This is an Preprint Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in "Language Brokering in Immigrant Families" edited by Robert S. Weisskirch in 2017, available online: http://www.routledge.com/9781315644714 or http://www.crcpress.com/9781315644714

# Friendly Takeover: Predictors and Effects of Language Brokering Among Diaspora Immigrants in Germany

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## Introduction

Reasons for language brokering are mostly assumed to be based on changes in the family system following migration and acculturation. Although language brokering can be seen as an acculturation-specific behavior that is limited to immigrant families, some evidence exists that it also can be understood as a form of immigration-unspecific general family support. From this perspective, language brokering may be explained – at least partly – by general characteristics of the family and intra-familial social dynamics. This chapter aims to show that these two perspectives have to be combined for a better understanding of language brokering in immigrant families. The study of the interplay of general family characteristics and acculturation-specific predictors for language brokering will be the first question addressed in this chapter. The second question will focus on the effects of language brokering. More specifically, we examine whether language brokering is associated with adolescents' psychosocial functioning (i.e. higher levels of internalizing problems), whether language brokering activities can expand to other family obligations (i.e., emotional and instrumental parentification), and whether language brokering interacts with normative developmental tasks (i.e, whether or not language brokering can annul autonomy processes during the adolescent years). Data presented in this chapter will primarily come from a specific immigrant group comprising ethnic German diaspora immigrant families who emigrated from countries of the former Soviet Union to Germany. When addressing these research questions, we combined both the acculturation and the general family process perspectives in empirical studies.

## Summarizing the Related Research

### Why do Children Translate for their Parents - An Acculturation-Related Phenomenon or the Result of Intra-Familial Processes?

**The acculturation perspective.** Language brokering is defined as the adolescent being the family interpreter and translator for documents, as well as the family expert for the new culture (Portes, 1997). It is a phenomenon occurring at least occasionally in almost all first generation migrant families where heritage and host country languages differ (e.g., Jones & Trickett, 2005; Roche, Lambert, Ghazarian, & Little, 2015). For this reason, in most of the research, language brokering is regarded as a behavior that has its origins in the acculturation process, i.e., changes in the original cultural patters of cultural groups through continuous first-hand contact (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Accordingly, inter-individual differences in the amount of language brokering most often are explained by differences in the acculturation process of children and their parents. Of relevance are variables such as length of residence, host and heritage language proficiency, host and heritage identity, and host and heritage culture behaviors (Jones & Trickett, 2005; Lazarevic, Raffaelli, & Wiley, 2014).

More prevalent in this regard is, however, the intergenerational disparity in the pace of cultural adaptation between children/adolescents and their parents, which is also termed acculturative dissonance (C. Wu & Chao, 2011) or acculturation gap (Telzer, 2010). Children and adolescent immigrants acquire socio-cultural skills (e.g., language and socio-cultural behaviors) much faster by being in close contact to the new society through school experiences and frequent interactions with native peers (Pease-Alvarez, 2002; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). For them, the process of acculturation often also comprises some degree of enculturation, i.e. "learning, what the culture deems necessary [by being] encompassed or surrounded by a culture" (Berry,

Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, p. 29). Adults often are not enmeshed in the host society to the same degree. Consequently, immigrant parents often lack behind in the acquisition of socio-cultural skills. The result is an acculturation gap between parents and their children, which is often discussed as a major reason for why language brokering of children and adolescents occurs (Jones & Trickett, 2005). Especially parents with poor host language skills are more likely to rely on their children in order to translate or interpret inside and outside the home (e.g., Roche et al., 2015).

**The family perspective.** There is, however, also some research which suggests that language brokering does not only depend on acculturation-related variables. Acculturation-unrelated factors, such as personal characteristics of parents or children, also seem to play a role. For example, older children, females, first-born children, and children with a more extraverted and agreeable personality have also been found to broker more often in their families (Chao, 2006; Valdés, Chávez, & Angelelli, 2003). Because these are characteristics that also explain (acculturation-unrelated) intra-familial helping and caregiving behavior of adolescents in native samples (e.g., Crouter, Head, Bumpus, & McHale, 2001; East, 2010; Gager, Sanchez, & Demaris, 2009), family dynamics moved into the focus of research. Studies just begin to regard language brokering as one (of many forms of) provision of intra-familial care and support (e.g., Bauer, 2015). In line with these arguments, language brokering may also be framed from the perspective of theories on parent-child relations. Still, to date, only few studies examined how language brokering is related to issues of general patterns of parent-child relationships and parenting practices (Morales & Hanson, 2005).

