

# Seeking academic help 🤔

## A case study of peer brokering interactions



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# My Presentation



Background



Brokering



Methodology



Findings



Conclusions

# Background

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- **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)

# Cross-cultural sensibilities or ignorance?

- **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)



## Brokering

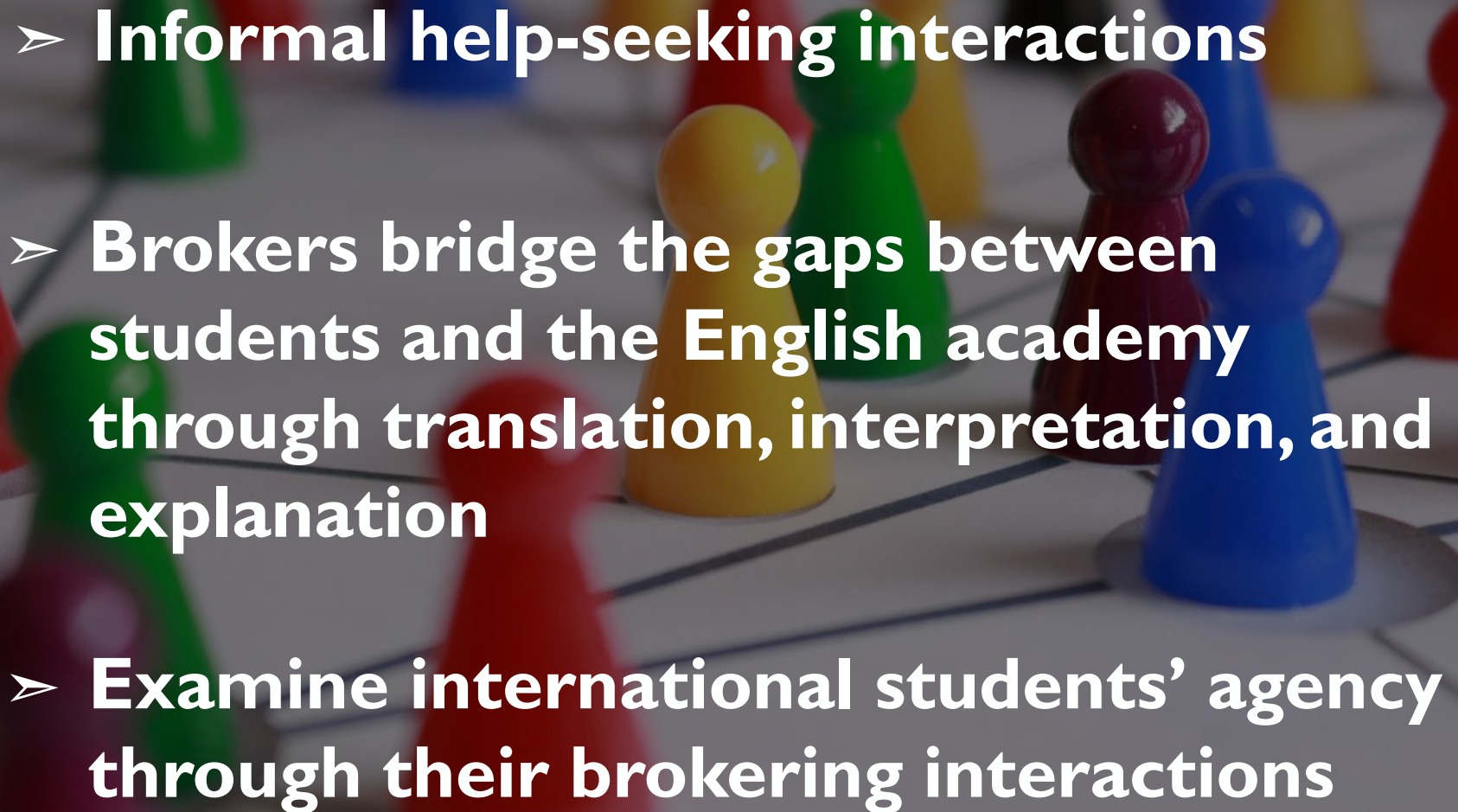
- **Brokers facilitate transfer of valued resources because of barriers in culture and language (Stovel, Golub, & Milgrom, 2011)**
- **Language brokering: Interpreting and translating performed by bilinguals without special training (Tse, 1996)**
- **Literacy brokering: Unpacking the underlying meanings and implications of unfamiliar texts and practices encountered on an everyday basis. More than translation, e.g. explain cultural content (Perry, 2009)**





