

## **‘Having a Tongue and Mouth But Not Able to Speak’: Francophone Immigrant Parents’ Experiences of Child Language Brokering in South Africa**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is an analysis of Francophone immigrant parents’ experiences of child language brokering in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews from nine immigrant parents who were selected through a convenience and snowball sampling technique. Through the lens of sociocultural theory and acculturation, the key findings indicate that the Francophone immigrant parents displayed positive feelings and had optimistic expectations concerning their children’s language brokering skills in English and their future prospects in South Africa. The paper concludes that Francophone immigrant parents’ experiences of child language brokering are complex and dynamic and are influenced by the context and purpose of communication.

**KEY WORDS:** Migration, South Africa, Francophone, immigrants, language brokering

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The rise in global mobility, the growing complexity of migratory patterns and their impact on countries, migrants, families, and communities, have all contributed to international migration having become a priority for the international community (Lacroix, 2013). Africa has become the receiver of migrants from many parts of Africa through transitional and trans-local migration (Deumert et al, 2005; Stats SA, 2012). Some immigrants in South Africa come from Francophone countries such as Congo, Burundi, Ruanda, Gabon, and Cameroon. Immigrants have to learn a new language to fit into the new and foreign environment of the host country (Kerswill, 2005). Many Francophone immigrants in South Africa struggle to do so, in English as well as in other South African languages.

Immigrant children are likely to learn the new language at a faster pace than their parents (Weisskirch, 2007) because their school environment provides them with

direct exposure to the language and the culture of the host country. As a result, many immigrant parents rely on their children, who act as translators and interpreters in the new host environment. The children translate documents, answer telephone calls for their parents, and speak on behalf of their parents in various formal and informal domains such as hospitals, shops, government offices, etc. (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Kemende Wunseh, 2018; Orellana, 2009; Trickett & Jones, 2007).

While language brokering is a common practice among immigrant families across the world (Cline et al., 2011; Katsere, 2016), available scholarship has mainly focused on the experiences of child language brokers. Many existing studies in Africa have examined language brokering from the children's perspectives only (Katsere, 2016; Kemende Wunseh, 2018; Kemende Wunseh & Nomlomo, 2020; Moroe & de Andrade, 2018), but there is still a paucity of research on language brokering in Africa in general, especially with regard to immigrant parents' views and perspectives on child language brokering.

In view of the above, this paper uncovers Francophone immigrant parents' experiences of their children as language brokers in the Western Cape province of South Africa. We believe that, with greater input from the parents, there would be more understanding of immigrant family dynamics around language brokering in multilingual contexts such as South Africa. In this sense, this paper contributes to the body of knowledge on child language brokering from an African perspective.

### **Immigrant Children and Language Brokering**

Child language brokering is a concept often applied to the phenomenon of linguistic and cultural translation (Anguiano, 2018; López et al., 2019). It entails translating, interpreting, negotiating, and advocating by bilingual children for their parents, relatives, and other people who have limited proficiency in the language/s of the host country (Anguiano, 2018; Baker, 2006; Orellana, 2009). It involves linguistic and cultural mediational roles that simultaneously convey important information inherent not only in the subject matter of the translation or interpretation, but also in the context of the cultural aspects of society, such as, but not limited to, person-to-person interactions and definitions of values such as respect and trust (Mier-Chairez et al., 2019; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Orellana, 2009).

Current debates on child language brokering are based on its impact on the parent-child relationship and the role of language brokering as a family practice (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022). One side of the debate refers to language brokering as a cause of role reversal which entails the suppression of the authority of parents, since children are viewed as experts with regard to language competence and they take the lead in family interactions (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Moroe & de Andrade, 2018). Role reversal is also known as parentification, whereby children assume authority and mediate for their parents and other people who are learning a language in a new country (Kemende Wunseh, 2018; Orellana, 2009; Weisskirch, 2007). It leads to a shift in roles and may expose children to inappropriate situations that place them under a lot of pressure as they act as interpreters and mediators for their parents in a foreign environment (Moroe & de Andrade, 2018). This can cause child distress, as children sometimes find themselves brokering in conflictual situations which reflect the socio-

political histories, cultures, and institutional inequalities in a given context (Crafter & Iqbal, 2020; Jones et al., 2012).