Although we do not know studies examining the impact of parent-child relationships on the amount of language brokering done by adolescents, there is some evidence that the quality of the

parent-child relationship influences how language brokers feel about their task. Studies among Mexican American adolescents found, for example, that feelings and emotions that prevail during language brokering were more positive with a stronger parent-child bond (Love & Buriel, 2007), and that more problematic family relations were associated with higher ratings of negative emotions such as anxiety, nervousness, and shame during language brokering (Weisskirch, 2007). Furthermore, Buriel, Love, and De Ment (2006) found that adolescent language brokers felt emotionally more connected to their parents than non-brokers. Although these findings cannot reveal whether or not family variables are predictors or outcomes, these results suggest that language brokering has important connections to family dynamics.

In sum, there are good arguments to assume that language brokering should not only be seen as a result of acculturation processes in immigrant families, but also as an intra-familial process of sharing chores and tasks that need to be done. This perspective is also in line with observations that children and adolescents mostly begin to language broker in order to help their less acculturated parents to cope with the demands of daily life in a new cultural setting (Bauer, 2015; Jones & Trickett, 2005) or, as Dorner, Orellana, and Jiménez (2008) put it "everyday language brokering may be seen as a normal expectation of the child-adult relationship" (p. 521). Consequently, language brokering adolescents might see their role as a way to fulfill their family obligation, just as they help out with other household chores like doing the dishes or taking care for siblings (Orellana, 2003; Villanueva & Buriel, 2010).

**Connecting the acculturation and the family perspective**. Against this background, language brokering needs to be seen as the result of two processes: Acculturation-related changes and general family dynamics. From the family dynamics perspective, general theoretical models developed to explain differences in parenting and parent-child-relations may not only explain

general outcomes of the parent-child relations, they should also predict inter-individual differences in language brokering among immigrant families. A useful model in this regard was developed by Belsky (e.g., 1984; 2014) and differentiates three aspects for explaining family-related behaviors: (a) characteristics of the children, (b) characteristics of parents, and (c) characteristics of the social context. Characteristics of the children include their gender, age, temperament, and personality. Similar variables in parents are also relevant, as parents also bring their developmental history into the interaction with their children. Besides parental and child characteristics, contextual variables might affect parenting and the parent-child relationship. These variables include the parents' marital relationship, their social network, and their workplace. Such general aspects until now have often been neglected in research on language brokering children and adolescents. They might nevertheless play an important role for explaining inter-individual differences in language brokering, particularly when language brokering is seen as a general aspect of the adolescent-parent relationship (Dorner et al., 2008). This model also has the advantage that these characteristics can be easily combined with acculturation-related variables in the study of immigrants (e.g., Tajima & Harachi, 2010). In our research we wanted to know whether indeed both, acculturation- and family-related variables play a role for the extent to which adolescents language broker.

**What Effects does Language Brokering have for the Individual and the Family?**

**a) Language brokering and psychological adaptation**. Which effects of language brokering on the psychological adaptation of adolescent immigrants are expected depends on the theoretical perspective. Some researchers argue that language brokering might foster language and academic skills, as well as self-efficacy, because it entails cognitive demanding experiences and interactions with adults which promote personal and social skill development (e.g., Acoach

& Webb, 2004; Buriel, Perez, de Ment, Chavez, & Moran, 1998). From a stress and coping perspective, however, other authors argue that language brokering can create stress and might overburden adolescents' social and problem-solving skills so that they experience exhaustion and may develop internalizing problems (e.g., Martinez, McClure, & Eddy, 2009). Both these perspectives may be accurate because evidence exists for both these perspectives (N. H. Wu & Kim, 2009).

This raises the question of whether there are potential moderators which modulate the effects of language brokering on the psychological functioning of individuals. One of such moderators that comes to mind is the age of the language broker. Age is a proxy for all the developmental processes that occur through the adolescent years, which include biological (puberty), social (friendships, romantic relations or autonomy from parents), and psychological (cognitive and planning skills) changes. From this perspective, it seems plausible that negative effects of language brokering were primarily found in younger samples (e.g., Puig, 2002; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002), whereas more positive effects were found among older adolescents (e.g., Acoach & Webb, 2004). Problem-solving and social skills increase during the adolescent years and are not yet fully developed in early adolescence (Adams, 1983; Luciana, Collins, Olson, & Schissel, 2009), so that particularly younger adolescents are more likely to lack essential strategies for dealing with their tasks of language brokering (Aneshensel & Gore, 1991). Older adolescents, on the contrary, are better prepared for dealing with brokering demands.

