft—work that she considered "bigger ticket items" than what she had previously done and "kind of stressful." The identity theft case

required (an) endless amount of phone calls and letters and faxes, every account under my parents' name, if you can imagine, any credit card, any bank account, any utility, anything under my parents' name required a letter, a fax, a phone call, a phone call to make sure the fax had been received to follow up with the letter that had been sent.

These recent events, which were not yet entirely resolved, seemed to weigh heavily on Eva, and she spoke of her responsibilities as both a mother and a daughter, living so far away from her parents. Indeed, after the interview, she emailed a two-page document to the authors discussing her dissatisfaction with having had to help her parents with both these things. While children who are carers also have to help their parents with such tasks, it is the centrality of language differences that are central to what Eva perceived as problematic.

In summarizing her earliest experiences at home with her mother, Eva explicitly distinguished them from her more recent experiences: "I wasn't making phone calls, I wasn't setting up things for my mum at that point, but I was definitely looking at the forms and trying to make sense of the forms." This reveals how the present served as a frame for understanding the past. Eva directly compared her current experience with earlier ones, and it is likely that her memories of her early experiences may have been colored by this more recent and particularly troublesome language brokering work.

Third account—Age 28

The third interview took place just a few months after the second. Eva had just turned 28. After telling the interviewer about her present life circumstances, she responded to the

prompt to explain “how (her life as a language broker) all started.” As in the first interview, she indicated that she “(was)n’t quite sure.” She mused about how much English her parents were likely to have known at that time, remembering going to kindergarten herself without much knowledge of English, and how some high school students used to help her with her homework. Eventually, the story she settled on and recounted was of a parent–teacher conference that she located in second grade: “I think how if I had to say one thing that started it, I would have said the parent teacher conferences.” She also recalled her mother later giving her “small tasks: calling the doctors, making appointments, going through the mail.” In this interview, Eva explicitly said that she “didn’t really remember,” but that “the one thing that sticks out are the parent teacher conferences.” We might note that while just a few months earlier she recalled language brokering as somewhat “traumatizing,” she did not claim that parent–teacher conferences were the most salient of these traumatizing episodes. Nor, in the first or second interview, did she name these as her *first* experiences.

What seemed most salient in this third account was interpreting for her *sister’s* parent–teacher conferences and the one conference in particular that preceded her sister being held back a grade in school that she had mentioned in her second interview. The memory no longer seemed quite as traumatic as it had just a few months earlier, although Eva said she “felt pretty lousy” about her sister having to repeat first grade. Significantly, however, this time she criticized her mother more than herself: “I think it was faulty of my mom not wanting to challenge the teacher or to challenge ... to challenge her ...”

This move suggests that Eva was once again reconceptualizing her earlier experiences from a new vantage point and making quite different sense of them. She seemed to be speaking from her perspective as a mother herself, comparing how *she* would respond to a parent–teacher conference like this today: “If I was to go in with my daughter and they were ... they were going to tell me that she needed to repeat the ... the school year, I’d be furious.” This is the first time in her narrations that Eva stepped away from her own child perspective to compare her mother’s mothering with her own. This is also the first time she expressed any criticism of her parents at all.

Both the second and third interviews took place during a significant time in Eva’s life—not long after she had moved to California and started a family of her own. She was both metaphorically and physically moving away from her family of origin and creating a new sense of family for herself. Her narratives suggest underlying tensions in this individuation process with mixed emotions surfacing: some guilt for not speaking up on behalf of her sister in that parent–teacher conference long ago, for not being as readily available to her parents as she had been in the past, and for feeling divided in her own loyalties—to her children and her parents. She may, in addition, have felt relief at being freed from some of the language brokering tasks. Along with the guilt, Eva expressed some annoyance at the fact that her parents still needed her in these ways. At the same time, there was a sense that she *liked* being needed and took pride in the special role she had had in her family all these years. And finally, there was this new emergence of critique, with Eva suggesting that her mother was lacking as a mother, in comparison with how she would behave in similar circumstances. This illustrates Andrews’ (2013) point that

new experiences, and new understanding of old experiences, bring with them a new perspective not only on our own lives—our present, as well as our pasts—but on the way in which we make sense of the lives of others. (p. 205)

Final account—Age 33

The final (fourth) interview with Eva took place via the telephone. The two authors were together on one end of the line. Ann began by referencing Eva's prior interview experiences, inviting her to share "anything (that has) been going around in your mind since then in the last five, six years since we saw you together ... around language brokering." With only a brief hesitation, Eva jumped in, explicitly framing her reflections around her current position as a parent and observer of other parent-child interactions in the suburban California community where she now lived:

I think um what's been really interesting for me is that in the community that I live in, there's a, a growing Latino population and I, I think more and more I, I see the children that translate for their parents and now as a parent with children it really um I think touches me and it reminds me of the work that I did for my parents and even five or six years ago I was still translating for my parents and for phone calls and mail that they would send it to me but I do so little of it now because um my sister who still lives at home and I feel like they don't need me anymore.

As would be expected from narrative theory (Squire et al., 2014), this opening sequence takes us to the heart of Eva's current story: the fact that she did not feel needed any more by her parents. She considered that her sister, who lived with her parents in Chicago, had stepped in to take her place. Her reflections on language brokering are partly kept current for her because her neighborhood is in the process of becoming more like the neighborhood in which she grew up. Seeing children in her community language brokering "touches her" and reminds her of her own childhood. The emotional resonance seems to be partly nostalgic about no longer occupying the coveted (albeit complicated) role that she had held in her own family throughout her childhood and into university. Suggesting she feels "touched" also suggests that her identification with the child language brokers opens her up to feeling sympathy for/empathy, and identification, with her childhood self. Indeed, she talks of wanting to help the children when she sees them having difficulties. In addition, newly being faced with language brokering in her neighborhood makes her have to encounter familial relations and painful feelings of having been usurped in her parents' affections by her younger sister.

