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"LOOK, YOU HAVE TO SIGN": LITERACY PRACTICES AMONG SUDANESE REFUGEE FAMILIES

VOLUME I

By

Kristen H. Perry

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

"LOOK, YOU HAVE TO SIGN":
LITERACY PRACTICES AMONG SUDANESE REFUGEE FAMILIES

By

Kristen H. Perry

Through this ethnographic study, I examined literacy practices among Sudanese refugees, focusing on the ways in which refugee families make sense of and negotiate texts and practices in the U.S. These refugees relied upon literacy brokers to help them understand issues related to language, culture, and genre in texts and literacy practices. Literacy brokering also was an important family literacy practice, as even young children brokered texts within the family. The following research foci shaped this study: (1) How do the language and literacy practices of these Sudanese refugee families in the U.S. reflect the different layers of their experiences as refugees? (2) How do these refugees negotiate, appropriate, and/or transform literacy practices through these experiences? and (3) How are the young Sudanese refugee children from these families negotiating or making sense of the differences between U.S. school-based literacies and the literacy practices of their homes and communities?

Data collection for this study involved participant-observation; semi-structured interviews with participants; and collection of artifacts. Data analysis relied upon literacy events as the unit of analysis, following Heath (1983), which were coded for texts, languages, social activity domains, and other contextual factors within each event. Emerging themes also were identified in the data, with a focus on literacy brokering. Focal participants in this study included three refugee families from Southern Sudan, all of whom had sojourned in Middle Eastern countries before resettling in Michigan.

Results indicate that the parents relied upon literacy brokers to help them understand texts and literacy practices in the U.S. Literacy brokering provided three types of knowledge: (1) *lexico-syntactic and graphophonic knowledge* related to encoding/decoding, vocabulary, and syntax; (2) *cultural knowledge* related to cultural information, beliefs and values, and expectations; and (3) *genre knowledge* related to the purpose and use of different genres, the specific features of those genres, and the purpose, use, and organization of those features. Parents in the three families relied upon a variety of different brokers, including their own young children.

The results of this study illustrate how—and what—people must learn in order to effectively participate in literacy practices. These findings also add to current understandings of child brokering in immigrant communities by showing that even emergent readers and writers can broker texts, and by illustrating that child brokering may impact families from different cultural communities in different ways. Insights for adult literacy/ESL pedagogy and future research are discussed.

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This book is dedicated to the three Sudanese families who participated in this study.

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Many people have provided valuable resources and support throughout the course of this research project. First and foremost, I must acknowledge and thank the members of Lansing's Sudanese community for making my research, and this book, possible. Of course, the three families described in this book deserve thanks beyond what I can express on this page. Viola, Akhlas, Falabia, and their families welcomed me wholeheartedly into their lives, offering hospitality and friendship as they simultaneously provided me with invaluable knowledge and insight. My connections with these families have deeply impacted me as a scholar and as a human being, and I will carry them in my heart always. I also must acknowledge the role of Nuer Nuer in making my research possible. A remarkable young man and an emerging leader among the Sudanese community, Nuer was instrumental in helping me build connections with other community members and answering numerous questions about Sudan and its peoples, languages, and cultures.

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Chapter 1

Learning about Literacies in New Contexts:

The Case of Sudanese Refugees

Viola Lupai, a Sudanese refugee woman that I have worked with for some time, called me in July, 2005, to ask if I could come over and look at some "financial documents" that her husband, Isbon Domoulouka, had received in the mail. Viola had earned a law degree in Egypt; she was fully literate in Arabic and proficient enough in English to occasionally translate in U.S. courts for other Sudanese refugees. Despite this, Viola often asked for help with texts that she encountered in the U.S. This particular request, therefore, was not unusual for her, nor for the other refugee families with whom I worked. Viola explained that Isbon needed advice about those documents, but he only was willing to talk with someone he could trust. When I arrived at the family's home, Isbon brought over his documents, and the three of us sat down together at the kitchen table. Isbon handed me a couple of envelopes from the Publisher's Clearinghouse sweepstakes, in which he and Viola had carefully preserved all of the contents. Most of these "documents" were form letters, with Isbon's name inserted in the appropriate places. Many of the documents stated that someone with the initials "ID" in Michigan would be chosen as the winner of the upcoming sweepstakes. Viola had unsuccessfully tried calling the company for more information, and she and Isbon did not know what they were supposed to do to claim the $1,000,000 they believed they had won.

As I talked with Isbon and Viola, I quickly gathered that they did not really understand how sweepstakes programs work in the U.S. It was clear to me that they took the documents' statements at face value—they did not know how to either read the fine

print or read between the lines. I spent several minutes explaining about the sweepstakes. I tried to explain that the sweepstakes officials choose only one winner out of the whole country; that they send out letters like this to people everywhere, and those letters included identical statements with other people's names in the same spaces; that I get these letters all the time myself, but just throw them away; that the sweepstakes company just wants us to send them money or buy their products. I also cautioned Isbon that some of these mailings are not reputable, that some of them are scams that are actually trying to steal our money or our bank account information. He should be very, very careful when responding to these kinds of mailings, I warned. This particular sweepstakes was probably legitimate, I suggested, and if he and Viola really wanted to enter, then I would help them. But, I also explained that the chances of actually winning were very slim, despite what the documents claimed. Viola asked again where the company's office was, because she wanted to call them. We looked at the pages together, but could not locate any contact information.

Isbon was very quiet during much of this, and after thinking for a while, he went back to the couch. Viola still believed that her family had won the sweepstakes. She insisted that the sweepstakes people knew a lot of information about them, and she took this as evidence of the veracity of the documents' claims. Viola continued to insist that the sweepstakes people know exactly where the Domoulouka's house is, and that they had even included a map to the house in the packet. Again, I explained that I receive these same letters from the sweepstakes company, only with my name in the same place where Isbon's name had been printed. I showed Viola some of the "tricky" language the letter used (e.g., you will win "*if* you have the winning number"), and showed that

everybody gets a different number. Viola and Isbon, I knew, were familiar with the lottery. The sweepstakes, I explained, is kind of like the lottery—many people enter, but only one or two people in the whole country win. I then told Viola about a relative of mine who had been swindled out of over $20,000, because she had gotten involved in something like this that was not legitimate. I also explained that this relative, who is 95 years old, has been entering the sweepstakes her entire life, but has never won anything. Viola's eyes widened when she heard this information. She called to Isbon and spoke to him in rapid Arabic. In English, Viola said to me, "I want him to believe!" She asked me to repeat my story to Isbon. I retold my story and also explained, "In my family, we call this stuff 'junk mail', because it's not good." Visibly disappointed, Isbon said that people around the world think it is very easy to win $1,000,000 in the U.S., but that is not actually true. He said he does not like to play the lottery because it is a waste of money, and I said that this sweepstakes was really the same thing. Again, I reiterated that if he truly wanted to try and enter, I would help him, but if it were up to me, I would just throw those papers away. Isbon said that he appreciated my advice; he said it was good advice, and he trusted me.

Text and Context: Learning about Literacy Practices in the U.S.

Viola and Isbon—and other refugees I worked with in the Sudanese community in Lansing—sometimes needed help understanding the texts that regularly crossed their paths in the United States. Although they were literate and had grown up surrounded by literate people who read and write as part of their daily lives, the Sudanese refugees in Lansing often struggled with knowing what to do with the texts they encountered in the U.S. As the sweepstakes example illustrates, understanding texts and their use was not

simply a matter of familiarity with the English language, although knowledge of English certainly was one aspect of what refugees needed in order to effectively interact with printed texts. In addition to familiarity with English, however, these refugees also needed access to cultural knowledge that was specific to the U.S. context, and they needed access to genre knowledge.

In Viola's and Isbon's case, for example, the couple needed information about a specific U.S. institution—the sweepstakes. They also needed to know about the genres of "junk mail" in general and sweepstakes promotions in particular. Viola and Isbon, like many refugees and immigrants to the United States, were familiar with the American dream of getting rich quickly. As Isbon noted, people around the world believe that it is easy to obtain a million dollars in the U.S. Unlike individuals who have grown up surrounded by this type of literacy practice, however, Viola and Isbon had relatively limited exposure to the sweepstakes or other promotions that come through the mail. In order to make sense of the "financial documents" that they received—documents that were particularly enticing because they appeared so personalized—Viola and Isbon needed to know a great deal of cultural information about the sweepstakes, knowledge that is specific to the U.S. context and that they would have been unlikely to acquire in other countries where they had lived: What is the sweepstakes, and how does it work? Why am I receiving this letter through the mail? Who else receives these letters? What sorts of U.S. cultural practices does the sweepstakes represent?

Viola and Isbon also needed specific knowledge about the genre of sweepstakes promotions. What is the purpose of this particular type of text? What sorts of textual features are typical of this genre? What is the purpose and function of those features?

How is this text used, or what am I expected to do with it? In this particular example, Viola and Isbon also needed help understanding the register, or particular stylistic variety of language, used in this type of promotion. As I explained to Viola, the sweepstakes people liked to use "tricky language" in their letters. Viola also was especially frustrated that she could not easily locate contact information to call the company. It seemed that she had tried to use her familiarity with the genre features of business letters in order to navigate the sweepstakes documents, but that strategy did not work because the sweepstakes mailing represented a different genre of texts—a genre that relied upon different cultural assumptions and different textual features to accomplish a different purpose than that of a business letter.

Learning Aspects of Literacy Knowledge

In this book, I present an exploration of literacy practices among Sudanese refugee families living in Lansing, Michigan. In the following pages, I will explore the ways in which the individuals in these families used literacy in their lives, with a close examination of the ways in which they learned about new literacy contexts, new literacy practices, and new types of texts as they resettled in Michigan. I also will discuss the ways in which the children's own literacy development contributed to the parents' learning about literacy in this new context. Specifically, I will use this case study of Sudanese refugee families to argue that all individuals require three interrelated types of literacy knowledge in order to effectively use texts in the world:

- *Lexico-syntactic/graphophonic knowledge*, which, in the United States, means knowledge of English and how to decode and encode it. *Lexico-syntactic knowledge* is the aspect of language dealing with vocabulary, or lexicon, as well

as the syntactic rules that dictate the ways in which words are put together to form meaningful utterances in a given language. *Graphophonic knowledge* involves knowing how a language is encoded in print. In English, this means knowledge of letter-sound relationships, spelling patterns, and pronunciation of words.

- *Cultural knowledge* specific to the context(s) within which people read and write.
- *Written genre knowledge*, that is, knowledge about the purposes, functions, and various features of different written genres within those contexts.

As individuals learn about reading, writing, and texts in new contexts, they often rely upon *literacy brokers* who can provide the necessary linguistic, cultural, and genre knowledge that they need for that context. Using this specific case study, I will show that individuals rely upon a variety of different types of literacy brokers, and that even young children, who are not yet fully fluent readers and writers themselves, can act as effective literacy brokers by providing parents with important information about texts and literacy practices in the U.S.

Culture, Language and Genre

What are *culture* and *language*, and what is the relationship between the two? *Culture* is a system of patterns, defined in different ways by different disciplines, that contextualizes all human experience. *Language* is an essential part of culture, a system of practices that provide one mode of the expression of culture (Duranti, 1997; Gee, 1996; Halliday, 1980). Halliday (1980), for example, suggests that language is the mechanism that allows humans to build a picture of the world in which they live by "shaping and transmitting the world view of every human culture" (p. 13). Functional linguists (Halliday, etc.) often say that culture is *realized* through language. Thus, language is

never independent of social world, or cultures. Language always occurs within, and is shaped by, a broader cultural framework.

According to Gee (1996), language "always comes fully attached to 'other stuff': to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world" (p. *vii*). In fact, Gee views the relationship between language and culture as a three-way interaction between cultural groups, languages, and particular contexts, and he argues that "there is no knowing a language without knowing the cultural models that constitute the meaning of that language for *some* cultural group" (Gee, 1996, p. 89).

To understand the interconnected nature of different dimensions of literacy knowledge, it is important to understand how language realizes culture in any society. In order to understand the ways in which language expresses culture, it is important to have an understanding of *culture* itself—what Gee refers to as the "other stuff" attached to language.

What is Culture?

Culture is a construct that is notoriously difficult to define. Scholars working within various disciplines use the term in different ways, and even scholars working within the same discipline disagree about the exact definition of culture. In popular thinking, culture tends to be equated with a society, nation, or ethnic community (Adams & Markus, 2004), such as *American culture, Black culture,* or *Hispanic culture.* Thus, cultures often are associated with styles of dress, types of food, and/or distinct holidays and celebrations. Such definitions are problematic, though, because they tend to homogenize and essentialize cultural groups. Culture consists of more than national,

racial or ethnic affiliation, many scholars argue, and "resides, not in group membership, but instead in the patterned worlds that are sometimes—although not always—associated with group membership" (Adams & Markus, 2004, p. 341).

Duranti (1997) provides a helpful overview of the ways in which various scholarly disciplines define *culture.* He identifies six different perspectives, in which culture is defined as:

- *Distinct from nature*, in which culture is "something learned, transmitted, passed down from one generation to the next, through human actions" (p. 24), rather than something that is biologically transmitted.
- *Knowledge of the world*, which "means that [members of a culture] must share certain patterns of thought, ways of understanding the world, making inferences and predictions" (p. 27). This perspective can be divided into *cognitive* and *socially-distributed* views on knowledge, both of which view culture as the knowledge necessary to participate in a society. Those who take a cognitive view suggest that individuals possess propositional and procedural knowledge. From the socially-distributed view, any knowledge is distributed across a community, and not all members have equal access to the same knowledge.
- *Communication*, which views culture as a system of signs. According to Duranti, "This view holds that culture is a representation of the world, a way of making sense of reality by objectifying it in stories, myths, descriptions, theories, proverbs, artistic products and performances...To believe that culture is communication also means that a people's theory of the world must be communicated in order to be lived" (p. 33).

- *A system of mediation*, based upon various tools and artifacts. Culture, from this perspective, includes both material objects, such as artifacts, and *ideational* objects, such as belief systems and linguistic codes, all of which are "instruments through which humans mediate their relationship with the world" (Duranti, 1997, p. 41);
- *A system of practices*, which Duranti suggests is closely related to Bourdieu's (1990) notion of *habitus,* "a system of dispositions with historical dimensions through which novices acquire competence by entering activities through which they develop a series of expectations about the world and about ways of being in it" (Duranti, 1997, p. 44).
- *A system of participation*, which is related to the previous conception of culture as a system of practices, and is "based on the assumption that any action in the world...has an inherently social, collective, and participatory quality" (Duranti, 1997, p. 46).

While these six perspectives vary in some ways, all suggest that cultures represent patterned systems of making sense out of the world. My own definition of *culture* draws upon aspects of several of the perspectives described by Duranti and other social scientists. Included in my definition of *culture* are patterns of behaviors, beliefs, values and norms (Adams & Markus, 2004; Ferdman, 1990), the various funds of knowledge held by communities or other groups of people (Gonzalez et al, 1995), material artifacts (Adams & Markus, 2004), and the "subtle, tacit, taken-for-granted events and ways of doing things" of a community (Rogoff, 2003, p. 11). I find Shweder's (2003) succinct definition of culture to be particularly useful:

> Culture refers to community-specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be cultural, those ideas about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency must be socially inherited and customary. To be cultural, those socially inherited and customary ideas must be embodied or enacted meanings; they must be constitutive of (and thereby revealed in) a way of life (p. 11).

Cultures are not timeless and unchanging, nor are they homogeneous. Rather, they are dynamic and malleable (Adams & Markus, 2004; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994). Individuals within a cultural community vary in their knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Rogoff, 2003; Shweder, 2003). And, importantly, individuals not only are shaped by the cultures into which they are born, but they also shape cultures (Adams & Markus, 2004; Rogoff, 2003).

Culture & Language

Language, therefore, is one essential aspect of culture that broadly contextualizes all areas of human activity. Language is an integral part of all conceptualizations of culture—and in some cases, such as the communication perspective, language *is* culture (Duranti, 1997; Gee, 1996; Halliday, 1980). Language and language use vary broadly by context and also within contexts. Even within a single language or dialect, different areas of life tend to be contextualized by what Bakhtin (1986) refers to as specific *speech genres.* These speech genres are recognizable patterns, or repertoires, of language-in-context. According to Bakhtin, speech genres

> reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through

> their compositional structure. All three of these aspects—thematic content, style, and compositional structure—are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60).

Speech genres, therefore, shape all social interactions from the very brief (e.g., a greeting between two colleagues passing in the hallway, ordering from the menu at a restaurant) to the very extended (a church service, board meeting, or parent-teacher conference). Speech genres, however, are not limited to oral language only. Bakhtin uses the term *speech* to refer to all language. Thus, speech genres also involve *written* genres, an important consideration in any study of literacy practices. (See Chapter 7 for further discussion of written genres and genre theory.)

Another way of conceptualizing the relationship between language and culture is through the sociolinguistic construct of *discourse.* Related to the Bakhtinian notion of speech genres, discourses involve far more than conversations or extended episodes of talk (or writing). Gee (1996), for example, distinguishes *Discourse* (with a capital D) from other definitions of the term by suggesting that *Discourses*

> are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize (Gee, p. 127).

In this way, Gee's Discourses are the linguistic equivalent of Bourdieu's (1990) construct of *habitus*. In fact, Duranti (1997) draws heavily upon Bourdieu when he describes culture, including language, as a set of practices:

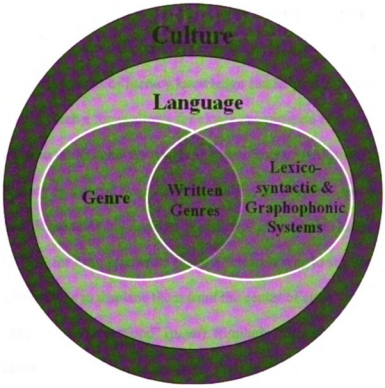
> A language only exists as a linguistic *habitus*, to be understood as recurrent and habitual systems of dispositions and expectations. A language itself is a set of practices that imply not only a particular system of words and grammatical rules, but also an often forgotten or hidden struggle over the symbolic power of a particular way of communicating, with particular systems of classification, address and reference forms, specialized lexicons, and metaphors (p. 45).

Following Bourdieu and Duranti, I define *language* as a set of cultural practices that involves phonological, lexical, syntactic and other grammatical patterns, and that also includes speech genres patterned by beliefs, values, attitudes and other contextual factors. Language also involves print in most (although not all) cultures. And thus, print literacy involves particular cultural practices, as I will discuss further in this chapter. Written language involves specific and culturally-patterned practices for encoding language in print. For example, some languages, such as English or Arabic, use alphabetic systems that symbolize individual phonemes, while other languages, such as Chinese, use character systems that symbolize whole words or phrases. Other cultural patterns shape factors such as the direction in which print is read on a page, or the ways in which a text may be constructed.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the nested relationship between culture, language(s), and genre(s). In this framework, culture contextualizes language by patterning and shaping a system of language practices. Contained within these language practices are speech

genres and lexico-syntactic and graphophonic systems, which are also patterned practices. Genres and lexico-syntactic/graphophonic systems are overlapping and interconnected, and they also contextualize and shape the practices of specific written genres.

Figure 1.1: The relationship between culture, language, and genre.



In the previous section, I introduced three aspects of literacy knowledge—lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, and genre knowledge—as though they were separate and distinct from each other. As Figure 1.1 illustrates, however, these three constructs are all aspects of the broader cultural system and are therefore interrelated and interconnected in important and significant ways. All texts and literacy practices exist within the linguistic, and therefore cultural, frameworks of a given context—they are shaped by (and, in turn, help to shape) those contexts.

Although the three aspects of literacy that I describe in this book form a nested system of practices, it is possible to identify and highlight individual aspects of the system, much as a photographer might tighten her focus on one element of a larger image. While it is possible to identify and highlight separate aspects of literacy knowledge that individuals must draw upon in order to engage in literacy practices and interact with texts, it is always important to understand that these various aspects connect with and inform each other in many ways. However, the process of foregrounding different aspects of literacy knowledge can help to illustrate the nature of the dynamic whole. Such a focus allows for closer examination of one aspect of the larger context, in order to understand the whole picture of literacy within culture. Scholars interested in literacy as a social practice often use this technique of foregrounding and backgrounding in order to tease out nuances in different phenomena. In his work on Discourses, Gee (1996), for example, wrote that the "clearest way to see the workings of language and literacy was to displace them from the center of attention, moving society, culture, and values to the foreground" (p. *vii*). Similarly, Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) alternately foregrounded cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on literacy development in order to demonstrate the important connections between both perspectives. Throughout this book, I individually foreground three important aspects of literacy knowledge—lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, and genre—in order to illustrate the ways in which these individual aspects contribute to the larger whole of literacy practices.

Literacy in Sociocultural Contexts

As a cultural phenomenon, print literacy increasingly has been studied from a sociocultural perspective. In advocating for an *ethnography of communication,* Hymes (1994) argued that "facets of the cultural values and beliefs, social institutions and forms, roles and personalities, history and ecology of a community may have to be examined in their bearing on communicative events and patterns" (p. 12). Focusing particularly on written literacy, the work of Heath (1983), Street (1995), Barton & Hamilton (1998), Purcell-Gates (1994), and others demonstrated the inseparability of literacy practices from culture. In the following sections, I turn my focus to literacy and literacy practices. This focus on literacy, however, is always situated within the broader conceptual framework of language and culture that I have presented in the first part of this chapter.

As I began my work with Sudanese refugee families in Lansing, sociocultural perspectives about literacy framed my thinking, including perspectives on literacy as social practice, emergent literacy, family literacy, and literacy brokering. These interrelated frameworks all suggest that reading and writing involve more than a set of cognitive skills—literacy is something that is practiced in the world, and practitioners of literacy, both emergent and fluent, learn a great deal about literacy from their social and cultural environments. I will provide a brief orientation to these theoretical frameworks in this chapter, and I will discuss them in more depth in the following chapters of this book.

Literacies in the World: Literacy as a Social Practice

Language and culture, as I have described, are interconnected and mutually constitutive. One particular aspect of language, literacy is a social practice that is likewise shaped by social, cultural, economic, political, and ideological factors (see, for example, Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street,

2001b). Scholars who work within this framework of literacy as social practice recognize that literacy looks different among different people, in different places, and in different historical times. Context, therefore, plays an important role in shaping literacy in a particular community.

Multiple Literacies

Communities—and the individuals that inhabit them—have many different purposes and uses for literacies in their daily lives. Because of the variety of literacy practices that exist both across and within communities, literacy scholars increasingly speak of literacies as *multiple* rather than of literacy as a single entity (Street, 2001b). This framework of multiple literacies is largely a response to the more traditional conception of literacy as a single, universal, and neutral phenomenon—a conception Street (2001b) has termed *autonomous*. This autonomous model conceptualizes literacy in technical, cognitive terms; autonomous literacy is literacy that is divorced from context. The autonomous model also views literacy as a commodity, something that people either do or do not possess.

In contrast to the autonomous model of literacy, the framework of literacy as social practice presents an ideological model of literacy (Street, 2001b). This model of literacy recognizes that literacy is deeply enmeshed in social, cultural, and power structures in a given society or community. The implications of the ideological model of literacy become even more apparent when literacy is viewed through the lens of the developing world (Freire, 1998; Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000). Those who view literacy through an autonomous lens tend to impose largely Western conceptualizations of literacy upon other cultures, with the result that entire groups are often characterized as

wholly illiterate when, in fact, they may engage in a variety of meaningful literacy practices (Street, 2001a). This characterization only serves to further marginalize non-Western literacy practices, which may not be recognized as legitimate literacy practices under the autonomous framework. Unfortunately, the use of this lens perpetuates the idea of the great "cognitive divide" between modern and traditional societies, such as those found in many developing African nations, in which societies are divided up into the "literates" and the "illiterates"—the literacy version of the economic haves and have-nots (Street, 2001a, Rogers, 2001). A sociocultural perspective on literacy, therefore, provides an important lens for studying the literacy practices of cultural communities that may be new to the United States context. All communities, such as the Sudanese refugees described in this book, bring with them a variety of different types of experiences with literacy and with texts which may or may not be similar to the texts and literacy practices of the U.S. communities in which they settle.

Literacy Events & Literacy Practices

This framework of literacy as social practice relies upon a distinction between literacy events and literacy practices. *Literacy events*, following the work of Heath (1983) and others within the ethnographic tradition in literacy studies, involve any interaction around a text. These interactions may involve reading or writing a particular text, talk about a text, and other similar activities that involve texts. While the term *text* can have many meanings, literacy events within this framework are largely based on text that involves printed language, and this is the definition of *text* that I use throughout this book. *Literacy practices*, in this sense, include these events and actions surrounding printed texts, as well as the beliefs, attitudes and values that inform the events and actions

(Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Because literacy practices are connected to intangibles such as beliefs, values, and attitudes, they are not observable. Literacy events, on the other hand, are observable, and they provide the basis from which broader literacy practices may be inferred. This connection to beliefs, values and attitudes also helps to illustrate why scholars who study literacy as social practice believe that literacy cannot be studied (or taught, for that matter) without considering social, cultural, and political factors.

Literacies in the Home and Community: Emergent Literacy and Family Literacy

Perspectives on emergent literacy and family literacy suggest that children can, and do, learn a great deal about literacy outside of formal instructional contexts. Children grow and develop within specific linguistic and cultural contexts, which expose children to particular languages, genres, and lexico-syntactic and graphophonic systems, in addition to values, attitudes, and beliefs about reading, writing, and texts. Home and community environments provide children with a great deal of information about the world of print, including the purposes and functions of literacy. These contexts impact children's literacy achievement in school, and they shape children's everyday literacy practices.

Emergent Literacy

The emergent literacy perspective suggests that young children learn a great deal about literacy before they ever enter schools, as children experience people reading and writing for different purposes in their lives. At home, children gain concepts of print (Clay, 1998), such as print directionality and how to hold a book, and they also acquire

knowledge of written registers, vocabulary, and letter-sound relationships[1] (Bissex, 1980; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Snow, 1983). This literacy learning occurs in natural settings, where children not only acquire concepts about print, but they also learn about the functions of print, the authentic ways in which people engage with print in their everyday lives. As such, literacy development is both a sociocultural and a cognitive process (Dyson, 1993, 2003; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Teale and Sulzby (1986) suggested that six important themes characterize this perspective: (1) literacy development begins long before children start formal instruction; (2) becoming literate is a developmental process, and, for the child, this means developing as a reader and writer; (3) literacy develops in real-life settings for real-life activities in order to "get things done"; (4) children are doing critical cognitive work in literacy development during the years from birth to six; (5) children learn written language through active engagement with their world; (6) literacy development looks different in different children, because children pass through emergent literacy stages in a variety of ways and at different ages. Individual literacy development also differs because children have different experiences with print use in their lives (Dyson, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 1995, 1996; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984).

