LANGUAGE BROKERING AND CODE SWITCHING AS TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOLS IN MULTILINGUAL SETTINGS: REFLECTIONS OF TWO IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History *Received: October 2022* *Revised: December 2022* *Published: January 2023* *Keywords* *Multilingual;* *Language brokering;* *Code-switching;* *Sociocultural;* *Funds of knowledge;*	*Language diversity is generally a norm in multilingual South African classroom. Orellana and García (2014) describe how multilingual speakers need to learn tools to allow them to be flexible with their language skills. Language brokering and code-switching form part of the everyday teaching and learning tools needed in South African multilingual classroom setting. Data was collected by means of observation and semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling was used to select Francophone immigrant children or learners who were observed outside the classroom in order to establish how they interacted with their peers on school playgrounds. Their personal narratives were collected and analyzed to enhance triangulation and thematic analysis was used to understand how immigrant children acted as language brokers. This research sets out to consolidate the position of language brokering and code-switching as pedagogically oriented language practices in a multilingual classroom setting. Using the sociocultural theories and the funds of knowledge (FoK), the current study rejects a deficit model, where linguistically and culturally diverse institutions of learning are reputed to be incapable of offering rich learning experiences and resources.*

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a linguistically superdiverse society where many learners speak English and a range of African languages at home and school. According to Sibanda (2019), one can find 50 learners who speak 12 different mother tongues between them, in a typical township classroom. There are at least 25 different languages spoken in South Africa (Lemmer 2002) where the 11 official languages are just a proportion of the full range of tongues. Notwithstanding the official language in education policy of additive multilingualism, in practice most schools do not provide the spaces and opportunities for learners to express themselves in languages other than English.

According to Alexander (1992, as cited in Wunseh, 2018) the diversity of South Africa is even more complex due to the flow of people from different parts of the world. As a result of economic and socio-political unrest in some African countries, Africans, particularly those from French-speaking African countries, have made South Africa their home. South Africa is referred to as a "rainbow nation", a term that was coined by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu (Allen, 2006). Upon arrival in South Africa most immigrant parents find difficulty in learning English, they encourage their children to do so, and thus their children in turn become their translators or interpreters. According to Wunseh (2018), by communicating in English, which they believe is the main language used nationally, immigrants therefore, look for ways of becoming part of this Rainbow Nation. The immigrant children quickly become

assimilated into their new host country's language system and help their immigrant families and friends by taking up new identities as child language brokers (Wunseh, 2018).

When brokering, children do not passively transmit words from one speaker to the other, but they use language as a tool for negotiation. This is because language brokering entails translating, interpreting, negotiating and advocating by bilingual children in a wide range of daily situations for their parents, relatives and other people who have limited English proficiency (Baker, 2006; Corona et al., 2012; Orellana, 2009, 2010). Therefore, language brokering is defined as the mediational work that children do as they negotiate for themselves and their families who are monolingual speakers (Orellana, 2009).

Teacher language brokers, just as child language brokers, do not only translate, but mediate, to develop the metalinguistic and cognitive skills of learners, meaning that learners must label, describe, synthesise and question (Pimentel & Sevin, 2009). Teachers act as language brokers by using code switching as a possibility for brokering language in a multilingual classroom. This enables learners to understand complicated subject matters taught in their L2. This also promotes outstanding achievement in teaching and learning. Meyers-Scotton (1992) defines code-switching as an interaction between speakers during a single communicative episode, and the use of more than one language. It can occur wherever there is a question of contact or interaction between speakers of different languages, or of the use of different codes by bilingual or multilingual speakers.

Upon arrival in the host country, most children are taught in an additional language, to prepare them for entering the 'mainstream education' in the new country (Baker, 2000). In many countries in Africa English is usually the most prestigious language, with high socio-economic status (Prah, 2005). Most immigrant children in South Africa must communicate in English, which is the medium of instruction in many schools. English language becomes a barrier to meaningful learning in the classroom as many of these children do not have adequate proficiency in it which, in some cases, is their third or fourth language (Prah, 2005). Hence, many immigrant children take up the role of language brokers for their peers who may experience difficulty in understanding and communicating proficiently in a second language of the host country.

