

More than Language Translation: Culture, Text and Genre Aspects of Literacy Brokering among Sudanese Refugees

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Learning about Texts and Practices

- ❏ **Brokering:** individuals rely upon others for knowledge about literacy
 - ❏ Lexico-syntactic/graphophonic knowledge
 - ❏ Encoding & decoding of English
 - ❏ Cultural knowledge
 - ❏ Context, expectations, beliefs & values
 - ❏ Written genre knowledge
 - ❏ Purposes, functions, features of texts

Culture is realized through language

- ❏ Language and language use are never independent of social context
- ❏ Cultures represent patterned systems of making sense of the world (Duranti, 1997)
- ❏ Language is always connected to:
 - ❏ Social relations
 - ❏ Cultural models
 - ❏ Power & politics
 - ❏ Beliefs, values & attitudes
 - ❏ Places and things (Gee, 1996)

Literacies and genres are social

- ❏ Genres are recognizable patterns of language-in-context (Bakhtin, 1986)
- ❏ Considerations of genre include:
 - ❏ How people create genres
 - ❏ How they use genres/written texts, and
 - ❏ For what purposes they are used (Bazerman, 1998)
- ❏ Literacy practices are:
 - ❏ Historically and contextually situated
 - ❏ Dynamic and malleable
 - ❏ Multiple and purposeful, and some are privileged above others
 - ❏ Informed by values, beliefs & attitudes
 - ❏ Deeply enmeshed in social, cultural & power structures (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2001)

Brokering provides help with language and literacy

- ❏ Informal translation work (Morales & Hanson, 2005), including oral & written language
- ❏ Draw upon linguistic, textual, and cultural resources to negotiate meaning (Mazak, 2006; Orellana et al, 2003)
- ❏ Limitations of current research:
 - ❏ Focus on translation
 - ❏ Examines Spanish-speaking communities

Research Foci

- ❏ How do the language and literacy practices of Sudanese refugee families reflect their experiences as refugees?
- ❏ How do these refugees negotiate, appropriate, and/or transform literacy practices through these experiences?

Ethnographic methodology

- ❏ **Data Collection**
 - ❏ Participant observation
 - ❏ Semi-structured interviews
 - ❏ Artifact collection
- ❏ **Data Analysis**
 - ❏ Coding of brokering events
 - ❏ Developing data matrices
 - ❏ Derivation of brokering categories
 - ❏ AtlasTi software
- ❏ **Unit of analysis:**
 Literacy (brokering) event (Heath, 1983)

Researcher's roles in community

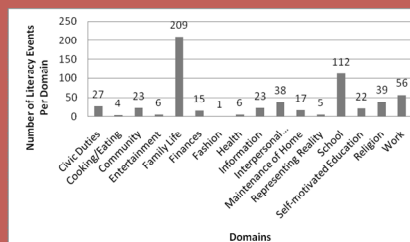
- ❏ **Variety of roles over 5 years**
 - ❏ Refugee tutor (paid & unpaid)
 - ❏ Community liaison/mentor
 - ❏ Board member: Southern Sudan Rescue & Relief Association
- ❏ **Reciprocity during study**
 - ❏ Academic tutor for family members
 - ❏ Community mentor
 - ❏ Chauffeur, babysitter, literacy broker, etc

Participants

	NAME	EDUCATION LEVEL	CURRENT WORK
High-education	Viola	Law degree	Factory line
	Isbon	Some college	Hospital janitor
Medium-education	Falabia	Nursing degree	Hospital janitor
	Primo	High school	Hospital janitor
Low-education	Akhlas	7 th grade	Seamstress
	Amin	Some high school	Dishwasher