Scholars in this field suggest that an important aspect of emergent literacy is the child's developing awareness of print and its purposes in the world (Clay, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004; Sulzby, 1986). Goodman (1986) suggests that many types of awareness develop during stages of emergent literacy—children develop awareness of print in different contexts, of the functions and forms of

[1] Of course, the degree to which children learn these concepts depends upon both the frequency of various types of literacy events in children's home lives and the types of texts that people read and write in children's worlds (Purcell-Gates, 1995, 1996).

writing, and metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness about print. Clay (1998) also argues that children often pay attention to features of print that adults may never think to explicitly teach. Dyson (2003), for example, powerfully illustrates the ways in which young urban children draw upon the various "textual tools" of popular media as they learn how to write.

Much of children's emergent literacy awareness is cognitive in orientation. Specifically, children gain phonological processing skills, such as the ability to identify words that rhyme; they gain knowledge about principles of print, such as knowledge of the alphabet or where to begin reading on a page; and they begin to experiment with writing by engaging in pretend writing, invented spelling, and writing their own name (Bissex, 1980; Snow, 1983; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). However, children's awareness nevertheless is shaped by the sociocultural milieu in which children observe and experience reading, writing, and different texts. According to Sulzby (1986), "an important part of what children are acquiring is an understanding of the relationships that can exist between oral and written language *in their culture* [emphasis added]" (p. 51). Similarly, Clay (1998) notes that what children learn "depends on the times in which they live, the country in which they live, and what each child chooses to attend to" (p. 85). For example, concepts about print may differ from language to language, depending on factors such as the script used or the direction in which print is read (Clay, 1998). In addition to shaping concepts about print that a child needs in order to read in a given society, scholars who view emergent literacy through a more sociocultural lens suggest that children also learn about literacy practices, about the ways in which reading and writing can accomplish certain social goals (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates 1995; Purcell-

Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984). Gee (2002), for example, argues that

> the issue for early literacy is not "learning to read" but how the child—at home, in the community, and at school—does or does not acquire specific social practices, social languages, and genres that involve 'ways with printed words,' along with much else (p. 35).

From this perspective, emergent literacy involves not only the awareness and acquisition of skills related to the ability to read and write, but also the awareness and acquisition of specific practices related to literacy (Dyson, 2003; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates 1995; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004).

Because much of a child's early literacy life centers on the home environment, literacy researchers and educators increasingly focus on the family as an important nexus of literacy learning for children. For example, Sulzby (1986) argues that "a theory of emergent literacy, however, cannot ignore adult development. Literacy develops in the child in a sociocultural context. Children learn from interaction with adults directly and from what they see adults doing in their presence" (p. 86).

Family Literacy

Because of the influence on home and community on early literacy development, literacy researchers, schools, and policy-makers have increasingly turned their attention to issues of family literacy (Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers & Smythe, 2005; Auerbach, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000). The focus on family literacy suggests that a child's family provides the foundation for his or her literacy development, and research has repeatedly demonstrated strong correlations between a child's reading

achievement in school and her parents' educational level, the uses of print and the number of books in the home, and the frequency of parent-child storybook reading (Purcell-Gates, 2000). Unfortunately, this body of research is often misinterpreted to mean that families that do not provide certain opportunities for their children are somehow deficient (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Auerbach, 1989).

Much recent ethnographic research has illustrated the rich and varied ways that individuals, families, and communities practice and value literacy (for example, see Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers & Smythe, 2005; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2000; Heath, 1983; Lipka, 1991; McCarty, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 1995, 2007). This research has demonstrated that families have access to what Moll (2000) and Gonzalez and her colleagues (1995) term "funds of knowledge" that underlie productive everyday life, such as the performance of household activities or the maintenance of social and community networks. Some of these funds of knowledge, of course, are not print-based, but children nevertheless draw upon these funds as they participate in formal learning, including literacy learning, at school. Despite this rich body of work, educational researchers have noted that the concept of family literacy is largely based upon White, middle-class definitions of literacy (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Heath, 1983). There appears to be less recognition by schools that individuals and families use literacy in multiple meaningful ways in their everyday lives—ways that are not necessarily identical to school-like literacy practices (Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers & Smythe, 2005; Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Gonzalez et al, 1995; Health, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2005, 2007).

The existing family literacy framework may be problematic in some ways (see Perry, in press, for further discussion). Research conducted in the area of family literacy

tends to focus on the home environment, looking at such factors as socio-economic status, language spoken in the home, and available print in the home (Auerbach, 1989; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000). However, families operate outside of the home as well, and families may also have extensive networks of kin and friends outside of the home who can provide literacy support (Perry, in press). Family literacy research also tends to focus almost entirely on a child's parents. In fact, the majority of this research has focused exclusively on mothers, although there have been calls to look more closely at paternal literacy skills (Gadsden, 2000). Some researchers also have begun looking at sibling literacy practices (Gregory, 2000; Volk & DeAcosta, 2000). In addition, research into parent-child interactions in the home tend to focus on storybook reading (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Auerbach, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000), despite the fact that children and parents may have access to many different types of texts and engage in a variety of different types of literacy practices together. Finally, family literacy models also typically operate under the assumption that family literacy is unidirectional—that is, that children are influenced by parents. However, in many immigrant and refugee families, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, parents also are influenced by children. Despite the complex and multidirectional nature of family literacy, school- or community-based family literacy programs tend to focus mainly on developing parents' literacy skills (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Auerbach, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Gadsden, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2000).

Intergenerational Literacy

Although the majority of family literacy research has focused on nuclear families, Gadsden (1998, 2000) prefers to use an intergenerational literacy model rather than a

family model. This intergenerational literacy model, according to Gadsden, acknowledges that literacy is impacted by more than just the family members living in a particular household. It also challenges the one-way transmission model of family literacy by arguing that intergenerational literacy development is multi-directional; that is, children also influence their parents' literacy practices (and other generations' practices, as well). Much of the ethnographic research that investigates literacy in home and community settings supports this intergenerational model. For example, Gregory (2005; Gregory & Williams, 2000) noted that siblings often play an important role as literacy teachers, what she calls *guiding lights*, in Bengali populations in East London. In my own work with Sudanese refugee families, I have often seen the young children specifically teaching their parents about English or about computer technology—a major theme that I will develop in this book. An intergenerational model of family literacy therefore may be more appropriate for immigrant and refugee families, who may be less likely to reflect the nuclear family model that represents the majority of White, middle-class families in the U.S.

Literacies in New Contexts: Language and Literacy Brokering

As the intergenerational concept of literacy learning suggests, individuals of all ages learn about literacy, and this learning is multi-directional. Immigrants and refugees rely on many resources as they work to understand a new language, new literacy practices, and how languages and literacy are used in their new context. Frequently, newcomers rely on *language brokers* to help them understand texts they encounter and are expected to use in their daily lives. While language brokering certainly is related to language translation and interpretation, it is a distinct phenomenon. The construct of

language brokering emphasizes informal translation work, particularly where power differentials exist between the players involved in the brokering activity. Immigrant and refugee families may rely on a number of different types of language brokers, but they often rely most heavily on family members—particularly their own children—when it comes to brokering language and literacy in the U.S. Language brokering, therefore, often is an important family literacy practice.

Language Brokering

How is language brokering related to, and different from, constructs of language translation and interpretation? As Morales and Hanson (2005) argue, the terms may differ depending on whether one is referring to oral or written language. Researchers who study this phenomenon tend to suggest that translation is associated with written work, "where the translator is believed to possess exceptional understanding of multiple languages", while interpretation is associated with oral communication, "where the interpreter is believed to possess exceptional understanding of potentially nuanced and circumscribed 'meanings' that may be conveyed in ordinary social interactions" (Morales & Hanson, 2005, pp. 472-473). The construct of language brokering certainly relates to these issues of translation and interpretation, although there is no clear consensus among scholars about the definition of brokering. For example, Tse and McQuillan (1996) suggest that child language brokers mediate communication rather than simply transmitting it. This distinction is somewhat problematic, however. Like language brokers, formal translators/interpreters also may mediate communication. Mediation of communication, therefore, is not a useful indicator of whether or not language brokering has occurred. Halgunseth (2003) provides a clearer contrast between these terms:

> Language brokering (LB) is different from translating and/or interpreting for three reasons: It is informal, the goal is to mediate communication rather than merely transmit it, and there exists an unequal power relationship between the broker and the agents, usually one in which the broker (i.e., a bilingual child) is normally under the authority or supervision of one of the beneficiaries (i.e., non-English-speaking parent) (p. 154).

The preceding definitions of language brokering primarily treat brokering is a matter of language only, particularly a matter of vocabulary and syntax. Yet, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, language is inseparable from the cultural context in which it exists. Effective communication, therefore, relies upon a great deal of knowledge that goes beyond familiarity with English syntax and vocabulary—particularly when communication involves printed texts. Unlike other scholars who largely emphasize the linguistic aspects of brokering, Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido (2003), acknowledge that brokering also involves mediation of cultural as well as linguistic meanings:

> Invoking a play on the Spanish word 'para,' we have coined the term 'para-phrasing' to signify the various ways in which children use their knowledge of the English language and of U.S. cultural traditions to speak *for* others and *in order to* accomplish social goals. We believe this term emphasizes that what children do is purposeful; they are taking action in the world, not simply moving words and ideas or explicating concepts (pp. 507-508).

Textual Brokering and Family Literacy

Much of the scholarly literature related to brokering focuses on interpretation of oral language. Yet, it is clear that brokers also are called upon to provide support for written language, and these brokers draw upon a variety of linguistic, textual, and cultural resources as they negotiate meaning in different ways. More recent brokering scholarship emphasizes some of these aspects of brokering events that are related specifically to written texts (Mazak, 2006; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003). Valenzuela (1999), for example, describes the different types of language support that children were called upon to provide in their families. Much of this brokering involved printed texts: "Translation spanned different activities including television news, important government documents and other mail, newspapers, ordering food or other services at restaurants or stores, and basic communication with English-speaking merchants and/or officials" (p. 728). Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, and Meza (2003) also noted that brokers not only were asked to help understand printed texts, but they also used texts as resources to negotiate meaning: "Children and parents collaboratively use the tools available to them, including national languages, dictionaries, electronic devices, and specialized knowledge of bureaucratic institutions, as well as social resources, to parse and coconstruct meanings of these texts" (2003, p. 30).

This newer focus on textual brokering, particularly when children act as brokers, therefore, may have enormous implications for how the educational community thinks about literacy development and family literacy, particularly in families where English is not the first language of the home. The brokering literature suggests that children in immigrant families may be involved in a wide variety of authentic literacy practices as they engage with many different types of texts in the home with the goal of supporting

family life. As a result, family literacy in immigrant and refugee families may not involve as much parent-child interaction around storybooks and fiction as occurs in more "mainstream" homes. Rather, parent-child literacy interactions in these families may occur more frequently around other texts such as bills, official letters, menus, or notes sent home from school.

Plan of the Book

In this book, I present a case study of the everyday literacy practices of three Sudanese refugee families in Michigan, focusing on the brokering that occurred as the parents and children worked to learn about why and how texts are used in the U.S. These parents relied upon brokers to help them understand linguistic, cultural, and genre aspects of the texts that they encountered in the U.S. Brokering in these families took many forms, including: teaching about language or texts, advising about cultural practices, and expediting literacy events. As children participated in these brokering events, they and their parents simultaneously gained knowledge about literacy, literacy practices, and texts.

In the following chapter (Chapter 2), I describe my own background and the experiences that led me to conduct a study of literacy practices among Sudanese refugees in Michigan. I also outline the research and analytical methods I used as I conducted the study.

Chapters 3 and 4 present historical and other background information about the three Sudanese families that participated in the study. In Chapter 3, I describe refugee experiences in general. I provide a brief history of Sudan, focusing on recent (and current) events that helped shape the families' experiences as refugees. I describe the

larger Sudanese community in Lansing, and also introduce the three families who are focus of the book. In Chapter 4, I describe the Sudanese parents' literacy and educational backgrounds, providing a picture of important contextual differences in the literacy environments of Sudan and the U.S.

Chapters 5 through 8 focus on literacy brokering, a method these Sudanese refugee families used to learn about texts and literacy practices in the U.S. These chapters describe three important aspects of literacy knowledge that refugees—indeed, all practitioners of literacy—require in order to read and write texts for different social purposes in their lives. Together, they illustrate the different *forms* that brokering takes, such as teaching, advising, or expediting a literacy event. They also show that individuals rely upon a variety of different brokers—including their own children—to learn literacy knowledge. Specifically, Chapter 5 describes brokering that occurred around lexico-syntactic and graphophonic aspects of texts, such as vocabulary, syntax, and encoding or decoding of print. Chapter 6 describes brokering around cultural aspects of texts, such as beliefs, values or expectations. Similarly, Chapter 7 describes brokering related to genre aspects of texts, such as the purpose and/or use of different texts and various genre features. Chapter 8 discusses the ways in which the three broad types of knowledge—language, culture, and genre—overlap with and inform each other. It offers a model of knowledge(s) that all individuals require in order to engage with literacy practices.

Finally, Chapter 9 addresses insights gained from studying literacy practices among Sudanese refugee families. In that chapter, I relate the study's findings to broad theories regarding literacy as social practice and specific theories about literacy brokering. I share insights for literacy pedagogy, both for adults and children, and discuss

what the study's findings might imply for thinking about family literacy and parent participation in children's schooling. I also offer suggestions for future research regarding literacy practices in cultural communities, literacy brokering, and genre.

Chapter 2

Studying Literacy in the Sudanese Community

This book is the result of a five-year relationship with the broader Sudanese community in Lansing, Michigan, and specifically, a two-and-a-half year study with three Sudanese families. My interest in literacy and in African communities, however, stretches beyond my entry into the Sudanese community. In this chapter, I describe my own journey to this community, the interests and experiences that have shaped my research, and the methods I used in studying Sudanese families' literacy practices.

Role of the Researcher/Positionality

Ethnographies do not exist in a vacuum (Van Maanen, 1988). As an ethnographer, I cannot separate who I am from the work that I do. My own background and experiences inevitably influence the questions I ask as well as the lenses I use to analyze experiences I take from my fieldwork. Who I am also influences how participants perceive and respond to me—and, as a result, it impacts the quality, reliability and validity of the data I collect and the conclusions I draw from my work. Because who I am as a researcher is so integral to my research, it is essential for me to describe my positionality in relation to my work. I am a former elementary school teacher and Peace Corps Volunteer, and these professional experiences have deeply impacted the type of scholarly research in which I engage.

My Own Background

I am a European American woman who grew up in an upper-middle class home—a classic WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), at least on the surface. As such, I am very different from the Sudanese refugee families that participate in my work. I grew up

in Omaha, Nebraska, the daughter of highly-educated parents. My father earned a Masters in engineering; my mother earned a Ph.D. in psychology and was a professor at one of the local universities. In the neighborhood where I was raised, nearly everyone looked like me, and most of the adults were professionals of some sort. My family believed strongly in public schools, and I attended public schools in Omaha before going on to a small, private liberal arts college.

I first became interested in elementary education as an undergraduate at Carleton College, where I volunteered as a classroom aide several mornings a week at Prairie Creek Community School, a small private school in Northfield, Minnesota. My time at Prairie Creek introduced me to progressive, child-centered philosophies of education—philosophies that were very different from the traditional public school education I had experienced as a child. Following my graduation from Carleton, I decided to become an elementary school teacher. I joined a year-long post-baccalaureate teacher training program through the Stanley British Primary School in Denver, Colorado. Through Stanley B.P.S., I was able to continue developing my understanding of progressive educational philosophies. More importantly for my scholarly development, I had the opportunity to teach in a mixed first and second grade classroom at Ebert Elementary, an impoverished, diverse urban school in downtown Denver. About half of the children in the school were African American, and the other half were Latino/a, most of whom spoke Spanish as a first language. All students in the school participated in the free lunch program. The children at Ebert caused me to begin asking questions about culture and its role in education and development. My students, I noticed, brought different kinds of knowledge and experiences to the classroom, and they also interacted with each other in

different ways that seemed to follow cultural patterns. I was particularly impressed with the bilingual children in my class. Their ability to switch effortlessly—or so it seemed to me—between languages amazed me, and I was impressed by the way the children who were more adept at English took their peers under their wings, translating and acting as peer tutors for them.

My interest in literacy, language, and culture deepened in 1999, when I joined the U.S. Peace Corps. I served as an education volunteer in the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho in Southern Africa. I spent two years working in education in that country, where my main assignment was as a Primary Resource Teacher in two rural village primary schools. In these two schools, I helped with general school development and provided in-service teacher training for elementary teachers who had very little formal teacher training (although, in many cases, they had more years of classroom experience than I). My work also supported ESL instruction in these schools, where the official medium of instruction was English—despite the fact that the entire population spoke Sesotho. As a secondary project, I became an HIV/AIDS educator in my area, where I trained high school girls to become peer educators to teach others in their villages about HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

The more time I spent living with the Basotho people and working in their schools, the more questions I began to ask about language, literacy, culture, and education. While the local people were almost entirely literate—with 82% of adults able to read and write, Lesotho has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa (UNICEF, 2007)—I noticed that the Basotho used literacy in ways that were far different from the ways in which I used literacy in my life. The children in my village were routinely

perplexed when they saw me reading a novel or working a crossword puzzle on my front stoop. They often asked me what I was doing or stopped to watch me as though I were some exotic animal in the zoo. One day, while standing in the hours-long line at the bank, I remember how startled I was to see a young Mosotho woman reading a paperback romance novel to pass the time. Everyone else in the line seemed to be surprised by this behavior, too! Because of these experiences, I began to wonder what sort of impact culture had on shaping the real-world uses of literacy. Most of the available texts in our village community were in English, and I wondered how local literacy practices might be different if most (or, at least, more) texts were available in Sesotho. As I watched the children in school struggling to learn via English, and as I heard the importance their parents placed on English-medium education, I began to think about the relationship between language, literacy, and power. Was education in English helping the Basotho, or was it hurting them? Was it giving them power by providing access to the global economy through English, or was it oppressing them by ensuring that few children could understand the academic content they were exposed to in school and that most of them therefore failed their exams?

My Peace Corps experience certainly provided me with the types of research questions I wanted to pursue in graduate school. The experience also supplied me with many of the skills and tools I needed in order to be an effective ethnographer. Before scattering us to our village sites, the Peace Corps required volunteers in Lesotho to undergo nine weeks of language, cultural, and job training. In addition to providing information specific to the Basotho context, our cultural training focused on developing cross-cultural relationships and handling cultural differences. Near the end of our two-

year service, the Peace Corps also provided us with training in how to say goodbye as we ended our village lives and with support for the reverse culture shock of re-entering the United States. These training opportunities certainly helped prepare me for the way ahead, but I found that daily life in my village offered the most effective, hands-on experiences for learning about culture and gaining access to a community that was so different from my own. Generally, I learned the hard way—through trial and error—about how to build trusting relationships and to reach productive cross-cultural understandings. Thus, my experiences in Lesotho ultimately helped me develop important tools for a cultural researcher: patience, tolerance, the knack of being able to communicate and sustain a conversation when neither party spoke the other's language particularly well, and the ability to smile while swallowing foods I was not so keen on eating.

As I conducted research in the Sudanese community, I often drew upon the skills I learned as a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa. I already had experiences with nurturing good relationships with people whose experiences were very different than mine, learning about a different culture, and practicing patience with a group of people whose sense of time was at odds with my WASP-y need for punctuality. And, as the time drew near for me to end my graduate studies and move to a different state once again, my Peace Corps experiences provided me with the tools I needed to say goodbye and bring closure to the work that I did with a group of people about whom I cared a great deal.

Accessing the Sudanese Community

When I returned from two years of service in Southern Africa, I sought to maintain my connection with Africa and Africans, because I wanted to continue working

with Africans in the areas of education and literacy. I also remained committed to furthering the causes of social justice, human rights, and peace in the world. I wanted to extend my Peace Corps service by continuing to work for the betterment of Africans, because I believe they are all too often overlooked and marginalized by the developed world. In the months between ending my Peace Corps service and beginning graduate studies at Michigan State University, I moved in with my mother, who lived in the Lansing area in Michigan. She introduced me to some local people who were working with the newly-arrived community of orphaned Sudanese refugee youth, commonly referred to as the "Lost Boys of Sudan." My mother mentioned that these youth needed tutors, and I immediately signed up to work as a refugee tutor through Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. I began tutoring approximately six months before beginning graduate school, working with young men who were in high school or beginning college studies. Even after beginning my graduate studies, I continued to tutor Sudanese refugee youth in the Lansing area. Early in my graduate studies, Victoria Purcell-Gates approached me about working with her as a research assistant on the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS). We agreed that an ethnographic case study based upon my work with Sudanese youth would make an interesting contribution to the CPLS project. Because of the groundwork I had laid through my role as a tutor, I was able to conduct a seven-month study of literacy practices among Sudanese youth in Michigan.

When I left Africa and began pursuing a graduate degree, I had fully intended to return to Lesotho for my dissertation research. However, the more deeply I became involved with the Sudanese refugee community, the more I could see the need for research that might be useful to not only a community that was so new to the United

States context, but also the U.S. teachers whose classrooms were absorbing African refugee students in rapidly increasing numbers. I had already done so much work toward accessing the Sudanese community, gaining their trust, and building relationships with community members, that it no longer made sense to think about abandoning the hard work I had already done in order to return to Africa for my research. The Sudanese community had drawn me in, and I was committed to continuing my work with them. I loved working with the youth, who were in their late teens and early twenties, but I also longed to work once again with younger children. Thus, I designed a project where I could work with refugee families with young children.

Researcher's Roles in the Community

During the past five years, my roles within the Sudanese community have both broadened and deepened. My various roles have included tutor, mentor/culture broker, unofficial social worker, community board member, chauffeur, personal librarian, babysitter, bail bondswoman and university researcher. I have continued tutoring Sudanese refugee youth for five years. For about half of this time, I was paid by Lutheran Social Services, and the remaining time, I have tutored on a volunteer basis. A few months after beginning my tutoring work, one Sudanese youth invited me to join the board of the Southern Sudan Rescue and Relief Association (SSRRA), a small non-profit organization comprised of both Sudanese and U.S. members that works to help Sudanese refugees. I have been a board member since that time. In addition to these official roles, I also became an unofficial mentor within the Sudanese community. I acted as a general cultural broker and unofficial social worker for many of the refugees in Lansing. Sudanese refugee youth often called upon me to help them in these capacities. They

asked for transportation to doctor's visits or to the grocery store, for help in filling out job applications, and for financial advice.

As I began to work more closely with the families, I continued with these roles and also found myself taking on new ones in relation to the children. I offered homework help and supplemental tutoring for the children in the families I was studying (as well as for the parents, who were enrolled in various classes of their own), and I sometimes babysat when the parents were absent. The children quickly discovered that I had a stash of children's books at my home, and I began bringing books with me during my fieldwork visits and occasionally loaning books to the families. After the children in one family requested that I take them to the public library, this became a frequent routine for me and some of the children. In return, the Sudanese families often invited me to participate in community events, such as graduation parties, weddings and funerals, Sudanese holiday celebrations, and welcoming parties for new refugee families. These multiple roles, therefore, provided me with legitimate access to both in-school and out-of-school literacy practices in the Sudanese community. Indeed, some of the most interesting data I gathered occurred at times when my primary position was other than that of researcher!

I strongly believe that researchers, particularly ethnographers and others engaged in deeply personal methodologies, must find a way to give back to the communities they study. Providing tutoring and mentoring services, therefore, was an important part of my work with the Sudanese families. I believe that building this kind of reciprocity into my data collection methods allowed a more natural relationship to develop between the Sudanese families and me. Reciprocity allowed me to gain access to the community more

easily, which in turn increased the likelihood that my data and findings were valid and reliable (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999).

Researcher's Role in Literacy Brokering

The many roles I played within the Sudanese community, and especially with the three families I describe in this book, certainly impacted my research. In some ways, the roles I played and the reciprocity that I built into my study enhanced the data I was able to collect. In other important ways, however, these roles and responsibilities limited some of my data. They also probably overemphasized other types of data I collected. This book, for example, focuses on the literacy brokering that occurred within these three families. The Sudanese parents in this study relied upon a variety of brokers, including their own children, to help understand and use texts. Because I was regularly available to the families, and more than willing to help out with whatever they needed, I often acted as the broker in many of the literacy events I describe in this book.

Based upon the number of events I describe in which I was the primary broker, it might be easy to assume that this is a book not about literacy brokering among Sudanese refugee families, but rather about what happens when refugees have regular access to me. I firmly believe that this is more than just a story of what happens when I am available to refugee families over a long period of time. Like many refugees who make it to the U.S., Sudanese refugees tend to be highly resourceful people. Part of that resourcefulness involves the ability to seek out people who can provide what they need. If I had not been available, the parents in this study definitely would have sought help from a different broker, especially for important texts. In fact, they often reported doing so. But, because I

was available to broker for them on a regular basis, there really was no point in them seeking someone else.

Nevertheless, my participation in many of these events complicates the data I was able to collect about brokering. Whenever I brokered for the Sudanese families, my role and my actions directly contributed to the data I was collecting. It is important to consider, however, that I did not initiate these brokering events. Rather, I received them and responded to them as a participant (although it is possible that my responses may have differed from those of other brokers). Although many of the events I report in this book describe events in which I was the primary broker, the Sudanese parents relied upon brokers other than me, as they reported in interviews and during my field visits. Those other events are backgrounded in this book, however, primarily because those events were reported and therefore are not as ethnographically rich as observational events in which I was a participant.

Another important consideration regarding my role is that literacy brokering was not the initial focus of this study. I entered the families' homes with an eye toward literacy events and practices, broadly defined. Recognizing that my presence likely would impact literacy events in each home in some way, I was careful to document my role in any literacy event that I observed and/or participated in. For example, I always made a note whenever the focal children interacted with texts that I brought with me, rather than texts that were already available in the home. It was not until data collection for this study was complete that I identified literacy brokering as the major analytical focus. Had I been focusing on literacy brokering from the start, it is possible—indeed, probable—that my interest in brokering might have impacted the amount, type, and quality of

literacy brokering that I performed with the families. But, because I did not have this focus during data collection, I believe that my role as a broker had less of an impact on the data I collected than might have occurred with a focus on brokering.

On the other hand, my participation in brokering events probably allowed me to notice aspects of brokering that might not have become apparent had I been observing someone else brokering. Participant observation is a powerful analytic tool for ethnographers (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; LeCompte et al, 1999). As Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) suggest,

> Ethnographic research calls for engagement in direct learning through physical and social involvement in the field setting. Knowing, for ethnographers, is first and foremost experiencing by observing, participating in conversations and daily activities of members of the community under study, and recording these observations (p. 72).

My role within the brokering events described in this book, thus, carries both benefits and drawbacks. As an active participant in many brokering events, I gained first-hand experience of literacy brokering, but this experience also impacted the data that I collected, the analysis, and the conclusions in important ways that must be acknowledged and accounted for.

