

Minority Youths as Translators/Interpreters: Benefits and Burdens of Language and Literacy Brokering

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Abstract

A recent ESRC seminar and the first ever international conference on that topic in Manchester in March 2005 revealed that non-professional language and literacy brokering by children and adolescents is a widespread activity taking place around the world every day, yet goes largely unacknowledged, in spite of its importance for the basic functioning of migrant families.

As children are often the first to master the adopted country's language, they are faced with the task of acting as language mediators (translators and interpreters) with regard to their families' administrative, economic and social needs in a total reversal of normal family roles. While their responsibilities include such typical translation tasks as official correspondence, legal and financial documents and their interpreting activities resemble those of community interpreters, the term language and culture brokering highlights the dialogic complexity of such intercultural transactions. Not only do they have to master skills required by the contextual contingencies of language use, but they also act as socialisation agents, since the parties involved are largely ignorant of each other's norms, beliefs and expectations.

While instances of successful language and culture brokering certainly bolster an adolescent's self-esteem, conveying a sense of competence, independence and maturity, children often perceive these tasks as a burden, especially when the stakes are high and a situation requires mediation skills that are beyond their linguistic, cognitive and emotional capabilities.

The aim of a study which I carried out in Germany in 2003 was to find out if such translation/interpreting tasks put second-generation immigrants under pressures unknown by their host-culture peers, whether they consequently gravitated towards their ethnic peers, and how the role reversal and cross-pressure situations thus experienced impacted on the development of the self.

Results show that since language brokering frequently invests migrant children with adult-like responsibilities, native youths are often perceived as immature, so that a sense of belonging is predominantly provided by the social reference group of their ethnic peers during the period of self-formation. This is characterised by a process of selecting and rejecting values from either culture, and culminates in the establishment of a distinct, third, identity, which is grounded in, but at the same time highly critical of, both cultures.

Key words: minority youths, language brokering, identity.

Aims, scope and limitations of the study

This study conducted among second-generation Turkish, Greek, and Italian undergraduate students in Germany set out to describe if and to what extent the identity formation of migrant adolescents was influenced by their parents' dependence on them as language mediators and socialisation agents. The aim was thus to find out if their parents' real and/or perceived inadequacies and the concomitant role reversals put second-generation immigrants under pressures not experienced by their host-culture peers, and in what way they might consequently develop differently during adolescence.

Of the 20 ethnic-minority students at the Kempten School of Translation and Interpreting Studies, of which I have been Vice Principal for ten years, 16 were willing to participate in the study. These female students were between 18 and 23 years of age, and in this study they looked back on the period most crucial for the formation of the self, i.e. the years between late childhood and early adulthood. The young women were all born to parents, who had emigrated from poor rural areas in their home countries in the mid-70s when they were in their mid twenties. The term 'Gastarbeiter' (guestworkers) given to them implies that they came to Germany in order to improve their economic situation intending to return home once their dreams had come true.

Data were gathered from questionnaires, which were meant to collect biographical, especially educational, data of parents as well as establish their attitudes toward the host country prior to migration and their respective post-migration linguistic skills. Group and individual interviews provided the narrative material analysed consulting relevant literature from the areas of bilingualism and development, language acquisition in an intercultural context, and negotiating a bi-cultural identity.

Before it was analysed *how* first-generation immigrants' linguistic inabilities in the respective host language affect their adolescent children's development, the *why* behind their disinclination to improve their German was looked at in some detail, since potentially negative consequences can only be tackled if the reasons are known and addressed. Inclusion of that particular aspect would be beyond the scope of the present paper, however.