# Brokering

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- **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

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## 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)

# Research Questions

**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

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**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

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## Non-peer brokers

Learning support

Proofread

Better grades

## Peer brokers

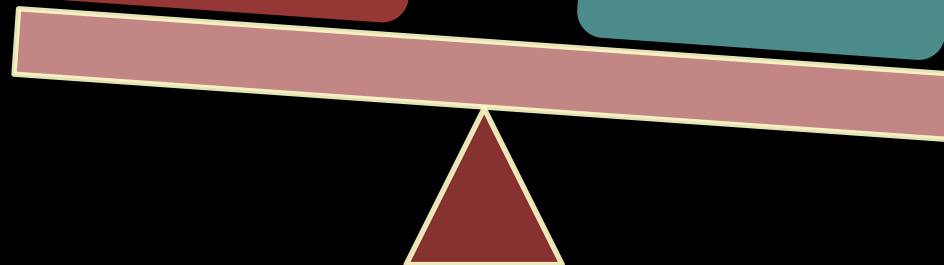
Classmates

Acquaintances

Top student

More experienced

Bilingual



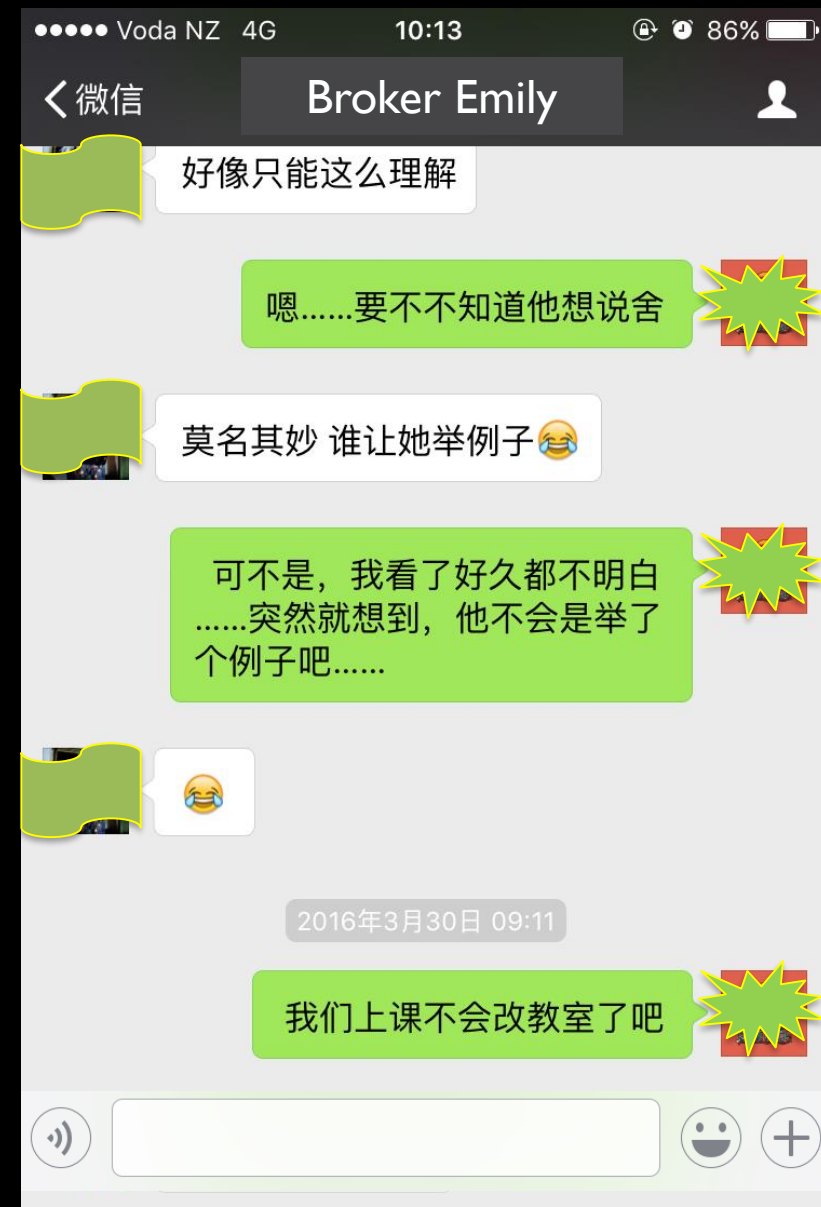
# Case Study: Linda & Emily

**Seeker: Linda (China)**

**Enrolled in a level 200 subject**

**Broker: Emily (China)**

**Final year undergraduate student in the same subject**



# Brokering Sequences

## 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. I Information Sequence

Linda-Emily II [19/05/16 assignment submission]

Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

Turn #	WeChat message	Commentary
6	<p>就是不是要在 moddle 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</p> <p>You know we have to submit it once on <b>moddle</b>, then submit the paper version to the faculty, if these two version have a slight difference it wouldn't matter right</p>	<p><b>Seeker: K- stance</b></p> <p>Asks question about submission</p>
7	<p>没关系啊 只要你符合他要求 其他不一样没关系的</p> <p>No problem as long as you fulfil his requirements any difference in the rest wouldn't matter</p>	<p><b>Broker: K+ stance</b></p> <p>Answers with certainty</p>
8	<p>哦，好的 </p> <p>Oh, ok </p>	<p><b>Seeker: Closes sequence</b></p> <p>Acknowledgement tokens, affective markers</p>

## E.g. 2 Advice Sequence: Resistance

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

Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

Turn #	WeChat Message	Commentary
1	<p>2 March 2016 approx. 13:51</p> <p>有的课有 required reading, 读不完会怎么样啊</p> <p>Some classes have <b>required reading</b>, what happens if I don't finish reading them</p>	<p><b>Seeker: K- stance</b></p> <p>Asks question about required readings</p>
	<p>Some turns later</p>	