Opponents of the concept of parentification, on the other hand, view parentification as a Western concept that overlooks the role of children in family tasks that prepare them for adulthood (Bauer, 2010; Orellana, 2009). It is associated with a deficit approach that does not acknowledge the children's contribution to their families' adaptation in the host country. In fact, in non-Western cultures, it could be viewed as a family practice associated with care and respect because children act as linguistic mediators for their immigrant family members (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Orellana, 2009; Weisskirch, 2007). It is associated with maturity, confidence, pride, and unselfish or cordial behaviour, as children provide emotional and instrumental support to their parents (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Moroe & de Andrade, 2018; Roche et al., 2014; Tomasi & Narchal, 2020).

### **Language Brokering and Parent-child Relationships**

There are clearly mixed views regarding language brokering and its effects on children's relationships with their parents (Morales & Hanson, 2005). One view is that child language brokering could lead to family dynamics in which parents lose their power and authority (Moroe & de Andrade, 2018). The other view is that it creates a strong relationship between parents and their children (Orellana, 2009; Tomasi & Narchal, 2020). The former view is associated with negative feelings and is seen as a cause of destabilising the family system (Bauer, 2010; Tomasi & Narchal, 2020). A study by Puig (2002) with Cuban refugee parents and their adolescent children, for example, found that language brokering negatively affected family relations because parents had to rely on their children to complete certain tasks for them.

On the other hand, children's language brokering is often aligned with parents' sense of pride, togetherness, and appreciation of the activities performed by children as language brokers (Cline, et al., 2011; Crafter & Iqbal, 2022). For example, Wu's and Kim's study (2009) found that there is a positive relationship between brokering and ethnic identity in maintaining family relations. Another study by Roche et al. (2014) maintains that language brokering has a positive impact on families as immigrant children gain self-efficacy and feel more confident. Another view is that language brokering is a family practice that characterises the everyday life of immigrants in a host country. This view problematises the idea that child language brokering is a way of disrupting family relations and parentification and, instead, views it as a dynamic practice of trust and care (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022). It argues that, while child language brokers assume powerful responsibilities as intermediaries for their families, their parents ultimately hold the power and responsibility in the house (Bauer, 2010; Crafter & Iqbal, 2022). Language brokering, therefore, could be regarded as a linguistic and social resource to immigrant parents that is embedded in the socio-cultural context, and enhances family acculturation in the host country.

## Language Brokering and Acculturation

This article draws on the notion of acculturation which is often used to describe the experience of immigration and intercultural contact in multicultural societies (Berry, 1997; Birman & Trickett, 2001). Chirkov (2009) explains that acculturation situates child language brokering centrally in the dynamic relationship that unfolds between immigrants and the host society. This process entails the gradual and mutual interpenetration of cultural elements originating from both the immigrant and the native-born segments of society. Andreouli (2013) and Berry (2005) maintain that acculturation is an ongoing process in which immigrant parents may use their children as language brokers, even when the parents' understanding of the new language is sufficient (Weisskirch, 2007). This implies that, even though mastery of the target language for immigrant parents may be hard to attain, with the aid of their children they continually try to become fluent in the language and to understand the culture attached to the language.

Acculturation is related to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of 'dialogues', whereby people interact socially and communicate with others to learn the cultural values of their society. These interactions normally take place at home, in the local community, in supermarkets or in public transport, and so on. This implies that human activities take place in cultural settings and cannot be understood in isolation from these settings (Woolfolk, 2004). Hence, acculturation may be associated with the socio-cultural view of learning (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). From a socio-cultural point of view, children and parents mutually scaffold each other's learning and understanding during language brokering events and together advance their first and second language development and knowledge of the new social environment. This indicates that child language brokers mediate between two (or more) different languages for their parents, extended family, and other members of the broader community (Kemende, 2018). Because language brokering involves learning the target language in the host country, immigrant learners, including parents, bring their own lived experiences to the process, which is grounded in their unique socio-cultural contexts.

In the context of this paper, the actions and strategies of immigrants are influenced by the values of the dominant society such as segregation, which is a legacy of the apartheid regime in South Africa. In this case, English is hegemonic at the expense of the nine official African languages that were marginalised during apartheid and still exist at the periphery of democratic South Africa. As a result, many immigrants tend to learn English and have little interest in learning the local African languages spoken by the majority of South Africans. This implies that language brokering inducts immigrant parents and their children into the dominant culture in order to access resources and adapt to the new culture (Valdés, 2003; Weisskirch, 2007).

