Seeking academic help
A case study of peer brokering interactions
My Presentation

- Background
- Brokering
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions
Most international students from Asia and are non-native English speakers (EAL: English as an Additional Language)

Deficit discourse on inadequate English skills and lack of class participation (Ryan & Louie, 2007)

Assertion of a monolingual perspective on students’ learning amounts to a disregard for language and cultural diversity (IAU, 2012; Ryan & Viete, 2010)
Need for intercultural sensibilities among staff and students to prepare them for living and working in a more culturally diverse environment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2013; Leask, 2009)

But prevailing deficit discourse ignores complex and diverse systems of cultural practices and perpetuates ‘cross-cultural ignorance’ (Singh, 2005)
Brokers facilitate transfer of valued resources because of barriers in culture and language (Stovel, Golub, & Milgrom, 2011)

Language brokering: Interpreting and translating performed by bilinguals without special training (Tse, 1996)

Literacy brokering: Unpacking the underlying meanings and implications of unfamiliar texts and practices encountered on an everyday basis. More than translation, e.g. explain cultural content (Perry, 2009)
Informal help-seeking interactions

Brokers bridge the gaps between students and the English academy through translation, interpretation, and explanation

Examine international students’ agency through their brokering interactions
Empirical Studies

**What**
- Interpreting and completing assignments
  
  (Li et al., 2010; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Wakimoto, 2007; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015)

  **Academic writing**
  
  (Che, 2013; Nam & Beckett, 2011; Séror, 2011).

**Who**
- Co-nationals, other international students, “experts” (native English speakers)
  
  (Che, 2013; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015)

**How**
- Face-to-face interactions and through mobile phones / computers
  
  (Goodwin, Kennedy, & Vetere, 2010; Krause, 2007)

  **Social Networking Sites** (e.g. Facebook)
  
  (Madge et al., 2009; Vivian et al., 2014; Vivian & Barnes, 2010)
What is the nature of brokering among international EAL students?

1. Who are the brokers?
2. Why are they chosen?
3. What are the dynamics of brokering interactions?
Methodology

- Focused ethnography

- Ten Participants
  - Mostly Chinese

- Regular interviews over one semester

- Observe meetings
- Screenshots of text messages
Conversation Analysis

- Conversation analysis according to the principles of turn taking (Sacks et al., 1974)

- WeChat/ Facebook Messages as conversation

- Brokering = Epistemic asymmetry
  K+ broker, K- seeker (Heritage, 2013)

- Use of emoji and other affective markers
Findings

Non-peer brokers

- Learning support
- Proofread
- Better grades

Peer brokers

- Classmates
- Acquaintances
- Top student
- More experienced
- Bilingual
Case Study: Linda & Emily

Seeker: Linda (China)
Enrolled in a level 200 subject

Broker: Emily (China)
Final year undergraduate student in the same subject
Information Sequence

- Straightforward requests (e.g. question) and answers (e.g. with certainty)
- Acknowledgement tokens closes exchange

Advice Sequence

- Seeker may not agree with advice by:
  - Resisting it as new knowledge
  - Rejecting the advice altogether
Accomplishing Brokering Interactions

Preferred Responses
Epistemic Asymmetry
Troubles-Talk

Native Language

Emoji

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY
**E.g. 1 Information Sequence**

**Linda-Emily 11 [19/05/16 assignment submission]**

**Linda**: Grey box, **Emily**: White box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn #</th>
<th>WeChat Message</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>就是不是要在 moodle 上提交一次，再到学院那再提交一次纸质版的吗，这两个版本有一丢丢不一样没事儿吧</td>
<td><strong>Seeker: K- stance</strong>&lt;br&gt;Asks question about submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You know we have to submit it once on moodle, then submit the paper version to the faculty, if these two version have a slight difference it wouldn’t matter right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>没关系啊 只要你符合他要求 其他不一样没关系的</td>
<td><strong>Broker: K+ stance</strong>&lt;br&gt;Answers with certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No problem as long as you fulfil his requirements any difference in the rest wouldn’t matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>哦，好的</td>
<td><strong>Seeker: Closes sequence</strong>&lt;br&gt;Acknowledgement tokens, affective markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh, ok</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### E.g. 2 Advice Sequence: Resistance

**Linda-Emily 01 [02/03/16 required reading]**

Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn #</th>
<th>WeChat Message</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 March 2016 approx. 13:51</td>
<td><strong>Seeker: K- stance</strong>&lt;br&gt;Asks question about required readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>有的課有 required reading, 读不完会怎么样啊</td>
<td>Some classes have required reading, what happens if I don’t finish reading them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some turns later</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>一般就看ppt和老师上课讲到的第几页第几页看一看这样</td>
<td><strong>Broker: K+ stance</strong>&lt;br&gt;Answers with example of what she usually does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually just read ppt and take a look at the pages the teacher referred to in class</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>我也觉得是，本科的时候中文都不读，英文的更不想看了</td>
<td><strong>Seeker: Resists advice as new knowledge</strong>&lt;br&gt;Echoes broker’s perspective, provides own reason for doing so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel the same way too, during my undergrad days it was in Chinese and I didn’t read them, now it’s in English all the more I don’t feel like reading them</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (1/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]
Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

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<tr>
<th>Turn #</th>
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</table>
| 18     | (我们学科的)历史……新西兰得(学科)历史吗还是世界的(学科)历史啊 | **Seeker: K- stance**  
Asks question about answering an essay question  
(Our discipline’s) history …… New Zealand’s (discipline) history or is it world (discipline) history |
| 19     | 新西兰的  
New Zealand | **Broker: K+ stance**  
Answers with certainty, provides explanation |
| 20     | 一般在这边学(这学科)都要写这边的  
Usually when you study (this discipline) you need to write about the local context |
E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (2/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]
Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

21. 我去......比如第一个问题 What role can (discipline) play in social change 这种很普试的问题，也必须带入新西兰啊

Seeker: Rejects advice, projects K+ stance
Negatively evaluates advice, sheds doubt on advice using rhetorical question

22. 最好是在新西兰范围内写

The best is to write about the New Zealand context

Broker: K+ stance
Asserts previous answer, provide another explanation

23. 因为你写别的国家老师不知道

Because if you write about other countries the teacher won't know

24. 然后就怕你忽悠他

Then the teacher will be afraid you're deceiving him
E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (3/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]
Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

Seeker: Rejects advice, asserts K+ stance
States reason for thinking otherwise.

Seeker: Troubles-talk
Loudly crying face emoji and ‘I don’t know’ statement solicits advice

Some turns later

Seeker: K+ stance
Provides alternative advice about asking teacher
### E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (4/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]
Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 31   | 🙁😔🙁🙁🙁 Seeker: Troubles-talk
       Worried face emoji solicits emotional reciprocity |
| 32   | 😞陈述 Broker: Empathetic stance
       Bitter smile emoji |
| 33   | 7 April 2016 15:40
       🙁🙁🙁🙁🙁 Seeker: Closes sequence
       Accepts broker’s advice but with negative affective stance |
| 34   | 我还是问一下吧……… Seeker: Closes sequence
       I’d better ask about it …… |

emoji: 😞, 😞, 😞, 😞, 😞
Conclusions

1. Agency = Seeker initiated academic-related help
2. Agency = Negotiating epistemic authority
3. Agency = Accomplishing brokering interactions through linguistic and non-linguistic resources
Conclusions

- English is NOT the only legitimate language in academic learning
- A common native language allows students to engage in meaningful brokering interactions
- Brokering demonstrates learners’ initiative and negotiation of knowledge positions
- Host institutions need to recognise the value of international students using their own cultural and social resources
References