The CPLS Project

My experiences with the Cultural Practice of Literacy Study (CPLS) were another important influence in the design of this study, and I cannot think about my study without acknowledging the important role CPLS played in shaping it. The CPLS project

> is an "umbrella" study that includes a series of case studies of literacy practice in socio-culturally-defined communities. Each case study is framed by theory that views literacy as social and cultural practice, patterned by institutions, historical events, values, beliefs, and power relationships. Each case study is also designed with the goal of developing early literacy instruction, particularly for marginalized and underachieving children, that builds on community literacy practices (CPLS, 2007).

All CPLS researchers follow common data-collection methods, including the use of the same semi-structured interview protocol. CPLS researchers "document texts, writing systems, historical and political contexts, social spheres within which reading and writing occur, and characteristics about participants (e.g. gender, roles, age, and education)" (CPLS, 2007). I am an affiliated researcher with CPLS, and my two studies of literacy practices in the Sudanese community contribute data to the ongoing project. Since the inception of CPLS in the spring of 2003, I have worked with Victoria Purcell-Gates to develop the study's design and analytic procedures, to collect and analyze data, and to disseminate findings that emerge from the project (for more details, see Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005, and Purcell-Gates, 2007).

Important Frameworks

CPLS frameworks, developed through four years of collaborative work, have informed my thinking about literacy practices in important ways. As I studied literacy practices among Sudanese families, my observations were shaped by specific constructs regarding *social activity domains*, the *functions* and *purposes* for interacting with texts, and different *genres* and *text types*.

Researchers who view literacy as a social practice often describe the different life domains, or spheres of activity, in which literacy takes place. Barton and Hamilton (2000) connect domains with discourse communities, "groups of people held together by characteristic ways of talking, acting, valuing, interpreting and using written language" (p. 11). They define domains primarily by location, such as home, school, work or church. Regarding young children, Dyson (1993) divides children's social worlds into *official, peer,* and *home* spheres. CPLS researchers, however, view domains in a slightly different way—we focus on *activity* rather than *location* or *sphere*. That is, *social activity domains* are defined by social activities that reflect social relationships, social roles, social purposes and goals, and social expectations. Reading, writing, and other acts involving texts mediate activities within these domains. CPLS researchers have identified 19 domains, which are named according to the social activities they represent, such as Relating Interpersonally, Participating in Spiritual Life, or Entertaining Oneself.

The CPLS project also requires researchers to document the different *functions* and *purposes* for any literacy event. *Functions* identify the immediate reason for reading or writing a given text, while *purposes* describe broader goals accomplished through the literacy activity. Functions and purposes are always related to each other, and they can be described as: to ___ [function] in order to ___ [purpose]. For example, someone might read a list of employment postings to *identify job openings* in order to *apply for a job.* Similarly, the function of writing a resume might be to *describe one's educational and work experience* in order to *apply for a job.*

Finally, CPLS researchers identify *genres* and *text types*, using a systematic way of identifying texts that is grounded in theory. Genres are defined by their socially-

created roles. That is, genres are created by social groups who use them to perform specific social actions. Thus, CPLS defines genres by the *functions* they perform and the *features* they typically include. For example, the Bible's function is to provide, store, structure, and convey religious knowledge to be used for religious celebrations and purposes. Bibles follow a particular structure, in which book, chapter, and verse always exist in the same order. *Text types* differ from genres in that they describe the physical form of a genre. Genres may be embodied in several different text types. Recipes, for example, are a genre whose function is to provide directions for preparing food. The features of most recipes include: the name of the dish, a list of ingredients, and cooking procedures to follow. Recipes may occur in many different text types, such as books, webpages on the Internet, or notecards in a box. (For further discussion on genre, please refer to Chapters 1 and 7).

As I studied literacy practices in the Sudanese community, the CPLS constructs of social activity domain, function, purpose, and genre shaped my thinking. They lurked in my mind as I observed the families and, when I identified and analyzed literacy events throughout my data, these constructs formed the basis of my initial coding. Although I used these constructs and codes partially for the purpose of providing data to the CPLS project, they nevertheless played an important role in the analysis of my own individual research questions, as I will describe later in this book. In the following section, I describe the specific methods I used to study literacy practices among Sudanese families in Michigan.

Studying Literacy Practices: Guiding Questions

The specific research foci that guided this study were: (1) How do the language and literacy practices of these Sudanese refugee families in the U.S. reflect the different layers of their experiences as refugees (e.g., first country of refuge, country of ultimate resettlement, available languages and literacies, experiences with schooling, experiences with religion)? (2) How do these refugees negotiate, appropriate, and/or transform literacy practices through these experiences? (3) How are the young Sudanese refugee children born in the U.S. from these families negotiating or making sense of literacy practices? Because I was interested in issues of culture and other layers of context in relationship to literacy with Sudanese families, I used an ethnographic design in the formation of this research project.

Sudanese Family Participants

Representative Sampling

To locate appropriate families for the study, I used representative sampling through reputational case selection. Reputational selection methods use community insiders/experts to nominate other community members who might be effective informants, based upon what the researcher wants to study (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). To participate in the study, I looked for families with young children in kindergarten or first grade, in which at least one parent spoke English well enough to be interviewed. In addition, I sought a balance in the focal children's genders across families. Because I was interested in exploring the ways in which parents' experiences with formal education might shape their literacy practices, I also purposefully selected families that represented different levels of formal schooling completed.

I relied heavily upon the relationships I developed in my previous work in the Sudanese community to locate willing families who met certain criteria. I also placed a notice in the SSRRA newsletter, which reached many local Sudanese households. One Sudanese youth, Nuer, was particularly helpful in terms of gaining access to families. Nuer was one of the orphaned youth whom I tutored for five years, and he also was the young man who invited me to sit on the SSRRA board. At a Sudanese community celebration we attended together, Nuer pointed out Viola and Isbon. They were community leaders, he noted, and Viola had been trained as a lawyer in Africa. Later, I met Viola in person, as she also joined the SSRRA board. I believed that Viola and her family would be very interesting to include in my project, and I was delighted to learn they had children of the right age for my project. As our relationship grew, Viola became a key community liaison for my work. She thought carefully about other families to include in my study, and she also made all of the arrangements for my initial contact with Akhlas and Falabia.

When I first approached Viola, I explained that I was a graduate student at Michigan State University, and I was studying literacy in the Sudanese community. I spoke about my background as an elementary school teacher and a Peace Corps Volunteer in Southern Africa. I wanted to come and visit her family each week, I explained, and I would take notes and ask many questions, because I planned to write a book about literacy in the Sudanese community. I described my plan to visit the children in school to see how they were doing with reading and writing. In exchange for participating in the study, I would tutor the children and provide other mentoring services for the family. By the time Viola and I negotiated with Akhlas' and Falabia's families, I

had been working with Viola for almost four months, and she had become very familiar with my work. When I first met Akhlas and Falabia, both women reported that Viola had already explained my study to them. I answered the women's questions and provided more details. All three families readily agreed to participate in the study; Falabia even commented that this was a chance she could not pass up.

The Three Families

The sample for this study included three southern Sudanese refugee families from a variety of educational backgrounds. Table 2.1 presents a comparison of the six parents in this study, their levels of education attained in Africa, and the work they performed in Michigan.

Table 2.1: Parents' educational levels before coming to the U.S., and their current work in Michigan.

THE FAMILIES	PARENT	EDUCATION LEVEL	CURRENT WORK
High-education family	M: Viola Lupai	Law degree	Factory line
	F: Isbon Domoulouka	Some college	Hospital janitor
Medium-education family	M: Falabia Edward	Nursing degree	Hospital janitor
	F: Primo Lukuat	High school	Hospital janitor
Low-education family	M: Akhlas Kago	7th grade	Seamstress
	F: Amin Nawai	Some high school	Dishwasher

In Viola's family[1], both parents earned high school diplomas. Viola also earned a law degree in Egypt, and Isbon obtained some post-secondary education. In Falabia's family, both parents earned high school diplomas, and Falabia earned a three-year nursing degree

[1] In Sudanese cultural traditions, women keep their maiden names when they marry. In addition, in some ethnic groups, surnames change with each generation. In that case, a child's full name is based upon his/her first name, followed by the father's first name, and then the grandfather's first name, which is used as a surname in the U.S. As a result, the families in this study had anywhere from 2 to 4 different surnames in a given household. To simplify things, I chose to refer to the families by the mother's first name, rather than picking among the available surnames.

in Sudan. In Akhlas' family, neither parent completed high school. Akhlas finished 7th grade, and Amin attended a year or two of high school.

Because part of my research interest included children's sense-making around literacy during their first contacts with formal schooling in the U.S., one criterion I used to choose participating families was that each family needed to have a young child in kindergarten or first grade. The three families had between 2 and 7 children per family, some of whom were born in the U.S., while others were born in Sudan, Egypt, and/or Lebanon. From each family, I selected a kindergartner or first-grader as a focal child. Viola's family had two children of the appropriate age, and I decided to use both as focal children. In all, I focused on four children: a boy and a girl in kindergarten, and a boy and a girl in first grade (see Table 2.2). In Viola's and Akhlas' families, the focal children were the oldest children, while the focal child from Falabia's family was the second youngest child.

Table 2.2: Focal children and their grade levels.

	Boys	Girls
Kindergarteners	Samuel Domoulouka	Remaz Abdelhrman
First Graders	Boni Domoulouka	Juana Gildo

All three families spoke a dialect of Arabic at home (which I do not speak), in addition to various other local Sudanese languages (none of which I speak, either). Because I speak neither Arabic nor any of the other local languages of Sudan, another criterion for participation in this study was that the focal children and at least one parent in each family needed to speak English well enough to be able to communicate with me to a reasonable degree. All of the parents and children in these families spoke English, although their levels of fluency varied a great deal.

Choice about Naming

I allowed the families to choose whether or not they remained anonymous in articles, presentations and other representations of this study. Research ethics and guidelines typically require researchers to protect the identities of participants through assigning pseudonyms. However, these guidelines are based on assumptions that individuals need this protection, and that they also desire it (Grinyer, 2002; Perry, 2007a). Grinyer suggests, however, that it is problematic for researchers to make this assumption for participants. In a study of the effects on families when young adults are diagnosed with cancer, Grinyer and her colleagues surveyed families and found that, to the researchers' surprise, about three-quarters of the participants wished to use their own names. The families indicated that this was one way of maintaining ownership of their stories and of honoring their loved ones' lives (Grinyer, 2002). Grinyer therefore suggests that researchers must negotiate the balance of protecting participants from possible harm while at the same time preventing the loss of ownership of their words and stories. I faced this same dilemma in my previous work with Sudanese refugees, and I have written elsewhere about this issue of anonymity in ethnographic research (Perry, 2007a). One young man refused to participate in my study of Sudanese youth because I intended to change his name. He had something important to say, he explained, and he wanted the world to know that he was the one who said it. Protecting the identities of participants is appropriate in many situations, and such situations certainly can arise with refugee participants who may rightly fear persecution. However, allowing refugee participants to retain ownership of their voices and their stories may prove an empowering experience for individuals who may never have had a voice before.

For this reason, I involved the families in the decision-making process concerning names. Because it would be inappropriate for some family members to use pseudonyms while others were identified by name, I planned to have each family decide, as a unit, whether or not to identify themselves or to opt for pseudonyms. In actuality, the parents made the ultimate decision about names. Much to my surprise, all of the families insisted that I use their real names. Viola explained her decision thus:

> We don't have any political problems or anything to hide our names. Our problems—we need people to know what is going on in our country and how we are suffering here. It's not easy for new refugees here to be like American people. They struggle in many ways...We need them to know our culture, our tradition, because of our kids.

Viola, like the other parents in this study, believed that using her real name would directly benefit both her own children and the wider Sudanese community, who are resettling in this country in ever greater numbers.

Data Collection & Analysis

Addressing issues of reliability and validity in ethnographic research involves triangulation across a variety of data sources which serve as sources of corroboration for each other (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In this study, I used a variety of data sources across the different contexts examined in order to address my research foci. Data collected included:

- demographic information for the participants
- oral histories of refugee experiences
- oral histories of parents' experiences with schooling in Africa and the U.S.

- elicited statements from parents, children, and the children's teachers about beliefs, values, and attitudes toward both literacy and schooling
- information about texts, language, literacy events, and social activity domains used in the current U.S. context
- historical contextual information from parents about texts, languages, literacy events and social activity domains in Africa
- observations of the children's U.S. school literacy events, texts, languages, and social activity domains
- interviews with focal children's teachers
- photographs of participants, contexts, environmental print, and literacy events; and
- examples of texts available to and created by Sudanese refugees and their children in various contexts.

Interviews

A variety of interviews formed one primary data source for this study. In order to collect oral histories, elicited statements, historical/contextual information, and demographic information, I conducted interviews with parents, children, and teachers. I tape recorded and transcribed these interviews. Some of these interviews were open-ended, with the aim to record general oral histories of participants' lives in Africa, their experiences as refugees, their experiences with formal schooling, and important aspects of Sudanese culture. Other interviews were semi-structured, following the CPLS protocol (Purcell-Gates, 2007). These interviews elicited statements concerning beliefs, values and attitudes toward both literacy and formal schooling. In addition, I asked questions about

various literacy practices in which the participants typically engaged. For example, the protocol included questions about types of texts that participants read and/or write in their daily lives for different purposes (see Appendix A). I conducted other semi-structured interviews to obtain demographic information that I was not able to obtain in other situations. Demographic interviews elicited information about: (1) countries where individuals had lived, and for how long; (2) how long individual participants lived in the U.S., and where they lived in the U.S.; (3) languages spoken, read, and/or written by participants; (4) levels of schooling attained, and where; (5) occupation and/or parents' occupation; (6) and religion practiced (see Appendix B). Finally, many interviews occurred on an informal, or impromptu, basis. Spur-of-the-moment interviews typically were brief, with a specific focus based upon whatever was immediately happening. I often asked on-the-spot questions about a particular literacy event or text (e.g., "Do you always read the label on the foods that you cook?"), or about cultural or other background information (e.g., "Why did you leave Sudan?").

I primarily interviewed parents and focal children, although I sometimes asked questions of the older children in Falabia's family. In addition, I formally interviewed the focal children's classroom teachers twice during the 2005-2006 school year. In all of the semi-structured interviews with parents, children, and teachers, I used the interview protocol to shape and guide the conversation, but I also maintained the freedom to ask additional questions or to alter the course of the conversation, depending upon responses given.

Participant-Observation

A second key method I used for collecting several types of data involved participant-observation in a variety of settings, including participants' homes, community contexts, and the schools and classrooms of focal children. Ethnographers tend to be participant-observers in the communities they study; they typically are neither full participants nor only observers. I therefore view participant-observation as a continuum, and my position along this continuum constantly fluctuated during the course of this project, and even within individual field visits.

I collected data for a continuous period of 18 months, beginning in February 2005 and ending in July 2006 (see Table 2.3). I visited each family's home an average of once a week during the academic year (and 1more irregularly during the summer) for a period of 12-18 months, depending on the family. I also observed in each focal child's classroom approximately every other week during the 2005-2006 school year, starting in late October[2]. As Table 2.3 illustrates, I spent a far greater amount of time visiting and observing Viola's family than I did Akhlas' or Falabia's families. This was a necessary step, due to the need to develop rapport with at least one family that I could then use as the basis for negotiating entry into other families' homes. In addition, working with only Viola's family for a few months allowed me to test and refine my data collection methods. Finally, because I selected two focal children from Viola's family, in contrast with only one child from each of the other two families, I believe that the extra time in her family ultimately was necessary for me to balance my understandings of each focal child.

[2] Because the analysis described in this book does not include data from the focal children's classrooms, I will not provide detailed description of the methods I used with the children's teachers or in the classrooms.

Table 2.3: Total time spent observing in family/community settings and focal children's classrooms.

Setting	Time Period	Number of Visits	Total Hours
Viola's Family	February 2005-July 2006	75	113 ¼
Akhlas's Family	May 2005-July 2006	41	57 ¾
Falabia's Family	July 2005-July 2006	41	71
Community Events	January 2005-July 2006	14	49
Boni's Classroom	October 2005-June 2006	13	15 ¼
Samuel's Classroom	November 2005-June 2006	11	13 ¾
Remaz's Classroom	November 2005-June 2006	11	14 ½
Juana's Classroom	November 2005-June 2006	12	14
		Total Field Visits: 218	**Total Hours: 348 ½**

I collected ethnographic field notes in each setting, using a small notebook to jot down notes that I later expanded and typed at home. The children, utterly fascinated by the speed and sheer volume of my writing, frequently commented about my field note-taking. During my home visits, I spent the majority of my time in the main living area of each family's house—typically the home's living room and kitchen. Viola's house included a spacious, covered front porch, and we often sat there during warm weather. When invited, I ventured into bedrooms, although I spent more time in the children's bedrooms than the parents'. I also had many opportunities to use the bathroom facilities in each house. As a result, I was able to observe the entire home context of each family. When the children (or their parents) worked on homework, we usually stayed put in one place—at the kitchen table, seated on the couch, etc. Other times, I was able to move freely about, observing and talking with different family members.

My field visits involved a great deal of multi-tasking. During the academic year, my weekly visits typically began with the children's homework. I jotted field notes, chatted with the parents, and interacted with other children as I helped whoever had homework that day. During homework help, the parents also initiated conversations, sometimes asking questions or bringing me a text for brokering. When the children's (and the parents') homework was finished, I spent more time observing and taking notes. During these periods when I was just "hanging out", the children frequently looked through books, drew pictures, or created things from the paper, scissors, crayons and glue that I usually brought with me. Sometimes I watched TV with the families, especially when they were viewing favorite DVDs or music videos from Nigeria, Egypt, the Congo, and other African countries. The families often invited me to share a meal with them, which I accepted whenever I could. Generally, I followed the flow of whatever was happening during my visit.

When I observed in other settings, such as church services or cultural celebrations, I followed the lead of the Sudanese families, sticking as close as possible to the focal participants. When I attended church with the families, for example, I sat next to them in the pew. At events where more than one family might be attending, I attempted to divide my time among the participants. I always carried my field notebook with me to these events, although I sometimes chose not to jot notes. I felt it would be inappropriate, for example, to take notes during a funeral. I almost always carried my digital recorder with me, and I sometimes chose to audio record an event rather than jot notes. In cases where I did not actively take notes or audio record during an observation, I jotted notes in

my car before going home. In cases where I made an audio recording, I was able to type field notes from the recording.

My field notes described important contextual information about each context, including: (1) physical descriptions of the homes, classrooms and community environments in which the observations took place; (2) general activities in which the families, children, and community members engaged; and (3) paraphrased reports and some word-for-word transcriptions of conversations and interviews that occurred during field visits. During observations, I particularly focused on literacy activities in which the participants took part, as well as conversations and other talk that took place about texts and literacy. Following Heath (1983), I define a *literacy event* as any activity that occurs around a printed text. A literacy event may involve activities such as reading, writing, or talking about a text, among others. For each literacy event, I described information about texts, languages, purposes for reading and/or writing those texts, participants in the events, and social activity domains that were mediated by literacy in refugees' homes, communities, and schools.

Artifacts

Gathering various textual artifacts provided a third important method of data collection. My artifact-gathering completely fascinated the children, who delighted in providing (and sometimes producing) items for me to take home and photocopy. I collected and/or made copies of texts that were available to the Sudanese refugees in a variety of contexts, such as religious texts, community bulletins, and homework assignments. In addition, I collected examples of texts created by the participants in this study, such as notes, letters, homework assignments, flyers for community events, and

artwork. In some cases, the artifacts I collected were not the written texts themselves, but they were photographs of print or of practices surrounding given texts (e.g., Viola creating a welcome banner for a Sudanese cultural festival). I used these photographs to document the visual literacy environment and to capture moments in which interactions around texts took place (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton, 2000).

Data Analysis: General

Data analysis for this study involved analyzing emerging patterns through coding, content analysis, and discourse analysis. For coding and analysis, I utilized the AtlasTi qualitative data analysis software program. AtlasTi helps researchers with the qualitative analysis of textual, graphical, audio and video data (AtlasTi Scientific Software, 2007). In addition to allowing for interactive coding of a wide variety of data materials, AtlasTi's various features allow for different types of data analysis and model-building. Coded data also may be exported to other analytical software programs for other types of analysis.

The first step in analysis involved uploading all of my field notes and interview transcripts into AtlasTi. I then read through my field notes several different times, each time identifying and applying different codes to the data. I coded data from field notes and interview transcripts on a variety of levels. The first, and most basic, level of coding involved identifying each literacy event represented in my data. These literacy events were both observed and reported, occurring in both field observations and semi-structured interviews on participants' literacy experiences. For each literacy event described in the study, I identified the languages involved in the event, the purposes and functions for reading and writing, and the social activity domains that contextualized the events. The codes for this basic level of analysis were derived from CPLS coding

schemes. For example, I applied the different social activity domains to any adult literacy events. Table 2.4 lists these social activity domain codes.

Table 2.4. Social activity domain codes.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY DOMAIN	DEFINITION
Doing one's art (ART)	Social activity for individuals that centers around creative/artistic activities and is engaged in for purposes of developing, improving, exploring, performing within one's creative/artistic area(s) of focus/interest/talent.
Responding to civic rules and regulations (CIV)	Social activity that centers around responding to bureaucratic requirements of governmental (on all levels). 'Bureaucratic requirements' reflect: official procedures, red-tape, routines, rules that bind, hierarchical administrative systems
Participating in Community Life (COM)	Social activity that centers around life in community, defined by the participants. This would include organizing, building, maintaining, or defining a community of people, visiting other members of one's community, relating to other members of one's community, defining oneself as part of one's community., "community" can be at different levels from local to global.
Cooking/Eating (CKG)	Social activity that centers around the preparation and consumption of food
Participating in Clubs/ Organizations (CLO)	Social activity that centers around participation in formally organized (has clear membership; organizational structures, etc.), social group activities
Entertaining oneself, having fun (ENT)	Social activity that is centered around relaxing or entertainment—things people do "for fun".
Participating in Family Life (FAM)	Social activity that centers around the relational life of a group of people who are considered 'family' by the participants
Maintaining Finances (FIN)	Social activity that centers around the maintenance, or management of money, including investments.
Attending to Health and Hygiene (HTH)	Social activity centered around the maintenance of health, physical fitness, and bodily care
Acquiring or disseminating Information/news (INF)	Social activity that centers around keeping up on, disseminating, or commenting on information or news.
Relating interpersonally (IPC)	Social activity that centers around maintaining, establishing, rejecting, or interaction interpersonally with others.
Maintenance of tools and home environment (MTN)	Social activity that centers around fixing, maintaining, or understanding one's tools and/or one's home environment.
Participating in Politics (POL)	Social activity that centers around political activity
Participating in spiritual life (SPR)	Social activity that centers around worship; maintaining or achieving spirituality;
Representing/ documenting reality to yourself (REP)	Social activity that centers around documenting, reflecting upon, constructing personal life worlds

Table 2.4 (cont'd).

Participating in formal schooling (SCH)	Social activity that centers around participation in formal schooling as a student
Engaging in self-motivated education/personal improvement (SME)	Social activity that centers around personal self-improvement or out-of-school education/learning.
Working (WRK)	Social activity that centers around activity that one does for a salary; or around finding employment; increasing one's skills for employment or salary increases..

After identifying all literacy events and coding for texts, domains, functions, purposes, and other contextual information, I read through my field notes to identify other important themes that existed in the data. Content and theme analysis allow important themes to emerge from the data, rather than relying on pre-set codes. They provide important methods of triangulating findings in an ethnographic study (Tusting & Ivanič, 2004). Content analyses in this study focused on the historical and cultural contexts of the southern Sudanese which reflected their literacy practices. I used theme analysis in this study to understand the meanings that participants ascribe to literacy, to education, to literacy practices, and to literacy brokering. In addition, theme analysis helped illustrate the ways in which refugees and their children made sense of, negotiated, appropriated and transformed literacy practices. Theme analysis specifically pointed to the importance of brokering in learning about texts and literacy practices among Sudanese families.

Not knowing which themes might ultimately be relevant to the study, I developed a variety of codes. Many of these codes were related to the families' personal histories and experiences, such as "Family History: Viola's family" or "Parents' schooling in Africa." Others related to community issues and refugee experiences more generally, such as "Community organization/leadership", "Citizenship/residency status", "Parents'

talk about life in Sudan", or "Sudan history: war". Because my particular focus was on literacy, many of the themes I identified in my data naturally related to literacy. Some codes related specifically to language issues, such as "Parents' talk about Arabic literacy" or "Language use: English proficiency". Literacy-related codes varied broadly, included issues such as "Certification/documentation", "Talk about the library", or "Resisting literacy".

Data Analysis: Literacy Brokering

Most importantly for this particular analysis, I also focused on events that featured *literacy brokering,* where participants sought others who could help them understand texts. Initially, I identified all events, both observed and reported, that seemed to involve some sort of brokering. These identified events included both oral types of language brokering and brokering involving printed texts. During my first attempt at this level of coding, I noticed that brokering events seemed to be related to issues of language, culture, and text. I applied basic codes for these three categories to each brokering event. I also identified *who* acted as broker during these events, particularly paying attention to times when I acted as a broker or when the focal children brokered for their parents.

In order to more accurately describe the phenomenon I was seeing, I developed a series of data matrices that allowed me to more precisely code each event (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I listed each event on one line of the matrix, including columns for information about the social activity domain of the event, the person involved in the event, the broker, the text brokered, the purpose for brokering, and whether the brokering event involved language, culture, or text. I also included columns to indicate whether the

broker had simply expediting an event, if the event related to technology, and "other". While this first matrix allowed me to identify some interesting patterns in my data, I quickly discovered that the categories of "language", "culture" and "text" were too broad and did not allow me to understand the nuances of literacy brokering.

In order to more precisely describe what was happening during literacy brokering, I went back to each individual brokering event and asked, "What, exactly, does the participant need to know in this event?" I added a new column to the existing matrix that indicated the aspect of knowledge or help that the participant required in each event. This new column provided a list of types of knowledge/help needed during brokering events, and I used the list to develop different categories of brokering codes. In many ways, the categories I identified confirmed my initial hunch about types of brokering—the new categories did relate to issues of language, culture, and text. However, I was able to break these broad categories down into much more precise sub-codes that more accurately described what I was seeing. For example, I initially broke the language category down into "vocabulary", "grammar", and "spelling/transliteration", with other codes related to "polish", "nuances", and "comfort level" (some of which ultimately dealt with issues of register and genre). With the culture-related codes, I identified different cultural issues, such as "U.S. government/public institutions", "Western organizations/institutions/practices", "values/beliefs about texts", "unfamiliar/culturally different objects", and "other/general advice". For the text group of codes, I first identified issues related to genre such as knowing features of a given text, rhetorical aspects of a genre, how to use a particular text, how similar texts differ, and so forth.