Results of the study

Taking their parents' insufficient command of German as a starting point, the students related how they were forced to communicate, orally and in writing, on their behalf with doctors, teachers and officials of German institutions such as banks, the Labour Exchange, the Inland Revenue, the Welfare Office, etc. (*"I remember how awful I felt when I had to go to the doctor's where, on top of being ill, I myself had to do all the talking and explaining of symptoms"*). For one thing, they were embarrassed that their parents were not able to communicate in anything better than their 'Ausländerdeutsch' (foreigners' German). (*"If my parents went to a parents' evening at all, they either didn't understand what the teacher said or conveyed the information wrongly to me so that I always ended up talking to the teacher myself the next day, trying to clarify matters and then relating back to them what the problem had been"*). But what they perceived to be even worse was that they were often weighed down by these tasks because, on the one hand, they did not really want to get involved in what they considered to be "adult issues" and their parents' responsibilities. (*"Can't you imagine that I absolutely didn't want to know about the financial trouble we were in, but there I was at age 14 having to negotiate an extension of our credit with the bank manager"*).

On the other hand, they had great difficulties reconciling the discrepancy between the demands made on them outside the home environment and their roles within the family. Relaying instances when, at the age of twelve, for example, they had to accompany their mothers to the gynaecologist's, staying with them throughout the examination in order to be able to interpret back and forth, they remembered vividly how this clashed with their

upbringing. Never having seen their mothers naked before or been told anything about sexual matters, they suddenly found themselves in a situation they "*could hardly bear for shame*", and which, as was tacitly understood, they had to strike out of their minds immediately after "*completion of the task*", pretending that it had never taken place at all.

While their parents thus failed to anticipate, acknowledge and account for potential psychological problems, on the more "technical" side of things, too, they did not realise how difficult or even impossible it was for their children to interpret in instances when they knew nothing about the subject matter, let alone the relevant terms in either language. ("*Does any German under the age of 25 really know how to file his income tax return? Well, I learnt at age 13!*") In these contexts, the students also remembered being criticised by their parents for minor mistakes or for not translating word for word. Complaining thereupon that their parents were always choosing the easy way out, all respondents recalled using some form of the following reproach, "*If you know better, why don't you handle this yourself, then?*" / "*How can you criticise me when you don't know any German yourself?*" / "*Why don't you learn German yourself, then?*" This in turn provoked their parents' stock rejoinder "*If I went to a German school, knowing the German you do, that would be no problem for me, so why are you making all this fuss?*" Along the same lines, but according to the students much harder to brush aside, was the accusation they were "*again and again*" confronted with when trying to avoid interpreting for their parents on such occasions, viz. "*After all we've done for you, and all the sacrifices we're making for your sake, you really find it too much to do this little for us?*"

This was also cited as underlying the implicit understanding that school grades "*had to be good, no matter what*", and any schooling or training begun had to be followed through to the end in the shortest time possible. While the students rightly saw this as an expression of the wish to ensure a better future for their children, they complained about the total lack of commitment on the part of their parents in school-related matters. Due to their insufficient command of the language and the concomitant ignorance of the intricacies of the German educational system, they never wanted anything to do with educators, nor did they ever lend support at crucial stages in their children's school careers, e.g. when choosing among the three types of secondary schools open to pupils after four years of attending primary school. ("*I practically had to drag my father to the grammar school with me for enrolment because he wouldn't accept that I couldn't handle that alone, he didn't see that I needed his signature*").

And while most of the respondents recalled incidents in which individual teachers had tried to be of assistance, crossing the bridge between school and the home environment ("*When my teacher found out that my parents wanted me to become a hairdresser, he actually called on them to convince them to send me to grammar school*"), they realised that these, acting alone, would not be able to effect changes on a broader scale. On the other hand, the minority students lamented the fact that their teachers had not done anything to alleviate conflicts of loyalty by raising the awareness level of their German peers as far as the potential for cultural clashes was concerned. The respondents were of the opinion that it would have made much of a difference if someone had pointed out their special situation to the German students, as they did not ascribe their behaviour to racist attitudes, but rather to ignorance.