**b) Language brokering and general family obligations**. Adolescent language broker come into a position with substantial responsibility for their family. They understand the spoken and written foreign language better than those for whom they translate, and have to make decisions of what aspects are important and which words in the native language convey the

original meaning best. In addition, they might come into contact with material that is beyond the scope of their age mates' experience, such as medical diagnoses of their parents, insurance details and bank contracts (Dorner et al., 2008). As a consequence, adolescents' support for their parents may not remain limited to translation or interpretation tasks. They may also start to take over other responsibilities related to instrumental or emotional support for their parents so that parents start to rely on their children in other family matters. Such an involvement is termed parentification and is defined as a process whereby adolescents are assigned or assume roles normally reserved for adults, for example by instrumental and emotional caregiving to their parents (Jurkovic, Thirkield, & Morrell, 2001; Williams & Francis, 2010). Parentification can increase adolescents' status in the family which "undermines the traditional power relationship between parents and children and increases parental dependence on their children" (Trickett & Jones, 2007, p. 143). This behavior was described among immigrants (e.g., Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009; Portes, 1997), but is well-known in other situations, in which parents are incapacitated to fulfill their parental role, such as families in which parents misuse drugs (Moore, McArthur, & Noble-Carr, 2011) or have mental problems (Aldridge, 2006). However, whether language brokering is associated with higher levels of acculturation-unrelated parentification behavior needs further research.

**c) Language brokering as moderator of developmental processes**. A third question concerning the effects of language brokering pertains to whether language brokering can change the developmental trajectories of adolescents. Such effects are particularly likely in the development of adolescents' autonomy. During the adolescent years, adolescents are granted increasingly more autonomy from parents (Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010; Titzmann & Silbereisen, 2012), which is defined as adolescent's freedom to self-regulate their behaviors as part of the

process of growing self-governance (Feldman & Wood, 1994). Because both language brokering and autonomy seem to affect the hierarchy, the role distributions, and communication in families and are likely to affect each other, studying the interplay between them offers new insights, particularly with regard to effects on family communication, which can be assumes to be a valid indicator for family dynamics and power distribution.

In particular, comparisons of associations between immigrant and native samples can highlight whether adolescent-mother communication in immigrant families is based on the same autonomy-related processes as it is in native families (similar associations between autonomy and family communication in both groups), or whether language brokering affects the parent-child communication in immigrant families more than (normative) autonomy development. It is also possible, however, that brokering and autonomy development interact with each other in their effect on family communication. Although interactions between acculturation-related and normative developmental processes have received some attention in recent years (e.g., Michel, Titzmann, & Silbereisen, 2012), empirical results are still quite scarce. Two possible interactions of language brokering and autonomy could be expected: They may either reinforce each other or may cancel each other out. Theoretically, a reinforcement can be expected when coercive family interactions occur leading to an escalation (Granic & Patterson, 2006). Following this argument, language brokering and autonomy may potentiate each other's effects on family communication so that autonomous adolescents who also broker communicate much less with their parents than any other group of adolescents. On the other hand, one of these processes (high levels in language brokering or high levels of autonomy) may be sufficient to change the family communication so that the effect of the other variable is eliminated. In this situation, both processes would cancel each other out.

## Examples of Research

### Diaspora Migrants as a Special Case of Immigration.

Most of the research on language brokering and family processes in immigrant families is conducted in North America, where, for example, about 90% of all studies on the acculturation gap come from (Telzer, 2010). Although some European studies started to address family relations (e.g., Albert, Ferring, & Michels, 2013), more research is needed. A specificity in the immigrant situation in Europe is the amount of so called diaspora migrants, such as ethnic Germans in Germany or Russian Jews in Israel (Tsuda, 2009). Diaspora migrants differ substantially from other immigrant groups. A particular difference is that they lived in a diaspora "where, over lengthy time periods, they maintained their own distinct communities and dreamed of one-day returning to their ancient home" (Weingrod & Levy, 2006, p. 691). Diaspora migrants thus share ethnic, cultural, and/or religious roots with the receiving society and often also face beneficial immigration conditions, such as immediate citizenship upon arrival and social benefits. In addition, diaspora migrants often do not differ in physical appearance (e.g., skin color) from the majority of the population.

Our studies comprised a group of ethnic German diaspora immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the largest immigrant population in Germany. More than 2.5 million ethnic German immigrants have moved from the former Soviet Union to Germany since the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' in 1989. Although this group was usually well adapted to the Russian mainstream culture (Dietz, 2003), and thus seems to undergo similar adaptation processes as other immigrant groups, these immigrants differ substantially in their orientation towards the receiving society. 'To live as German among other Germans' was an often cited reason for their immigration (Fuchs, Schwietring, & Weiss, 1999). Research on diaspora immigrants is still scarce and it is an

open question whether they undergo similar processes of adaptation as other immigrant groups. It was of particular interest whether language brokering is a relevant phenomenon also in this group, in which the immigrant parents have much better conditions to adapt to the host society than in traditional immigrant groups, and what the precursors and consequences of language brokering are.