Language brokering is an alternative communication strategy for a diverse range of people from different countries as they cannot communicate effectively in the imposed official language/s (Baker, 2006; Corona et al., 2012; Orellana, 2009, 2010). Child brokers from many different countries and languages have been described as demonstrating many tasks related to language and literacy that required them to mediate language and to make decisions (Harris & Sherwood, 1978; McMillan & Tse, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

South African children, just like immigrant children, all face challenges using English as language of instruction in most cases. In many South African schools, there has been an increasing mismatch between the stated policies on language and what one obtains on the ground. Webb (1999) states that meanwhile the country's institutional documents, (the Constitution and the national policies being developed) proclaim linguistic pluralism to be the national objective the country seems to be regressing to its pre-apartheid situation of monolingual practice situation of 'English only'. Barkhuizen (2002) suggests that the slow progress towards the implementation of indigenous African languages in schools and universities may be attributed to the fervent reactions from educationists, planners and politicians who have highlighted the impracticality of such a move. This has made English to maintain the prestigious position among other official languages in South African education system. Such values attributed to English as a language of success, progress and sophistication exclude those people who go to school with multiple languages and want to

live in a culturally integrated, multilingual society as people with the power to make their own decisions (Barkhuizen 2002).

To foster understanding of content taught, some educators and learners in multilingual South African classrooms have decided to code-switch. Allwood, Hammarstrom, Hendrikse, Ngcobo, Pretorious, & Van der Merwe (2010) claim that code-switching refers to instances of complete and unaltered forms of another language (English in particular) that are used in discourses between two or more speakers of the same language. These will also be used to refer to expressions in which a mixture of IsiZulu language and lexical material from the English language is manifested. Backus (2000) points out that the term codeswitching was originally coined to refer to alter-national switching between two languages. García, (2009) prefers to use the term *translanguaging* to reconceptualise the term *code switching* as a social practice that forms part of the everyday social life. According to Makalela (2014) translanguaging can be defined as a purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes.

For this research, the term 'translanguaging' is used to refer to both language brokering and code-switching. This is because translanguaging involves sophisticated pedagogically oriented language practices that include code-switching, translating, language recasting, and language brokering (Gort & Sembiante, 2015; MacSwan, 2017).

The study argues that by using language brokering and code-switching as teaching and learning tools in a multilingual classroom setting, bilinguals are considered as unique language users who act naturally and bring diverse experiences into communities (García, 2009). This portrays bilinguals who practise code-switching and language brokering as active constructors, bringing their own meanings to text, and thus reading and writing is in essence a construction and reconstruction of meaning. This study argues that a more appropriate balance can be achieved in South African multilingual classrooms if learners and educators are allowed to use their diverse natural communicative practices to promote meaningful teaching and learning for all in a multilingual context. Therefore, this study aims to understand the efficacy language brokering and code-switching in a multilingual and multicultural South African context. Hence, the following question: What are the implications of language brokering/code-switching for English language learning in the SA multilingual context?

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study used a qualitative methodology as it involves collecting information about participants' personal experiences. According to Silverman, 2005 cited in Wunseh, (2018), qualitative research is concerned with human beings in terms of interpersonal relationships, personal values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. The qualitative researcher attempts to attain rich, real, deep, and valid data from a rational standpoint.

The current study was based on a qualitative case study research design. The qualitative design enabled this study to investigate the various instances of language and cultural interactions between immigrant language brokers, their peers and their teachers in and outside multilingual and multicultural South African school context.

This study used an interpretive paradigm to understand the implications of language brokering/code-switching for English language learning in the SA multilingual context. To address the abovementioned question, this study followed the qualitative method informed by the Funds of Knowledge (FoK) theory to look into the practices of language brokering/code-switching/translanguaging by both teachers and learners in the South African multilingual and multicultural classroom setting.

Participants

The participants of this research were two immigrant children: Claire and Belleange (pseudonyms). At the time of data collection, Claire was a sixteen-year-old Grade ten Congolese girl. Belleange was a seven-year-old female Grade one learner. She was born in Congo but moved to South Africa with her parents when she was just three years old. Claire and Belleange grew up with two home languages as a result of being the offspring of 'mixed marriages', where parents come from different ethnic groups and speak different first languages. The study needed immigrant children who had spent at least two to three years or more in South Africa and who were registered in primary schools. The research also needed immigrant children from French speaking countries who were willing to share their experiences of struggling to learn and use English language. Claire and Belleange met these conditions.