Aggravating such cross-pressure situations in general was the fact that they never dared to talk to their parents about their problems, either, for fear of upsetting them unduly by pointing out their linguistic inadequacies or insufficient knowledge of the host culture. By the same token, they were never even asked if they felt a special task too demanding or a certain responsibility too heavy to shoulder, but were, instead, left alone with their feelings of inadequacy. And while they realised that their fathers could not acknowledge their achievements properly for fear of losing face, the odd 'Thank you' or even occasional praise would have bolstered their self-confidence and conveyed to them at least tacit understanding of their special situation on the part of their parents. Not being allowed to bring things out into the open moreover meant that no betterment of their situation was in sight as long as

everything was swept under the carpet, leaving them with a feeling of a lack of control over the future. (*"It was simply not done. They never asked if I was up to [a certain task] and I would never have told them how I really felt about it. So we all pretended that everything was fine, and I think my father actually managed to cheat himself into believing that it really was. You know ... and they lived happily ever after"*).

This partly explains why they did not really mind being involved in the upbringing of their younger siblings on account of their parents' poor German because they felt the urge to make life easier for their brothers and sisters, wanting them to have a better start at life in the host country than they had had. Thus, for example, they often willingly supervised their siblings' homework, talked to their teachers when problems arose, or enrolled them in secondary schools. (*"I wanted my brother to pass the grammar school's entrance exam, so I sat down with him every afternoon for four weeks and reviewed everything with him"*). However, when duties only stemmed from the culture-bound tradition of showing solidarity and loyalty within the family, such as walking their brothers and sisters to kindergarten/school and back home as well as doing a considerable part of the household chores, and when these were felt to make inroads on their time in excess of what was acceptable given their own workload at school, for example, they often felt at a disadvantage compared to their German peers. (*"My German classmates never had to look after their brothers and sisters, and they hardly ever had to help in the house, so I was often angry because I felt that I had only duties while they had all the pleasures"*).

While the ensuing lack of spare time was one factor cited as a reason for little interaction with their host-culture peers, the most important aspect for not exactly seeking contact, but rather trying to avoid it was the fact that the majority of respondents admitted to feeling ashamed of their parents due to their inadequate host-language skills. (*"When schoolmates phoned, my father wasn't even able to take their names and phone numbers down for me to call back, so they eventually stopped calling altogether, and somehow I was relieved"*). Or, *"I can remember one birthday party when my mother pronounced a German word in strange way, and a German kid made fun of her. From then on I tried to avoid such situations by simply not inviting classmates anymore"*).

Moreover, since their parents did not know about social conventions in Germany, the students often found themselves in situations, e.g. on class trips, in which they did not know how to behave in order to meet German teenagers' approval. Consequently, they would have liked their classmates to have taken them by the hand, disentangling the maze of teenagers' self-made, unspoken rules and agreements. But these took their helplessness for a lack of interest since the second-generation immigrants never asked to be acquainted with German ways, having learnt at home to keep their feelings of insecurity to themselves, to pretend that there was nothing special about their situation.

On the other hand, they were not really keen on spending much time with their German peers, anyway, whom they felt to be years behind in their development towards mature and responsible adults. (*"German kids are pampered by their parents, who do everything to prolong their childhood, so that when we're beginning to feel, think and act like adults they still live in their innocent dreamworld"*). On top of this discrepancy in social age, they did not feel quite at ease in the company of German youths because they felt they had too much explaining to do, when it came to relaying matters of a more personal nature, for example, since the Germans were perceived to *"think and feel differently"*. What they were seeking instead was the kind of tacit understanding that doesn't need so many words being based, as it were, on shared experiences and a common outlook on life. Consequently, they turned to their ethnic peers who went through much the same as they did and accepted them for what they were. (*"With them I never had to behave in a certain way in order to be liked and respected, and they always sensed when something was wrong with me and would try to make me feel better"*). The empathy, intimacy and reciprocity thus experienced made them feel much closer to their ethnic-minority peers, spending most of what little free time they had with them and choosing venues where they felt to be among their own, e.g. those discos

specialising in 'Türkpöpop' (Turkish pop), which are rarely frequented by German youths. (*"Nowhere else do I experience the same feeling of belongingness ... The songs describe my experiences here in Germany and express everything I feel"*).