## Research Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative approach, within a descriptive case study research design. Qualitative research is a means of understanding people's perspectives, experiences, and beliefs in an authentic context (Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Given, 2015). A research design, on the other hand, is a blueprint or tool that guides the researcher on how to conduct a study to address the research problem (Kumar, 2011; Mouton, 2001) in terms of the sample size, the methods of data collection, and the research instruments to be used.

For the purpose of this article, we adopted a case study research design. A case study aligns with qualitative research and it draws on the participants' histories and their environment to gain multiple perspectives of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2018; Karlsson, 2016). It allows the use of different methods of data collection to gain insight into the participants' experiences, perspectives, and worldviews within a social context. In other words, it provides an in-depth description and understanding of a particular phenomenon, and it can involve single individuals or a group of participants, depending on the case under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Henning et al., 2004).

While we acknowledge the relevance and suitability of the three categories or types of case studies, namely exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies in qualitative research (Yazan, 2015), we adopted the latter to capture or describe the case from the participants' point of view (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2009). The aim was to acknowledge the participants' voices (i.e., the Francophone immigrant parents) in terms of how they experienced and understood child language brokering within their own environment. In a nutshell, the case study design enabled us to study the problem in-depth and learn more about the immigrant parents' environment and perspectives, and how they interacted with their children as language brokers. We engaged with the Francophone immigrant parents to gain more insights into their own understanding and experiences of children's language brokering in the South African context. Through this approach, we were able to access rich information from a small number of Francophone immigrant parents ( $n = 9$ ) to discover and understand their own experiences and interpretation of child language brokering in a foreign country. In this way, we had an in-depth study of the case that informed our analysis as discussed in the following section.

### **Sampling Technique**

The use of small samples is one of the characteristics of qualitative research (Burton et al., 2008). Using a snowball technique that entailed referral, we consulted one Francophone immigrant parent who introduced us to eight others who had spent at least three years in South Africa, with children of primary school-going age. Snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, permits participants to refer the researcher to others who may be able to potentially contribute towards or participate in the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2008). We needed immigrant parents with children of primary school-going age, who had spent at least three years in South Africa. The first participant was a neighbour to one of the authors of this article, so it was easy and convenient to ask for her assistance to reach more immigrant parents who met the selection criteria of the study. Six of the parents were female and three were male. The parents spoke Lingala, Kiswahili, Bassa, and Kirundi as their home languages. Therefore, for this article, we focus on the nine immigrant parents' experiences to investigate their experiences of child language brokering. The parents' age ranged between 36 and 41 years old.

## Ethical Considerations

Research ethics were followed by seeking informed consent and voluntary participation in the study. We refer to the female participants as Madam A, Madam B, Madam C, Madam D, Madam E, and Madam F to protect their identity. The male participants are referred to as Mr. G, Mr. H, and Mr. I. None of the female participants were employed while the three men worked in different companies. For example, Mr. G was a security guard; Mr. H was a driver in a storage and logistics company; and Mr. I was a hawker.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The nine immigrant parents were interviewed to investigate their experiences with children acting as language brokers for their immigrant families in South Africa. In line with the qualitative research approach, we used semi-structured interviews to gather information from immigrant parents. Semi-structured interviews are guided by open-ended questions to obtain rich information from the interviewees as they allow participants to talk more freely (Burton et al., 2008; Stuckey, 2013). This approach was followed in interviewing the parents who were given the freedom to use either French or English in their responses, or to switch between the two languages to express their views, as one of the researchers was proficient in both languages.

The interviews were conducted in English and in French. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. For this paper, the parents' responses were translated into English by one of the authors of this article who has a good command of French. The data were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis entails identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this article, thematic analysis was used to identify common patterns and themes that emerged from the data collected from immigrant parents and to categorize the themes accordingly. The recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim to avoid losing any valuable data.