The sample for our studies was recruited in 2010/2011. Registry offices in three German cities provided lists of potential participants based on the country of origin (states of the former Soviet Union or Germany) and age (between 10 and 18). Randomly selected adolescents and their mothers were invited to participate. Questionnaires were completed anonymously and separately sent back per mail by mothers and adolescents. In sum, 185 ethnic German and 197 native German adolescent and mother dyads responded and were eligible for the study (for details see Titzmann, Gniewosz, & Michel, 2015). All participating immigrant adolescents were first generation immigrants (born in a country of the former Soviet Union) with on average 9.7 years of residence in Germany. That language brokering is a relevant phenomenon in this group was revealed by the fact that about 90% of the adolescents in our sample performed as language broker in the past three months before the assessment (Schulz, Titzmann, & Michel, 2013).

**Language Brokering as an Acculturation-Related Phenomenon or the Result of Intra-Familial Processes.**

To answer our first research question, we performed a multivariate regression analysis with the level of language brokering as outcome (for a full description of the study, please see Schulz et al., 2013). Language brokering was assessed by the frequency of adolescents' translating 11 documents (e.g., notes or letters from school, medical forms or bills, job applications, insurance forms, or bank statements) for their parents (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Three groups of variables

were entered into the regression analysis: demographic variables (sex, age, length of residence, maternal education), variables related to the cultural adaptation of mothers and children (maternal competence in German, adolescent competence in German, adolescents' competence in Russian, an interaction term of adolescents' competence in German and Russian), and variables related to the family environment (maternal self-efficacy, maternal employment status, two-parent vs. single parent family status, the number of German people in mothers' network, and children's positive attitude towards language brokering).

Results showed that particularly variables related to family interactions contributed to the prediction of inter-individual differences in language brokering. Among the demographic variables, age was the only significant predictor. In line with the general increase of family obligations during the adolescent years (Wilkinson-Lee, Zhang, Nuno, & Wilhelm, 2011), older adolescents reported higher levels of language brokering. Contrary to the frequent results obtained in the US (Morales & Hanson, 2005), we found no differences in the frequency of brokering between male and female adolescents. Further research is needed on this issue, but it seems likely that gender plays a more prevailing role in immigrant groups with more differentiated gender-roles, such as Hispanics (Corby, Hodges, & Perry, 2007). Our adolescents are from the former Soviet Union, where gender roles are less well-established. Empirically, this explanation is corroborated by the fact that adolescents from the former Soviet Union in the US also reported no gender difference in language brokering (Jones & Trickett, 2005).

Somewhat surprising was the finding that mothers' lower competence in German was the only significant acculturation-related predictor for higher levels of adolescents' language brokering. Obviously, mothers rely on the children when they miss the required linguistic skills in the receiving culture, independent of the children's competences in Russian or German. A

substantial share of variance in language brokering was explained by the variables usually used to predict family interactions (Belsky, 1984). Adolescents had to broker less frequently when there were two parents, when the mother had German acquaintances in her social network, and when the adolescent had a less positive attitude towards the translation. The first two of these variables demonstrate that alternative help in translations (partner, friends) can take some of the burden from adolescents. The third significant predictor, a positive attitude of adolescents towards brokering, was related with higher levels of brokering and represents the general motivation of adolescents to support their parents in this matter. The results, thus, support the general notion that language brokering, at least among diaspora migrants in Germany, can be better understood from a family perspective and the family interaction involved and seems to a lesser extent a pure acculturation phenomenon, although both perspectives (acculturation and family interactions) are needed for a decent understanding of why adolescents language broker.

**Effects of Language Brokering on the Individual and the Family.**

Our second overarching research question concerned the effects of language brokering. We addressed this question in three ways. First, we wanted to learn more about whether and under what circumstances language brokering was associated with better or worse psychological adaptation outcomes. Second, we wanted to see whether language brokering was associated with other acculturation-unrelated tasks. Third, we wanted to learn more about the interaction of language brokering with normative developmental processes (i.e., the development of autonomy).

**a) Language brokering and psychological adaptation**. In order to examine whether language brokering was associated with higher levels of distress and a greater risk for the psychological well-being we drew on three indicators: depressive symptoms, feelings of exhaustion, and difficulties to relax (for a full description of the study see Schulz et al., 2013).

Since all these indicators were highly correlated ($r > .50$), we created a latent construct termed internalizing problems. This latent construct was regressed on a number of predictors, which included age, gender, family income, adolescents' externalizing behavior in childhood (retrospective measure), and language brokering. In addition, an interaction term of language brokering and age was added, in order to examine whether the effects of language brokering were more or less detrimental depending on age. Only three variables reached significance: Adolescents' externalizing behavior in childhood was associated with higher levels of internalizing problems. Language brokering predicted higher levels of internalizing problems, which supported the general notion of language brokering being a risk rather than a promotive factor for adolescents' development. More important, however, was the significant interaction of language brokering and age. As shown in Figure 1, the detrimental effect of language brokering on internalizing problems was based on the younger adolescents: Simple slope analyses revealed a significant association between language brokering and internalizing problems in early adolescence (one standard deviation below the mean of age), which meant an age of about 13 years and 7 months. In late adolescents (one standard deviation above the mean of age, at an age of 18 years and 1 month), however, no such effect was identified. This finding supports the supposition that language brokering is particularly detrimental in the early years of adolescence when individuals have not yet developed the social and problem-solving skills that are necessary for dealing with the demands associated with language brokering.

