



Multilingual children and language brokering

Kim Armstrong and Sarah Crafter

Speaking more than one language workshop

ESRC Festival of Social Science

10th November 2018

Who are we?

Kim Armstrong - Mothertongue

- Operations Manager for Mothertongue Counselling Service
- Interest in CLB from own experience and working with migrants at MT
- Completed a Masters Dissertation in 2013 on the role of CLBs and the social agency they use in situations

Sarah Crafter – The Open University

- Child and family migration, transitions to adulthood and identities
- How young people themselves felt about the role – tied to their ideas about childhood
- The role of school during child language brokering
- How their language brokering led them to mediate culturally as well as linguistically, and how that experience might differ across context
- <http://languagebrokering.info>



What is Child Language Brokering?

- Children of immigrant families who translate and interpret for their families and others
- But brokering suggests it is not straightforward interpreting but some form of cultural mediation

Group discussion

- Should children be allowed to act as child language brokers?
- Does context or circumstance alter your view.
Talk about each situation in turn:
 - In a shop
 - At home while watching TV
 - During an emergency in A&E (before professional can be found)
 - Collecting medicine from the pharmacy

Why study Child Language Brokers?

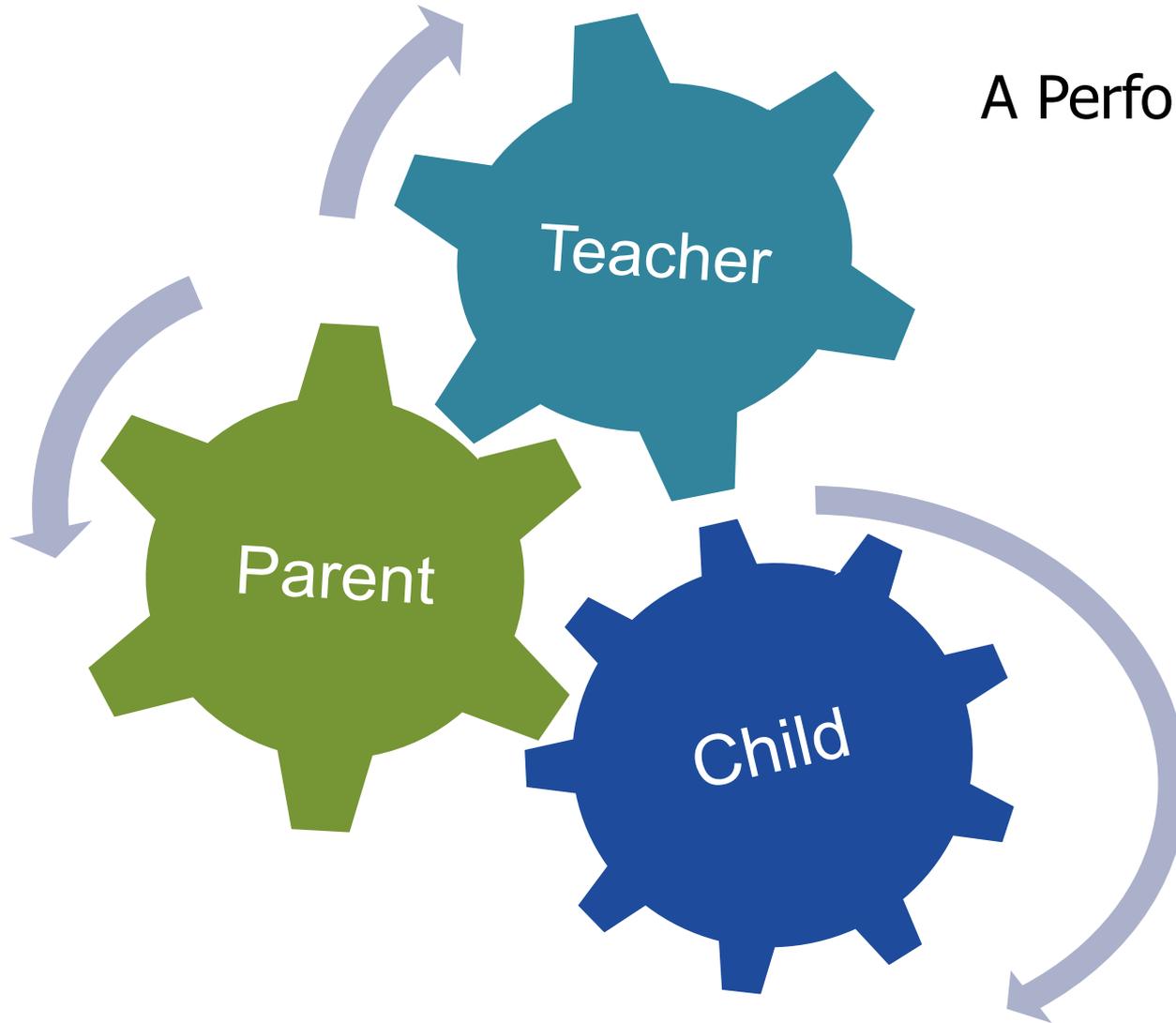
- Traditional ideas that children should not be used to interpret in the adult world
- Newer studies which look at the benefits to the child and the positive effects towards citizenship and integration
- How is social agency used and what other skills become available to the child as a result of brokering