The research question was as follows: "What are immigrant parents' experiences with their children or other immigrant children who broker for their families and friends?" In order to address the research question stated above, we grouped similar phrases and words from the interview data collected from the immigrant children's parents. We interrogated, examined, and categorised the codes (phrases and words from the data) to see what themes and patterns emerged. All the immigrant children's parents expressed joy in seeing their children speak and write English. They made use of specific markers of success such as "brighter future", "clever in English", "good job", etc., when commenting about their children being language brokers. We also noticed that almost all the parents were happy to have multilingual children, as they repeatedly used this phrase, "my child/son/daughter can speak Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English". However, they were also delighted that the children maintained their first language while acquiring other additional languages. This could be seen in

their general responses where the following words were used: “we still speak our home language at home... the kids still use our language and mix with English....”

## Research Findings

The research findings indicate that parents had diverse experiences regarding child language brokering. Overall, the parents displayed positive feelings and optimistic expectations in terms of their children’s language brokering skills and their future prospects in South Africa.

### Positive Experiences of Language Brokering

During the interviews, parents of the immigrant children were asked to explain their views and experiences of their children’s role as language brokers. All nine interviewed parents expressed pride in their children who were brokering for them. Four of the parents said that child language brokering assisted them to learn English and assimilate cultural issues in South Africa. For example, Madam A spoke of her improvement in English and her curiosity about the host country’s cultural development. She expressed her happiness and pride in having a child who could be her personal language broker at any time.

I learn from my child every day. My English isn’t so bad like before... I ask to do homework together with her when her home teacher is helping... I tell myself this is going to help me learn also new things about the culture and people of South Africa because my child is going to school and bringing new information every day.

The above excerpt not only positions the parent as a lifelong learner but also shows her involvement in her child’s schoolwork. She acknowledges her improved English language skills [*My English isn’t so bad like before*], and the strategy she adopted to learn it [*I ask to do homework together*]. Her child is portrayed as a great source of knowledge and the parent displays great joy and motivation to learn more than the language through her child’s language brokering skills. In this case, a degree of role reversal is apparent [*I learn from my child every day*], while her responsibility for her child’s learning is not neglected. There is an involvement of a ‘knowledgeable other’ [*her home teacher*] who helps both of them.

Five of the parents (Madam B, D, E, and Mr. G and Mr. I) expressed loyalty to their home languages while they also showed pride in their children’s ability to speak English and other South African languages. Madam B, for example, showed pride in her child and had high expectations of her. She expressed herself thus:

My daughter is going to be a star; you know she can speak Afrikaans, isiXhosa, and English very well. I’m not forgetting our home language, Lingala. I’m so proud of her! My husband says the future is very bright for us here in South Africa because, not only our daughter will get a good job, but he also will get a better job than being a security worker.

In this excerpt, the immigrant child is not a broker for English only, but her multilingual skills are acknowledged and associated with high levels of intelligence and better socio-economic opportunities. Of interest is that the child's proficiency in other South African languages, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, is given as much attention as English. While the parent shows loyalty to their home language (Lingala), English is associated with economic benefits for other members of the family [*he also will get a better job*]. This perception could be understood in relation to the hegemonic status of English across the globe and its association with the job market and better life chances.

Madam D experienced far more difficulties in English than Madam B. Although Madam D's daughter could understand English, she was not as proficient as children born in an English-speaking country. Madam D revealed that her daughter used to watch certain English television programmes even while they were still in Congo. So, when they arrived in South Africa, Madam D expected her daughter to play the role of a language broker for her whenever there was a need. Although Madam D seemed to experience challenges in English, she also expressed pride in her daughter:

*Je ne parle toujours pas bien l'anglais, alors je compte vraiment sur ma fille, même si son père dit que ça dérange ses études... J'ai du mal à communiquer parce que je n'ai jamais fait l'anglais auparavant. À la maison et même ici, je parle Lingala avec des gens à qui je suis habitué... Mais je sais que de temps à autre, quelques mots de ma fille en anglais vous aideront.*

I still don't speak English well, so I really rely on my daughter, though her father says it disturbs her studies... At home and even here, I speak Lingala with people I'm used to... But I know picking up a few words from my daughter in English from time to time will help me.