The values propagated by the sub-culture constituted by their ethnic peers, as well as the German way of life of which they have been part since they were born, however, often led to frustration over their parents' refusal to acknowledge their special situation, i.e. the necessity of trying to reconcile two worlds instead of choosing one over the other. After all, although their parents chose to live here, they were the ones who had been striving to combine the best of both worlds, i.e. wanting to have a real go at life in Germany without betraying their origins. *"And why should that not be possible? After all, I'm not a bad person just because I'm part-German, too. So I don't really feel bad or guilty about that"*. In this context, the biggest grudge they bear is that their parents tried to act as if they brought their children up in their respective home country to which they would shortly be returning (*"But all the time they know that this isn't true because they want us to finish school here, and my youngest sister is only 8. And of course she might want to go to college the way I do. So that would be another 15 years, and I would be 35 by then, with a job and a family. So it's all a pipe-dream, but they refuse to acknowledge this"*), while most of their host-society educators and all of their native peers turned a blind eye, acting as if Germany was their home country. Thus both groups denied them the support needed for steering their course through territory uncharted by either of them.

Analysis and discussion of results

Coping with cross-pressure situations

Since socio-linguistic studies have shown the importance of parents' pointing out to their bilingual children in which ways "they are perceived to be different from monolinguals, so as to help them define and sort out their identities" (Hoffmann, 1991), it is safe to assume that parental assistance would be all the more necessary in cases where not only two languages, but two radically different cultures are involved. After all, "the socialization process of children entails modelling their identity on that of the community" (Hoffmann, 1991), and with two models presenting themselves, as in our case, this process will doubtless be more complex. Moreover, becoming truly bicultural entails the acquisition of skills enabling second-generation immigrants to develop an identity which embraces and encompasses the whole of their (unique) experiences. (In Atabay, 1994) After all, the formation of personal and social identities requires a feeling of "being at home in one's body, one's home and in one's social world" (Ghuman, 1996).

In this context, it is not surprising that the students unanimously cited the wish for their parents to reach out and open up to members of the host culture as the most overriding of their adolescent years. They all felt a strong need for parental guidance in a world so different from their "Little Anatolia", and would, above all, have wanted their parents to socialise with Germans in an effort to learn enough about German culture to be able to function as culture-brokers for their children, instead of asking precisely that of their offspring.

After all, they all suffered heavily when no line was drawn between household chores or obligations towards younger siblings, and responsibilities which were simply "too heavy at their stage of maturity" (James and Prout, 1997). This was especially true when the line between mediating for parents and acting as decision-makers became blurred, e.g. when taking educational decisions for themselves or siblings independently, if not voluntarily but rather as a consequence of a lack of parental involvement. While 45 % of Tse's (1996) study sample of Asian-American students quoted independence and maturity among the benefits of brokering, which accordingly made them proud, 11 % felt embarrassed and 17 % burdened by it. That all this evidently sped up the process of maturing, or increased their 'social age' (James and Prout, 1997) can be seen as a positive factor only with the benefit of

hindsight, since at the time they often felt that too much was expected of them and that they were being denied the right to be a child.

For in order to be effective as (cultural) interpreters second-generation immigrants need mediation skills that require frequent changes of perspective, which may actually be beyond the cognitive and affective abilities of children at the threshold between late childhood and early adolescence. Having had to translate tax forms, legal documents or correspondence with the bank was unanimously related by the respondents as far beyond their capabilities, which may not have been entirely due to the officialese used in such texts, but probably to a greater extent by the fact that "the stakes in this kind of language brokering are very high" (Jimenez, 2003). Knowing that any mistake or error on their part might have spelt disaster would certainly have added to their discomfort and distress, as would the likely expectations by their parents that they acquire enough factual knowledge about the subject matter along the way, as it were, to be consulted as authorities in the respective realm. And it is precisely at this intersection of language and culture brokering that the reversal of roles makes itself most strongly felt in a way that the enforced premature assumption of adult roles distorts the "ethnic family system, boundaries and dynamics" (Sebuliba, 1997).