Following this first revision of my coding scheme, I revisited the relevant scholarly literature in order to locate existing research and theoretical frames that might help shape my own codes. I also looked at the ways in which other researchers had specifically described and categorized brokering. I returned to my own data, revised my codes again, and developed a final matrix to organize my findings. The final code list involved three broad categories of brokering events, divided up into specific sub-categories. These included:

- Lexico-syntactic and graphophonic brokering[3]
    - Brokering—encoding/decoding
    - Brokering—syntax
    - Brokering—vocabulary
- Culture-related brokering[4]
    - Brokering—cultural beliefs/values
    - Brokering—cultural expectations
    - Brokering—cultural knowledge
- Genre-related brokering[5]
    - Brokering—organization of features
    - Brokering—purpose of features
    - Brokering—purpose of text
    - Brokering—specific features of text
    - Brokering—use of features

[3] See Chapter 5 for definitions
[4] See Chapter 6 for definitions
[5] See Chapter 7 for definitions

- Brokering—use of text
- Brokering—register

In addition to these specific codes, I also identified and coded for other important issues related to brokering. Digital technologies played an important role in many brokering events, particularly when participants needed a broker to gain access to technology. I coded these events with "availability of technology". Similarly, many brokering events involved expediting a particular literacy activity, as I will discuss in Chapters 5-7, and I coded these with "expediting event". A handful of events involved helping participants with strategies for using different texts, which I coded as "strategies of use". This code seemed to be similar to, but slightly different from, the genre-related code of "Use of text". The "use of text" code applied when participants did not know how to use a particular text. In contrast, in instances where I coded for "strategies of use", participants typically understood *how* to use a text, but they might need *advice* about using it. Some brokering events involved other issues that seemed to be important but which were not easily categorized, and I applied the code "other" to these events. These last two codes, "strategies of use" and "other", demonstrate that these codes and this analysis do not provide an exhaustive explanation of the phenomenon of literacy brokering.

Writing is an important ethnographic method of analysis (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Erickson, 1986). Throughout the data analysis process, I wrote analytical memos to help develop my codes and process my thinking. Writing up the final report of a research study also forms a final level of analysis in ethnographic research. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw suggest that "even in the process of writing, [ethnographers] make

discoveries about data" (1995). As I wrote drafts of the chapters of this book, I returned again and again to my field notes, to the data matrices I developed, and to the analytical memos I had written. Not only did this constant re-visiting keep my data and findings fresh in my memory, but it also deepened my analysis and understanding of the phenomenon of literacy brokering.

Validation of Findings

I employed several ethnographic research strategies to validate the findings of my work. Validity is an important consideration in any ethnographic study (Creswell, 2003; Sanjek, 1990; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). One important method involved triangulation across multiple data sources (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Triangulation involves using several data sources, such as field notes, interview responses, and artifacts, to corroborate and enhance the validity of findings. Ethnographers also increase the validity of their findings as they increase the amount of time spent in the field (Creswell, 2003; Erickson, 1986; Janesick, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2004; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). There are no hard-and-fast rules about how much time in the field is "enough". Rather, sufficient time is determined on a case-by-case basis. Ethnographers must allocate plenty of time to gain access to the field and to observe multiple instances of the events and phenomena that are relevant to the study (Erickson, 1986; Janesick, 2000; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999), and they know that their data collection is sufficient when they no longer collect data that are new (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Because I spent 18 months collecting data (in addition to the three years I had already spent working with and studying the Sudanese community prior to beginning this project), the

findings from this research study are more likely to be valid and reliable than if I had spent less time in the field.

Another strategy for enhancing the validity of the study's findings involves participant checks (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). I often informally checked my thinking and my emerging understandings during data collection and early data analysis with participants. This sort of checking allowed participants to show me where some of my perceptions and/or findings were erroneous and clarified their positions to me on important issues. I involved participants in a final check of the data after I had written up the results of the study for publication.

Limitations within the Study

Several limitations existed within the study's design. My inability to speak, read, or write Arabic certainly was one important limitation in this study. Although the parents in this study spoke English to different degrees, and despite the fact that these parents generally were careful to speak English in my presence, I am positive my data would have been richer and my findings more complete if I spoke the language with which they were most comfortable.

Other limitations related to scheduling observations. I typically visited each family at about the same time on the same day of the week, because these were the days I could be most helpful as a tutor, given the children's homework schedules. I did occasionally visit the families on weekends, as well as on weekdays during vacation times, and when we made special arrangements, but the majority of my observations occurred on a regular schedule. My data and findings may have been richer had I been

able to observe each family across a greater variety of days and times during the week. I would have liked to observe the children's bedtime routines, for example.

Another limitation related to great differences in my knowledge about the mothers' literacy worlds as compared to those of the fathers in the three families. Contextual circumstances, such as the fathers' schedules and the nature of my relationship with each parent, contributed to the different level of findings. Like many immigrant and refugee adults, the fathers in this study had to take whatever jobs they could get in Michigan, based upon their experiences with education, their facility with English, and their training for different types of jobs. And, like many other newcomers to the U.S., the available jobs often were those that were less desirable—low-wage, menial jobs that often required late-night shifts. As a result, Isbon, Amin, and Primo often were at work or asleep when I visited their homes. Isbon typically worked overnight shifts as a janitor at the local hospital. Primo's janitorial shift schedule frequently fluctuated, and he also took some classes at the community college. Amin usually worked from early evening to past midnight in his job as a dishwasher at the local hotel. When the fathers were home, I frequently suspected they felt it was important to stay out of my way when I was interacting with their children or their wives. Primo, for example, often removed Diana from the living room and brought her into his bedroom so that she would not "bother" me when I was visiting. My gender, along with Sudanese cultural expectations, probably also played a role in shaping the differences in my relationships with the mothers and the fathers. When I attended Sudanese community events, for example, I noted that women generally socialized primarily with other women, and men with other men.

The parents' different levels of English fluency also played a role in these relationships. Akhlas, Viola, and Falabia were more fluent in English than their spouses, and because I speak no Arabic, I found it much easier to communicate with them than with their husbands. Amin, for example, was least fluent with English of all the parents in this study, and I decided not to even attempt to interview him as a result.

Over time, I developed a very good relationship with Isbon—this was partially due to the fact that he was at home more often than the other fathers when I visited the families. However, our relationship also deepened after I helped him out of a difficult situation. Isbon had been arrested (wrongfully, as it happened), and he and Viola could not afford to pay the $380 bail until their paychecks arrived a few days later. Viola called me around midnight that night and asked for my help. I went to the jail and paid Isbon's bail, knowing that the family would repay me within a few days. As we stood on the sidewalk in the darkness outside the jail, Isbon effusively thanked me many times. He shook my hand and also enveloped me in a bear hug. Our relationship became visibly stronger following this interaction. In fact, the following month, Isbon called me for financial advice, because he felt he needed to speak with someone he could trust—the sweepstakes episode I described at the beginning of Chapter 1.

In the next chapter, I introduce Viola's, Akhlas', and Falabia's families in more depth. I describe the conditions in Sudan that led each family to seek asylum in the U.S., and I describe their new lives in Michigan. I also introduce the focal children from each family: Boni, Samuel, Remaz, and Juana.

Chapter 3

"And Then We Came to Here":

Refugees in Michigan

We come through United Nations. We stay in second country, have a lot of trouble in Beirut. Every day people fight together. They have a civil war in Beirut. There are people killed...and we [can't] stay there...The government want us to be back in my country. My country have war, too. And the United Nations don't want us to be there, because we will be killed. And then they said, "We take names, we can send you to USA...or Australia or Canada"... And then we came to here. They give us ID and they give us protection for a year.

~~Viola

And also we came out because we need a good future for our kids, to have a better education. Because with the war, they can't...study, cannot learn anything, because they gonna be afraid, they don't care about school.

~~Falabia

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Language and literacy practices, as I described in Chapter 1, are always shaped by cultural contexts. In this book, I present a specific case study of literacy brokering that serves to illustrate three different aspects of literacy that individuals must understand in order to effectively read and write texts and otherwise engage in the literacy practices of a given context. Because literacies cannot exist without cultural contexts, this study is not simply about literacy. It is also about a particular group of people—Sudanese refugees—who are resettling in the U.S. in ever greater numbers. Like all social and cultural
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practices, the literacy practices of the Sudanese families I describe in this book have been shaped by the families' own cultural contexts and unique experiences. Exploring the cultural and historical context of Sudan, along with the three families' own personal histories and experiences, therefore is an important part of understanding literacy practices among these families. In the following sections, I offer a general discussion of what it means to be a refugee in the world today; I provide a brief overview of historical and political issues in Sudan, including the various conflicts in that country; I describe the larger Sudanese community in Michigan; and I introduce the three focal families that participated in this study.

Changing Demographics: Immigrants and Refugees in the U.S.

Why study literacy among Sudanese refugees? Studies of literacy practices in immigrant and refugee communities are particularly relevant to the realities of life and education in the United States today. The demographics of the U.S. are increasingly shifting to reflect populations from around the globe, and projections suggest that White Americans of European heritage may become a minority in this country by sometime in this century (Pellegrini, 2000). U.S. educators, who typically come from White, middle-class backgrounds, need to understand their students' cultural contexts in order to better meet their educational needs, and this pressure will only increase as the U.S.'s demographics change over the next generation. Studies of the literacy practices of immigrant communities, particularly Latino immigrants, have become more common recently (e.g. Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Moll, Saez, & Dworin, 2001; Zanger, 1994), but there are relatively few studies of literacy practices among refugees, and even fewer that look at refugees from countries in Africa.

Choice vs. Necessity: Immigrant and Refugee Statuses

No two immigrant experiences are alike, but it is important to recognize that, as broad categories, "regular" immigrants and refugees have distinct characteristics and experiences in their native countries that differently shape their experiences in the U.S., their literacy practices, and their relationships with formal schooling. Immigrants leave their native lands and come to the United States (and other countries) for a variety of reasons, including seeking out different or better educational and employment opportunities and higher standards of living, accompanying family members who seek such opportunities, or escaping difficult situations in their home countries. Refugees represent a specific subset of immigrants to the United States. In fact, they are legally distinct from other types of immigrants (UNHCR, 2006). Refugees have been forced to flee their native countries for a variety of reasons. They may seek refuge from oppressive political or economic systems; from religious, ethnic, or political persecution; from warfare; or from genocide (UNHCR, 2006; U.S. Committee for Refugees, 2004). Host nations often grant asylum to refugees with the understanding that refugees will return to their native countries should the situation in that country improve. However, many refugees do not return home. Instead, they apply for permanent resident status, and sometimes even citizenship. The most practical difference between immigrants and refugees, therefore, is based upon whether or not individuals left their home countries under duress, and whether or not they have a realistic option to return to their native lands (Richmond, 2002).

By the Numbers: Immigrants and Refugees in the U.S.

International migration—whether by refugees, legal or illegal immigrants—continues to be an important issue worldwide. Consider these facts regarding immigration in general:

- Currently, more than 140 million persons worldwide reside outside their countries of birth (GCIR, 2006)
- Immigrants comprise over 12 percent of the U.S. population (Camarota, 2005)
- Other English-speaking countries have a greater percentage of immigrants in their populations than does the U.S. For example, more than 17 percent of the Canadian population and more than 21 percent of the Australian population are foreign born (GCIR, 2006)

Immigration issues, related to both legal and illegal immigrants, have been hotly debated in the U.S. recently. These debates often stereotype immigrants as competing for scarce employment, exploiting welfare and other public services, and possibly being dangerous criminals or even terrorists. While these debates typically focus on illegal immigrants, the UNHCR notes that refugees similarly "are increasingly perceived as a threat to national security, a drain on public resources and a constraint to local development" (UNHCR, 2006, p. 6). As a result, Richmond (2002) suggests that refugees are now the new "underclass" in terms of international migration. Refugees nevertheless comprise an important segment of international migration:

- 21.7 million people—approximately 1 out of every 275 people on earth—are refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), or returned refugees or IDPs (UNHCR, 2006)

- There are currently 14.9 million refugees and asylum seekers worldwide (UNHCR, 2006)
- Refugees comprise about 7% of the immigrant population in the U.S. (Capps et al, 2005)
- In 2000, over 52,400 people applied for asylum in the U.S. (UNHCR, 2006).

Demographic statistics suggest that Africans are disproportionately represented among the world's refugees, as political and religious conflicts exacerbate already-existing inequalities in food security and availability, public health, educational opportunities, and other challenges:

- 5 of the 10 countries from which the majority of the world's refugees originate are in Africa—Sudan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Liberia (UNHCR, 2006)
- Sudan is the country of origin for nearly 700,000 refugees—the second largest population of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2006).

Children of immigrants and refugees from all over the world also comprise an important segment of the U.S. population:

- Over 15 million children of immigrants live in the U.S., comprising more than 20 percent of children in the U.S. This represents the fastest growing segment of the U.S.'s child population (Camarota, 2005)
- 1 out of every 5 school-aged children—a total of 10.3 million—were children of immigrants in 2000 (Camarota, 2005; Capps et al, 2005)

- Children of immigrants likely will represent at least a quarter of all U.S. children by 2010 (Urban Institute, 2006)
- Children comprise almost half of the world's refugee population. Worldwide, 45% of refugees are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2006a)
- In 2005, 38% of all refugees admitted to the United States were below the age of 16—over 20,000 children (Department of Homeland Security, 2007b)
- Between 1997 and 2005, over 190,000 refugee children under the age of 18 came to the U.S (BRYCS, 2003; Jeffreys, 2006).

These data suggest important implications for U.S. schools, who must educate all children, regardless of their backgrounds:

- Immigration accounts for virtually all of the national increase in public school enrollment over the last two decades (Camarota, 2005)
- In 2000, 58 percent of all young children of immigrants and refugees (i.e., those who have not yet entered school) had at least one limited English proficient (LEP) parent. Twenty-nine percent of young children of immigrants had parents who are bilingual (Urban Institute, 2006)
- In 2000, 10.8 million school-age children were children of immigrants, but only 3.4 million were classified as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Therefore, the majority children of immigrants are *not* classified as LEP (Capps et al, 2005).

These data show the significant impact that refugees and immigrant have on U.S. populations, and the impact that their children have on U.S. schools. Immigrants and

refugees—regardless of whether they are born inside or outside of the U.S.—continue to add to school populations. This last group of statistics also has important language and literacy implications, particularly for adult ESL and literacy development, as well as for family literacy. Limited English proficiency, including limited proficiency with English literacy, presents challenges for many refugee adults. Over half of refugee children have parents with limited proficiency in English, but less than one-third of immigrant and refugee children are similarly classified as LEP. Therefore, many immigrant and refugee children are more proficient in English than their parents. Refugee children, as the Sudanese children in this book demonstrate, often are a significant family resource when it comes to learning new language and literacy practices in the U.S.

Challenges Refugees Face

All immigrants to the United States face certain challenges, both in their daily lives and in formal schooling experiences. Many of these challenges relate to broad cultural differences (Campey, 2002; Glenn, 1992), while other cultural challenges are more specific to issues of language and literacy (Glenn, 1992). Immigrants often find that they must adjust to new laws, new social roles, or new patterns of interaction. For example, immigrants may discover that practices that were legal in their native countries, such as polygamy or certain ways of disciplining children, are illegal in the U. S. Schools may have different expectations for parents, and immigrants may find that what counts as appropriate parent participation or respectful behavior by children also differs from the educational contexts in which they were raised. Immigrants from some cultural communities may find that their traditional family structures or roles are different or disrupted in the U.S., as parents rely on children—who may have more competence in the

new language or culture—to translate or to act as cultural brokers (Campey, 2002; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Orellana, 2001; Pryor, 2001).

Language and Literacy Challenges

In addition to the general social and cultural differences to which immigrants and refugees must adjust, newcomers to the United States also face challenges specific to language and literacy practices. These challenges may include speaking or learning to speak English, a language in which immigrants might have minimal (if any) proficiency. They also may need to learn new culturally-determined conversational conventions (Tharp, 1989), such as whether or not it is appropriate to interrupt someone in differing circumstances, and how to negotiate turn-taking. Newcomers might find themselves learning to read and/or write in a new language, which also may involve learning a different alphabetic or orthographic system. For example, many refugees from Sudan are literate in Arabic, and they must learn the Roman alphabet in order to be able to read and write in English. Some refugees face simply becoming literate in *any* language for the first time (Pryor, 2001). And, as I will show throughout this book, refugees often need to learn about new genres, or about new ways of using familiar genres, when they come to the U.S.

All of these challenges impact the ways in which immigrants and refugees practice literacy in the United States. Newcomers to this country, such as the Sudanese refugees that I describe in this book, bring many literacy experiences and resources with them to this country, which they draw upon as they make sense of U.S. literacy practices and learn how reading, writing and various texts are used to accomplish different social goals in their new context. The challenges I described also have important implications

for U.S. schools, which must absorb immigrant students regardless of their experiences and abilities. Studies of individual communities—such as this examination of a community of Sudanese refugees in Lansing, Michigan—offer important insights into the ways in which we think about literacy development and literacy practices, as well as the ways in which we think about and implement literacy instruction in schools for both children and adults.

"You know in my country when they were killing people?": Sudan, the War, and the Refugee Experience

Viola, Falabia and the other parents in this study left Sudan, sojourned in Middle Eastern countries for several years while they sought refugee status from the United Nations, and eventually resettled in Michigan with their children. The three families in this study, as I will describe in this chapter, reflect the great diversity of refugees from Southern Sudan. Although they are members of different ethnic groups from different regions of Southern Sudan—Lotuka, Fujulu, Zande, and Nuba—most of the parents spent much of their youths living in Khartoum, Sudan's capital city. Viola, Falabia, and Akhlas also represent families with different social statuses in Sudan, as well as different levels of experience with formal education. Each of the families is similar in their deep Christian faith, as well as their desire to create the best life possible for their children and families in the U.S. Because the families' personal experiences and literacy practices developed within the cultural, historical, and political context of Sudan, it is important to provide an overview of that context.

The experiences of Viola's, Falabia's, and Akhlas' families reflect common themes in Sudan that have led to the displacement of nearly 5 million Sudanese people—

and the deaths of millions more. Several interrelated themes characterize the history of the Sudan, such as diversity, marginalization, struggles for power or autonomy, and violent conflict (Beswick, 2004; Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006). "Sudan has never been a peaceful country", according to one of the so-called "Lost Boys", orphaned refugee youth from Sudan (Perry, 2007b, p. 59). Much of Sudan's internal conflict relates to the great diversity among its many peoples, and resulting ideological differences. Focusing on Southern Sudan in particular, Beswick (2004) argues that the region faces great obstacles, many of which contribute to ongoing conflicts:

> Civil war with Northern Sudan and the intense hatred of those Islamic peoples on their northern frontier, the desire to have separate nation status from the Islamic Northern Sudan, disagreements over the official geographical boundary and definition of "South Sudan", intense intra-South Sudanese ethnic conflict, the continued and preferred reliance on the pastoral economy of raiding and its concomitant conflict, perceived ethnic expansion and dominance by one ethnic group, the Dinka, over all other South Sudanese peoples, the continued problem of Northern Islamic slave raids, the persistence of the Nilotic philosophy of fission politics, the importance of communal religion, and the centuries-old male forms of dominance over women (p. xi).

These issues have contributed to power struggles and subsequent marginalization of the disempowered within Sudan. And, as a result, modern history in Sudan "is littered with the abnegation of promises made by hegemonic elites to grant equitable citizenship instead of a life of inferiority, insecurity, and indignity (Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006, p. 13).

Sudan's inner turmoil, the three families reported, played an important role in their lives—and in their decisions to leave that country.

Diverse Peoples, Languages, and Influences

Geographically, modern Sudan is the largest country in Africa. Sudan encompasses more than 50 ethnic groups, divided into nearly 600 tribes who speak more than 100 languages and dialects (Embassy of the Republic of Sudan in London, 2002). Arabic is the most widely spoken language in Sudan, although English is a lingua franca in the South. Sudan's rich cultural heritage in part reflects its geographic location as a crossroads. Located in northeast Africa (see Figure 3.1), Sudan shares borders with Egypt, Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Sudan also borders the Red Sea, across from Saudi Arabia. Sudan's cultural influences therefore include sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Arab world. As a result, Christianity, Islam, and ancient Egyptian religious beliefs all have impacted modern Sudan (Beswick, 2004; Iyob & Khadiagala). Sudan's written history stretches back to biblical times (Beswick, 2004), and many Sudanese community members trace their ethnic heritage back to the Bible. Sudan has been ruled by a number of different empires, including the ancient kingdoms of Egypt, Meroe and Nubia, as well as various Muslim African sultanates. In recent history, Sudan has been dominated by Turko-Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian colonial alliances. Turko-Egyptian colonial rule began in 1821, and the second colonial administration began when the British overthrew the government in 1898 (Beswick, 2004; Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006). Sudan gained independence from the joint Anglo-Egyptian administration in 1956.

Figure 3.1: Map of modern Sudan



Ethnic, Religious, and Ideological Conflicts

Sudan's great diversity has fueled intense conflict. The Sudanese people have experienced war after war since achieving independence in 1956. Sudan's internal wars are not fought because "we just hated one another", according to Ellias Nyamlell Wakoson, a scholar from Sudan and president of the Sudan Studies Association (Fieldnotes, 4/14/06). Rather, they are a product of ethnic, religious, and ideological differences. Wakoson noted that three ideological groups have predominated in modern Sudan:

1) Arabized Islamicists, who have controlled Sudan since 1956. The Islamicists' vision was that Sudan be governed as an Arab-Islamic country, where each Sudanese person must accept Islam and Arabization. Islamicists have long controlled the government of Sudan. They fought against the Southern People's

Liberation Army (SPLA) and allegedly sponsor the *janjaweed* militias that currently terrorize the Darfur region.

2) African Southern Sudanese, who are predominantly Christian or Animist and have resisted Islam and Arabization. According to Wakoson, "If you're not forcibly converted, you are killed or you leave the country." Although most Southerners adamantly reject the philosophy of the north, they have been subjugated by the Northern Islamic government. Politically, Southern Sudanese desire either a plural society in Sudan, where all ethnic and religious groups may participate in governing the country, or independence for Southern Sudan from the Northern part of the country.
3) Afro-Arabs who desire a middle ground. According to Wakoson, Afro-Arabs are a moderate faction of the Arabized group.

Western media tend to portray Sudan's political, ethnic, and religious divisions as following Northern/Southern lines: Northern Sudan is characterized as predominantly Arab(ized) and Muslim, while southern Sudan is predominantly comprised of Christian or animist African tribes. Most scholars, however, believe that Sudan's conflicts are much more complex than a simple North-South division would suggest (Beswick, 2004; Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006). Deng (1995) therefore argues that the North-South dichotomy is only one aspect of the "complicated racial, cultural, and religious configuration of the Sudan" (p. 26). The three refugee families in this book reflect this complexity. Although all come from Southern Sudanese (and therefore marginalized) ethnic backgrounds, most of the parents spent their childhoods in the northern city of Khartoum, Sudan's center of

power. Some of the parents in this study grew up in families that were once part of the government and military, but they are now marginalized and persecuted.

Marginalization of Many Groups

Although Sudan's differences and divisions are complex, the Sudanese government nevertheless is controlled by the Arabized Islamicists, who have systematically worked to subjugate the South (and other marginalized areas of Sudan, such as Darfur) by imposing Muslim *sharia* law, making Arabic the official national language, and turning a blind eye to the traditional practice of enslaving southern Sudanese (Bok, 2003; Deng, 1995). Historians note that slavery has been a tradition in Sudan dating as far back as the late 1700s (Beswick, 2004), with tribes in the north making raids further south to capture slaves from the Dinka, Nuba, and other tribes. Enslavement of Southerners became more and more common as the region increasingly identified with Arab culture and considered non-Muslims to be infidels and therefore enslavable (Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006). Although the current Sudanese government denies it, the practice of slavery in Sudan continues to be documented today (Bok, 2003).

In addition to sanctioning slavery through its passivity, the ruling government has been accused of routinely marginalizing many ethnic and religious groups in Sudan. Sudan's government allegedly persecutes non-Muslims as well as African Muslims and other Arabized ethnic groups that exist in Sudan's periphery, such as the people in Darfur (Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006). As a result of this marginalization, many people have fled the country in order to escape slavery, forced conversion to Islam, political persecution, violence, and/or involuntary conscription into the army. The families in this study, for example, all fled the country for different reasons: as a result of the civil war, one mother

faced political persecution (guaranteed imprisonment and possibly death), one father faced forced military conscription, and another father had been shot and wounded in a battle near his home in the Nuba Mountains.

The Civil War in Sudan

Sudan's most recent, and longest-running, war began in 1983 when the Southern Sudanese organized an uprising against the northern-dominated Sudanese government. Beswick (2004) suggests that a series of events triggered the conflict, including: the discovery of oil in the South, President Nimeiri's[1] abrogation of the Addis Ababa peace agreement that granted autonomy to Southern Sudan, his subsequent alignment with Saudi Arabia, and the resulting imposition of Muslim *sharia* law. Following a coup by Muslim fundamentalist army officers in 1986, General al-Bashir seized power in 1989 and continued to implement Islamic law in Sudan. Ultimately, al-Bashir's government harbored Osama Bin Laden and other radical Muslims (Beswick, 2004). As a result of these events, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A), led by John Garang, engaged the government in a civil war that lasted more than two decades. While the conflict was largely between those in power (the radical Islamic government in Khartoum) and those on the margins, the Sudanese government also apparently exploited traditional animosities between tribes, which fomented inter-ethnic conflicts between Southern groups. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to characterize these Sudanese conflicts as existing between powerful elites and marginalized communities, rather than purely between Northerners and Southerners in Sudan.

Consequences of the War

[1] I have seen former President Nimeiri's name spelled many different ways in the scholarly literature and news media—Nimeiri, Numeri, Numeiri, Nimeri, etc. I arbitrarily chose to follow Beswick's transliteration of this Arabic name.

The conflict(s) in Sudan have had many serious consequences. Civil war completely devastated Southern Sudan. More than two and one-half million people were killed. Militias bombed, pillaged and destroyed villages and crops, slaughtered families, raped women, and captured women and children to be taken to the north, where they were kept as slaves and forced to convert to Islam (Beswick, 2004; Bok, 2003; Mylan & Shenk, 2003; Yang, 2002). Sudan's wars have caused a mass exodus of Southerners—nearly five million, many of whom ended up either in Egypt or in the Kakuma Refugee Camp near Lake Turkana in Kenya. And, as the conflict in Darfur continues, refugees increasingly are seeking asylum in countries like Chad and the Central African Republic, countries that are already desperately poor and politically instable. Despite vast oil reserves, southern Sudan remains one of the most underdeveloped areas in the world, due to the ongoing conflicts (Matheson, 2002). There are few roads, schools, or hospitals. A recent news article noted that southern Sudan has "possibly the worst health situation in the world" (Ross, 2004a). Diseases that have been eradicated in the rest of the world are making a resurgence in the Sudan, and mysterious new diseases are emerging (Ross, 2004b). As Falabia noted in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Sudanese refugees leave their country not only to seek safety, but also to seek better living conditions and educational opportunities for their children.

