



## Research questions

- What qualifies one to be a language broker?
- Who seeks out language brokers and why?
- What is the nature of language brokering practices?



## Theoretical Framework

- **Bakhtin (1981):**
  - Heteroglossia: Every utterance is embedded in a context that is defined by the place, time, social and historical conditions in which it is uttered
  - Words infused with ideologies of speakers; appropriated and populated with one's own intentions
  - Hybridization: mixture of languages; potential for new forms to express new world views

## Theoretical Framework

- **Anzaldúa (1987)**
  - "The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other..."
  - Border tongue=a living language
  - Linguistic terrorism: "So if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity-I am my language." (p.80)

## Methodology

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY ENGLISH LITERACY PRACTICES

## Community



## School



## Library/Community Center



## Maria's Vision of Learning



- **Learning is...**
  - | Loud
  - | Physical (involves singing, dancing, moving around)
  - | Communal
  - | Cross-generational
  - | Exploits all available resources
- **Title V grant**

## My Role in the Community

- Librarian's assistant
- Taught conversational English class
- Lived with a retired teacher who had worked 30 years at the school (cultural sponsors/advocates)
- Part of a well known local family
- Improving my Spanish

## My Role as Broker

- Not how I wanted it to be, but how it ended up
- Was able to see very few events where I wasn't asked for help
- Sometimes I wasn't the only broker, but almost always I was a broker

## Methods

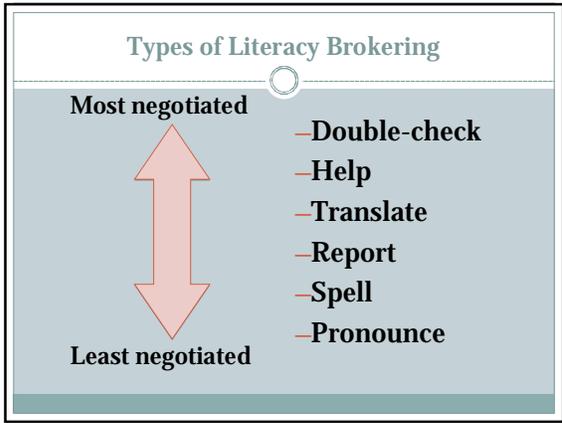
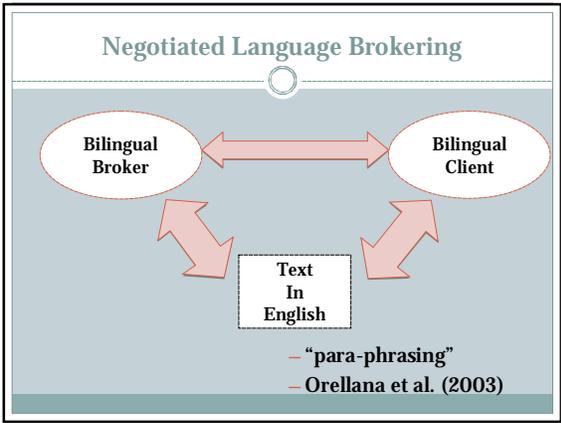
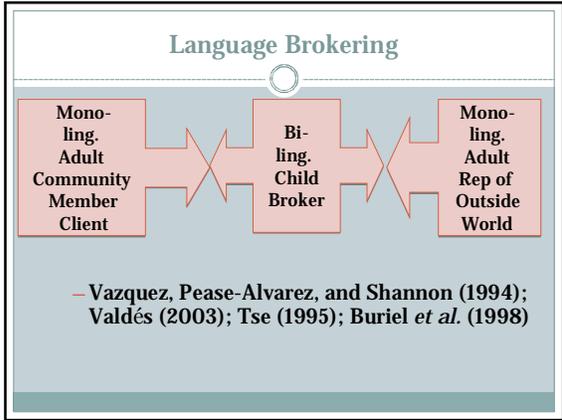
- **Four months of participant observation**
  - | Ethnographic field notes
  - | Observed all uses of English text
  - | Observed attitudes toward English
  - | Recorded talk around text
- **Identified focal participants (n=10; 6 female, 4 male; 6 adults, 4 children; 2 return migrants)**
  - | Interviews