Changing Contexts, Changing Practices

- ❏ **Reading and writing across many life domains**



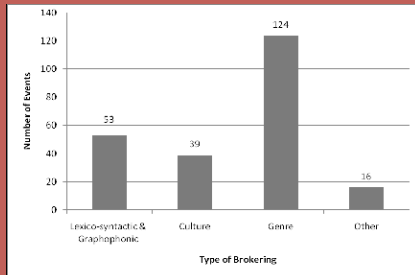
Changing Contexts, Changing Practices

- ❏ **Practices in Sudan**
 - ❏ Religion
 - ❏ Formal schooling
 - ❏ Interpersonal communication
- ❏ **Practices in the US**
 - ❏ Family life
 - ❏ Formal schooling
 - ❏ Work
 - ❏ Religion
 - ❏ Interpersonal communication
- ❏ **Languages in Sudan**
 - ❏ Arabic
- ❏ **Languages in US**
 - ❏ English
 - ❏ Arabic

Changing Contexts, Changing Practices

- ❏ **Michigan presented refugees with a new literacy environment, including**
 - ❏ New language
 - ❏ New written genres
 - ❏ New purposes for reading/writing
- ❏ **Adults continued some practices & adopted new ones**
 - ❏ e.g., digital technologies
 - ❏ Required for school & work
 - ❏ Facilitated communication with Sudanese diaspora

Brokering: More than translation



Brokering: Lexico-syntactic & graphophonic knowledge

- Existing research primarily focuses on language and translation of text
- Three sub-types of brokering
 - Vocabulary
 - Curriculum, rhyme, or developmental
 - Syntax
 - Making things "sound nice" in English
 - Letter-sound relationships
 - Spelling & pronunciation

Brokering: Cultural knowledge

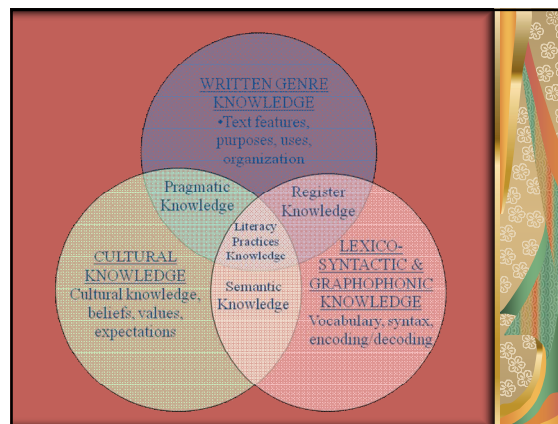
- Knowledge specific to US context
 - Holidays, history, national symbols
- Beliefs & values
 - What should be included in resume
- Expectations
 - The "rules here in America"
 - Especially common in texts sent home from schools
- Common questions:
 - Is this a good thing?
 - What should I do?

Brokering: Written genre knowledge

- Purpose of text/genre
 - Yearbooks, phone books, crosswords
- Use of text
 - Coupons
- Specific genre features
 - Location of glossary in textbook
- Purpose of features
 - White pages vs. yellow pages
- Use of features
 - Hyperlinks, dialogue boxes, icons

Brokering: Genre knowledge, cont.

- Genre knowledge is connected with practices—what people DO with texts
 - Common question: What do I do with this?
- Ability to effectively use a text relies upon knowledge of
 - Purpose
 - Use
 - Features



What do these findings suggest about genres & literacy practices?

- New contexts may require new written genre knowledge
- Learning about written genres can be one way individuals learn about literacy practices in their communities

What do these findings suggest about literacy brokering?

- Brokers may be one important source of literacy learning for adults
- Brokering involves much more than translation of language
 - Learning about language, culture, & written genres
- Brokering can give access to power
 - Provides help with and knowledge about valued practices

Implications: Adult literacy/ESL

- Learning basic literacy skills is only one aspect of becoming literate
 - Literacy development also involves learning about genres, cultures, and literacy practices
- Adult literacy/ESL programs should explicitly teach about genre and culture
 - How are genres used in real world?
 - For which purposes?
 - What cultural knowledge is embedded in texts?

Implications: Parent participation in children's schooling

- Findings may help explain some patterns of parental response/involvement in schools
 - Many brokering events involved school texts
- Sending notes home is more than a matter of translation
- Parents may not understand the function of the text or cultural expectations embedded in the content