Social Agency

The children used considerable agency when:

- Managing difficult situations
- Medical interpreting
- Telling the truth
- Managing their vocabulary
- Managing the expectations of their parents
- Gaining parental approval

A Performance Team?



Positive outcomes (study by Armstrong, 2013)

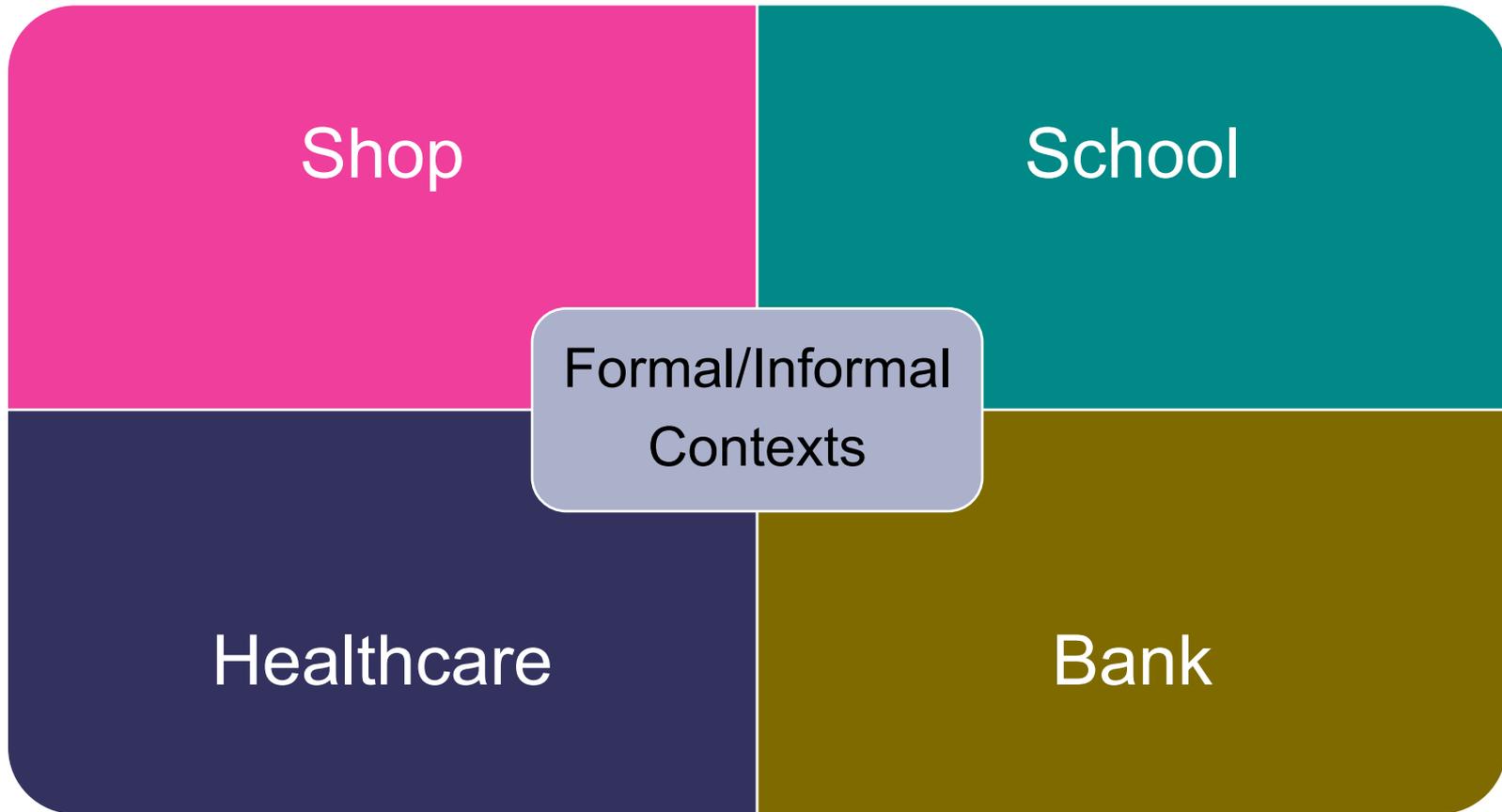
- Helping others to read and write
 - All participants had helped parents or younger siblings to read and write English.
- Dorner et al (2008) recorded that brokering engendered a 'helping others' outlook
- Bauer (2010) recorded positive contribution towards being active citizens
- The future opportunities that being bilingual would bring in terms of career