Madam B's and D's utterances show not only the role played by their children in learning English but also the power that has been assumed by the children through language brokering [*rely on my daughter*]. However, Madam D's husband shows his concern with the child's role as a language broker in their home [*it disturbs her studies*]. The data also indicates that Lingala is used as a common lingua franca among a group of immigrants from different language groups in Congo. This suggests that the immigrants retain loyalty and pride in their home language as a marker of identity, despite their determination to learn English in South Africa.

Madam D's utterances suggest that the child's role is to support her parent in mastering English only. Given the hegemonic status of English in South Africa, this is unsurprising. It has become common for South African children, especially those from the middle class, not to speak and learn their home languages at school; these African languages are not associated with economic benefits. This practice encourages subtractive bilingualism and often leads to semi-lingualism, whereby children are neither proficient in their home language nor in their second language (Cummins, 2000).

Likewise, Madam E expressed her feelings about having her daughter interpret or translate for her:

*Eh bien pour moi, c'est une grande aide, car si elle n'était pas là avec moi, je me sentirais muette, je serai silencieuse dans ce pays; Ce serait comme avoir une langue et une bouche mais pas capable de parler.*



Well, for me it's a great help because if she were not here with me, I would feel mute, I would be muted in this country; it would be like having a tongue and mouth but not able to speak.

In the above excerpt, child language brokering is portrayed as a valuable resource in integrating into a new country – to 'unmute' and provide a voice to the adult immigrant who displayed vulnerability in the new language environment.

### Experiences of Guilt and Children's Frustration

While parents had positive experiences of their children's language brokering, they also expressed some negative effects of this practice on their children's emotions. For example, Mr. G expressed feelings of guilt that his 12 years old son acted as a language broker. He felt that he was overworking his son by expecting him to broker for him. Similarly, his son expressed frustration and stress in brokering for his father. Mr. G expressed himself as follows:

*Dans mon pays d'origine au Burundi, je communiquais à Kirundi ou au Swahili que je connaissais... ici en Afrique du Sud, les choses sont différentes. Nous rencontrons parfois d'autres étrangers qui parlent français, mais mon français est très pauvre, vous ne pouvez même pas le comprendre clairement... mon fils a beaucoup de travail pour me traduire du français au Kirundi, de l'anglais au Kirundi; c'est trop pour lui.*

In my home country, Burundi, I used to communicate either in Kirundi or the little Swahili I knew... Here in South Africa, things are different. We sometimes meet other foreigners who speak French, but my French is very poor, you can't even understand it clearly... my son has a lot of work translating things to me from French to Kirundi, from English to Kirundi; it is too much for him.

The above excerpt shows the parent's linguistic richness as he was competent in two African languages and was also exposed to English and French, in which he had limited proficiency. It also shows how immigrants maintain their identity and group relationships through a common language in the host country as reflected in his words, *We sometimes meet other foreigners who speak French*. Furthermore, it reveals the child's multilingual skills as he could translate three languages, English, French, and Kirundi. However, the remarks reveal that, while the child had low proficiency in the two colonial languages, English and French, he was expected to translate for his father, who had empathy for him. Emotions such as guilt are common among adult immigrants who are dependent on their children for communication purposes (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022). In this case, it may be argued that the son's role as a language broker could have been stressful, as he was not confident in communicating in English or French.

It appears that there were instances when some children exhibited frustration due to a lack of confidence and low proficiency in English. However, the parents insisted that child language brokering would benefit them as adults in various settings. Mr. I's explanation below shows his child's difficulty in translating for him at the airport:

*C'était notre première fois en Afrique du Sud, nos bagages manquaient et nous étions tous deux en difficulté avec l'anglais. je m'attendais à ce que mon fils soit*

*plus intelligent, à interpréter pour nous, mais il ne pouvait pas interpréter ce que les préposés nous disaient, mais il a fait un visage triste, comme frustré, j'ai remarqué qu'il ne pouvait pas interpréter*

It was our first time in South Africa, our luggage was missing and then we were both struggling with English. I expected my son to be smarter, to interpret for us, but he could not interpret what the attendants were telling us, but he made a sad face, like frustrated, I noticed that he was not able to interpret.

Mr I's expectation of his son's fluency in English suggests that his child had some exposure to English before they arrived in South Africa. The child's difficulty in translating for his father could be explained in terms of his age (nine years old) and his limited exposure to English as they spoke French in their home country.