4	<p>一般就看ppt和老师上课讲到的第几页第几页看一看这样</p> <p>I usually just read <b>ppt</b> and take a look at the pages the teacher referred to in class</p>	<p><b>Broker: K+ stance</b></p> <p>Answers with example of what she usually does</p>
5	<p>我也觉得是, 本科的时候中文都不读, 英文的更不想看了</p> <p>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</p>	<p><b>Seeker: Resists advice as new knowledge</b></p> <p>Echoes broker's perspective, provides own reason for doing so</p>

## E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (1/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]

Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

Turn #	WeChat Message	Commentary
18	<p>(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</p> <p>(Our discipline's) history ..... New Zealand's (discipline) history or is it world (discipline) history</p>	<p><b>Seeker: K- stance</b></p> <p>Asks question about answering an essay question</p>
19	<p>新西兰的</p> <p>New Zealand</p>	<p><b>Broker: K+ stance</b></p>
20	<p>一般在这边学(这学科)都要写这边的</p> <p>Usually when you study (this discipline) you need to write about the local context</p>	<p>Answers with certainty, provides explanation</p>

## E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (2/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]

Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

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

Shit ..... for example the first question **What role can (discipline) play in social change** this kind of very general question, do we still need to refer to the New Zealand context

**Seeker: Rejects advice, projects K+ stance**

Negatively evaluates advice, sheds doubt on advice using rhetorical question

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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

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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

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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

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我就是觉得这是个特别哲学的问题，好像不太牵扯到个别国家，就是个.....世界性的问题.....也要把新西兰弄进来啊.....🙄🙄🙄，不会写了

I just feel it's a particularly philosophical question, doesn't seem like it involves any particular country, it's a ..... question about a global issue ..... and we have to drag New Zealand into it .....