In a study on the psychological effects of role reversal, four forms of increasingly worrisome adultification were identified (Burton, 2002). As, theoretically, they all apply to children acting as language and culture brokers, the strains they experience may put them on a less than optimal developmental pathway. Unsurprisingly, our interview responses revealed adultification along Burton's lines in the form of 'precocious knowledge', i.e. possession of knowledge a child had better not have, such as information about the family's dire financial situation. The actual act of language brokering falls into the category of 'mentoring adultification', which sees children engage in oral and written communicative acts for, and on behalf of, their parents. If this activity comes to entail decision-making processes, such as negotiating with a third party in the family's interest without consulting the parents at each and every turn in the conversation, 'peerification' will result. This will culminate in actual 'parentification' if the children function as socialisation agents vis-à-vis their parents and siblings, e.g. taking their own and their siblings' education into their own hands.

Under normal circumstances, their position in the family would preclude them from relaying advice given to their elders by doctors or teachers, for example; and this all the more so if they know a particular piece of advice to contravene parental values, beliefs or expectations. The ensuing conflicts of loyalty pose a dilemma insofar as the decision to come out in favour of one party will invariably be seen by the other as a breach of trust. Thus the children are actually victims of a discourse they should not be involved in at all (in Jung-Fehlmann, 1998), and are prevented from reaching a stable status within the mesosystem, i.e. the interrelations between the microsystems of family on the one, and school on the other hand (in Bronfenbrenner, 1981), which they themselves have to build in order to establish some kind of link between home and school. As long as parents and educators do not support these efforts by accepting part of the responsibility to enable meaningful interaction to take place between the two spheres, however, this link will be far too weak to constitute the 'symbiotic relationship' that would best serve the development of a coherent identity (in Ghuman, 1996).

Striving for autonomy and stability

Since, on the other hand, the adolescents had to put feelings of shame and incompetence aside in their dealings with the authorities on their parents' behalf, their self-esteem was bolstered by the fact that they all experienced the necessity to adapt to each new situation that presented itself and act in a way that would be conducive to the business on hand. As language brokers they thus learnt at a relatively young age to make themselves heard so as to assert their rights in front of an often unaccommodating German bureaucracy, which has been found in similar studies to provide bilingual immigrants with an increased

sense of personal and interpersonal competence (in Jurkovic et al., 2004). Moreover, they were also quite successful when acting as "culture-brokers (...), introducing their younger brothers and sisters to the shared understanding, the work and community practices of their society" (Durkin: 1995), a task they would have wanted their parents to perform for them in the first place.

Nevertheless, the respondents were able to develop a strong feeling of autonomy in the context of their linguistic and cultural mediation tasks, of setting their own course and following it through for the benefit of their families. And precisely this feeling of being able to take not only their life, but also the lives of their families, into their hands and making a go of it, sharply collided with the authority nevertheless exercised over them by their parents; and the little everyday rebellions they staged must be seen in this context. In our case, the "adolescents felt that their rights were being curtailed by [their] parents; [while their] parents felt that their adolescents often defaulted in their moral obligations to the family" (Durkin, 1995). Whereas conformity and solidarity are traits traditionally expected from these ethnic-minority youths, striving for independence through challenging authority is generally accepted for German adolescents establishing their identity. Thus, trying to please their parents by meeting their expectations and as a consequence often being praised by their teachers, for instance, was in fact 'socially disastrous' to them, since their schoolmates naturally expected 'ingroup solidarity' (Durkin, 1995).