Eva noted that until a few years ago (around the time of the third interview), she had still performed language brokering long distance, by telephone, but

I just don't do for them anymore. I, I don't translate the mail for them, I don't make phone calls for them and really I think it's because my sister lives with them and, and whatever they may need, my sister can help them with that.

Eva did not seem to remember that at the time of our prior interview, she had expressed considerable *annoyance* at her parents' dependency and *frustration* about the work she

had to do. Her focus now was instead on seemingly having been displaced by her sister who had stayed close to home and now lived there.

In this final interview, Eva noted that she still occasionally helped her parents with “a few larger things,” but instead of confirming her continuing importance to her parents, it served to remind her of their aging and potential mortality—specifically, their wills and trust. She experienced this as “kind of sad because they are thinking about death,” explaining,

So I'm helping them look into, um, getting everything done on paper and, and taking inventory of everything that they have and how they want that to, I guess to, to be recorded in writing and, and working with the attorney and what not, so I moved on from helping with all the small stuff to a couple larger things that they need my help with.

At this point in the interview, Eva made a connection to her relationship with her own children and her current life positioning that constituted a key narrative (Plummer, 2001) constructed as much from what she did not say as what she *did* say. She did *not* step into her children's perspective to imagine how they may someday feel about *her* growing older. She did *not* create a story about how perhaps her children should help *her* now (as she had her own parents or as the children she observed in her community did their immigrant parents) or in the future. Instead, she wanted to be needed by *them*, as well as by her parents. She said, “It feels um in a very odd way, the way I think one day my, my children will grow up and they won't need me in the same way. They won't need me.” This underscores the recurring theme across all of Eva's narratives—that she derived meaning, purpose, and a sense of identity from *being needed* and from being a helpmate to her family members. She hoped that her children would always “need me hopefully for advice on those (everyday) things. My parents don't need me for the little things anymore.” With this wistful description of the present and anticipation of the future, Eva's retrospective narrative brings her childhood into the present as melancholic nostalgia.

Discussion and conclusion

Over the course of the four long interviews that we summarized and analyzed above, Eva presented a picture of having been pleased to interpret for her parents, and having gained much from the experiences, in terms of the closeness of her relationship with her parents and the expertise she developed. Yet, the episodes Eva selected as signifying her experience of brokering varied over time, as did the valence she attached to them.

Our analyses suggest that there is no singular “truth” about how Eva felt about language brokering or even what she remembered about her experience. The things Eva identified as salient were related to her positioning in her life course at the time of the interviews, and their meanings can only be deciphered in relation to her current preoccupations. The employment of narrative analysis is helpful here in that it enables analysis of how the past, present, and future are aligned in the stories people tell. Rosenthal (2006) explains that

When reconstructing a past (the life history) presented in the present of a life narrative (the life story) it must be considered that the presentation of past events is constituted by the present of

narrating. The present of the biographer determines his or her perspective on the past and produces a specific past at times. In the course of a life with its biographical turning points new remembered pasts arise at each point.

Our analyses echo Josselson's (2009) longitudinal study of one woman's life narratives; Josselson found that the same episode recounted four times was recounted differently depending on her participant's current life experiences and relationships. We similarly found that Eva's current life circumstances were central to her narrative. Our addition to Josselson's theorizing is to emphasize this as a way in which childhood was brought into the present.

We further show how this movement of childhood into the present is shaped by both past and current *relationships*. Eva's generational positioning was psychosocial in that she was deeply emotionally invested in being needed by both her parents and her children. That desire and commitment meant that she experienced her language brokering as having more traumatic elements in the second interview—when she was 27 years and struggling to disentangle her parents' problems with identity theft from a distance, while looking after her very young children—than in the first, when she had just recently moved from home into the relative independence of college. The fact that she felt that responsibility so keenly is itself psychosocial and relational in that she was also struggling to maintain her vision of herself as the child who did most for her parents and was closest to them. That struggle entailed imagining of herself, now a mother, in her mother's place during the third interview (at 28 years) and finding her mother "faulty." This reconstruction of a difficult episode when she had to interpret for her mother that her sister would be held back a year at school gave her permission to stop blaming herself for what was an unhappy and shocking event for the family. By 35, when she did little language brokering for her parents, the increasing number of child language brokers in her neighborhood allowed her to identify with them and empathize with her childhood self. This produced nostalgia for the past and wistfulness about not being needed so much by her parents as well as imagined future projections of possibly not being needed by her children.

Childhood themes were being reworked in the present at each of the interviews and in anticipation of future identities. In this sense, Eva's childhood was still very much alive as she grappled with the meanings of childhood language brokering. Those meanings were in process and were contingent on her current circumstances.

Eva's narratives also make it clear that the search for a definitive answer to the question that has preoccupied many researchers—about how child language brokers feel about this work—is futile, given the complex psychosocial dynamics bound up in the task and in the attendant family relationships, the ways both the tasks and the relationships change over time, and their re-interpretation in relation to ongoing life dilemmas. Our longitudinal analyses show the power of narrative as a sense-making device and the value of analytically interrogating these tensions in the service of holistic understandings of childhood and its relationship to adult life.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by grants from the Spencer Foundation/National Academy of Education and ESRC Award number: RES-051-27-0181.

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