Figure 1 about here

**b) Language brokering and other family obligations**. Another explanation for detrimental effects of language brokering could be that adolescents acting as language brokers may also get involved in other family obligations that are not acculturation-related, so that they are not overburdened by the language brokering but by the overall amount of responsibilities that are normally without the scope of adolescents. Hence, language brokering may be seen as a first step or an acculturation-related subcomponent of parentification. In line with earlier research (Jurkovic, 1997; Williams & Francis, 2010), we differentiated between instrumental and emotional parentification. Emotional parentification refers to support in the regulation of parental emotions and comprises behaviors such as dealing with family conflicts. Instrumental parentification refers to support in domestic-related parental responsibilities, such as financial decision making (Hooper, Marotta, & Lanthier, 2008).

We addressed this question in two ways. First, given the fact that about 90% of immigrant adolescents broker (e.g., Jones & Trickett, 2005; Schulz et al., 2013), we expected that the general level of instrumental and emotional parentification is higher in immigrant as compared to native samples. Second, inter-individual differences in language brokering should be associated with inter-individual differences in instrumental and emotional parentification in the immigrant sample. Both these assumptions were supported in our research (for a full description of the study see Titzmann, 2012).

The between subjects effects of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated that immigrant adolescents reported significantly higher levels for both types of parentification. After the control variables (maternal and paternal education, age of the adolescent, academic school track of adolescents, and two-parent family) were accounted for, the mean levels for instrumental parentification of ethnic German diaspora immigrants were 2.42 (SD = 0.91) and for

emotional parentification 2.65 (SD=1.00), whereas native Germans reported on average a level of 2.21 (SD=0.92) for instrumental, and 2.22 (SD = 0.99) for emotional parentification. Furthermore, associations between language brokering and instrumental as well as emotional parentification were positive and significant, even after including a number of other potential predictors, such as demographic variables (age, gender, length of residence), maternal reported partnership dissatisfaction, and the network size of mothers and adolescents.

**c) Language brokering as moderator of developmental processes.** Our third question on the effects of language brokering aimed at examining the communication between mothers and their children and to study whether or not language brokering may undermine the normative developmental processes related to autonomy development (for a full description of the study see Titzmann et al., 2015). We used the concept of child disclosure to study intra-familial communication processes. Child disclosure is the child's free, willing revelation of information towards parents. It has been found that parents' receive their information about their children's whereabouts mainly through their child's willing disclosure rather than through other sources, such as control and solicitation, which are less relevant for parental knowledge about their children (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). High levels of child disclosure are the result of adolescents' "trust in their parents – whether they feel that their parents are willing to listen to them, are responsive, and would not ridicule or punish if they confided in them" (Stattin & Kerr, 2000, p. 1083). However, we were less interested in how much the children actually tell their parents, but focused explicitly on the agreement between mothers' and adolescents' reports on the extent of the adolescents' disclosure. In more detail, we wanted to know whether this agreement was less pronounced in immigrant as compared to native families, and whether this agreement was

predicted by the amount of language brokering, by the normative developmental level of autonomy, or by the interaction of both these variables.

A general disagreement between mothers and adolescents seems to be rather normative as we found an imbalance between mothers' and adolescents' ratings in the offsprings' disclosure. In both groups, mothers estimated the level of disclosure higher than the adolescents themselves did (for detailed results see Titzmann et al., 2015). More specifically, mothers from both groups did not differ in their estimation of how much their child discloses. That the mother-adolescent agreement was lower in the immigrant as compared to the native sample was, hence, mainly due to immigrant adolescents reporting lower levels of disclosure than their native age-mates. This finding strengthened the assumption that additional immigration-related predictors, such as language brokering, might play a role in the communication processes in immigrant families.

This assumption was further corroborated in multivariate regression analyses. In order to be able to predict mother-adolescent agreement, we created a new measure that captured the profile agreement within each mother-adolescent dyad. This measure consisted of the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC, one-way random), which is a single indicator capturing dyadic agreement in elevation, shape, and scatter/variation (Furr, 2010) across the child disclosure items used. The ICC has a Pearson correlation metric so that high positive values indicate high mother-adolescent agreement, whereas correlations close to zero point to independent disclosure ratings and thus low agreement. As each mother-adolescent dyad had a specific ICC indicating the level of agreement between mothers and adolescents, we used this indicator as outcome in the multivariate regressions.

