

# Participation roles of a language broker and the discourse of brokering: An analysis of English–Macedonian interactions



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## Abstract

This study focuses on a language broker – a younger family member who performs lay interpreting for other family members. This paper examines three real-life interactions between a broker who relays speech from English-speakers to Macedonian-speaking family members. Adopting Goffman's notions of 'footing' and 'participant roles' that a speaker can assume, this paper examines how a broker engages with the conversational moves of others for him to assume the role of not only *animator* and *author*, but also *principal*. Transcribed speech shows evidence of features that are characteristic of interpreter speech: 'relayed inter-lingual transfer' and 'recipient design'. At the same time, inter-lingual transfer is punctuated cyclically by responses and prompts from others to engage with the broker as a speaker in his own right. This paper shows a broker's positioning to the role of *principal* and how this is negotiated and re-negotiated in changes of footing in which the broker can assume this role and then relinquish it.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on language brokers – younger family members who perform lay interpreting and advocacy for older family members – has been undertaken mostly by educational ethnographers and psychologists who examine how protagonists take on and accomplish specific tasks, usually normally outside their role as younger family members. There have been comparatively few studies that examine the *linguistic* attributes of brokers' renditions of others' speech and 'talk-in-interaction' with family members. At the same time, language brokering is different from intra-family conversation due to the presence and contributions of another ratified and allophone speaker and the broker's relaying of his/her speech into the family language.

This paper employs a model which distinguishes between different roles that speakers may assume vis-à-vis the words that they utter. This paper employs Goffman's (1981) notion of 'footing' and the different modes that a speaker can assume. These modes are 'animator', 'author' and 'principal' and they refer to the participant roles assumed by brokers (as speakers) and their position vis-à-vis the source speech that they are relaying. Footing changes and changes in the mode assumed by a speaker are located in conversational shifts, such as moves which display personal directness or involvement, direct or reported speech, interjections, etc. For this reason, this paper employs CA as a tool to capture the local organisation of interactional episodes and to describe conversational shifts and their relation to changes in the mode or role that speakers assume.

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This paper seeks to explore how different constellations of speakers' participant roles are enacted by a broker and negotiated by others. The data sample is based on real-life audio-taped interactions between a Macedonian–English broker and his mother in three different interactions. In real-life interactions, the broker is the animator of relayed speech but his role as author and principal may be less clear. Through a presentation and analysis of transcriptions of recordings from the data sample, this paper examines the following: how a broker recasts others' speech; the mode(s) that the broker assumes in this 're-presentation'; conversational moves of the Macedonian-speaker (the broker's mother); discourse features and patterns that may be characteristic of brokered interactions.

This analysis is backgrounded by discussion of the notion of (language) brokering, characterisations of lay and professional interpreting within the field of Interpreting Studies, and current discussion on the roles that interpreters assume, when performing dialogue (or liaison) interpreting. Sociolinguistic information on the informants as well as self-reported conventions of interaction with English-speakers in public or professional settings are also presented.

## 2. Brokers and language brokers

Language brokers are the “children of immigrant families who translate and interpret for their parents and other individuals” (Morales and Hanson, 2005:471). This term refers to the linguistic, usually verbal actions of children who mediate the interests of their parents and others, usually through representation and advocacy on their behalf. The term 'broker' derives from the term 'cultural broker', a designation that the famous anthropologist Geertz (1960:230) reserved for those individuals and groups in post-colonial Indonesia “who can communicate both with the urban elite and with the rural followers of a particular local tradition perform an altogether critical function”. In its gerund form, 'brokering' has been popularised by sociologist, nurse and social activist, Mary Ann Jezewski, to refer to the act of “bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural systems for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change” (Jezewski, 1993:79). While Jezewski employed the term to refer to her advocacy for a particular group of people – people born outside the US in health and mental health care settings – the term has been used by activists (Soong, 1983) to refer to the work that they perform on behalf of others and it has been employed by sociologists (Singh et al., 1999), anthropologists (Szasz, 2001) and educationalists (Páez and McCarthy, 1997) who study others who mediate or represent others.

In more recent studies, the terms 'cross-cultural brokering' refers to the work of intercultural mediators employed by NGOs or publicly funded entities who “as transmitters and enforcers of legal and social norms” and “as promoters of welfare services and human rights” function also as “mediators between different normative, institutional and cultural backgrounds” (Agusti-Panareda, 2006:409). While 'brokering' is a term employed in different contexts and situations, the notion of personal activism and advocacy for another or others remains a constant. This is also the case for 'language brokering'. Although this term has been in use for at least 20 years (cf. Tse, 1995), it has been one that has been seldom used by linguists or Translation Studies researchers, but by educationalists (e.g. McQuillan and Tse, 1995), Social Work researchers (e.g. Weisskirch, 2005) psychologists (Morales and Hanson, 2005) and ethnographers (e.g. Orellana, 2009). The linguistic aspects of language brokering are not usually examined in detail in these studies – sociologists initially considered such linguistic behaviour unremarkable and an enactment of social roles that themselves were of greater interest. Linguists' interest in brokering is of a more recent vintage. In a study of inter-generational communication breakdown and the role of second-generation intermediaries in interpreting for flanking generations Del Torto (2008) adopts a sociolinguistic and conversation analysis framework. In another study employing a CA methodology, Bolden (2012) examines repair sequences in language brokering. There has now been much recent research in Translation Studies (e.g. Antonini, 2010; Bucaria and Rossato, 2010) and Intercultural Studies (Meyer et al., 2010) on this topic.

Brokering involves not only cross-linguistic transfer but also mediation and negotiation between interlocutors who often occupy asymmetrical roles, with differences in class, status, education level, world views as well as ethnicity. These features provide for interesting situations for the study of cross-cultural communication, presentation of self and negotiation of role-relationships.

### 2.1. Language brokering within and outside Translation Studies

Within Interpreting Studies, language brokers, as lay interpreters,<sup>1</sup> are sometimes examined as a contrast control group to trained interpreters for particular production skills (Dubslanff and Martinsen, 2005) or as potential or current trainees of interpreting courses (Mikkelsen and Mintz, 1997; Niska, 2005; Valero Garcés, 2003; Angelelli, 2010). Some accounts focus on social engagement and skill enhancement amongst young bilinguals, foregrounding the emancipatory and activist nature of lay interpreting (e.g. Michael and Cocchini, 1997; Valdés, 2003) with less attention paid to actual

<sup>1</sup> The term 'lay interpreting' is used in this paper to refer to interpreting performed by unpaid and untrained individuals.

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