🙄🙄🙄, I don't know how to write it anymore

**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

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Some turns later

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你只能说我能不能除了新西兰之外联系一下世界性的

You can only ask whether you can write about global issues apart from writing about New Zealand

**Broker: K+ stance**

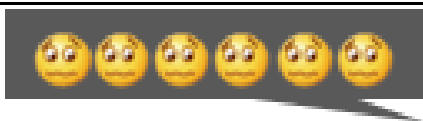
Provides alternative advice about asking teacher

## E.g. 3 Advice Sequence: Rejection (4/4)

Linda-Emily 09 [07/04/16 interpreting assignment]

Linda: Grey box, Emily: White box

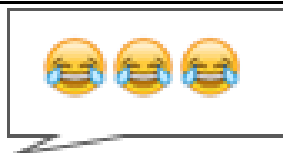
31



**Seeker: Troubles-talk**

Worried face emoji solicits emotional reciprocity

32



**Broker: Empathetic stance**

Bitter smile emoji

33

7 April 2016 15:40



**Seeker: Closes sequence**

Accepts broker's advice but with negative affective stance

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I'd better ask about it .....







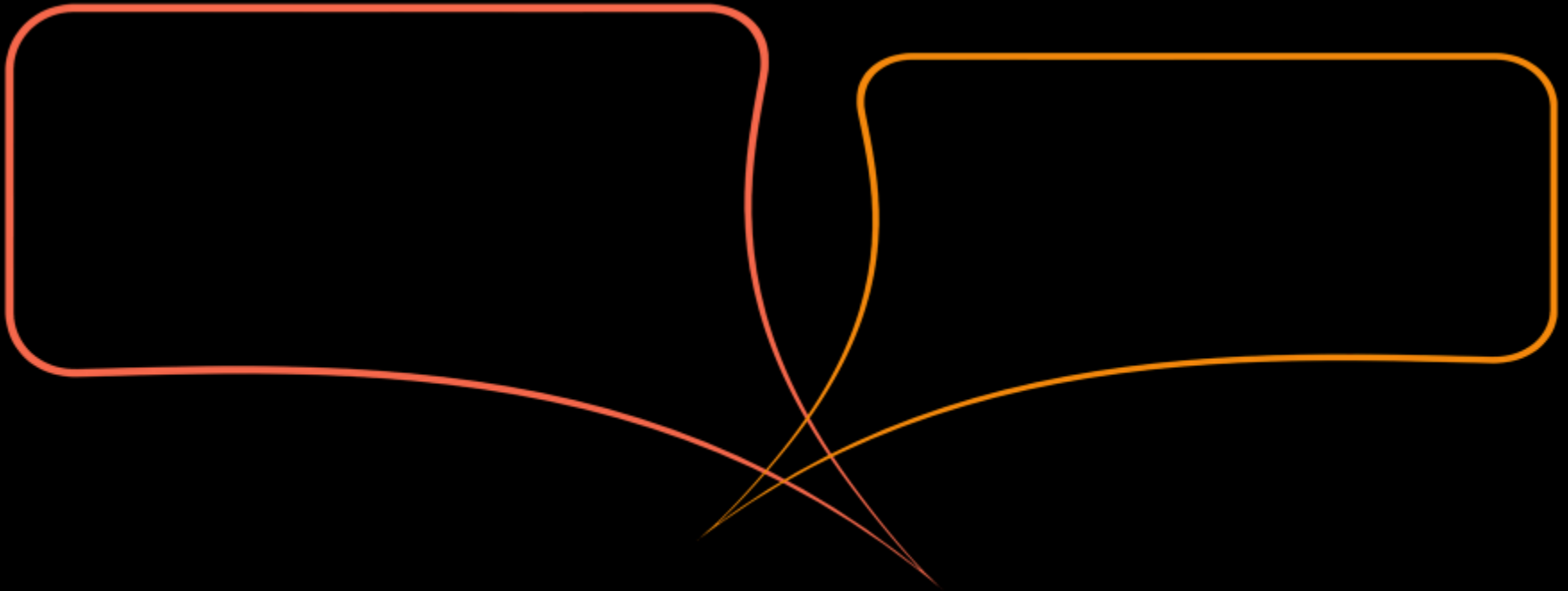
# Conclusions

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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



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