Instruments

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. The Francophone immigrant children were observed outside the classroom in order to establish how they interacted with their peers on school playgrounds. Semi-structured interviews, observations and immigrant students' personal narratives were used as methods of data collection for triangulation purposes. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research which are intended to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to understand how immigrant children acted as language brokers, and how they negotiated and constructed their identities through English (L2) learning. Data collected by using recorded semi-structured interviews was transcribed as the first step in preparing and organizing the data for analysis (Creswell, 2003). The recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim to avoid losing any valuable data. The transcribed data were coded into various themes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Translanguaging which sometimes occurs outside the classroom must be capitalised by educators in class. Data collected and analysed showed that francophone immigrant children have different language experiences but have a common goal; to learn and use English properly to ease communication in multilingual South African context. Findings indicate that the immigrant children participated in varied and complex activities required in the process of family settlement and mobility in the new country. Their participation helped their parents to reduce the stress and frustration associated with settlement, thus resulting in more effective family functioning (Valenzuela, 1999). For the purposes of this paper, responses from two francophone immigrant children, Belleange and Claire are presented and discussed.

Language brokering as an emotional activity

During the semi-structured interviews, the two francophone immigrant children were conscious of their role in helping their families and friends in South Africa with regards to language. They played a significant role as translators across different languages within their respective social circles. It should be borne in mind that translation is an aspect of language brokering (Orellana, 2009). For example, one of the participants, Belleange, explained that whenever she went to the shops, social gatherings or meetings at school she had to perform the role of language broker, and this made her;

> *I feel fine helping mama ...then I'll be very happy she understands after.*
> (Belleange, interview, 20/04/2016)

This excerpt reflects the child's positive feeling as a language broker. In other words, she finds the experience exciting and so reports positive feelings about her language brokering performance, adding:

> *…I also enjoy talking to my siblings in English … I do it so they can be proud of me… I like being a translator to my family and others who are in need.*

The fact that Belleange uses words and short phrases like "enjoyed" "talking with siblings in English" "being a translator to my family and others...in need" shows that she acknowledges that she belongs to a particular community which lacks certain language skills such as English language competence. Therefore, English is treated with high regard, and proficiency in it seems to be a marker of high status. Hence, those who lack proficiency in it are proud of those who have it at their disposal.

However, in another interview Belleange explained that she was unhappy because she could not help her father due to her lack of understanding of "big English words" making her;

> *… feel bad not helping papa with his work paper …I couldn't understand the big English words…*
>
> (Belleange, interview, 20/04/2016)

This suggests that while Belleange acted as a language broker for her parents, she had a limited vocabulary in English. This could be attributed to her young age and her few years of exposure to English. She was seven years old and had arrived in South Africa only four years prior to the interview.

Research on child language brokering confirms that young immigrant children like Belleange could serve as language brokers for families and friends. In their study of migrants in the US, Morales & Hanson (2005) found that language brokering starts from one to five years after entering the immigrant country and the child may be as young as eight or nine years old. Language brokering not only enables children to translate information and communicate things to their parents but also aids in developing an understanding of cultural practices and norms (Weisskirch, 2010).

Belleange's proficiency levels in English – which still seemed underdeveloped – could also be explained in relation to Cummin's (1989) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1989) states that students' proficiency in reading academic texts, termed Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) lags significantly behind their oral proficiency, termed Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). In the case of Belleange, her BICS which takes two to three years to develop (Cummins, 1989) is not a problem since she could communicate orally in English. The problem seemed to be with the CALP which was not yet fully developed as she was still struggling with written texts. She could not help her father with paperwork because she did not understand the "big English words."

In the same way, the sixteen-year-old Claire explains how proud she is to be a language broker stating that she does not do language brokering for her family only, but for all immigrants who face difficulties in communicating due to lack of English proficiency and

> *It is a pleasure for me to help explain things in English to my family members and others and also explain to them what is said in English…I feel honoured when I receive just a "Thank You" after helping people understand what is said…*
>
> (*Claire*, interview, 24/05/2016).