Seeking cultural cohesion and an identity

Being pulled, so to speak, in different directions, they are in a state of linguistic and cultural disequilibrium and feel marginalised, since they are labelled 'too German' by their ethnic communities and 'not enough German' by the host society. This phenomenon is known as 'anomie', which can be described as a feeling of "rootlessness, social isolation and personal disorientation" that may unbalance a person psychologically (Hoffmann, 1991). Being denied the social approval necessary to establish a positive social identity, they look critically at both cultures from their enforced vantage point, and come to find that they need a third model of self to build their selves on.

Since their reference groups do not have access to the same wide range of knowledge structures, they "grow beyond *both* the cultural models of their home cultures and those of mainstream and school culture" (Gee, 1996). Moreover, with the discrepancy between subjective, objective, and other-imposed connotations of their 'cultural identity' intolerably wide, and the dichotomy between their compliant – false – self and their true self a constant source of distress (Samovar and Porter, 1997), they have no one to turn to but their peers. After all, these face exactly the same problem of negotiating an identity across cross-pressure situations (Durkin, 1995).

Trying to achieve 'positive distinctiveness' through knowledge of social category membership and attached values, they strive for a self that competently functions in number of – often conflicting – social roles (Giles and Coupland, 1991), and adopt a "final adaptation strategy, cultural transmutation" that will alter their parents' original as well as the host-country culture and establish a set of distinctive new norms. (Samovar and Porter, 1997). This in turn requires them to integrate a multitude of divergent and even contradictory values and beliefs into their identities (Brislin and Yoshida, 1994), and they will turn to their ethnic peers for support in their quest for belongingness and some sense of 'cultural cohesion' (Durkin, 1995). The identity thus established is not merely a mixture of the two cultures in contact, but rather a distinct and unique identity in its own right.

In this process of self-formation, however, they feel left alone by their parents as well as by the host society, since neither group acknowledges, let alone assists in coping with, the 'cross-pressure situations' (Kneidinger and Sommer, 1996) the adolescents are faced with. Since the groups mentioned yield quite a substantial influence during adolescence, their failure to lend support to the minority adolescents' development of a self leaves their ethnic

peer group as the sole stable factor to lean on during that period. Such youth subcultures being the "means by which future adult familial and occupational roles can be both 'held at bay' and rehearsed in safety" (James and Prout, 1997), they are especially important in our case.

Thus, adopting an identity strategy of choosing a "third party option (...) by identifying with a marginal, transnational or transcultural group", is facilitated. For only with their ethnic peers can social communication take place, by which we understand communication as an exchange of "mental images, of knowing and accepting one another and expressing oneself in and through otherness" (both Camilleri, 1995). Hence, in contrast to the social reference groups mentioned before, in their interactions with ethnic-minority peers *otherness* suddenly has an intrinsic value; and for the first time, a multi-layered identity structure is no longer seen as guilt-inducing, but as conferring an internal locus of control. Thus being able to accept "identity and otherness [as a] dynamic relationship between two entities which mutually give meaning to each other" (Camilleri, 1995), they can now reconcile the necessity of operating differently in varied contexts for pragmatic reasons with the need for a 'core personality' (Brislin and Yoshida, 1994), or rather a stable identity across a wide range of domains, expectations and environments (Camilleri, 1995).

Conclusions

Since the students saw their parents' avowed intention of returning to their country of origin above all as an excuse for not having to commit themselves to having a wholehearted go at life in a foreign culture, they viewed it as paramount that these faced up to reality and acknowledged the necessity of accommodating to the host society to some extent. Given the fact that parental stereotypes against the host culture as well as racism and/or indifference on the part of host-society members were resented as the underlying causes of being left alone while negotiating their identity between the two cultures involved, the importance of making both sides aware of these failures should be stressed.

Thus, awareness programmes should drive home to first-generation immigrants – regardless of the cultures and languages involved – that they have to be active partners in the socialisation processes undergone by their adolescent children in the host societies' schools and peer groups. Among the mass of literature on multicultural and intercultural communication a wealth of policy suggestions aimed at increasing the host societies' willingness to ease their immigrants' acculturation efforts is being churned out, with little or no advice given to parents who expose their children to a foreign culture and instead of easing their burden, increase it by relinquishing their responsibilities in an area essential for their children's healthy development and their future as bi-cultural adults. But as long as the host society is singled out as the only culprit standing in the way of a smooth transition from 'foreigner' to 'fellow citizen', second-generation minority youths will continue to bear a greater burden than would be inevitable under the particular circumstances.