Similarly, Madam F shared her hopes and dreams for her children. It was notable that she seemed to have high expectations of her son that could possibly burden the child, as he was expected to act as a role model for his siblings as illustrated in her comments, "My son may feel I'm being hard on him, but it's because I know he needs to set an example for his siblings. At first his English was not good, mine was worse, but we are getting there."

These high expectations of the oldest child are not generally experienced as a negative phenomenon in the African culture, as older siblings are expected and prepared to take over their parents' roles and support their siblings as soon as they are able to. This responsibility is entrenched early in the children's lives, especially in sons. However, despite the stress and frustration experienced by some children in language brokering, all the interviewed parents were optimistic about a better future for their children, which they defined largely in terms of their children's proficiency in English.

### **Child Language Brokering and Better Life Opportunities**

The analysed data shows that all the parents believed that education would provide their children with better life opportunities in South Africa. They had high expectations of their children, not only in terms of their proficiency in English and the role they played as language brokers, but as good role models for other immigrant families in South Africa. For example, Madam A had this to say about her children:

I know that my children can get a better job here. I know that they can study more here and become better and have a better job than me. The way I see my daughter behaving, I know there is a brighter future ahead for the whole family.

Proficiency in English was associated with better economic benefits in a foreign country. Thus, Mr. G had this to say:

It's worth keeping going and fighting against the language that one does not know; it is worth having jobs that require a lot of physical strength and make us tired; it is worth the sacrifice that one makes to be away from one's home country, one's home, the people one is accustomed to see and talk to.

Mr. G's drive for his child to gain proficiency in English for better job opportunities is also common among South Africans. With the 1976 riots, which forced the use of

Afrikaans on a 50:50 basis in South African education during apartheid, English was regarded as a language of liberation, and it never lost this status (Alexander, 2005).

Madam B, who was still struggling with English, expressed how her daughter would become a successful woman and role model among immigrants in South Africa. The child's success was linked to her role as a language broker, not only for her parents, but also for the entire immigrant community in South Africa. Madam B had this to say:

*Je veux dire à mon précieux fille qu'elle réussira dans cette nouvelle terre, qu'elle nous rendra fière et que les autres enfants immigrés puissent accomplir beaucoup ici, et c'est tout, et je vous félicite parce que vous avez aidé votre les parents, votre mère, et comment vous êtes un modèle pour toute la communauté des immigrants en Afrique du Sud.*

I want to tell my precious daughter that she will succeed in this new land, that she will make us proud, and for the other immigrant kids, that they can accomplish a lot here, then, and that's it, and congratulate you because you have helped your parents, your mother, and how you are a role model for the whole immigrant community in South Africa.

In Madam B's case, learning English from her daughter meant relinquishing her power to the child during the language learning process. This is consistent with the literature that emphasises the transfer of power by the parents for the survival of the family in host countries. This may occur as an acculturation strategy that is beneficial to the family (Berry, 2005; Weisskirch, 2007).

The high or prestigious status of English was clearly recognised by immigrant families. English was regarded as an asset for socio-economic advancement, as highlighted in all the parents' responses, which used specific markers of success such as 'good job', 'brighter future' (Madam A), and 'role model' (Madam B). Parents expressed optimism and hope in learning English through child language brokering as expressed in phrases such as 'we are getting there' and 'keep going' (Mr. G). This suggests that immigrant parents regarded proficiency in English as a key element of acculturation or integration into the South African multicultural society.

## Discussion of Findings

The findings show that immigrant parents greatly relied on their children for communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries in South Africa. This relationship could be understood in terms of role reversal, in which children assume authority and power through language brokering for their parents (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Moroe & de Andrade, 2018). While the literature indicates that role reversal may lead to parents' lack of trust in their children as they assume more power and control through language brokering (Martinez et al, 2009), the findings of this study show the opposite. All the parents demonstrated optimism, pride, trust, and cooperation with their children who acted as intermediaries through language brokering.

This article has also shown that the children themselves did not have adequate proficiency and confidence in English, and yet were expected to perform 'expert' roles in language brokering. In this way, the children were confronted by two dilemmas: low

proficiency levels in English and their parents' expectations of them as language brokers or interpreters. These expectations sometimes led to children's frustration, since they were not always able to adequately mediate for their parents; they also led to parents' feelings of empathy for their children, coupled with a sense of powerlessness, since they could not communicate for themselves. These feelings are common among immigrant parents and their children (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Katsere, 2016), and can affect family relationships, either positively or negatively (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022). However, in the case of this study, family relationships were not strained; instead, parents' positive feelings of pride and a sense of security were displayed.