Refugee Resettlement

After escaping to countries like Kenya, Egypt or Lebanon, many Southern Sudanese apply to be resettled in developed countries around the world, including the U.S. Since November, 2000, the U.S. State Department has resettled these refugees around the United States, from Houston, Texas, to Omaha, Nebraska, to Lansing,

Michigan. The resettlement program is the result of an agreement between the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Services) (U.S. Department of State, 2001). Several other countries—most notably, Canada, Great Britain and Australia—also are participating in this refugee resettlement program.

Certain areas of the U.S. traditionally have accepted more immigrants and refugees than others. The Urban Institute (2006) notes that 68 percent of the total population of young children of immigrants lived in six "major destination" states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey. While these traditional destination states continue to accept large numbers of newcomers, other states actually have experienced much greater growth in their immigrant and refugee populations. According to the Urban Institute,

> Ten states had especially rapid growth in their populations of young children of immigrants between 1990 and 2000: North Carolina (270 percent increase), Nebraska (269 percent), Arkansas (244 percent), Nevada (236 percent), Georgia (210 percent), Iowa (182 percent), Tennessee (165 percent), Oregon (159 percent), Colorado (155 percent), and Idaho (152 percent). These states have little experience with immigrant integration, but the presence of these new arrivals may be felt by new demands on health care, social services, and schools—demands that are driven in large part by increasing numbers of children of immigrants (2006, p. 2).

These new settlement patterns often are influenced by whether a newcomer is a "regular" immigrant or a refugee. Immigrants typically have a choice about where they choose to settle in the U.S.; refugees often do not. The UNHCR, in conjunction with non-governmental sponsoring agencies, often religiously-affiliated social service organizations[2], coordinates refugee resettlement programs (Migration Policy Institute, 2007; UNHCR, 2006). These agencies make every attempt to resettle refugees where they may already have family members or where there are pre-existing communities of refugees' ethnic groups (Migration Policy Institute, 2007). As a result, refugee communities tend to cluster in certain areas. In 2000, for example:

> Florida resettled more Cubans than all other states combined. New York resettled the largest number of refugees from the former USSR, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, whereas California resettled large numbers of Vietnamese and Iranians. The largest number of arrivals from Iraq was resettled in Michigan. Many Somali and Ethiopian refugees were resettled in Minnesota, and the largest number of Sudanese refugees arrived in Texas (Migration Policy Institute, 2007a, n.p.).

Although resettlement agencies work to place refugees near their families or communities, refugees still have little control over the resettlement process. For example, some of the orphaned Sudanese youth, commonly referred to as the "Lost Boys of

[2] According to the Migration Policy Institute (2007a), the most active Voluntary Agencies—religious or community-based organizations that see the care of resettling refugees as part of their core mandate—include the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Lutheran Immigrant Aid Society (LIRS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), World Relief Corporation, Immigrant and Refugee Services of America (IRSA), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Church World Service (CWS), Domestic and Foreign Missionary Service of the Episcopal Church of the USA, Ethiopian Community Development Center (ECDC), and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). These agencies are "expected to provide the following services to refugees approved for resettlement: sponsorship; pre-arrival resettlement planning (including placement); reception upon arrival; basic needs support for at least 30 days, including housing, furnishings, food, and clothing; community orientation; referral to social service providers (including health care, employment, etc.); and case management and tracking for 90-180 days" (Migration Policy Institute, 2007a, n.p.).

Sudan", with whom I have worked (see Perry, 2007) explained that they did not know that they would be resettled in Michigan until they were handed a plane ticket at the airport. As a result, Southern Sudanese now find themselves in diaspora around the world, and it is not unusual for Sudanese refugees to have family living in many countries on several different continents.

Michigan: A Specific Case

Like many states that have been less-traditional destinations for immigrants and refugees, Michigan has experienced unprecedented growth in immigrant and refugee populations. In 2005, for example, the state ranked 13th in immigrant population (Camarota, 2005); Michigan currently ranks 11th among states for total number of refugees in the U.S. (GCIR, 2006). Between 1983 and 2004, Michigan provided a home for nearly 43,000 refugees (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2006). Michigan's population also reflects increased immigration from Africa: Of the foreign-born population in Michigan, 5.1% are from Africa, compared with 3.5% nationwide (Migration Policy Institute, 2007b).

This growth among immigrant and refugee populations is also seen in Michigan's schools. In 2000, for example, approximately 88,000 children of immigrants were enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade in Michigan, while approximately 90,000 were enrolled in 6th-12th grades (Capps et al, 2005). Michigan also saw a 105% increase in the number of students who are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) between 1990 and 2000 (Capps et al, 2005). These demographic statistics suggest that, like the entire United States, the face of Michigan is rapidly changing, and these changes bring

many challenges and opportunities for the nation, for the state, and for immigrants and refugees themselves.

The Sudanese Community in Lansing

In 2007, nearly 10,000 refugees lived in the Lansing area. These refugees arrived from Sudan, Cuba, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Somalia, and many other countries (Refugee Development Center, 2007). Lansing's Sudanese community reflects the great diversity of refugees from Sudan, and is comprised of several Sudanese ethnic groups and other sub-communities. Orphaned youth, commonly referred to as the Lost Boys (and Girls) of Sudan, represent one subset of the larger Sudanese community in Lansing. Beginning in 2000, area churches began sponsoring these orphaned refugees. Nearly all of the orphaned youth who arrived in Lansing were boys, although a handful of girls also resettled in the area. The group was comprised mainly of boys for two primary reasons: First, boys fled their villages in reaction to news that the armies on both sides were abducting boys and forcing them to fight. Secondly, many young boys were away from home, tending to herds of animals in remote cattle camps, when militias descended upon their villages, destroying the villages and slaughtering their families (Yang, 2002).

Many orphaned youth arrived in the U.S. as minors. Lutheran Social Services, a local agency, placed these youth with U.S. foster families. Others of the orphaned youth arrived in the U.S. as legal adults and lived on their own, often in apartments with several other Sudanese youth. Most of the Lost Boys in Lansing attended school—either at local high schools or the community college—while also working one or more jobs in order to earn enough to live independently and send money back to loved ones in Sudan and the Kakuma Refugee Camp. The majority of Lost Boys in the Lansing area come from the

Dinka tribe, the predominant ethnic group in Southern Sudan, although other ethnic groups are represented among the youth. Having spent many years in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, where they were educated in English, most of the youth arrived in Lansing already able to speak, read, and write English, although with varying degrees of fluency. (For more on the Lost Boys, see Perry, 2007b).

Intact families represent another group within the larger Sudanese community in Lansing. Unlike Lansing's Lost Boys, whose ethnicity is predominantly Dinka, the Sudanese families in Lansing represent many different ethnic groups from Southern Sudan. Ethnic groups from the Equatoria region of Southern Sudan are especially prevalent in Lansing, and the city also has a sizeable community from the Nuba Mountain region. Also unlike the orphaned youth, most of Lansing's Sudanese families sojourned in Middle Eastern countries (typically Egypt), rather than Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp, before being resettled in the U.S.[3] As a result, these families had less exposure to English before coming to Michigan than did most of the orphaned youth in Lansing. Most Sudanese refugee families in Lansing speak a dialect of Arabic at home, in addition to various other local Sudanese languages. The educational experiences of these refugees also reflect great diversity—from little, if any, attendance at school to graduate degrees. Some of Lansing's refugees came from rural backgrounds in Sudan, where they farmed and raised livestock. Many others, however, came from urban, professional backgrounds, owning businesses or working as doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, or university professors. Most Southern Sudanese families in Lansing also come from Christian backgrounds, typically Roman Catholic, Anglican or evangelical Protestant

[3] Although most of Lansing's Sudanese families did not spend time in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kakuma does house many Sudanese refugee families. Due to patterns of resettlement, more Kakuma-based families resettled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, than in Lansing.

denominations. In Lansing, a few refugees continue to attend Catholic or Episcopalian churches. However, many choose instead to attend the local Lutheran churches that sponsored their resettlement in the area. As a result, Lansing's Trinity Lutheran Church and Christ Lutheran Church both have large Sudanese congregations, and much Sudanese community life is centered around these churches.

Lansing's larger Sudanese community also includes people from Northern Sudan, although only a portion of these Northerners socialize with the Southern Sudanese community. Like the southern Sudanese, many Northerners fled the ongoing conflicts in their country and resettled in the Lansing area. These Northerners also reflect a variety of backgrounds. Some, for example, own small shops in Lansing, while others teach at Michigan universities, among other occupations. A few Northerners maintain close ties with the Southern community in Lansing; during data collection for this study, I often noted that a handful of Northern Sudanese usually attended memorial services, cultural celebrations, and other events sponsored by Southerners. One man, who taught Arabic at Michigan State University, had been a friend of Viola's father in Khartoum. He helped Viola and her family get settled in Lansing, and he threw a huge party to celebrate Samuel's birth shortly after the family moved to Michigan. However, historical tensions between Northerner and Southern Sudanese also flared up sometimes in Lansing. For example, one day as I was driving with Viola, she pointed out one shop that was affiliated with some Northern Sudanese. The owners, she reported, had hung the old Sudan flag on the wall of the store, which had caused problems in the community, particularly with the Lost Boys, who wanted the shop to display Sudan's new flag. After that, she reported, Southern Sudanese were not welcome anymore at the shop.

The Sudanese community in Lansing, thus, is a large and diverse group of people. In fact, the parents in this study often commented on how diverse the community was, and they lamented the fact that the Sudanese community was not more united in Michigan. For example, Viola explained, "We don't know the Lost Boys, and they don't know us." Both she and Isbon hoped that the local community could come together more in the future "to remember all the time we're Sudanese". Lansing's Sudanese community continues to grow as new refugees resettle in the area. Recently, for example, some of the Lost Boys and Girls managed to make contact with family members in Sudan and arranged to bring their parents and siblings to the U.S. And, in the spring of 2007, Lansing welcomed its first refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan.

The families described in this book represent one slice of the Lansing's Sudanese community. Each individual family's story is unique, however. In the following sections, I introduce each family. For each family, I describe the family's home in Lansing, I share the parents' childhood and educational experiences in Sudan, and I introduce the focal children.

Viola's Family

The Family's Home

During the time of the study, Viola Lupai and her family—her husband, Isbon Domoulouka, and their children, Boni, Samuel, Medo, and Anthony Domoulouka—lived in a small two-story house on the east side of Lansing, in the same neighborhood as I. Their yard hosted a scattering of toys, and on warm days, the family propped open the bright red back door to let in fresh air. Inside, Viola decorated her home in typical Sudanese style: Embroidered or crocheted doilies and antimacassars graced the furniture,

heavy green drapes separated the main living area from a smaller nook, and puffy red curtains covered the windows. A very large flat-screen TV, complete with a huge sound system, filled one wall of the living room. A second TV and VCR sat in the smaller nook. There were two comfortable couches in the main living room, and two divans covered in pink vinyl in the nook. A large table filled most of the kitchen. Boni and Samuel completed their weekly homework at this table, underneath the kitchen light fixture that usually offered only one working light bulb. The house was nearly always neat and tidy—which always impressed me, given that Viola worked long hours and had four very young boys to care for.

Viola and Isbon shared a small bedroom on the first floor. A colorful bedspread covered their bed, and Viola stored important papers (such as her university documents, their wedding certificate, and the children's report cards) in her dresser. Another very small room next to the staircase initially housed a desk and a non-functional computer. For a while, the room was set up as a bedroom for Medo, but he preferred to share a room with his brother. Isbon planned eventually to fix up the room as a study/homework space for Viola and the boys. Upstairs, the four boys shared two bedrooms (although Samuel indicated that he would prefer a room to himself, because his brothers were "too messy").

A quick glance at the home's decorations showed what was important to the family. Many pictures were on display: pictures of Viola and Isbon's wedding, of extended family members, and of Viola's father taking his oath of office. Christian symbols abounded—crucifixes, plaques with Bible verses, and a small card commemorating Viola's sister's profession as a nun. In the kitchen, a large two-month calendar hung from the wall, where Viola and Isbon recorded appointments and other

important information in both English and Arabic. Next to the back door, Isbon installed a small cork bulletin board, where the family posted notes, bills to be paid, and other reminders.

The Parents: Viola & Isbon

I first noticed Viola and her family during a Sudanese community event I attended with one of the orphaned Sudanese youth that I knew. I had accompanied Nuer to the annual May 16th celebration, and he pointed out Viola and Isbon to me, explaining that they were important community figures. At that time, Isbon was the elected leader of the Sudanese community in Lansing, and Nuer also explained that Viola was a lawyer. I later got to know Viola through the Southern Sudan Rescue and Relief Association. We served together on the organization's board, and when I first began recruiting families to participate in the study, Viola immediately volunteered her family.

Viola's Childhood

Viola grew up in an elite, highly-educated southern Sudanese family. When she was a child, Viola's father served as the Minister of Justice in Sudan. Her mother worked as a legal secretary in her father's law practice. During my first visit, Viola explained that hers was a "very political family". Her family had been a leading family in Sudan for a long time, and some of her family members were high-ranking officials in the SPLM (the Southern People's Liberation Movement). Viola proudly showed me a picture of her father, Samuel Lupai, being sworn in by President Nimeiri. Mr. Lupai had been present at three of the earlier peace agreement meetings in Sudan: an accord in Addis Ababa in 1972, the Koka Dam agreement in 1986, and another peace accord shortly before his death in 1988. Viola noted that her father also had worked as a governor in the Wau

region. As a result, Viola's family was well-known among refugees in Michigan. "All the Lost Boys know him, heard about him," she explained. According to Viola, law and political science were "the two things in my house." Viola's sister still worked with the Islamic government in Sudan, but she "helped southerners". The government would not let her sister leave the country, Viola reported. If the sister "gets out" of the Sudan, the government would kill her.

As the child of a high-ranking government minister, Viola had many opportunities that were not available to the majority of black Africans in Sudan. She attended excellent private schools in Khartoum that were expressly set up to serve government officials' children, and she earned a full scholarship to attend university in Egypt. At university, Viola followed in her father's footsteps and studied law. According to Viola, Sudanese parents tended to choose major courses of study and careers for their children, and that father had chosen law for her and for several of her siblings. According to Viola, her father "want me to replace him" in his law firm. She said that he already had an office, and that "his name is very famous," making the children's careers much easier.

In fact, all of Viola's surviving siblings obtained at least some university education and embarked upon professional careers, although nearly all relocated as refugees around the globe: Michael studied law at Beirut American University and then moved to Virginia. Lucy studied both law and journalism and resettled in England. Sista still lived in Sudan and worked as an attorney for the government. Hania studied nursing in India and moved to Vancouver, Canada. A now-deceased brother, Adam, studied engineering in Germany. Mary also resettled in Canada and studied arts and languages;

Eva studied accounting and lived in Uganda; Queen lived with Viola's mother in Syria; and the youngest, Anthony, was a Christian minister who lived in Jordan.

Although Viola's father had chosen her career for her, Samuel Lupai was nevertheless a non-traditional Sudanese father in many other ways. Sudanese tradition, Viola reported, was for parents to arrange marriages to rich or well-known men who were from good families, and these men sometimes had many wives. "My father, [he] don't want to keep this tradition," explained Viola. Mr. Lupai allowed her to choose her own husband, but he encouraged her to finish school before marrying. He believed that having a degree was better than having a man to take care of her: "Your certificate is your husband," he told her. During my study, Viola was in the process of applying to law school in Michigan, so that she could continue to work in her profession, a process I will describe later in this chapter.

Isbon's Childhood

Isbon, too, came from a professional family in Sudan, although one not quite as highly connected as Viola's family. Isbon's father had studied forestry and worked as a guide with Europeans and Americans who came to Sudan on safari. His mother had trained as a nurse-midwife, and later in her career, she also taught nursing students. Like Viola, Isbon's parents were less traditional than most in Sudan. Isbon reported that his mother had taught him and his brothers how to cook; he had no sisters. Life was different for people who were raised in the city than for those who lived in rural areas, Isbon explained, because the people out in the country maintained traditional ways—they believed that women should do all the cooking and cleaning.

Isbon completed high school in Sudan, as well as some business school. Like

Viola, he planned to attend university. However, he put his own education on hold to help Viola complete her university education, after her scholarship to the university in Egypt was withdrawn as a result of political tensions between Sudan and Egypt. Isbon moved to Cairo and worked 18-hour days at a Chinese-run resort in order to pay the tuition for Viola's last year of school: "For year I work there, to help her, to pay the money." Viola added, "And he pay for the books, for the other—some exam, like that." Isbon, Viola explained, had provided this assistance before their marriage, and that it had been essential for her to complete her law degree. After their marriage, Viola and Isbon moved to Lebanon, where Isbon had been accepted into university. Unfortunately, he was not able to complete his education there because of financial difficulties.

Coming to the U.S.

Viola and Isbon easily received refugee status from the UN because of Viola's family connections. As the African Christian children of a former government minister, Viola and her siblings were a target of the Islamic government in the long-running civil war between the government and the SPLA. "At that time," Isbon explained, "it was not easy to go out from Sudan." Viola had left Sudan on a student visa, and her family members had signed affidavits that she would return to the country. According to Viola, "You have to pay a thousand and sign paper why you go out." She did not return and, to make matters worse, she married without the embassy's permission. This created problems for her family members, as Viola explained:

> There is a paper, certificate. Then they will let you go. If they know you are—you study, you finish, they want you back. You cannot go at all outside [the country]. They know you have position there. And my sister come sign, and when I late,

like six months, and Mary, they put her in the jail...They don't want educated people to be—to get out. They want us to work with the Islamic government. That's my trouble now. If I go to Sudan, I will go to jail...Now, it will be okay, I will have American citizen[ship]. But, my situation before, I don't have to [cannot[4]] go back. Because there is a paper we sign that you will be back—I [say I] just go to see my brother, I coming back. But I go marry.

Viola and Isbon lived as refugees in Beirut, Lebanon for five years, where both developed important connections. Isbon worked in the office of Rafik Hariri, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, who was assassinated in February, 2005. Hariri, Viola reported, had helped the family get documentation to come to the U.S., had given them $2,000 when they left, and had also provided personal contacts at the Lebanese consulate where they should go if they had any problems. As Viola explained in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, she and Isbon could not remain in Beirut, due to political instability in that country.

Despite Viola's law degree and Isbon's high school diploma, both worked in low-wage, labor-intensive jobs in the U.S[5]. Isbon worked in janitorial services at one of the local hospitals. He spent much of his time cleaning and disinfecting. He also had the job of properly disposing of biohazard materials for the hospital. Isbon typically worked the night shift—and many weekends. For most of the time that I knew her, Viola was a homemaker who cared for her four boys. For a short time, she worked in housekeeping at a local hotel. Toward the end of data collection, she took a position at a local factory that

[4] Viola always used the phrase "don't have to" to indicate something that she could not do, or that was not permitted.

[5] Refugees frequently have to work in menial, low-paying jobs, even if they have credentials from their home countries (Palladino, 2007; Pipher, 2002)

manufactured automobile door locks. Unfortunately, Viola also had to work a shift that lasted from 3pm until 1am. She was only supposed to work four days a week, but her supervisor often called her in to work extra time on the weekends. Viola felt she could not refuse these calls, and the family also relied upon the extra money that her overtime hours provided.

Community Involvement

Respected as leaders within the Sudanese community, Isbon served one term as the elected leader for the entire Sudanese community in the area, while Viola also served as an officer in that organization. A national U.S. organization of Sudanese from the Equatoria region of Sudan also tapped her for service. Because of her background in law and her level of English ability, Viola often volunteered her time to translate for Sudanese refugees in court. In fact, she did this so frequently that she explored the possibility of obtaining certification as an official Arabic-English court translator.

Viola also was especially active in her church community. Although raised in the Roman Catholic church, Viola, Isbon and the boys attended one of the local Lutheran churches that sponsored many refugees and had a large congregation of refugees from Sudan and other nations. Viola joined a women's group through the church, and she actively volunteered her time through this group. She frequently helped serve food through the church's regular soup kitchen for the homeless, and she was part of a committee that organized an African cultural festival. Through this women's organization, Viola also participated in a study group that read the evangelist Rick Warren's *40 Days of Community* (Warren, 2004) together.

The Children

Viola and Isbon had four young boys. At the beginning of the study, Boni (short for Boniface) was a 5 ½-year-old kindergartner, although he attended first grade for the majority of the data collection period. When I first met him, Samuel was 4 years old and was enrolled in his second year of a local Head Start program. He attended kindergarten for the majority of the study period. Medo was 2 ½, and baby Anthony was 2 months old. Both Boni and Samuel participated as focal children. I often marveled that they were brothers—they could not have been more different!

Boni

Boni, the oldest, was a friendly, charming, energetic, happy-go-lucky boy. He loved to learn about volcanoes, tornadoes were his favorite thing to draw, and he was an avid admirer of Jackie Chan movies. He always had interesting things to talk about, and he cheerfully undertook whatever was asked of him, with the glaring exception of homework. Viola and Isbon relied upon Boni, as the oldest child, to help with a variety of tasks, including keeping an eye on the younger children. Whenever I visited, Boni took his job as host very seriously, always offering me tea or soda.

Boni had a keen interest in his African heritage. He enjoyed listening and dancing to music from Africa, and he particularly enjoyed watching the African music videos and soap operas that his parents bought. When the musical *The Lion King* came to East Lansing, Boni made sure I not only knew that "those African people are coming", but he also made clear that he desperately wanted to attend the performance. Boni preferred to speak Arabic at home, much to his parents' dismay. Isbon and Viola not only wanted him to gain fluency with English, but they also felt it is rude for Boni to speak Arabic around me, since I did not understand it. Not one to be daunted by this, Boni set out to teach me

Arabic, attempting to teach me words like "car" and "wall"—not exactly helpful in terms of conversational Arabic, but, clearly, words Boni thought I needed to know. Everyone liked Boni, and Boni liked everyone. In fact, I often thought of him as "Mr. Personality"!

Boni's Academic Achievement

Academically, however, Boni struggled. Boni generally enjoyed going to school, but he was not a fan of homework, and he particularly abhorred spelling tests. Spending time with books was not typically on Boni's list of fun things to do, either. But he always was eager to please, and he genuinely wanted to do well on assigned schoolwork, even when it was clearly beyond his capabilities. At the end of his kindergarten year, Boni's teacher recommended retention. Viola and Isbon felt retention was inappropriate for Boni at that time, and I supported their decision to refuse the recommendation. In first grade, Boni fell further and further behind, particularly in literacy achievement. He received extra instruction with a reading specialist through Title I, but this was not enough. At the end of his first grade year, Boni again was recommended for retention. Luckily, however, the district he attended had an entire school devoted to intensive literacy and math instruction for primary-grades children who are struggling. Boni was accepted into this program for the second grade. Despite the intensive instruction, Boni continued to struggle. School officials began to suspect that he had a learning disability.

Samuel

Samuel was the yin to Boni's yang. While Boni bounced cheerfully around, Samuel was a quiet, introverted child, whom I usually thought of as "Mr. Serious." While Boni liked to be in the thick of things, Samuel preferred to quietly observe, usually sucking on two or three of his fingers. Samuel firmly believed in rules and order—he

easily grew frustrated with other children who misbehaved in school, and he disliked the fact that Medo messed up their shared bedroom. In celebration of my birthday, Viola purchased a cake from a bakery, but Samuel had recently heard from his doctor that too much sugar was not good for him, so he steadfastly refused to eat any of the cake. (Boni happily gobbled up his brother's share!) Samuel also displayed much more ambivalent feelings about his Sudanese identity. He often expressed distaste for traditional Sudanese foods, he more frequently spoke English at home than did Boni, and he once became very distressed when Viola required him to wear a traditional African shirt to a Sudanese cultural celebration (see Figure 3.2). "I'm not having fun with my shirt!" he exclaimed to me when I commented on it.

Figure 3.2: Samuel, in his African shirt, with Boni at the Sudanese Cultural Festival.



Unlike Boni, who clearly enjoyed socializing, Samuel preferred to engage in quiet, solitary activities. In fact, Samuel often disappeared entirely when visitors came to the house. He loved to draw, and he often sat with crayons and paper, happily humming to himself and drawing a picture of Superman or some other superhero, while others around

him carried on lively conversations. Samuel loved books and reading—he eagerly carried off the books that I sometimes brought with me in to a corner of the room, where I could hear him quietly pretend-reading aloud to himself.

Samuel's Academic Achievement

School was relatively easy for Samuel. Samuel's academic achievement was right on track. In fact, he was a better reader than many of his native English-speaking kindergarten peers, and he was one of the most prolific writers in his class. Although Samuel was outwardly quiet, he had a highly active inner life. He enjoyed challenges, and he frequently set himself academic tasks to perform at home. Even before he started kindergarten, Samuel asked me to teach him to write the alphabet and numbers, and he regularly sprawled out on the kitchen floor to practice writing. He spent a great deal of time mulling over interesting ideas or questions in his mind. For example, I once observed Samuel and his classmates as they were filling in missing numbers on a chart during a math center. Several of the children were talking about large numbers, and one stated that one million was the "last" number. Thirty minutes—and two center rotations—later, Samuel called me over to ask why it was that one million was the last number. Clearly, he had been mulling over that idea for quite some time!

Akhlas' Family

The Family's Home

Akhlas Kago and her family—her husband, Amin Nawai, and their daughter and son, Remaz and Remon Abdelhrman—lived in a two-bedroom apartment on the north side of town, in a complex that housed many refugee and immigrant families. Their apartment was on the ground floor, down a short flight of stairs. The living room featured

two nicely upholstered brown sofas, a glass coffee table, a small entertainment center with cable television, and Akhlas' favorite chair, a well-used brown recliner that she had bought at the "used store". Professional pictures of her two children, taken when the family still lived in Egypt, perched on top of the entertainment center between carefully-arranged sprays of artificial flowers. The entertainment center also stored photo albums that Akhlas had lovingly assembled. A sparkly black and gold painting of a tiger hung on the wall, next to a calendar that featured a recipe of the month. Akhlas had draped the windows and the hallway door with red curtains. Her kitchen was big enough to fit a large table, which was pushed against the wall. The refrigerator had one or two magnets on it, securing some of the children's artwork.

Akhlas and her husband, Amin, occupied the apartment's larger bedroom, while the two children shared the second, smaller room. Remaz slept in a regular twin bed, while Remon used a smaller child-sized training bed. The children's room featured its own television, often tuned to PBSKids. On the shelf underneath the TV, Remaz and Remon stored the large number of children's books that church members had donated to the family.