Claire indicated how she facilitates communication by acting as a language broker for other immigrants

> *Almost every day, I come across immigrants struggling to pass a message through in the little English they know… It's embarrassing when one feels impotent because one doesn't know the language. I help translate wherever and whenever I can and I am glad to be of help*
> (Claire, interview, 24/05/2016)

The excerpt shows how these two immigrant children act as language brokers across space and time in their host country. Claire uses the expressions, "I help translate", "wherever" and "whenever", to better explain how this happens. From Claire's responses to the interview, it can be deduced that home language maintenance is a linguistic asset in multilingual settings. Language brokering may serve as a means of preserving home language competence among children (Tse 1995). Maintenance of the home language appears to be a means of sustaining positive relationships amongst immigrants in a new country (Naddumba & Athiemoolam, 2022; Makgabo & Niipare, 2022). Claire's home language is Lingala which she used everywhere after she had just arrived in South Africa. Her Congolese friend who was born in South Africa and could speak English helped her to understand English by translating information from English to Lingala. She also introduced her to her English-speaking friends from whom she could learn English. Subsequently Claire mastered English and she started to explain things in English to her mother and other immigrants who were still learning English. This happened at meetings in schools or in other social gatherings (Zano, 2022; Alemayehu-Dheressa, 2022).

Claire was motivated by her family and other immigrants she brokered for. She felt very positive about life and her future as she was also recognized by her school authorities as hard working and a good language broker. In the second excerpt, Claire expresses positive feelings about being a language broker for her family and others. Affirmation by other immigrants motivated her to do better in language brokering for her immigrant community in South Africa. Belleange's and Claire's positive feelings can be understood in relation to Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of practice (COP) framework which shows a strong link between the act of learning a second language and the community in which the learning is actually taking place. This concept is a perspective that locates learning in the relationship between the person and the world; at its centre is how the social and the individual constitute each other. Lave & Wenger's (1991) COP framework is included as part of the Poststructural Approach to second language learning identified by Block (2007) and other scholars (Lantolf, 2000; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

The responses of these two children seem to imply that English is a prestigious language that affords or cultivates high self-esteem in the person who speaks it. This relates to Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) works which draw attention to the importance of power in structuring discourse with interlocutors who hardly share equal speaking rights. Bourdieu (1991) considers the use of language as a social and political practice in which the value of an utterance and its meaning is determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks. In this case study, Claire is considered as a person of power and high status as she can understand and speak the language of high status in South Africa namely, English. The compliments and appreciation she receives from other immigrants motivates her to learn English. In this way, she can negotiate and construct a new identity through English which is seen as a prestigious language, not only in South Africa but across the globe.

In the case of second language learning, it is dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge and allows performance to outstrip competence. Language brokering is a continuous learning process as immigrant children perform brokering acts for their families and peers on a daily basis. In the light of this it is likely that the immigrant children will not only be proud of having competence in English but will also have increased confidence in using the language (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Walinchowski, 2001).

From the literature used, we can say both immigrant and South African learners have high self-esteem and feel proud when they are able to make use of their rich language repertoires to understand lesson content in school. The sense of pride seems to arise from the knowledge that they are able to use their home languages to better understand content taught in English in many formal domains in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

This study, through the theory of funds of knowledge concedes the substantial academic potential associated with loads of knowledge that arise from students' active participation in multi-generational (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020), multicultural, and multilingual academic activities. According to this concept, learners do not enter the academic space as blank slates (Bonomi, 2019); neither do they arrive with only their prior school learning. They arrive in the classroom with knowledge that should be viewed as resources rather than obstacles. Such resources include their home language. The funds of knowledge theory argues that academic instruction should be linked to students' lives and lived experiences (Ramirez & Ross, 2019), and the details of effective pedagogy should be linked to local histories and community contexts (Gonzalez, 2005) from which learners come.

The households where learners come from are 'repositories of knowledge' (Gonzalez 2005: 26), and these forms of knowledge can be transferred to the classroom, thus affording opportunities to bridge the space between their life worlds and the learning institutions they attend (Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2018). The current study, therefore, suggests multilingual learners must be made aware that their ability to code-switch, and act as language brokers, is integral both to their academic success in multilingual South African classrooms (Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018). Educators across the academic sphere should encourage learners to draw from their rich, fluid linguistic repertoire (Yuvayapan, 2019). An interesting point that was noted is that language brokering/code-switching and language learning are mutually constituted, influencing each other. In addition, it became clearer that language learning for multilingual learners mean the acquisition of discourses in the South African community.

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