Another interesting finding is that children learn and develop better language skills and confidence as they broker for their parents in English. There was mutual scaffolding between the children and the parents, with the parents relying strongly on their children's language brokering for communication purposes in the host country. While it could be said that roles were reversed from the Western point of view, parents showed pride and appreciation of their children as language brokers. Language brokering seemed to strengthen family ties, and in this case, language brokering could be referred to as a mutual care practice (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022), whereby both the parents and children care for each other. This is closely related to the African philosophy of 'ubuntu' or humility which encompasses human values of respect, compassion, and mutual dependence or interconnectedness.

The data show that none of the parents showed an interest in learning the African languages with official status spoken in their residential areas. Silence about these languages could be attributed to their low economic and social status, which exacerbates their marginalisation in business and educational domains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). Clearly, the basis upon which parents make choices regarding their children's language brokering is not simple but stems from their political history and knowledge of the past, as well as the goals that they aspire to for their children. High levels of proficiency in English persist as 'the distributor of power' (Nkosana, 2011, p.11). Thus, immigrant parents encouraged their children to learn English, as they believed that, through English, they would not only adapt to a new environment but also access economic assets. As in other African countries, the lure of English is difficult to resist in South Africa despite the country's multilingual wealth. This could be explained in terms of the hegemonic status of English, which is regarded as the language of political, social, and economic liberation (Lombard, 2007; Maile, 2004; Msila, 2005).

The findings further reveal that the mothers were excited and positive about learning the new language (English) and culture through language brokering, as they talked about their daughters with a great deal of passion and excitement. Although she wanted the best for her son, one of the female participants did not seem satisfied with her son's language brokering. This finding corroborates with Dorner et al. (2007), which found that children reported brokering more for mothers than for fathers.

The power and dominance of English among immigrants are closely linked to the South African language history and politics. Situations where immigrants communicated with locals through English reflect traits of dominance and power imbalance. The analysed data portray parents as lifelong learners who relied on their children to learn English, which is associated with better life chances and/or opportunities in South Africa. In other words, children gave a voice to their parents to adapt to a new environment through English.

Finally, the immigrant parents showed loyalty to their home languages, as the home language formed part of their identity; however, they were eager to learn English for intercultural communication in South Africa. While learning English through language brokering could be regarded as part of the acculturation process for immigrants, its success remains questionable, since integration into South African society cannot be attained through mastery of English only. Therefore, language brokering by immigrant children is complex and depends on the context and purpose of communication. In the case of this study, language brokering was primarily a means of portraying mutual care and trust between parents and their children.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study have implications for language policy, practice, and research. The South African language policy is underpinned by inclusive and socially just principles that promote inclusion, multilingualism, and multiculturalism. Given the growing mobility across the world, it is imperative that policymakers revisit their language policies and reconceptualise the concept of multilingualism, which is becoming more fluid and complex to be understood within the parameters of the local space only. This implies that, at a practical level, immigrant languages must be part of the multilingual global discourse, which must be embraced as vital cultural and linguistic tools for integration and social cohesion in host countries across the world. Thus, the findings of this study inform language policy on a global scale because migration is a global phenomenon.

The findings also provide insights into how child language brokering empowers immigrant families. They reveal the responsibilities and skills that immigrant children acquire in their host country, not only for their survival, but also for the adaptation and acculturation of their parents who have limited or no proficiency in the most prestigious language of the new country. On the basis of the findings, it could be argued that immigrant parents' experiences of language brokering by their children are complex and dynamic, and influenced by the context and purpose of communication.

Given that language brokering is dialectical, it is imperative to understand how immigrant parents feel about their children's language brokering. More needs to be investigated about the long-term effects of the role reversal that takes place in immigrant families with regard to language brokering and whether the high hopes pinned on the children of immigrant families on account of their proficiency in English are generally realised. Thus, more research is needed to understand other variables that may influence children's language brokering experiences and the implications for parent-child relationships.

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