The Parents: Akhlas and Amin

Viola first introduced me to Akhlas, a short, plump woman with an easy laugh. After checking with Akhlas to determine if the family was willing to participate in the study, she had arranged for my first visit. Akhlas, who was braiding a friend's hair when I first met her, often served as a hairdresser for others in the community. She also was known for her abilities to create beautiful henna decorations for hands and feet. Akhlas and her family came from the Nuba Mountains region of central Sudan. The Nuba

Mountains are not geographically part of southern Sudan, but its people have long been aligned with the Southern Sudanese and with the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement. Like their neighbors to the south, the Nuba people are black African Christians who have long been marginalized by the Islamic government.

Akhlas' Childhood

Although Akhlas is from the Nuba Mountains region, she grew up in Khartoum, where her parents were employed. Akhlas did spend a couple of her childhood years living in the Nuba Mountains with her grandmother, where she learned some of the local language, Rutan. When she was a child, both of Akhlas' parents worked to support their family. Akhlas' father, who had attended some school and who was literate in Arabic, worked as a tailor in Khartoum. Her mother had no formal schooling, but was literate enough in her native language to read the Bible. She worked selling tea in a local shopping center. Akhlas was one of several children, and she is now the only member of her family who lives outside of Sudan. She attended school through the seventh grade, where she consistently performed at the top of her class:

> You know, when I am in school, always I *love* school...My mom, she's so happy! She say—uh, my other sister and brother, later on they go to high school—she says, "Always I tell them story about you. I tell them, 'You must be like Akhlas!"...Yes, because my mom, she said, "You are so smart, girl!" She love me a lot because when I bring homework, every—just hundred. Hundred for hundred [*makes motion of marking a paper*]. I don't know what you call. Yeah, hundred for hundred...I always do. My mom, she's so happy when I come from school. My paper is always—I get first or second in my school.

Unfortunately, Akhlas was unable to continue her education because her parents could not afford to send her to high school. Because of this, Akhlas routinely sends money back to her family to support her two youngest siblings' education through high school. The third child of seven, Akhlas had many siblings, and all but her two youngest siblings are now married with their own families. One of Akhlas' brothers works as a butcher, and her sisters work alongside their mother, selling tea in a shopping center.

Akhlas came from a traditional family. Unlike Viola, she had not been allowed to choose her own spouse. In the Nuba Mountains, she explained, parents arrange marriages for their children when they were very young. Her own marriage to Amin had been arranged in this manner. Akhlas married at the age of 19, and she and Amin had known as children that they were going to get married: "Amin's mom, she sees me. She tell father, 'I want the girl. She grow up, she will marry him.'" Akhlas and Amin had been married for seven years at the time of the study. "I love Amin now," Akhlas reported, but, she explained, they had not gotten married for love. Things are changing in Sudan, she suggested, as more people choose their own spouses.

Amin's Childhood

Amin grew up mainly in the Nuba Mountains region. Like many rural Sudanese children, he cared for the family's cattle as a herder. Amin attended school through one or two years of high school. Before he married Akhlas, he had been shot—a casualty of the ongoing civil war in Sudan. "You know in my country when they were killing people," Akhlas explained, Amin had been caring for the family's cattle when he was shot in the leg and foot by government soldiers. Akhlas claimed that it had been an accident:

> My husband, he have a lot of problems. He's sick. He scared...They shot him with a gun...he's in Nuba Mountains, and he's uh, he's uh—I don't know what you call in English, the people who feed the cows?...My husband, he's too far, got shot, then when the people come, the people [shoot] him. That's an accident...They shoot his feet, you know. That's why he hurt, and people were running.

Coming to the U.S.

Having an injury as a result of the civil war automatically allowed Amin and his family to claim refugee status. The family sojourned in Egypt for two years, where Amin received some medical attention for his injury, before they were approved to come to the U.S.

In Lansing, Amin worked as a part-time dishwasher at a local hotel, where he often had to work the night shift. His leg and foot injuries continued to trouble him—apparently, some shrapnel had been left in his body, which was not only painful, but which also caused recurring infections. In January, 2006, Amin was hospitalized for nearly two weeks, where he underwent surgery again and was treated for a blood infection. Amin was so ill, in fact, that he continued to receive intravenous antibiotics at home for a month following his hospitalization, and his doctor would not allow him to return to work for nearly three months.

In Michigan, Akhlas worked as a seamstress at Peckham, Inc., a local company that employed many refugees. She enjoyed her job and the opportunity to meet and work with people from around the world. She also enjoyed sewing as a hobby. A friend from

church had taught her how to quilt, and during my first visit to her home, Akhlas proudly showed me the quilts she had put together.

Continuing Education

Both Akhlas and Amin continued to further their education once they came to the U.S. Of all the parents participating in this study, Amin's English was the most limited. Amin enrolled in ESL courses through a local adult education program, with the intent of ultimately obtaining a GED diploma. Giving up her lunch hour, Akhlas participated in ESL classes that were offered through her workplace. She seemed to have a natural knack for languages, and she learned to speak, read and write English very quickly. In fact, toward the end of data collection, Akhlas' English teacher singled her out to work as a peer tutor for others at Peckham. By the end of the study, Akhlas was ready to move on to coursework at the local community college, but she decided to wait until Amin found a full-time job before enrolling. Both Akhlas and Amin regularly studied for their coursework, and it was common to see Remaz and both of her parents gathered in the living room, working on their respective assignments.

Church Community

As with many of the Sudanese refugees, religion and the church played an important role in the life of Akhlas' family. Unlike others in the Sudanese community, however, Akhlas did not attend one of the two Lutheran churches that had large African (particularly Sudanese) refugee congregations. Akhlas and her family had been sponsored by a local Disciples of Christ church, and they continued to attend that church. The church helped Akhlas' family in many ways. Church sponsors helped Akhlas, Amin, and the children get settled when they came to America, offering cultural brokering to the

family and often providing household items that the family needed. In fact, one American friends from church taught Akhlas how to make quilts. Even after they had become better adjusted to life in the U.S., the church continued to support the family. When Amin was out of work for so long after his surgery, church members provided the family with pre-paid gift cards to local stores so that they could buy food and clothing. At the end of the study, Akhlas and her family moved to a new home. A woman at the church agreed to rent a house to the family at a discounted rate, and the church community pitched in to help the family repaint the home and move their belongings. The same friend who had taught Akhlas to quilt, and who often invited Remaz and Remon to play or go swimming with her children, also dropped Remaz off at kindergarten and picked her up each day.

The Children

At the time of the study, Akhlas and Amin had two children: Remaz, the focal girl from this family, was a five-year-old kindergartner. Their son, Remon, was a month or two shy of his third birthday when I first started visiting the family. In March of 2007, Akhlas gave birth to a second son, Ismail—and with each of her children born in different countries (the Sudan, Egypt, and the U.S., respectively), Akhlas had a truly international family!

Remaz

Remaz was a bright and friendly child with a gap-toothed smile. Before kindergarten, she attended a local Head Start program. Unlike other children in this study, Remaz and Remon both attended day care at one of the local churches because Akhlas worked full-time and because Amin worked challenging hours and could not always supervise the children. Remaz had strong, positive feelings about her Sudanese identity.

She loved traditional Sudanese foods (although her favorite food was broccoli!), she talked with obvious admiration about African women's fashions, and an outing to see the African Children's Choir, a group from Kenya, was a deeply emotional experience for her (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Akhlas and Remaz, dressed in traditional African styles, on their way home from seeing the African Children's Choir.



Remaz, like many of her peers, enjoyed "girl things"—Disney princesses, the color pink, and having her hair done with long, intricate extensions. Unlike other children in the study, however, Remaz preferred PBSKids television programming to other kid-oriented channels. She avidly watched programs like *Arthur, Buster,* and *Zoom!*, and she eagerly repeated information that she learned from these shows. As a five-year-old, it already was apparent that Remaz had a deep intellectual life. She spent a great deal of

time wondering about the world. She went through a phase where she wanted to know what different things were made of, often bewildering me with questions such as, "What is light made out of?" Because of Remaz's knowledge of interesting (and often esoteric) information, and her ability to ask intriguing questions, I often thought of her as the "Little Professor."

Remaz's Academic Achievement

Following in her mother's footsteps, Remaz was at the very top of her class. She loved going to school, and she loved learning. In fact, she was so eager to participate in all lessons and activities that her kindergarten teacher often had to remind her to raise her hand rather than just shout out the answers, which invariably were correct. Also like her mother, Remaz had picked up English quickly in the two years that she had been in the U.S., perhaps due, in part, to her attendance at a preschool where English was the lingua franca. Remaz not only spoke without an accent, but her vocabulary was so sophisticated that her kindergarten teacher actually had no idea that Remaz spoke another language at home until I provided this information. "You know," her teacher said, "I wouldn't have guessed. Yeah, you would probably think that she's American. A lot of people probably would think that." Reading and writing came very easily to Remaz—although she sometimes expressed frustration at being left-handed—and she spent the year in the most advanced reading group in her kindergarten. Remaz was so advanced, in fact, that at the end of her kindergarten year, her teacher recommended that she be placed in a mixed first and second grade classroom to ensure that she would be challenged academically.

Remon

Remaz's younger brother, Remon, was equally precocious. When I first met him, I was surprised to learn that he was not yet three years old. I clearly remember thinking that he was the most articulate two-and-a-half-year-old boy that I had ever met—and English was his second language! Remon was a happy-go-lucky, energetic little boy who was filled with curiosity. During my first visit, he happily announced that he liked to eat crayons, the truth of which he subsequently proved on a number of occasions. Remon, like his sister, seemed to be developing a positive Sudanese identity. Remaz and Remon always requested that I bring books with me when I visited, and Remon early identified a favorite: *Chameleon's Colors* (Tashiro, 2003), a story about animals in Africa.

Falabia's Family

The Family's Home

The largest of the three families in this study, Falabia Edward and her husband, Primo Lukuat, had five children of their own, whose last name was Gildo. At the beginning of data collection, Julia was 13, Godfrey was 9, Emmanuel was 7 ½, Juana (the focal child) was 6, and Diana was almost 3. In addition to their own children, Falabia and Primo had also taken their niece, 15-year-old Golda Lowure, and nephew, 12-year-old Chris Lowure, into their home. Golda and Chris' mother, who had died before the family left Sudan, was Falabia's sister.

Falabia's family lived in a two story, government-subsidized home in the extreme north end of Lansing. The front door opened onto a landing; taking the stairs upward led to four bedrooms and a bathroom, and taking the stairs downward led to the living room, kitchen, a fifth bedroom, and a utility room. Falabia had decorated the living room, the largest room in the house, with care. The room included a matching furniture set—two

nicely upholstered brown couches and an easy chair—and a glass coffee table with a small stool that the children often sat on while they did their homework. A large desk with shelves stood in one corner of the room, which housed a fairly new Dell computer. Indeed, this family was the only one of the three in the study that owned a working computer. The desk's shelves held several textbooks and reference books, such as an Arabic-English dictionary. On the top shelf, Falabia displayed a wooden cross, a little organizer for bills, a box of envelopes for the weekly church offering, and some greeting cards, including one that friends had sent her upon Diana's birth. Occupying one whole wall of the living room, a huge entertainment center held a large TV and several shelves, upon which Falabia displayed other objects that the family cherished: Julia's medals and trophies from cross-country and track, photo albums and scrapbooks, small decorative knick-knacks. One shelf held the family's Arabic Bible, which had been lovingly placed on a crocheted doily. Late during the period of data collection, the entertainment center was replaced by an even larger one that housed an enormous flat-screen TV. Family photographs completely covered one wall of the living room, next to a picture of the Virgin Mary and Jesus. Falabia also displayed weavings, gourds and other traditional African artwork in her living room.

The kitchen, large enough to hold a table and several chairs, opened off the living room. Windows above the sink looked out at ground level, and from these, I could often hear Golda or Julia shout to announce my arrival to the rest of the family. There were several magnets on the refrigerator, and someone had posted a pizza delivery flyer and a clipping from the newspaper on good nutrition for children.

Upstairs, the common space outside the bedrooms had a large chair that looked like one section of a sectional sofa, as well as a second TV. Falabia occupied one of the bedrooms, and Diana slept with her in a queen-sized bed. This bedroom also had a desk piled with textbooks, notebooks, folders, and papers, where Falabia retreated to study for her classes. Juana and Julia shared the bedroom next to Falabia's. Across the hall, Golda had her own small room. Next to Golda, the boys' bedroom was crammed with three single beds. They also had a small TV hooked to a Playstation system, although Falabia and Primo usually did not allow the boys to use it during the school year. Primo slept in the bedroom on the ground floor.

The Parents: Falabia & Primo

Falabia, like Viola, served on the board of the Southern Sudan Rescue and Relief Association. I did not know her well before the start of my study, however, because her work schedule and parenting responsibilities often prevented her from attending the board meetings. Viola suggested that I study Falabia's family, and, as she had done with Akhlas' family, she made the arrangements for our initial meeting. During my first visit, Falabia expressed delight when she learned that I had lived in Lesotho for two years, because her brother lived in Lesotho at that time. Her brother had attended the National University of Lesotho, where he had married a Mosotho woman. This discovery provided an instant connection between Falabia and me.

Falabia's Childhood

Falabia was a member of the Latuka tribe from the Equatoria region of Southern Sudan, but she spent most of her childhood in Khartoum. Her father was an officer in the Sudanese military. Falabia explained that she lived in several different places as a child,

like many military children: "I born in Khartoum, and I grow up in Khartoum...[and] I live in Juba because my dad he's in army. They used to move them, the [*army*] people from area to area. Then we move in Juba and we live there I think for seven years. Then we came back again to Khartoum." Falabia reported that she also spent two years living in Turit, the village where her family and many other members of her tribe lived. As a result of her father's status and salary as an officer in the military, Falabia and her siblings were able to attend good schools and complete high school. "My family was very rich," Falabia explained, because they owned many cows in the village, for whom their father paid someone to care.

Falabia's father had completed his own schooling, and he was literate in both Arabic and English. Her mother had not been to school at all, and therefore was not literate in any language. Her parents "gave birth for 16 babies", Falabia reported, but many of them died. Her surviving siblings all had pursued higher education, many in the medical field. A younger sister worked as a nurse in Sudan, and Falabia explained that another sister, Golda and Chris' mother, was "almost a doctor. I don't know what they call—medical assistant? Yeah, she was medical assistant". Falabia's brother, Daniel, studied law in Egypt and resettled in Virginia. She had two other brothers living as refugees, one in Egypt and one in Uganda who had been a teacher before fleeing Sudan.

Following high school, Falabia herself entered nursing school and earned a nursing degree. She worked for a time in a hospital in Khartoum and was later hired by an international aid organization to work as a nurse at a feeding center for dehydrated and malnourished children:

> At that time I was working with [an] American company. They went in my country and they treat people and they built a hospital. After I graduate from Khartoum nursing school, then I apply and they took me, so I was a nurse for the kids that have like dehydrated—dehydration.

Falabia's parents, like Viola's, allowed her to choose her own husband, although she still asked for their permission before marrying Primo. As she explained, "I chose him, then I talk to my father. They say, 'Okay, this is a good family. We don't have problems if you guys love each other.'" Primo paid the traditional bride price of several cows to her family before their marriage, Falabia reported.

Coming to the U.S.

Primo, too, completed high school in Sudan, but he did not have the opportunity to study for a higher degree. After high school, he managed a shop in Khartoum for an Egyptian company. Falabia recounted that the family was at risk in Khartoum because Primo worked for an Egyptian company, "and people in Sudan, they don't like that. They don't like that company, even Sudanese who are working over there. And they beat them, and they take their names and their names was in the list." Primo's connection with the company ultimately allowed the family to enter Egypt as refugees. One time, he wrote an essay in English entitled "Difficult Journey" that partly explained his experience:

> I was working in a Sudanese-Egyptian company from 1990-1998. The government politices [*sic*] in Sudan wanted to send me to fight the SPLA, which is the Sudanese People Libaration [*sic*] Army. I was among the first batch of the employees in the company to be taken for training. When the day came I didn't report to them. As a result, a security man came to our company, and asked me

why I didn't report for training. I told him I was out of town, but he didn't believe me. He told me I wasn't telling the truth. Then he ordered me by gun point to get into the security car. My boss explained to him why I did not report to head-quarters. After that the security man told me I wold [*sic*] get a letter soon to be ready for the next time. Finally I decided I had to leave Sudan, I asked my boss who was Egyptian to help me to get a visa to inter [*sic*] Egypt, so he helped me a lot, because he knew many people in Egyptian Embassy.

Like many refugees, Falabia's and Primo's African credentials did not count in the U.S. In Michigan, Falabia once again found herself working at a hospital, but this time as part of the housekeeping staff, rather than as a nurse. She continued to pursue higher education in Lansing so that she could again do the work she loved. Falabia earned a scholarship to attend Davenport University, a private university that specialized in career development, and she also took classes at Lansing Community College. In addition to taking basic academic courses in English as a second language, science, and math, Falabia also enrolled in a program to earn a nurse assistant certificate, and she completed a program in phlebotomy so that she would be certified to do blood-work in the hospital. She believed that both of these programs would further her goal of becoming a certified nurse in the U.S. Primo also worked as a janitor in the local hospital, and he enrolled in courses at Lansing Community College. Primo's fluctuating work hours, along with his demanding academic schedule, ensured that he was rarely home when I visited the family. In addition, he clearly felt that my primary role was as a tutor for his children, and he appeared to deliberately stay out of my way in order to avoid being a distraction for

the children's homework. As a result, I did not get to know him as well as I knew Isbon or the mothers in the other families.

Falabia became the first of the adults in this study to obtain U.S. citizenship. She studied hard in order to pass the citizenship exam, and I accompanied her to the citizenship interview in Detroit. Falabia became a U.S. citizen on June 15, 2006 (see Figure 3.4), and she invited me to join the family at the ceremony in Grand Rapids.

Figure 3.4: Falabia, standing with Primo and Diana, displays her certificate of citizenship following the ceremony on June 15, 2006.



Falabia's mother, Boronika, also lived in Lansing, although she did not live in Falabia's home. Boronika was in her late seventies. Unlike Falabia, Boronika spoke no English, nor could she read or write in Arabic. Golda and Chris' two adult brothers lived with Boronika, caring for her and acting as liaisons with the American world. Although she did not live in the family's home, Boronika nevertheless played an important role in the family. The children often talked about going to visit their grandmother, and Falabia frequently provided care for her elderly mother, who was hospitalized twice with heart

problems. Despite her lack of English and her health problems, Boronika nevertheless traveled to Grand Rapids to witness Falabia become an American citizen. After earning American citizenship, Falabia wanted to invite her elderly father, who still lived in Khartoum, to join the family in Michigan. Sadly, Falabia's father passed away of natural causes in March, 2007, before Falabia could bring him to the U.S.

The Children

Many of Falabia's children went by both their Sudanese and Christian names, unlike other children in the study. Falabia reported that her own traditional name was Omjima, which means "born on Friday." Julia and Godfrey often were called Tuna and Mangisto, their respective Sudanese names. Emmanuel was less commonly referred to as Ichalang, while Juana and Diana were always called by their Christian names. When I asked about Juana's Sudanese name, Falabia claimed that she could not even remember it. She reported that Boronika knew the name, but "I just call Juana Juana." Falabia said the same thing about Diana: "My mom knows. I always call her Diana, because she born here." All of the older children were born in Sudan, she explained, except for Juana, who was born in Egypt and who "has Egyptian passport and birth certificate."

Juana

Juana, an energetic and social child, clearly enjoyed spending time with her siblings. She adored her brothers and frequently emulated their rambunctious behavior, much to the frustration of Golda, who often had responsibility for caring for the children. Juana, the next-to-youngest child in the family, took her role as "big sister" to Diana seriously. She frequently talked about taking care of Diana, and she often squirreled away little treasures—a book from the library or a sticker from school—that she could bring

home to her "baby sister". As I will describe in Chapter 8, Juana also saw herself as a teacher for Diana.

Juana, like Samuel in Viola's family, was ambivalent about her Sudanese heritage. She almost never spoke Arabic at home. In fact, I even overheard her telling the older children that she did not understand some words when they spoke in Arabic. Juana also had ambivalent feelings about Africa in general. After a Black History Month presentation at the children's school, she told her mother about the "Africa people" who came to the school "to dance and sing." When Falabia asked from what country the performers had come, Juana replied matter-of-factly, "Africa." Falabia laughed and explained Africa has many countries, naming a few. Juana said, "They live in one of the ones where they got TV that they can watch." Falabia replied, "We got TV also in Sudan". On another occasion when Juana and I had visited the public library together, I had found an ABC book that described different aspects of African culture. "Is that book about Africa?" Juana asked. When I confirmed that it was, she wondered, "Why are you reading that?" To my suggestion that the book was "cool", Juana replied, "No it's not. It's poor. It's poor in Africa. They don't have no food to eat in Africa."

In contrast with her feelings about her African heritage, Juana had strong positive feelings about American culture. Like children the other Sudanese families in this study, Juana and her siblings watched a great deal of television. She particularly liked watching the Disney Channel. She idolized the shows' characters, such as Hannah Montana or Lizzie McGuire, and other popular actors like Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen. Her first-grade teacher laughingly told me that Juana kept the rest of the class informed about fashion and hairstyles. Juana, therefore, was very much a part of girl-oriented American

pop culture.

At home, she often bounced from activity to activity—horsing around with her brothers, sometimes settling to watch TV, or vying with her siblings and cousins to play Internet games on the family's computer. Because of the importance of sibling relationships in her life, I often thought of Juana as the "Kid Sister" among the focal children.

The Library

Golda, Chris, and Julia all had American tutors and mentors who helped them with their schoolwork, often at the Lansing Public Library. Because I also entered the family's home partially in the capacity of academic tutor, Juana and her brothers believed that going to the library should be part of my relationship with them, as well. I frequently chauffeured Juana, Godfrey, Emmanuel, and sometimes Chris to the downtown library, where the children raced to sign up to use the computers. Juana was the only one who ever wanted to look at books when we went to the library (see Figure 3.5), and this only occurred occasionally. Juana, who expressed interest in the library's books, rarely engaged with them for long, instead flitting from book to book and sampling them only momentarily. She engaged longer with books if I read them aloud to her, but she often rejected my offers to do so—the allure of the computers, the many games and puzzles, and the other children who congregated at the library was too strong.

Figure 3.5: Juana at the library



Juana's Academic Achievement

Juana's energetic, social nature carried over into her academic life. At school, she was a social butterfly whom her teacher described as "a chatterbox." Academically, Juana was about average in her first grade classroom, although her levels of literacy and mathematics development were rather behind where they should have been, compared with national norms. As Juana's teacher noted, however, the same was true of the majority of children in that classroom. At the end of first grade, Juana, like many of her classmates, was only reading at an early first-grade level, most likely due to the fact that the teacher had taken maternity leave during the middle of the year, and the class had been taught by several different substitute teachers. As she was at home and at the public library, Juana was highly social at school. During whole-group activities when the class was seated on the floor, Juana often got in trouble for chatting or playing with her neighbor's hair. During the morning's literacy center rotations, Juana often wandered around the room, requested to go to the bathroom, get a drink of water, or otherwise

found ways to be distracted from whatever activity she was supposed to be doing during that time. She did not enjoy the academic aspects of school—for Juana, the appeal of school seemed to be that it provided a space where she could socialize with her peers. As I will describe in Chapter 8, however, some of Juana's apparently off-task behavior involved helping her classmates with their academic work.

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Viola's, Akhlas' and Falabia's families are similar in some ways, and different in others. All of the parents experienced formal education, but to differing degrees. All experienced hardships in Sudan, but in different ways. One experience all of the families share is that of coming to the U.S. and adjusting to a new language, a new culture, a new school system, and new ways of practicing literacy. The families' experiences in Sudan shaped their language and literacy practices, and the knowledge that these refugees brought to the U.S. about literacy and about texts. In Chapter 4, therefore, I describe the parents' literacy and educational experiences in Sudan.
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Chapter 4

"Reading and Writing is so Important for Everybody": Parents' Literacy Practices in Sudan and Michigan

For me, reading and writing is so important for everybody. That will help you to get a good life, and get a good job, and can help us to help our kids to grow. We get good knowledge, and also we cannot ask someone to come write for us or read for us. We will know everything, and also we know our rights. We will know our duty to these. And in my country, reading and writing is important also because without reading and writing, that mean you are nothing. You cannot do anything. You cannot develop your life. And that's the reason everyone [who] come from Africa need to know how to read and need to know how to write. And here, we also try to do that same thing, because we need to get better job and we need to make communication with the people—with American people here. And also we can make our kids also [follow same] things that we do before.

~~Viola

Like Viola, the other Sudanese parents reported that literacy played an important role in their lives. What was this role? Why, and how, did these parents engage with reading, writing, and texts in their lives? As Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest, literacy is integral to the context in which it is practiced, and we cannot understand literacy practices without understanding the contexts that have shaped them. In order to understand how refugee families practiced literacy, particularly how they negotiated and participated in the literacy practices of the United States, it is important to understand the literacy contexts the parents experienced before they arrived in Michigan. Contexts

shaped the ways in which parents grew up reading and writing different texts for various purposes in their lives, as they became fully-fledged members of a particular community of literacy practice that included "a variety of tacit and taken-for-granted values, norms, cultural models and narratives" (Gee, 1998, p. 186). Barton and Hamilton (1998) emphasize that different literacies are associated with different domains of life, and, importantly, literacy domains vary according to culture. The Sudanese adults reported to me that they experienced many texts and literacy practices before coming to the U.S. They also encountered new texts and practices when they resettled in Michigan. Similarities and differences in texts and practices across both contexts illustrate the fluid, dynamic and changing nature of literacy practices—and their inseparability from those contexts. Although texts and their associated practices may have changed according to context, several themes nevertheless thread themselves throughout both settings. One theme is the centrality of formal schooling—in the classroom, at home, and in the community—in shaping many literacy practices in both Michigan and the Sudan. Religion and community life also connected closely to literacy in the Sudanese community.

Understanding Sudanese families' literacy experiences and environments also is important from an emergent literacy perspective. Literacy develops within a sociocultural context, both in and out of school (Clay, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). In their everyday lives, children observe and engage in activities that are mediated by print, and their participation facilitates literacy development. Because families and contexts differ, children necessarily observe and experience texts that are read and written for differing purposes.

Thus, Viola, Akhlas, Falabia and their husbands became literate within specific literacy environments that differed from each other and also differed from those found in the U.S. When they migrated to the U.S., they carried many of these texts and practices with them.

Michigan presented Sudanese adults in this study with a brand-new literacy environment, complete with a new language, new texts, and new practices. And, because literacy practices are dynamic and shaped by context, the parents reported that they adopted and adapted many of new genres and practices when they resettled in Michigan—often with the help of literacy brokers. These refugee families therefore created new literacy contexts that shaped emergent literacy development of their own children, contexts that combined elements of their own Sudanese literacy experiences with the contexts and practices of the U.S.