However, in order to address wrongs within the host societies that have come to light in the course of this research project, grievances that are partly grounded in racist attitudes and practices found in Germany, and possibilities to do away with institutional racism need to be looked into in the first place, for these would go a long way towards making the transition to bi-cultural adult easier for second-generation immigrants. As the idea of a multi-cultural nation has not yet found favour with policy-makers, who continue to negate Germany's de facto status as an immigrant nation (in Flynn et al., 1995), too little is being done to accommodate immigrants' needs by, e.g. facilitating interaction between the 'guestworkers' and German authorities.

Not surprisingly then, surveys of hospital patients in Berlin between 1996 and 1999 showed that minority women, the majority of them of Turkish origin, felt that they had not been exhaustively informed by their doctors as far as diagnoses and treatments were concerned, while doctors complained of not being able to make proper diagnoses in the first


place owing to poor communication (*Die Tageszeitung*, 2003). All too often "chance interpreters" had to be relied on in hospital settings, such as Turkish cleaning ladies who happened to be around, fellow patients, or whoever of the relatives possessed at least some knowledge of German, with the bulk of such activities falling on children, thus potentially causing even greater emotional turmoil than the hospitalisation of their mother as such (*Berliner Zeitung*, 2002). In order to improve the provision of health and social services to minorities and spare their children age-inappropriate tasks which moreover often prevent them from attending school (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 2003), in 2003 Berlin introduced an EU-funded 7-month programme designed to train unemployed bilingual migrants to become community interpreters. Building on their intercultural communicative skills and their knowledge of the societal norms, beliefs and values prevalent in either culture, which certainly often ensures more culturally-aware, sensitive language-mediation than might be the case with a native German interpreter, they were familiarised with the basics of German health and social services, legal and ethical issues arising in the context of translation and interpreting assignments, as well as medical and administrative terminology (*Migration und öffentliche Gesundheit*, 2003). Commendable though that project is, funds for future courses have not yet been secured and it is not clear, either, where the money to pay for the interpreters' services is to come from.

So, unless and until changes along similar lines are instituted throughout the country, it is mostly the schools which are left with the task of reaching out to young immigrants and their families. Exemplary efforts giving rise to optimism in this respect were outlined by Salinas Sosa (1997) in her literature review of "US school districts' successful practices in involving Hispanic parents in their children's school activities". Overcoming logistical and attitudinal as well as expectations barriers were seen as the most important factors in an effort to ensure greater interest and participation in their children's learning. This frequently meant relatively simple things such as foregoing teacher preferences and instead taking immigrants' work patterns into account by holding parents' evenings on a Friday night, thus immediately boosting attendance figures. On the other hand, communication problems, uncertainty about their roles in the U.S. educational system, or dissatisfaction with their own ability to provide support to their children, which also underlay their reluctance to get involved, were more difficult to address. It is interesting to note that a project in Oakland, California, built up a support network of immigrant parents who were trained to act as culture brokers in an educational context so as to enable recent arrivals to take a more active role from the start, something which their children would probably not have achieved on their own, as we learnt in our study. The last issue, expectations barriers, will be most difficult to overcome, as they are the result of immigrants' comparing themselves unfavourably with host society members, who they often feel judge them negatively on e.g. socio-economic status and ethnicity, and are thus part and parcel of successful integration programmes operative in a specific country (Salinas Sosa, 1997). But since these do not present unsurmountable problems, educators should shoulder the responsibility they have towards all the children entrusted to their care, irrespective of colour, creed, or origin, namely to create an environment in which these can thrive, both intellectually and personally (in Jung-Fehlmann, 1998).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	
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