Regressions were conducted in several steps. The first two steps (Step 1: control variables; Step 2: autonomy) were performed in both the immigrant and the native groups. In the immigrant

group, an additional third step was entered consisting of the immigration-specific predictors. Results are shown in Table 1. First of all, a more general effect of growing up was observed. In both groups, the mother-adolescent agreement was lower among older adolescents - an effect that disappeared after autonomy was added as predictor in Step 2 of the regressions. These associations point out normative developmental processes of growing up. With increasing age, adolescents become more independent from parents so that parents may have more difficulty to judge how much an adolescent actually tells them about their whereabouts. More importantly, however, language brokering and the interaction between language brokering and autonomy added to the explained variance in the immigrant group. As expected, the mother-adolescent agreement was lower in families in which adolescents broker more frequently. This finding indicates that language brokering does have similar effects as the development of autonomy. Further, the interaction of autonomy and language brokering also reached significance. As indicated in Figure 2, the data suggest that both processes cancel each other out. For adolescents high in autonomy, it does not matter whether or not they broker in their family, the mother-adolescent agreement is rather low. Similarly, for adolescents who broker more than average, the amount of autonomy is not as strongly associated with mother-adolescent agreement than for those adolescents who broker less. This interaction between language brokering and autonomy in predicting mother-adolescent agreement in the reported level of adolescent child disclosure shows that normative development (autonomy) and immigration-specific processes (language brokering) can be competing processes for select outcomes. Research with an exclusive focus on developmental aspects of immigrant adolescents' pathways may, thus, result in an oversimplification of the dynamics in immigrant families, as would be research that reduces adolescent immigrant functioning to acculturation-related processes.

Table 1 about here

Figure 2 about here

## Conclusion

Most of the research on language brokering has been conducted in the US and with very specific populations, such as Hispanic families who are known to have rather high values in filial piety or familism (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). Results, hence, may not be generalizable to other immigrant groups in other immigration contexts. Our research on diaspora migrants is a particularly hard test for the generalizability of the existing findings, because diaspora migrants not only have connections with the receiving society before they actually make the transition to the country, but also because they receive substantial support and even citizenship right upon entry into the country (Slonim-Nevo, Mirsky, Rubinstein, & Nauck, 2009). In our research on ethnic German diaspora migrants from the former Soviet Union in Germany, about 90% of all adolescents performed as language broker in the past three months, although to varying degrees (Schulz et al., 2013). Indeed, it seems as if language brokering is a rather normative experience for first generation immigrant adolescents. But our research also added new insights into the understanding of why adolescents act as language broker. We could show, for example, that language brokering is not only an acculturation-related phenomenon, but that both an immigration and a family-dynamics perspective have to be combined for a better understanding of inter-individual differences in the level of language brokering.

Furthermore, the effects of language brokering on the psychosocial functioning of adolescents are a constant matter of debate with some people expecting disadvantageous and

others expecting beneficial outcomes. Our research suggests that both these expectations may be valid depending on the age - with younger adolescents being at a higher risk for maladjustment (Schulz et al., 2013). Negative outcomes of brokering may also be the consequence of language brokering extending to other acculturation independent domains of adolescents' support for their parents, i.e. parentification (Titzmann, 2012). In addition, our research showed that language brokering can interfere with normative developmental changes, such as changes in family communication that are normative with growing autonomy (Titzmann et al., 2015).

**Future Directions**

This chapter clearly shows that research has made substantial progress in the understanding of language brokering. Nevertheless, the picture is far from being complete. One challenge is that current research is often based on cross-sectional studies. What is needed is more longitudinal and experimental work, including intervention studies. Only these approaches can address issues of causality and of individual trajectories in their brokering experience. In addition, more comparative research is needed that includes various immigrant groups. Comparative research can address the question of whether or not observed phenomena are universal or group specific, and it can identify similarities in adaptation, as well as group-specific aspects of adaptation (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). However, comparisons should not only be made across immigrant groups, but also across immigrant and native populations. Although such comparisons are hardly done, our study showed that such research is informative: The association between autonomy and mother-adolescent communication was similar between native adolescents and immigrants who do not language broker.

In addition, more effort needs to be invested into the study of mechanisms that explain the developmental processes related to language brokering. In our study, for example, we found that

age is a moderator for the effects of language brokering on internalizing problems (Schulz et al., 2013). Unfortunately, age is only a proxy for all the processes that occur in the biological, social and psychological domains of adolescent development. We had not included measures that allowed us to identify which competences and skills are actually relevant in this regard, although such measures may help in preparing adolescents for a successful dealing with the demands of language brokering. The identification of such skills is an important step in future research.