## Analysis

- **Analyzed fieldnotes**
  - | Identified language brokering events
  - | Analyzed using Hymes (1972) Ethnography of Communication
  - | Open and focused coding
  - | Document types
- **Transcribed interviews and recordings**
  - | Coded along with fieldnotes

# Language Brokering

NEGOTIATED INTERACTIONS AROUND TEXTS



## Double-check

- Clients approached brokers in order to double-check the meaning of a text that they had already read
- Client and broker worked together, pooling language and other resources, to decode text
- Example:
  - Señora Torres
  - Pell Grant approval form
  - “Está aprobada...pero, tiene que decir si hay algo equivocado.”

## Help

- Clients were trying to read the text themselves, but sought help from a broker to do so
- Though both client and broker were leveraging resources and expertise, this was not negotiated in talk-around-text
- Example:
  - Junior high girls; María
  - Yahoo email form
  - “zip code”

## Translate

- Clients approached brokers to provide a simple translation of text
- Brokers were approached as if to serve client
- Broker was seen as expert and the meaning of the text was not negotiated
- Example:
  - Keyla
  - Fan letter to Heath Ledger
  - "Hasme un favor"



## Report

- Broker was sought by client to read a text and summarize relevant information orally
- Client did not ask for a word-for-word translation, but rather relied on the broker to pull out key information and explain it
- Example:
  - Suegra
  - Direct Loans letter
  - "Ábrela, y mira si tiene que pagar."



## Spell

- Client asked broker to spell something in English
- Example:
  - José
  - Internet search engine
  - "¿Cómo se escribe Britney Spears?"



## Pronounce

- In the process of reading a text out loud, the client asked a broker to pronounce the English words
- Example:
  - Workshop leader
  - Librarian's technology workshop
  - "University of Florida"



## Four-way language brokering event

- Eugenio (9<sup>th</sup> grade), Dalia (6<sup>th</sup> grade), María, me
- Dalia's English portfolio
- Shared knowledge of language and contextual genres to compose introduction
- Crossed borders that usually separate students by grade and students from adults
- Portfolio became an authentic language learning activity

## Community Brokers

- María (the librarian, English "made in Puerto Rico")
- Rita (return migrant)
- Lico (return migrant)
- Eugenio (9<sup>th</sup> grade president of the library club)
- Other English teachers
- Workshop leader
- Me (also an English teacher and a *gringa*)

## Safe Border Crossing

### – Borders crossed

- | Age
- | Class
- | Culture



## Sharing Knowledge

### – Language

- | Spanish, English

### – Text type

- | student loan letter

### – Content

- | health, finances



## Finding and Using Resources



### – Cultural value of resource-sharing

### – Know who can help

### – Know how to ask

## Implications

FOR EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY, COLONIAL LANGUAGE THEORY, AND BILINGUALISM

## Educational language policy

### – Recognize cultural values behind brokering practices

### – Create safe spaces for borders to be crossed

- | Supportive environments where people with different linguistic toolkits are in contact



## Colonial language theory

### – Types of texts that entered linked to colonial relationship

### – Imposed and chosen texts

### – How people interacted with texts was their own invention

- | Language brokering as resistance



## Bilingualism in the Borderlands

- Bilingualism is...
  - | natural
  - | expected
  - | facilitated by border practices such as language and literacy brokering
- Defies imposition of standards or binary categories

## Bilingualism and Colonialism

- Knowledge of colonial language is necessarily incomplete (withheld)
- The deficiency of knowing both
- "Bilingual" is loaded term
- More research is needed to describe bilingualism in colonial contexts



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