Support for Child Language Brokers

The main stressors for the brokers in this study were:

1. Lack of vocabulary in mother tongue and English
2. Managing parental expectations
3. Managing the flow of conversation
4. Being perceived 'expert' because of knowledge of English but no knowledge of the actual transaction

What are the demands in different contexts?



Group Discussion:

Situations in which parents/adults require language support

- Please discuss the different scenarios listed
- Discuss whether a child language broker could be used or whether a professional interpreter should be present

Questions for discussions

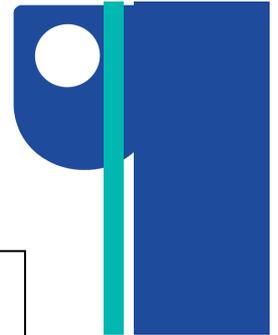
- **At the Housing Office:**
- Can a child decline to be involved?
- Is it OK for a child to use his/her social agency in this situation?
- **At the Bank:**
- At what point in the conversation should the bank person have checked the understanding of the child?
- Name 3 points for you which are the most important learning from this scenario

Questions for discussions (II)

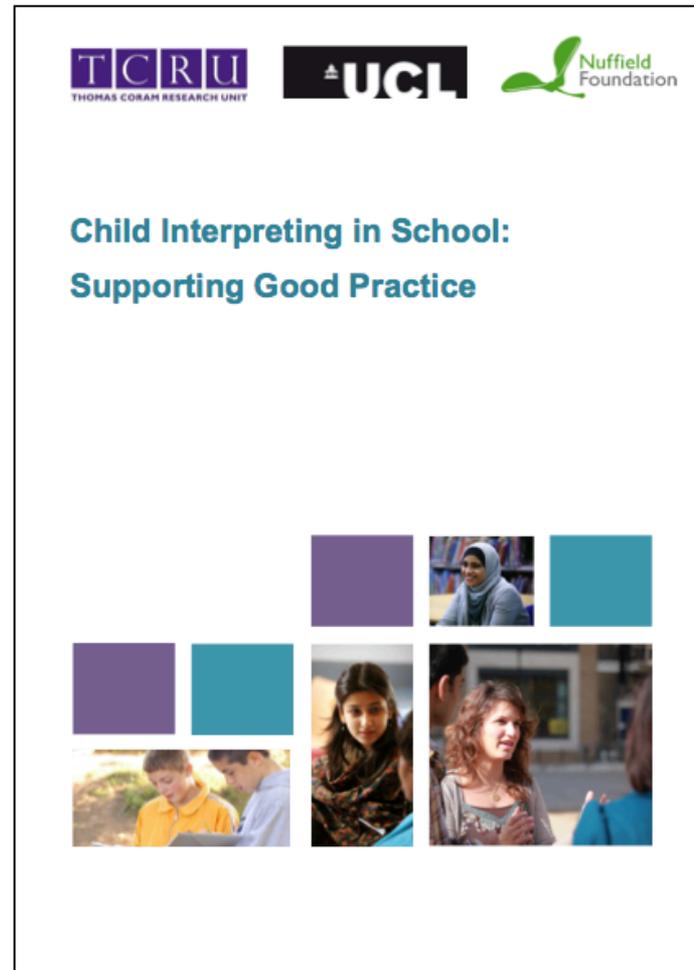
- **At the Doctor**
- Are the parents' wishes sought and respected?
- Should every medical appointment be facilitated by a professional interpreter even if the patient wishes a member of the family to interpret for them?
- **At the school**
- Should there be a clear and explicit school policy on involving a student for language support?
- Should a school pay for professional interpreters to be available at parents' evenings?