Parents' Experiences with Formal Schooling in Sudan

The parents in each of the three Sudanese families reported that they had experiences with formal schooling, although amounts of schooling differed from family to family. They all attended elementary schools, some attended high school, and some attended and/or completed post-secondary education. Some attended government-run public schools, while others had the opportunity (and the funding) to attend private schools. African nations, on average, have the highest pupil-to-teacher ratios in the world (UNESCO, 2005). Public schools can be very crowded, with many students crammed into a small space (Deng, 2003; Metz, 1991). The parents in this study confirmed that Sudan was no different. "Every school, every class have like fifty students," Viola explained. As the daughter of a government minister, however, her family could afford to send her to private schools: "We go to the private school that time," she said. "The

private school, the people will be like twenty-five, half."

The Cost of School: "If You Don't Have Money..."

Although Sudan's government has set a goal of universal free primary education by 2015 (Deng, 2003), many of the country's schools charge fees for students to attend school (Mayom, 2006). Even university costs vary. Metz (1991) noted that only the University of Khartoum was completely free for students, covering tuition, room and board, and other fees. Other national universities waived tuition, but students had to provide for their own living expenses. Corruption also posed a problem in the education system, as administrators and teachers demanded unofficial fees or bribes (Mayom, 2006).

Viola, Akhlas, and Falabia's reported different experiences regarding the costs of education in Sudan. Akhlas explained that schools were costly for her family. "It's expensive," she said, "You know, my brother, he called me, 'I want to go back to school!' He need money. Yes, every year, you pay money...*Lots* of money. When you don't have money, you can't go." Falabia, in contrast, noted that her schooling had been free, at least before the war started: "After the war broke up [out], then everything changed. From grade school to high school until you graduate—free...But the university, you have to pay money." In Viola's experience, though, university fees often were covered by the government, at least until the beginning of the war:

> You don't have university that you have to pay...This if you smart...They will give you a scholarship, like they give me to Egypt. And if there trouble between the government, they will cut the scholarship. That what happen with me. They cut the scholarship for...the students, and Isbon go work to pay my scholarship.

Falabia also suggested that the educational system had changed a great deal since the Islamic regime took over in Sudan. Scholars have noted that Sudan's civil wars exacerbated already existing inequalities in schooling for Northerners and Southerners (Deng, 2003), and Falabia's report suggests that these inequalities also appeared in the educational system. Often, she explained, school administrators demanded that Southerners pay in order to attend school:

> For the high school sometimes, they don't [make] us pay, but they don't let us be in the government schools. They say, "The school is full, you have to have this, you have to have this," and that means money. To have this, you have to pay...They just lock the door for us. Yeah. They don't say like, "We don't want you," or what. They just say, "Go bring that. If you want your son to be in this school, bring that [item]." If you go there to bring that thing that they need, you have to pay a lot of money, so if you don't have money, so your child is not going to be in school.

While these differences of reported experience may seem difficult to reconcile, it is important to remember that Viola, Akhlas, and Falabia represented very different backgrounds. As daughters of high-ranking government and military officials, Falabia and Viola had access to privileges that were not available to Akhlas. In addition, there may have been a generational shift: At 26, Akhlas had primarily grown up during the war, while Falabia and Viola, 10 and 16 years older than Akhlas respectively, had completed the majority of their schooling before the war. In addition, Deng (2003) noted that the "education system has been a key tool used by the northern ruling elite for perpetuating socio-economic and political marginalisation of the majority rural

communities and southern Sudanese in particular" (p. 2). Schools, and educational experiences, varied widely throughout Sudan, and not all children were afforded the same opportunities (Deng, 2003; Metz, 1991).

"We Have a Special Situation at Home": Family Support for Education

During interviews and conversations with me, the three women indicated different levels of family support for their studies when they were children. Viola, for example, earned a scholarship. Her parents and siblings also offered a great deal of support for her education. Viola's father was working on his master's degree at the same time as Viola was graduating from 7th grade. Her family invested a great deal in supporting Viola, her father, and another brother who was facing important high school exams:

> You know, my father graduate when I was in the primary last class. He have a, he have a hard test. My brother who died, he in high school. He have test, too...Three of us sit together, till morning. We study. And uh, he tried to help me, I tried to help him, like that, you know...We have a special situation at home. They have to prepare everything for us, the three of us. They have to leave a room for us, they have to clean the clothes for us, like that, till the year is finished...Anyone want to finish high school, finish the university, they give you special situation at home...Even [if] you work part-time there or something like that, they stop you. They pay everything for you. Yeah, and that's what happen. In my country, you don't have to study and work...They don't allow you to work...This the *best* thing! Even they have money or not, they have to work hard to let you graduate. Never, ever ask you to do work.

Once she attended high school, however, Viola's life changed. She went away to

boarding school, where she stayed in a hostel and had to do everything for herself, like cooking and "washing her dress." She only was able to see her family once a year.

Akhlas and Falabia, in contrast, reported receiving much less support from their families than Viola. "They not help," Akhlas explained, "Everybody's busy. You know, [in] my country, like when you go to school, they not care about how they help you. You must do everything yourself." Akhlas and Falabia's own parents' levels of education probably played a role in the types of support they received at home. Falabia's mother, for example, was not literate, and she could not help Falabia with her homework. Her father, the military officer, was well-educated, but Falabia explained that he was often too occupied with his own work to help her: "He was busy. He had to travel everywhere...every month." Akhlas' parents likewise could offer little support. These women nevertheless recounted that they found ways to get help when it was needed. As Akhlas explained to me, "You can ask somebody [who] know how to read and write. He will help you." Akhlas occasionally asked her teachers for extra help, but she more often relied upon her older siblings. "When you have your brother or sister is in 7th grade or something like this and you are three or four grade, he will help you a lot," she explained, "because he know more than you." Falabia, the baby of her family, also noted that she turned primarily to older siblings when she required homework help.

Many of these family influences carried over to the U.S., as Boni, Samuel, Juana, Remaz, and their siblings began attending schools in Michigan. Often, these parents made comments that showed how highly they valued education—in fact, all of them commented that providing a good education for their children was a major impetus for

coming to the U.S.[1] However, they were able to offer different types of support to their children for various reasons, including their own English abilities and work schedules.

Literacy in Sudanese Schools: "You Got to Read"

Literacy practices in Sudanese schools were fairly traditional, the parents reported to me. Testing and exams played an important role in shaping the literacy practices in the classroom. Students were formally tested three times a year, Falabia explained, and "you got to read, to study. If you don't study, it's hard." Sudanese students had textbooks available to them, and the parents reported regularly copying the teacher's notes off the blackboard and using them to prepare for yearly exams. "They used the blackboard," Falabia said. "We do have books, too. If you go home, you gonna follow in the textbook." Homework often consisted of reading textbooks and completing required exercises, as Falabia explained: "Like in reading, they gonna say, 'Read chapter whatever, then do the exercise and bring it tomorrow.'"

Akhlas also reported that students spent a lot of time writing in notebooks in schools in Sudan:

> You buy the notebook because you have a lot of stuff you want to do. Maybe today, I will write like for seven, seven notebooks, different stuff today. By this hour you write by this thing, and next hour, teacher she will come, different teacher. You do different things. You must have like seven or six, something you write every day.

In terms of post-secondary education, Viola and Falabia both indicated to me that they spent a great deal of time studying from textbooks. Falabia read a variety of books

[1] Palladino (2007) notes that improved educational opportunities, especially for girls, is often a greater rationale for refugees' migration than is seeking the relative freedoms that the U.S. offers in comparison to home countries.

when she studied to become a nurse:

> You had to read the books, yeah, like kids and how you gonna take care of the small babies or adults, or people who have asthma, or people who have like diarrhea. You have to read all those books. And people who have like diabetics. The diabetics people, they always have big [sores]...how you gonna clean that, what you gonna use.

Falabia's nursing textbooks were "all in Arabic, but the medicine names are in English, but they write it in Arabic. Like 'penicillin', but they write it in Arabic." As a result, Falabia explained that she already knew the names of many medications when she came to the U.S.

Schools in Sudan, the parents recounted, used corporal punishment as a primary method of classroom management and discipline. Viola and the other parents remembered this method of discipline in relationship to learning how to read and write. Viola explained that her teacher had showed her a different way to hold a pencil because she is left-handed. She demonstrated this by weaving a pencil between her fingers in a way that looked truly uncomfortable. When she had made mistakes, she added, teachers would take a match and burn her fingers. According to Viola, Sudanese teachers beat students in all grades, even in high school. She added that middle-class families often made their kids work hard and study at home, too. She said that kids often were afraid to go to school because they did not want to get beaten. Viola herself talked about sometimes feeling physically ill in the mornings before school.

Religion in the Schools: "I Read Islamic Stuff"

Although Sudan had public and private schools, both types of schools included

religion in the daily curriculum, as the parents explained during interviews. After the Islamic government took power in Sudan, all government schools were required to teach Islam (Embassy of the Republic of Sudan in South Africa, 2006; Metz, 1991; Yongo-Bure, 2006). And, because Islamic religion was part of the mandatory yearly exams, all students had to pass religion in order to advance to the next grade. Thus, parents reported that reading the Koran and other Islamic texts was an important school literacy practice. As Akhlas noted, Christian students were not comfortable with this:

> It's not [a] Christian school. Even I, I read Islam. You know, in my country, because it's a government school, a lot of people, they are Muslim, but not Christian. Um, you know, because we are a lot of Christians, after that we tell the teachers, "We are Christian, and we read Islam stuff! How you can—you must bring us a teacher for ... Christians. We cannot read Islam stuff." *Five years*, I read Islamic stuff in school. When you are not read[ing] this, you cannot pass your school. That's why I read. I read and writing and everything. After that, because a lot of Christian people in this school, they brought teacher. Yeah, we can—every day, we read the Christian things. They teach us the Bible after that.

Viola explained to me that her experience was somewhat different. In her school, Christian students left the classroom during Islamic instruction, and they took Bible study on the weekends. In addition, because many of the church leaders came from around the world, Viola had exposure to English texts through her weekly Bible study:

> Because all the schools, they used Islamic, and for us, we are Christian. We have to go Sunday evening to have Bible study, and even the exam they bring from the church...they translate to Arabic, and they will give us the same time with the

other students. They have Islamic, and we have Christian. And what happened same time, and they will give us the grade, they will grade us, because they don't have teacher for kids who their parents are Christian...And if they—[if it is] time for the religion, if I am a Christian, I have to go out. I stay out for one hour, and they stay inside. And the religion is so important. Here, they don't teach you in the school. Like, my kids, they don't have something they call religion, but in Sudan, you have to take that. That's the reason we see English for the first time.

Languages in the Schools: "I Go with Arabic"

Although the medium of instruction in most Sudanese schools was Arabic, the parents reported that some schools—particularly those run by Christian missions—used English. In some of Arabic-medium schools, particularly in Southern Sudan, students studied English as an academic subject (Metz, 1991). For example, Viola and Isbon both described reading *King Solomon's Mines*, a novel about South African history in school. Isbon, however, described the English classes as difficult:

> Like in my school, I go with Arabic. It's a school with Arabic, you see. Primary school, I go with Arabic. Junior, I go with Arabic. High school, I go with Arabic...You have one class for English...Sometimes, the people, when the class English coming, these people do not understand. These people sometimes go outside, leave three people, two people...Out the people go...When the teacher come, the teacher find maybe one boy there.

Isbon also noted that students felt these required English classes were irrelevant given the Sudanese context. "I go outside [skipped class], because it's hard," he explained. "When I come back, my father say, 'Why you didn't know English?' I said, 'If I know English,

I'm gonna speak to who?'"

As a result of their school experiences, the Sudanese parents in this study were fully literate in Arabic. In addition, some reported exposure to English through their coursework. As they explained during interviews and other conversations we had about school, the parents also were familiar with traditional school texts and literacy practices. They read textbooks, took notes, and prepared for important yearly exams. However, they also reported participating in a broad variety of literacy practices outside of school, as I will describe in the following section.

Family and Community Literacy Practices in Sudan

Akhlas, Falabia, Viola and Isbon described different community literacy environments in Sudan. As they explained, these out-of-school literacy contexts varied according to different factors, such as the education levels of the parent's own family, or whether he or she lived in a rural or urban setting. All of the parents reported growing up in communities where people read and wrote for a variety of meaningful purposes. They recalled seeing people in their communities engaging in various literacy practices for many purposes related to everyday life, such as work, interpersonal communication, or community life. Religion—whether Islam or Christianity—shaped many prominent literacy practices in both urban and rural areas.

Akhlas, Viola, Falabia and Isbon spent many years living in large cities like Khartoum or Juba, the largest city in Southern Sudan. Some also reported maintaining connections with family in villages. Falabia, for example, visited her father's native village, where he owned land and cattle. Akhlas also lived with her grandmother for a time in a rural village in the Nuba Mountains, and Amin spent most of his childhood in

the Nuba Mountains, as well. Akhlas described rural Nuban villages as places where few people were literate, and where people tended to rely on oral language practices during daily life activities. When I asked Akhlas how people find out about news, she replied, "We hear in the radio...That is important in my country. When you have radio, you know anything. It's not like newspaper, because a lot of people, they not reading. They hear from the radio." In contrast with Akhlas, Falabia recalled, "For us, we see the news in the TV." In her family, Akhlas explained, oral storytelling played a more important role than reading:

> Just my mom, she liked to say stories... I *love* my mom! You know, like nighttime, we come together. In my country, I just—we have a big place, not like apartment, a *big* one. Nighttime, everybody here. My mom, she's sitting, and we sit round to her [*indicates a big gathering with arms*], and she say a story for us...Sooooo like to say stories, the loooong—all stories about the grandma and grandpa. Looong stories, she always liked to say. Just we listen to her. And we are *tired* because of it!

Although Falabia and Akhlas indicated that literacy played a minor role in some parts of Sudan, they nevertheless remembered observing and participating in many everyday literacy practices. Religious practices, work life, and interpersonal communication shaped many of these remembered literacy practices in their communities.

"They Know How to Read the Bible": Religious Literacies

Religion, all of the parents reported, played a prominent role in the literacy practices the parents engaged with as children or observed in their communities. "Back home, I don't think they're doing some reading in the community except the Bible,"

Falabia recalled. Similarly, Akhlas noted that her mother had never been to school, but "she know how to read my language. She liked to read Bible always." In fact, she explained that many people in her village could read the Bible, despite having never been formally taught to read in the local language. "Some people, they read Arabic," she reported, "And some people in my Nuba Mountains language." However, she commented that she was rather perplexed by this, because she did not know how these village adults had learned to read:

> From right now, I'm confused about how the old people they know how to read the Bible, because my country, they're not—I don't see they teach us Nuba Mountain language. But my mom, even she don't read [in Arabic], but she know how to read. I don't know...Now they teach us...But before, I don't know. I'll ask my mom...because I see old people—you see old lady, very old, she know how to read Nuba Mountain language. But how—they go to school or not, I don't know.

Although all three Sudanese mothers described the centrality of the Bible and religion in many community literacy practices, Akhlas spoke most about religious literacies, not only in relation to her community in Sudan, but also for herself: "In church, we read a lot of books, like the life story about Jesus and about another people, all people they talk in Bible, just like that. We have a program like this. We have to read in the church." She also described a game she played with her friends. They memorized passages from the New Testament and then quizzed each other:

> You know, when I am in my country, in the Bible I know how to say like uh the New—when Jesus he come, all of them—I know how to say in my mind. But

> now everything, how you say—Matthew, Luka, other people—I know *all* the numbers! When I [*seven*] I learned by mind...because I learning a lot, all the time...I learning, and we make first a, um, game to read fast. You pick from the Bible and you see fast...to remember in your mind every week. You come next week, and you keep in your mind. You have to keep it in your mind. When you come, [you] don't see it in the Bible, just you say it in your mind. Yeah, we do that...for fun, yeah. To know how to learn more in the Bible.

Akhlas also recalled participating in church choirs, which provided another important context for her religious literacy practices in Sudan—and one that she brought with her as she sojourned in Egypt and resettled in Michigan. She reported that people in her church used hymnals when they sang during church services:

> I have in my language...and in America, too, I sing. I am in choir. Even when I come in Egypt, I am in choir. Even I make book. We have a book of songs...we have many songs. I write many songs, because when we came refugees, we want to make like church song in my language...And when we come, people who know [how to] sing in my country, like I know how to sing in my country, I know a lot of songs. I write down, and some people write down, and we make big group.

This particular example shows the ways in which these participants carried some their literacy practices with them across contexts.

Work Literacy Practices

Viola and other Sudanese refugees also reported seeing their own parents engage with literacy for work purposes. Some of these literacy practices involved staying

informed about professional knowledge. Viola, who came from a family of educated professionals, indicated that adults in her family read a variety of professional texts:

> Everyone major in different things, and they—they don't just read what they major in. There's different books, you know, they need to know, they want to have experience before they have their jobs. That's the reason they read a lot of books.

Isbon similarly reported that his father read books, in English, related to his job as a wildlife and wilderness expert. Isbon's father read "agriculture, right. Like in the forest. My father, his English perfect, because he worked with the companies called [*Life*] Safaris." Other parents remembered literacy practices that were necessary for the daily operation of a business. Akhlas, for example, indicated that her parents did not need to read much for their jobs, but her mother often wrote lists of items she needed to buy for her business of selling tea in the market.

Literacy Practices in the Wider Community

Outside of their immediate families, the Sudanese parents in this study were immersed in a world that read and wrote texts for a variety of purposes. In urban areas like Khartoum and Juba, adults engaged in many literacy practices. The parents remembered that bookstores, libraries, and community centers all provided texts that people in the community could read. "There a lot of libraries," Viola reported, and with the bookstores, "You have to go buy, and the price is not high...You know, their books come from Middle East and come from different countries, Arabic countries." Because books came from Arabic-speaking countries, they typically were available in Arabic. However, Viola also noted that English texts were available in the markets in the South.

During interviews, the parents reported that many community literacy practices centered around helping children with schoolwork. For example, Viola described the libraries that were available in some towns, which sometimes offered tutoring services:

> They help you if you want to know something about history or different countries, like that. Because they have something, and you have to know about Egypt. You have to know about Nigeria, you know. The teachers in the school, they also—they want us to know, because those people live with us, and if they ask you, you have to answer. Sometimes people from Africa, they live Kenya, Uganda—they don't know anything about Sudan, but we know about them. Why, because we read history about them, and we always ask. That's the reason.

Local community centers also offered programs related to literacy and education. Parents in the community, Falabia explained, sometimes would take children to these centers: "Sometimes they help students with their homework, yeah, in the center...Like, I think like a church, but there is a, like a blackboard and chalk." Centers offered materials and programs in both Arabic and English, parents reported. However, Isbon indicated that attendance at libraries and centers may have varied by social class: "There some families, educated families. Some poor people, they don't care about that."

In addition to literacy practices supporting education, the parents recalled that many community literacy practices involved interpersonal communication. When I asked whether people in Sudan got mail or if there was a postal system, Falabia just laughed. She did explain to me, however, that letters sent by messenger were important methods of communication when she was a child, as most people did not have access to telephones. "They write letters a lot," she reported, for "communication, because we don't have

phones everywhere. But now, I heard that the phones are everywhere. You can call, yeah, but that time there is no phone."

Because Falabia and the other Sudanese parents I studied had grown up surrounded by meaningful texts and multiple literacy practices, they brought a great deal of literacy knowledge with them when they came to the United States. They continued to engage in many literacy practices that were familiar to them in Sudan, as Akhlas did when she continued to write down hymns and other songs to perform with her church choir. In addition, these Sudanese parents adopted new literacy practices that they encountered in the U.S., as they reported in interviews and as I observed during my visits.

Literacy Practices in the U.S.

As I described in Chapter 1, Viola, Isbon and other Sudanese parents sometimes relied upon literacy brokers to help them understand texts and literacy practices in the U.S. Yet, they appeared to successfully navigate U.S. textual worlds during the majority of their daily literacy events, and they only sought out brokers for a portion of the texts they encountered. I observed that Sudanese community members read and wrote a variety of types of texts, and for many different purposes in their lives. These Sudanese adults, like the participants in Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener's (2004) study of adult literacy, "began new genre practices, dropped old ones, and shifted back and forth among genres as their lives shifted and changed according to opportunities, responsibilities, and role changes" (p. 109). When they came to the U.S., Sudanese parents continued to read and write in Arabic, and they also began to engage in literacies in English. In addition, the U.S. presented them with opportunities to engage with digital literacies—a medium with which parents reported they had not been familiar in Sudan.

"Some Books in My Language": Arabic Literacies

I observed that Akhlas, Falabia and the other parents continued many Sudanese literacy practices. Because their literacy practices in Sudan had been almost entirely conducted in the Arabic language, many of their imported literacy practices also used Arabic texts. Arabic literacy practices tended to reflect the same life domains that had shaped the parents' literacy practices in Sudan.

Religion

Religion, I noted, continued to play a major role in Arabic-language literacy practices in the U.S. Some Sudanese families in Lansing attended churches where religious services, or parts of services, sometimes were conducted in Arabic. I attended several services, for example, that included readings from an Arabic-language Bible. Viola and Isbon reported that a relative in Egypt would "monthly send a newspaper about the church for us here." Akhlas, who had taught Sunday school in Egypt, also told me that she infused her religious faith into literacy activities with her children. "I have a big church book in my language," she explained. "I brought from Egypt." She shared the Bible with her children, teaching them "when God, He do everything. That's the only one I have in my language. I try to explain the first one that He do—He make world."

Personal Improvement

The parents in this study also reported reading Arabic texts in order to keep updated on professional knowledge or for self-improvement. Akhlas said that she read a variety of self-help texts in Arabic: "I try to read like the life books, like how to be great, like good mom. I try to—even me and my husband, how to be great or something like. We have some books in my language." Viola, who missed being able to practice law,

reported that she read Arabic law books for two reasons—to keep up-to-date on the legal profession, and also to keep her Arabic language and literacy skills honed:

> Actually I have law books. This is about the international law and about *sharia* law, because I want to know what is going on back in my country...I have to know everything, because maybe one day I will go back, and I will start work by Arabic. That means my Arabic supposed to be perfect.

Texts in the Community

In addition to reading Arabic texts for personal reasons, Sudanese adults in Lansing encountered Arabic-language texts in the community. Akhlas and Viola both explained that they preferred to shop at local stores that were owned by Somalis, Iraqis, Sudanese, and others who spoke Arabic. These stores sold many products labeled in both English and Arabic, or in Arabic exclusively (see Figure 4.1). "Arabic stores" supplied "a *lot* of stuff in Arabic...Like, milk in Arabic, cheese in Arabic," Akhlas explained. "And cereal in Arabic," piped in Remaz, who had been intently listening to her mother's explanation.

Figure 4.1: A yogurt container labeled in both English and Arabic.



In addition to food products, local shops also carried newspapers and other Arabic-language texts. "Weekly they have Arabic news," Viola said, "That talk about *all* the news in the world by Arabic. We have to get that." Isbon added, "You can know what's going on in Middle East." Akhlas, like Isbon and Viola, reported that she regularly read the Arabic newspapers to keep abreast of international news.

Arabic newspapers also provided important local information, some of the parents reported. Isbon and Viola explained that they relied upon the ads and other classifieds provided in the Arabic newspapers to look for jobs or locate Arabic-language services. Advertisements in the papers were "like the telephone book," according to Viola, where "you can find doctor from Arab, you can find *everything*—lawyer from Arab…Everything! Even housing." Viola, Akhlas, and Isbon all reported that Arabic newspapers were an important source of many types of information. "We read those magazines," Viola explained, "because we can know what is going on."

Writing in Arabic

In addition to reading a variety of Arabic texts, Sudanese community members also wrote in Arabic for different purposes. I observed, and they confirmed during interviews, that they wrote in Arabic when they needed to create notes, lists, or other record-keeping items for themselves. Akhlas and Falabia both reported that they wrote shopping lists in Arabic, for example. Late in the spring of 2006, Viola's car broke down on her way to work. She left the car on the side of the highway, and I later drove Isbon to check out the damage. He pulled a small piece of paper from his wallet. On this paper, I noticed that he had written contact information in Arabic, and he consulted this in order to call an Iraqi friend who was a mechanic. Another time, I watched Viola jot notes to herself in Arabic on a piece of scratch paper. When I questioned her about the notes, she explained that she had been trying to recall the dates of her attendance at Ain Shams University so that she could request a transcript.

Participation in Sudanese community events also appeared to prompt some Arabic writing events. In April, 2006, for example, Akhla attended a regional meeting of people from the Nuba Mountains. She told me that she had been elected the secretary for that group, and she had written notes from the meeting in Arabic on some looseleaf paper. After she returned from the meeting, I saw her neatly recopying her Arabic minutes, "the things we talked about," into a spiral notebook.

Sudanese refugees, I observed, imported many Arabic literacy practices when they resettled in the U.S. Many imported practices occurred around church and community contexts—places where others spoke Arabic, and where Arabic-language texts were available. Akhlas, Viola, and Falabia and the other parents never sought

literacy brokering for these Arabic texts, probably because they spoke, read, and wrote in this language, and probably because they continued to engage in literacy practices that were very familiar to them. However, the Sudanese adults also engaged in many English-language literacy practices. Although they sought brokering for some texts and practices they encountered in Michigan, I observed that they read and wrote many texts without seeking the help of a broker.

English Literacies

Although the three Sudanese families had access to many Arabic-language texts, they lived in a predominantly English-speaking world in Michigan. As a result, they engaged in a variety of literacy practices in English with many different types of genres. The parents requested brokering help for some genres they encountered, but not all. Table 4.1 compares English-language genres that parents read and wrote in the U.S. with those for which they sought brokering. These genres represent both those that participants reported reading and writing, as well as those that I observed them reading and writing.

Table 4.1: Parents' textual worlds in Michigan—texts parents read and wrote compared with those for which they sought brokering.

Genres Akhlas Read/Wrote	**Genres Brokered for Akhlas**
Activity/word puzzle, magazine	Activity/word puzzle, worksheet (Crossword puzzle)
Activity/word puzzle, worksheet (Crossword puzzle)	Application form
Advertisement, newspaper	Bible
Alphabet letters	Computer interface text
Application, form	Dress pattern
Bible	Newsletter
Caption, TV	Official letter
Computer interface text	Order form
Computer login text	Package text, magazine
Contact information, address book	Public notice/announcement, flyer
Copy text	Survey, form
Definition	Test review, list

Table 4.1 (cont'd).

Dictionary Dress pattern Form-filling text Greeting card Homework, unknown Homework, worksheet Information text, pamphlet Invitation Item list Job Evaluation Journal Keep book Label Lyrics Minutes Name News story, newspaper Newsletter Notes Number, phone card Official letter Official status text Order, form Package text, food Package text, magazine Pattern book Personal letter Picture story book Price tag Public notice/announcement, flyer Puzzle/game, workbook Receipt Record-keeping list Self-help text, book Signature Survey, form Teacher note Test review, list Timecard Unknown, book Unknown, form Unknown, newspaper Webpage Workbook	Webpage Workbook

Table 4.1 (cont'd).