**Contribution to theory**

In our view, the most fundamental contribution of our research to the theory development in the area of language brokering is that researchers studying immigrant adolescents' adaptation should integrate more developmental aspects and approaches into their theoretical thinking. In general, studies that combine acculturation and general developmental views reveal that immigrant adolescents are first and foremost adolescents and only at second view immigrants. Changes in autonomy expectations were, for example, best explained by normative developmental patterns rather than by acculturation-related changes (Titzmann & Silbereisen, 2012). Similarly, general predictors (well-known from the research on non-immigrant samples) explained a substantially higher share of variance than immigrant specific variables in immigrant adolescents' delinquency (Titzmann, Silbereisen, & Mesch, 2014). With regard to language brokering, our results showed that a substantial share of variance can be attributed to normative developmental aspects, such as the family context.

A second theoretical implication relates to research on immigrant adolescents' civic engagement. Some studies show, for example, that immigrant adolescents are less involved in civic activities (e.g., Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeld, 2006). Our findings suggest that they are not less engaged per se, but simply engaged in different domains of life. They support their

family more than native adolescents and may, thus, have less time for other activities. Theory and research on adolescents' civic engagement should therefore include measures of family support in order to not underestimate immigrant adolescents' societal contributions to the adaptation of immigrant families.

All these approaches will help not only to understand the processes of the integration and adaptation of adolescent immigrants, but they may also reduce stereotypes and misinterpretations with regard to the behavior of adolescent immigrants. In growingly multicultural societies, a more inclusive problem-focused research could help in highlighting the often substantial similarities between immigrants and natives and may thus bring different groups together instead of creating barriers through focusing solely on the group-specific aspects. Language brokering, for example, may not only be seen as immigration-specific unique behavior, but more generally as family support that can also be observed (albeit in different form) in native families.

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Table 1

*Unstandardized regression coefficients (standard error) of a structural equation model predicting mother-adolescent agreement (ICC)*

| | Natives | | Immigrants | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 |
| Age | -.07 (.02)** | -.02 (.03) | -.06 (.02)* | -.03 (.02) | -.02 (.02) |
| Gender (0=male; 1=female) | .35 (.12)** | .36 (.11)** | .22 (.13) | .21 (.12) | .26 (.11)* |
| Parental education | .06 (.05) | .07 (.05) | .07 (.05) | .12 (.05)* | .11 (.05)* |
| Adolescent academic track | .08 (.13) | .16 (.12) | .02 (.14) | .06 (.13) | .06 (.13) |
| Two parent-family (0=yes; 1=divorce, widowhood) | -.13 (.16) | -.13 (.15) | -.03 (.15) | -.09 (.14) | -.07 (.14) |
| Autonomy | | -.26 (.05)*** | | -.23 (.05)*** | -.24 (.05)*** |
| Length of residence | | | | | .00 (.02) |
| Language brokering | | | | | -.16 (.07)* |
| Language brokering X autonomy (interaction) | | | | | .15 (.05)** |
| *R-squared* model | .10 | .21 | .06 | .19 | .26 |

*Note.* * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. *ICC* = intra-class correlation coefficient.