Key areas of the guide

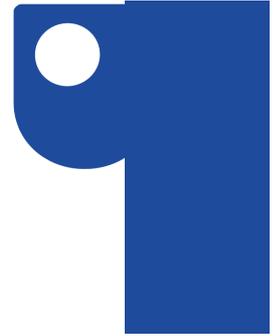
<http://child-language-brokering.weebly.com>



- Choosing the best person to act as a translator: questions to support good practice
- Training young interpreters in a formal scheme
- Interpreting for parents and family members
- Supporting peers in the classroom



Choosing the best person to act as a translator: questions to support good practice



When should adults be used? Providing teachers with a series of questions as prompts to decision-making

- Is there a sensitive issue so that the discussion might become tense or serious or embarrassing?
- Might family members consider it inappropriate for a child to be involved?
- Are there safeguarding issues or a report of domestic violence?
- Are the police involved, e.g. about a drug related incident involving another student?
- Is the subject of the meeting personal or private to those involved?
- Does a child have problems at school?
- May it be necessary to translate a child's criticisms of a teacher?

“It is not fair if you ask a 15 year old, if you think they've got emotional issues, you wouldn't ask a child to say ‘can you talk with your parents that’, you know, you've got problems with making friends. No, you can't do that because you will hurt the child's feelings... So, no, I certainly won't talk about any sensitive issues using the child themselves.”

Phoebe (Teacher)

“I felt like I was exposed to things that I wouldn't expose my own 7 year old to, no way.”

Ines (Ex-CLB)

Conflict avoidance

Active broker

Neutral broker

Conflict avoidance

- “I would say to my mum ‘Sorry mum, I don’t understand this, let’s go to the other person, maybe he knows what it is’”
- “I just left the room and went to my friend’s house. I just gave up. I said do it yourself.”

Active broker

- “Oh that was intense. We had to call someone, apparently no one wants to help us and they told us to call someone. They gave us a phone and a number. And we didn’t know where we were calling and why we were calling. And it was me and my mum passing the phone, like you know. It was funny at the beginning because again, this person didn’t really speaking English. And my mum was like ‘Call him an idiot’. And I was like ‘No mum, I won’t do it’. She was like ‘Call him an idiot’. ‘No’ (me). And she just took the phone, she said ‘Idiot’. That’s all. And I was like ‘That’s not the way you’re supposed to speak to people’.”

Neutral broker

- “What was the awkward part of it? The way that you couldn’t find the words? (D): Yeah (S): Or the actual conversation itself, what they were talking about?”
- (D): They were talking about job or something *so it’s not my business anyway*. But the way I couldn’t find the particular words”

Quotes from CLBs

'I have to think about what I want to say, it's really hard sometimes. I'm really happy that I can help my mum. I feel proud I can help my mum and she is proud of me'

'I have helped my dad filling in forms for his job, so I tell him what to write down and he does. They have started to pick up more English because I tell them what words mean and they then learn more. Then they need me to tell them less'

'I am proud of myself, without me my mum couldn't do anything, all she can say is hello. She can speak Russian but can't learn English, she has no patience with this language'

'I helped my mum when she and my dad split up for a time. We had to rent a new house, sort out council benefits, my mum could not do anything without me as she has no English'

'I do as much as I can for her (mother) because she brought me here (to the UK) so I can have a future in Poland, that I can speak English, and maybe other languages like Spanish which will get me a good job in the future.'