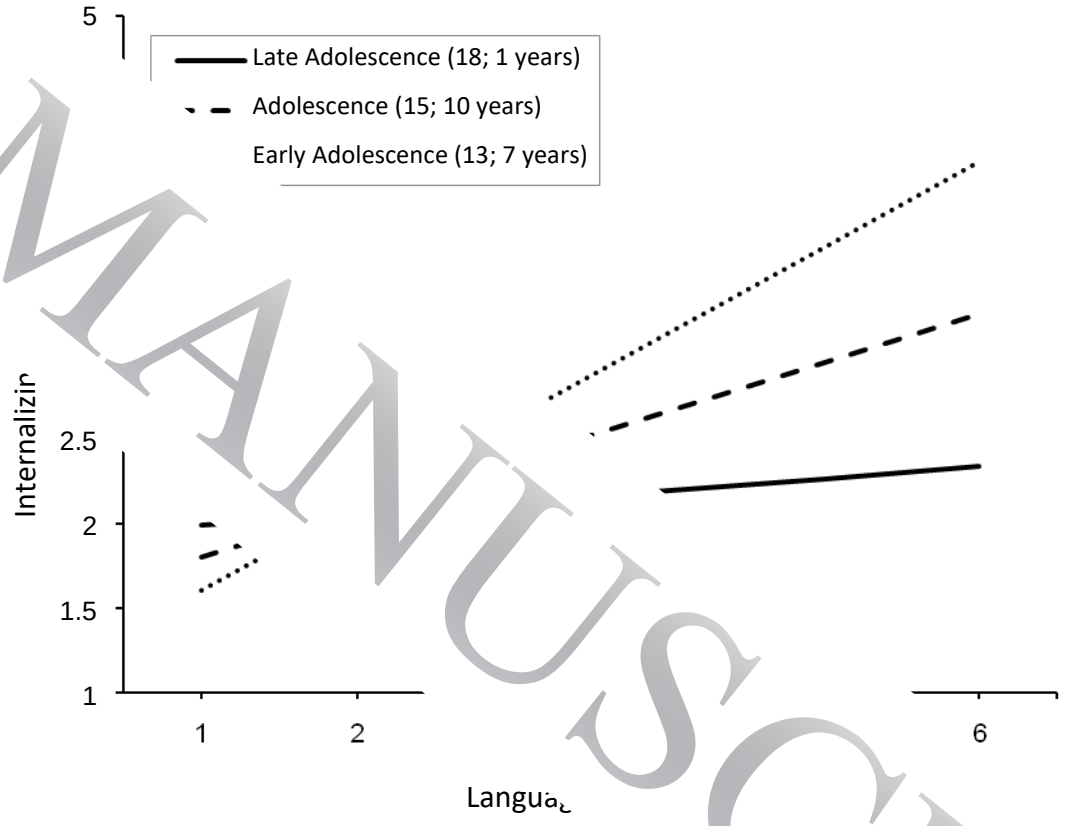


Figure 1. *Moderation effect of age and language brokerin*
*prediction of internalizing problems*

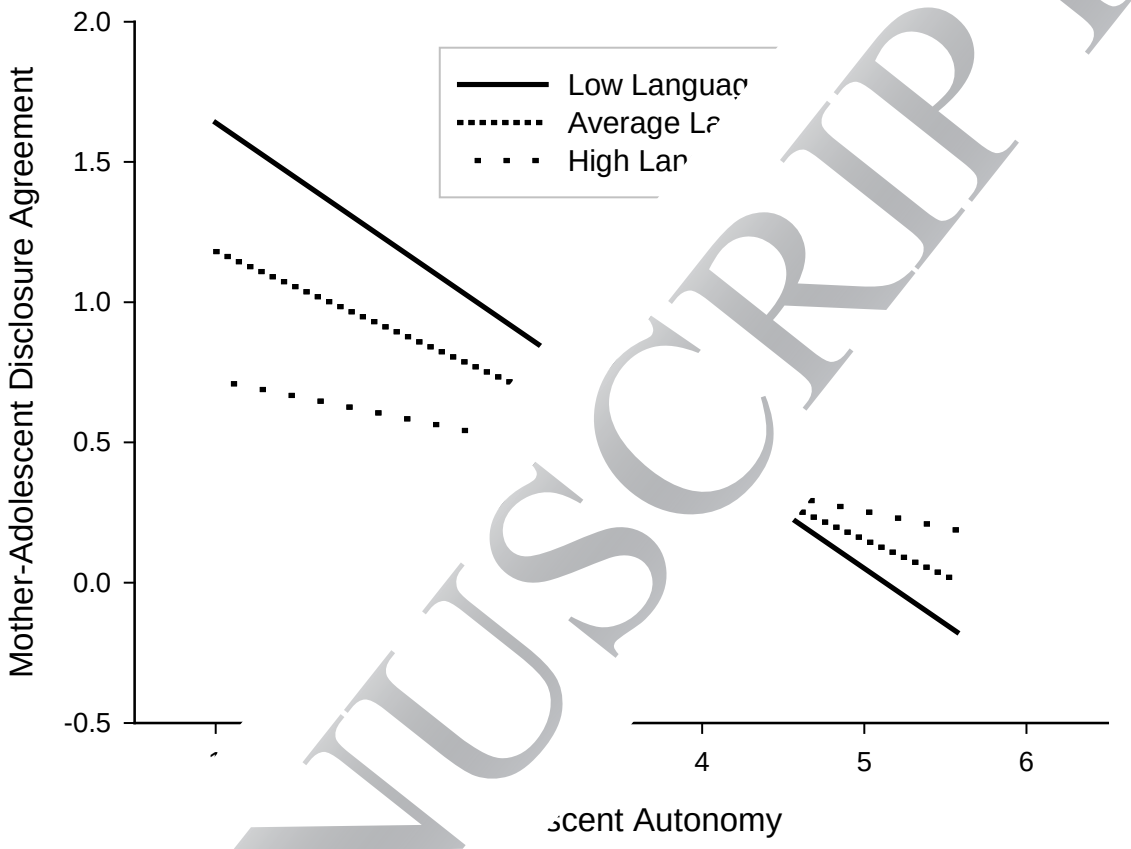


Figure [illegible] *xering and autonomy in the prediction of mother-adolescent agre* [illegible] *C)*