Worksheet Worksheet-filling text	
Genres Amin Read/Wrote Application, form Bill Caption Computer interface text Consent, form Copy text Form-filling text Homework, unknown Information form Manual Official letter Official status text Package text, magazine Personal letter Program Schedule Signature Textbook Unknown, mail Webpage Workbook Worksheet Worksheet-filling text	**Genres Brokered for Amin** Application, form Computer interface text Consent, form Information form Official letter Package text, magazine Webpage
Genres Falabia Read/Wrote Application, form Bible Caption Catalogue, course online Computer interface text Contact information, address book Coupon Dictionary Directional signs Directions Exam Exam/question answers Form-filling text Greeting card Information text, book Invitation Item list	**Genres Brokered for Falabia** Application, form Catalogue, course online Coupon Directions Job evaluation Official letter Resume Test review, list Webpage

Table 4.1 (cont'd).

Job Evaluation Journal Lecture notes Lyrics Official letter Official status text, certificate Personal letter, email Phone number Picture story book Program Public notice/announcement, flyer Receipt Report card Research report Resume Schedule, online Signature Speech notes Survey, form Teacher note Test review, list Textbook Transcript URL Webpage Webpage, printout Workbook Worksheet-filling text	
Genres Isbon Read/Wrote Advertisement, newspaper Application, form Bible Business letter Calendar entry Contact information, business card Coupon Employment posting, newspaper Employment posting, online Exam/question answer Form-filling text Incident report Information note, pager Information form Item list	**Genres Brokered for Isbon** Application, form Official letter Personal letter Promotional text, mail

Table 4.1 (cont'd).

Journal Name News story, magazine News story, newspaper Newsletter Official letter Personal letter Personal letter, email Promotional ad Promotional text, mail Schedule Unknown, magazine Unknown, mail Unknown, newspaper	
Genres Viola Read/Wrote	**Genres Brokered for Viola**
Advertisement, newspaper Alphabet letters Application, form Bank check Banner Bible Budget Business letter Business letter, email Calendar entries Caption, TV Citation, ticket Commemorative card Computer interface text Computer login text Consent, form Contact information, address book Contact information, business card Contact information, notebook Contact information, sticky note Copy text Coupons Date Declaration, Sticker Dictionary Directions Employment posting Employment posting, flyer Employment posting, online	Application, form Bank check Banner Computer interface text Consent, form Directions Employment posting, online Exam result Homework, worksheet Information form Information note Invitation Invitation, flyer Label Official letter Order, form Personal letter Phone book Promotional text, mail Public notice/announcement, flyer Receipt Reference letter Resume Teacher note URL Webpage Webpage, printout Worksheet

Table 4.1 (cont'd).

Evaluation, form	
Exam	
Exam result	
Exam/question answer	
Form-filling text	
Form-filling text, online	
Glossary, book	
Greeting card	
Homework, worksheet	
Information form	
Information note	
Information text, book	
Information text, handout	
Information text, pamphlet	
Information text, TV	
Inspirational text, keychain	
Invitation	
Invitation, flyer	
Item list	
Journal	
Label	
Labeling sign	
Lecture notes	
Map	
Medication label	
Membership card	
Name	
News story, newspaper	
Newsletter	
Notes	
Novel, book	
Official letter	
Official status identification	
Official status identification, card	
Official status text, certificate	
Official status text	
Order, form	
Package text, books	
Package text, food	
Package text, homework folder	
Package text, objects	
Personal letter	
Phone book	
Phone number	
Picture story book	
Promotional ad	

Table 4.1 (cont'd).

Promotional text, mail Public notice/announcement, flyer Public notice/announcement, sign Puzzle/game, electronic Receipt Record-keeping list Reference letter Regulatory sign Religious pamphlet Report card Resume Schedule Self-help text, book Signature Spelling list Survey, form Teacher note Test review, list Textbook Transcript Unknown Unknown, magazine Unknown, mail Unknown, newspaper URL Webpage Webpage, printout Word Worksheet Worksheet-filling text	

Mothers' and Fathers' Literacy Practices

Table 4.1 suggests that Viola, Falabia and the other parents read and wrote a great variety of genres in Michigan, but they only requested brokering help for a portion of those genres. Figure 4.2 illustrates the percentage of texts brokered for each parent. The data in these tables come from both observation of literacy events and participants' own reports of the reading and writing they did with different texts.

Figure 4.2: The percentage of genres brokered for each parent.

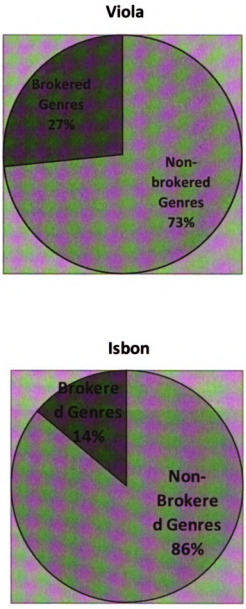
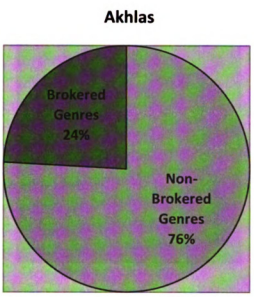


Figure 4.2 (cont'd).



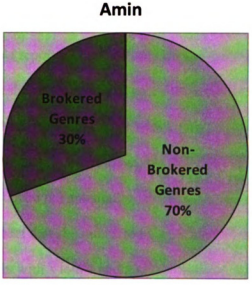
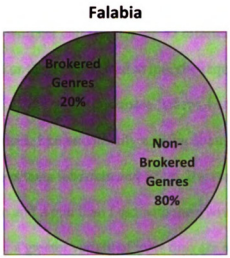


Figure 4.2 (cont'd).



Among the parents, I observed Viola reading and writing the greatest variety of texts. I counted 105 different genres Viola read and wrote. Among those genres, I observed (or Viola reported) that she only needed help with 28 genres, or about 27%. This indicates that she understood and was able to use the vast majority of genres that crossed her path. Akhlas, who reported or who I observed reading and writing 58 genres, sought brokering assistance for 14 of these, roughly 24%. Although observational and interview data contained documentation of a total of 45 texts that Falabia read and wrote in Michigan, I suspect that she interacted with a greater variety of genres on a regular basis. Unlike my visits with Viola's and Akhlas' families, Falabia often was away from home when I arrived for my observations. As a result, I had fewer opportunities to observe her literacy activities than I did with the other mothers. Falabia's work schedule fluctuated a great deal, and she often attended evening classes at Davenport University or Lansing

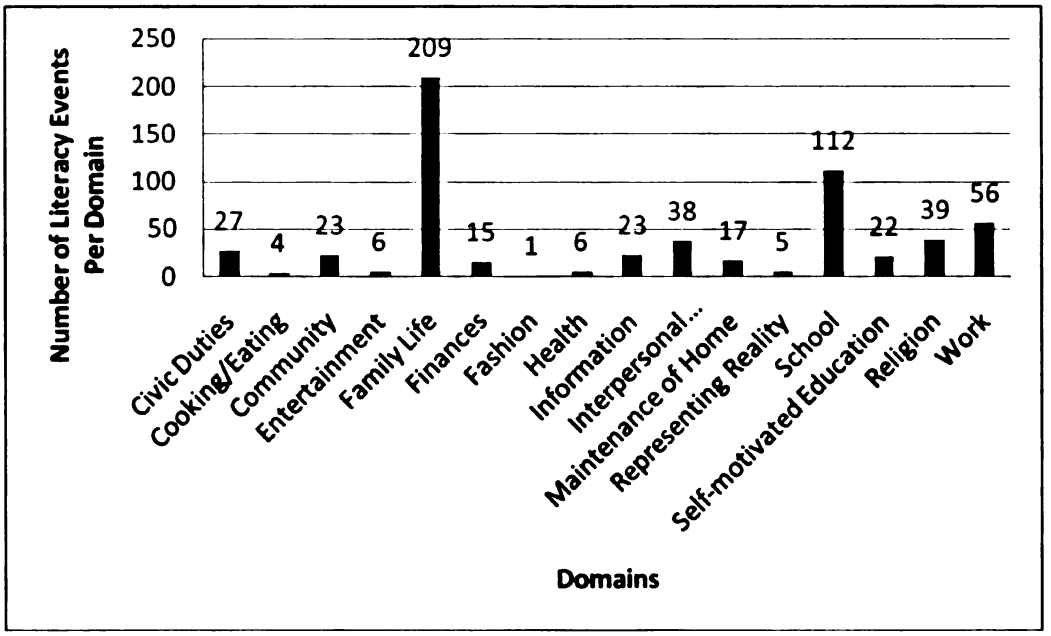
Community College (LCC). Even when she was home during my visits, Falabia often took the opportunity to retreat to her bedroom to study for her own courses, while I spent time with her children. Of the 45 different types of genres that I observed Falabia engage with, or that she reported to me, she requested brokering for 9, or approximately 20%.

Among the Sudanese fathers, I was able to best learn about Isbon's literacy practices. I know virtually nothing about Primo's literacy practices. Therefore, I will only discuss texts for Amin and Isbon. Because I had fewer opportunities to interact with Isbon and Amin than I did with their wives and children, I suspect that both men read and wrote a greater variety of texts than are represented in Table 4.1. Nevertheless, based upon the available data, I suspect that these texts represent texts the men regularly encountered. Isbon sought brokering assistance for 4 texts out of 29, or 14%, that I observed him reading or writing, or that he reported doing. Similarly, my observations and interviews documented Amin reading or writing 29 texts in his daily life, and he sought brokering for 7 of those texts, or 30%—a greater percentage of brokered texts than any other parent in this study. Although I have more limited data for Amin in comparison with other parents, based upon the available data, I concluded that the greater percentage of brokered texts is representative of the differences among the parents in general. In comparison with Akhlas, Falabia, Viola or Isbon, Amin was still very early in his process of learning to speak, read, and write English. His greater percentage of brokered texts most likely reflects his more limited understanding of the English language.

The texts in Table 4.1 reflect several different purposes the parents held for reading and writing across different life domains, including religion, their own continuing

education, family life, work, interpersonal communication, and their citizenship or residency statuses in the U.S. Figure 4.3 illustrates the various domains represented in observations and interviews with the parents, and the relative number of literacy events within each domain, for these Sudanese parents in the U.S. In the following sections, I describe the parents' literacy practices within some of these domains in more detail.

Figure 4.3. Reading and writing done in different social activity domains across participants.



Religion: "They Will Read it and They Will Pray for You"

As the Sudanese parents spent more time in the U.S., they reported that their religious literacy practices increasingly centered around English texts. These parents continued to read the Bible in Arabic, but, because their churches had multi-lingual or predominantly English-speaking congregations, many of their church literacy practices took place in English. I observed, for example, that the church's pastors, whether Sudanese or American, consulted their notes as they offered sermons in English. At

different services I attended, community members participated in church services by reading passages aloud from the Bible, and they sometimes followed along while singing songs from the hymnal. Congregants also had to read a number of different documents in English, Viola reported, such as the church bulletin. One Sunday before Christmas, I accompanied Akhlas and her family to church. She showed me a sign-in form she used when dropping off Remaz and Remon for Sunday school. Another common church literacy practice involved prayer requests. The parents all reported requesting prayers from their pastors or church congregations, which they wrote in English. Viola explained,

> I have to write down if I have something I want them to pray for me, I have to write during the mass, during the service, I have to write down what I want. They have blue cards. You have to write the prayer, and then they will read it and they will pray for you.

I often observed Akhlas and the other parents engaging in many English religious literacy practices outside of church. They read newsletters, church directories, and other relevant texts. On one of my visits, Akhlas showed me an invitation from her church. The invitation, embossed with "Royal Ambassadors of Christ", was for an event to honor youth club volunteers.

Especially active in her church community, Viola reported that she took on many leadership roles requiring her to read and write in English. She belonged to a women's group, that "meet every month, once, and we have to write the—we have ideas. We have to write all the ideas and we have to do something...We write stuff down, what we do." For example, the group organized a Sudanese cultural festival. The church's secretary, an American, also led a reading group comprised of Sudanese, American, and Cuban

women, which Viola invited me to attend with her. Together, the women read Rick Warren's *40 Days of Community* (Warren, 2004) and, at the meeting I attended, they devised a plan for improving the church and helping to reach out to the local community. Viola's participation also extended beyond her local church community. As she explained,

> I read the newspaper of the church because I'm one of the members of the Lutheran Women—Lutheran International Women's Group ...through these magazines we can know what is going on and also we can give them some ideas to my church. That is the reason I have to read them.

Education: "You Have to Use English Dictionary"

Sudanese community members in Lansing felt strongly about furthering their own education (Perry, 2007b), and these parents were no exception. I have already described Akhlas' ESL courses at her workplace, and Viola's efforts to apply to law school. In addition, Falabia, Primo, and Viola all took classes at the local community college, while Amin enrolled in a combined ESL and GED course. They sometimes requested brokering with school texts, as I will demonstrate in later chapters of this book, but they also successfully read and wrote the majority of the texts for their courses. I often observed the parents as they completed their homework or read various texts, and they also reported reading textbooks, handouts, dictionaries, workbooks, worksheets, lecture notes, webpages, emails, exam questions, transcripts, and course catalogues. They took notes in class; responded to worksheets or workbooks; filled in forms; and composed emails.

Because English was the language of instruction, these Sudanese adults reported used English almost exclusively for school purposes. "They don't teach us over there [in]

Arabic," Falabia commented, "just English." She explained that she could have taken notes in Arabic, but Falabia recalled that she quickly forced herself to use English for all of her educational reading and writing. Although Falabia owned an Arabic-English dictionary, she explained that she began to exclusively use an English dictionary, upon the advice of another refugee friend:

> The first time, I was having problem because I was using Arabic dictionary, but I have problem. I used to have a problem. Then after that, there is a lady, she's from Rwanda. She was in my class in Lansing Community College, and she say, "You know what, Falabia? Don't use Arabic dictionary. You have to use English dictionary, then everything is going to be easy for you."

Apart from the usual reading and writing that she had to do for her English class, Akhlas also explained that she regularly filled out teaching evaluations for her ESL instructor:

> The teacher, every three weeks they send the papers. Did you like teacher? What's something new did you learning? Something like this. You do and you say something, you write—like, you want to do something, you write, "She's good and help a lot and now I know how to read and write."

Because Akhlas, Viola and Falabia all experienced formal schooling before coming to Michigan, they appeared to be quite familiar with most genres and literacy practices they encountered in American classrooms. Differences, in this case, occurred in language and access to digital technologies—major factors contributing to literacy brokering, as I will describe in Chapters 5-8.

Parenting: "Mama, Can You Help Me with this Book?"

Requirements of family life also shaped many (in fact, most) English-literacy practices I observed these Sudanese parents engaging with in the U.S., or those that they reported to me. Several practices revolved around raising children. The parents reported reading a variety of genres with their children, including homework, children's books, dictionaries, and text on the TV screen. As Falabia explained during one interview,

> I always read with them their books, their schoolbooks. Yeah, because if I read to them the magazine or another book that is higher from their level, they can't understand anything. So, I'm always reading to them their books...the ones from school. Sometimes the Bible.

Although I typically helped the children with their homework, their parents also provided homework assistance. Boni struggled in school, and I often watched as Viola gave him extra help. On one occasion, Boni lost his weekly spelling list. Viola called up the mother of one of Boni's classmates and asked her about the week's spelling words: "If you read it for me, I will write down." After jotting down the words, Viola helped Boni practice for an upcoming spelling test.

Formal schooling provided the context for some, but not all, parent-child literacy interactions. I often noted, for example, that Akhlas' children liked to read for fun, and she seemed to want to accommodate this desire in her children. Remon, who had a stash of children's books in his bedroom, often scampered off to fetch something to read with his mother. She indicated, however, that reading could be difficult for her, given her still-developing English literacy skills: "Sometimes Remaz she have a book. She says, 'Mama, can you come help me with this book?' I try to read to her, but she's good now. She know how to read [by herself]."

Viola reported reading other, less traditional, genres with her children. "We have some, some movies. They put translations, they write," Viola explained, "[The children] ask me what that is, and we have to read...African movies, American movies also. Also, the African movies, they ask 'what's that?' You have to read to them." Boni and Samuel seemed especially interested in informational texts. In an interesting twist on a bedtime reading routine, Viola told me on several occasions that the boys liked to have her read from a children's dictionary before they went to sleep. The dictionary had pictures of animals and other things, she said, and "they want me to say their name." Boni particularly liked maps, and Viola talked about looking at maps together with him. She described one particular incident, a Sudanese community member died in a car accident: Viola had told Boni that the man would be buried in Oregon. Boni wondered were Oregon was, and Viola showed him Oregon and Michigan on the map.

Family Life: "We Have Our List for What We Need"

Other family-related literacy practices did not involve parent-child interactions, however. The Sudanese parents in this study, I observed, often had to read and write *about* their children, in addition to *with* their children. The local schools regularly bombarded these parents with texts that they needed to read, fill in, or sign—application forms, consent forms, order forms, evaluations and surveys, announcement flyers, newsletters, notes from the teacher, official letters from the school district, report cards, spelling lists, and, of course, homework assignments. The parents often requested brokering assistance with these texts, likely because they related to important aspects of their children's education, as I will describe in Chapters 5-8. However, I frequently saw the parents successfully read and write school-related English texts on their own. Viola,

for example, regularly reported to me on the contents of classroom newsletters and notes from the teacher, because she knew I was interested in them.

Some literacy practices related to caring for the family. Several times, I watched Viola, Falabia and Akhlas read prescription instructions when caring for their sick children. One day in September, I arrived at the family's home just after Anthony, Viola's baby, had been diagnosed with asthma and an ear infection. He needed to take two medications, so Viola unwrapped a measuring syringe and read the medication's instructions. Carefully measuring out the required dose, she squirted the liquid into the squirming Anthony's mouth.

When she cooked for her family, Viola also read product labels. "If I want to do American food or something not from my traditional food," she explained, "I have to read the direction, I have to read what to do." Other times, she explained, she consulted labels in order to properly use a product. While she made bread one day, I watched Viola read the label on a giant block of active yeast. Wondering why she had done so, I questioned if Viola knew how to use yeast. She knew how to cook with it, she replied, but "I want to know where I can keep it when I open it." Reading the instructions, she added, told her that the yeast needed to be refrigerated. She and Isbon also reported, "Sometimes we use chemicals to clean the house. We have to read the direction, how to use it. Sometimes we have cleaner stuff, it's stuff that will be dangerous for the kids."

Writing also appeared to play an important role in English family literacy practices, as parents wrote shopping lists, jotted down entries in their calendars, or filled in various forms. "Sometimes I have maybe papers for the doctor," Viola shared, "I have to write down...some of them have asthma. I have to write down how many times I give

him [*medicine*]. Sometimes I have to take his temperature." During interviews, each of the parents indicated that they wrote grocery lists, at least some of the time. "If I plan to go shopping I'm going to write my stuff down," Falabia explained. "So, if I go to store, I'm just going to follow," and she imitated looking at her list. Isbon indicated that writing shopping lists and creating a budget also were important for the family:

> Before you go to shopping, Viola can sit down to writing the stuff, what we needed. She can go to see the [ ], see down there what we didn't having, what we needing. Because sometimes we can sit down, we want to buy some things the kids like it. Because sometimes when we buy, sometimes the kids didn't eat it. They turn down there, and we throw away. After that, Viola can write down all we need like that, and how much. We can calculate how much the money. Because we want to see our budget, too, how much we have in here. After that, we can go to shopping. Already, we have our list for what we need. We can go choose the stuff.

These data suggest that literacy practices mediated many aspects of life for these Sudanese families in the U.S., and—apart from practices related to children's schooling—the parents rarely appeared to require brokering in order to read and write texts necessary for daily living.

Work: "I Have to Read My Schedule"

Most Sudanese refugees in Lansing worked in English-speaking jobs, and as a result, they had to read and write in English at work. Each of the parents initially indicated that they did not have to do much reading or writing for their jobs, because they worked doing housekeeping, sewing, or manufacturing: "No reading in housekeeping!",

Falabia commented. However, all later reported doing some reading and writing at work. Akhlas, who worked as a seamstress, noted that an important work literacy routine involved clocking in and out each day:

> You write the day and your name and the secret number for your ID. ID for me. You write down, yeah. You come and out and your number, name. That's all you do...Yeah, because some people they come late...They want to see what time you come exactly. Maybe when you come—the machine [time clock] is there, but they need to see, like did you come today or not, because maybe sometimes you are not working today. You give somebody your ID, maybe he will punch for you. That's why you must write the paper, so they know today you are here.

Other work-related literacy practices, they reported, involved checking daily and weekly schedules or reading messages on pagers. Viola, for example, explained that she checked the schedule each day at the factory where she worked:

> I have to read before I start anything, yeah. Also, I have to read my schedule, because they always change. They sometimes have something like overtime. They sometimes want me to go to different lines. There like seven lines. I don't have to be in one line. They want me to know everything about the whole lines, and that's the reason I have to read. Maybe today my name change there and here. Before I start, I *have* to read.

Isbon, who worked in housekeeping at a local hospital, also reported that he followed written directions at work:

> [When] I want to go start my job, I can find the, the job, the program for job for today. I want to get my list, my name up. I take it. Sometimes it say, "Isbon, today

you work in ER" ...Sometimes, I'm going to help the woman who is working there in the room, take the bed. Take it for them inside. When they make isolation...they can page me. I take my pager, it say, "Isbon, take room 5 bed #2," I want to take new bed down there. I go to store down to take new bed down there. The ER call me, need more bed people, I go to take the bed down. That's it.

Part of Isbon's job involved disposing of the hospital's biohazard waste containers, what he referred to as "bios". Sometimes, he explained, he had to fill in report forms regarding the containers: "I have every day to give report to my supervisor for the bios, how many bios today I take to go to Detroit."

Akhlas reported engaging with some practices at work that were not related to her job as a seamstress. She often reminded me that she regularly gave up her lunch hour to participate in ESL classes, for example. She talked about bringing her Christian faith into her job as well. Deeply spiritual, Akhlas reported gathering each day with a group of colleagues for a short religious service. "Nine o'clock we have service," she said, "We pray...We have a thing we pray, like seven people. We pray ... for everything, for work for supervisor, for everything...We read *every*, every day. We read Bible some."

Digital Literacies: "We Want to Contact them by Email"

During interviews and observations, several of the parents emphasized that coming to the U.S. provided them with new opportunities to engage with computers and other digital technologies. The three Sudanese families, as I described in Chapter 3, had varying access to computers. Falabia's home, unlike Akhlas' or Viola's, had a working computer with a high-speed Internet connection. The computer was almost always in use during my visits, and family members reported using the computer on a daily basis for

education, information, and entertainment. Falabia sometimes asked for brokering assistance related to her computer. She occasionally asked me to help her troubleshoot some problem, and she reported calling upon her nephew, who knew quite a bit about computers, several times when the computer crashed. However, Falabia already knew how to use the computer and to navigate the Web. Her requests for help more commonly related to problems with the technology: how to access a password after her children unwittingly changed it, for example. Falabia used her computer and Internet connection for many of her course requirements at LCC and Davenport University. "Like research paper," she explained, "You have to search in the computer and type it." Each semester, she checked her schools' online course catalogues, and she registered for classes online. Falabia also reported exchanging email messages with classmates and instructors.

For Falabia, the computer also appeared to be an important means of maintaining connections with distant family members and of keeping abreast of news in Sudan. "There is my brother-in-law, he's in Denmark," Falabia said. "He's the one who is always email me." She explained that the Internet provided many websites in both English and Arabic that she could use to access Sudanese news. She bookmarked Al-Jazeera's website on her "favorites" list, as she had Juana demonstrate one day when I visited. She also reported that she regularly browsed the website Sudan.net, which provided Arabic-language news. Falabia typed the website's URLs in English, she explained, but the sites used Arabic for the main text:

> For Sudan, I go in Internet, the website...I have to write in English, but it's Arabic. I have to write in English and the, the news is going to pop...If I write "ww Sudan net", the web is gonna pop up, but the news in Arabic, not English.

I observed that Akhlas and Viola had much less regular access to computers, in contrast to Falabia. As a result, both women appeared to rely upon literacy brokers to help them understand how to use computers and how to read, write, and otherwise interact with digital texts. Viola and Akhlas reported first learning about computers through a program at Refugee Services, and Akhlas explained that she also received some tutoring through her educational program at work. In June, 2006, Akhlas invited me to accompany her to a tutor training program at Peckham. Designed to train peer tutors who could help other employees, the program helped immigrants learn English, American history, and other information they needed to obtain U.S. citizenship: "Peckham wants as many people as possible to, number 1, learn English, and to learn the technology," the teacher explained. When I visited the program, I noted that Akhlas seemed to have learned a great deal about how using computers at Peckham. During the training session, I watched her log in to the computer independently, open up the required settings, and launch Internet Explorer. Later, she explained to me that she learned how to do these things as part of her ESL course.

When I asked them about using computers, the Sudanese parents all indicated their belief that it was important to learn how to use computers for three reasons: to keep up with American practices, to maintain contact with scattered family members, and to keep informed about Sudan. "This now our problem about the computer," Isbon noted:

> We do ... want to buy computer to help us in house here. Maybe now Viola work now, it will be easy to get the computer. It's very important. This thing, we're not happy now about not having the computer in the house, because we have many friends make emails, we want to contact them by email. We don't have that.

Digital literacies provided many occasions when the Sudanese parents sought literacy brokering help, most likely because digital literacy texts and practices were new to these Sudanese refugees: None reported access to or experience with computers before arriving in the U.S. Some, like Falabia, used computers frequently in their daily lives in Michigan and therefore were very comfortable with them. Others, like Viola and Isbon, had far less access to computers, and more often required the help of literacy brokers.

Hybrid Literacies

Although Falabia, Viola, Akhlas and their husbands continued to read Arabic texts in certain areas of their lives, they also reported that English practices became increasingly important. Their literacy practices therefore became a linguistic hybrid, as many of the texts that I observed them reading or writing, or that they reported reading and writing, relied upon both languages, like the webpages that Falabia described in the previous section. Falabia, for example, reported that she now wrote in "English and Arabic both." She added, "The first time I was writing in Arabic, but now it's changed, really." English had been difficult for her at first, she explained, but she was now much more comfortable with it. In fact, many of the parents' literacy practices appeared to reflect their increasing comfort level with English, as they read and wrote texts in both languages—sometimes simultaneously.

Religion was one key life area where parents described increasingly engaging with dual-language texts. Akhlas, Viola, and Isbon all reported using bilingual Bibles. "We have Bible translation, Arabic-English...together," Isbon noted. "You can read the same thing with Arabic, because they are writing in English. Arabic, English, Arabic, English." Putting his hands together, he indicated facing pages. "It's like that, like

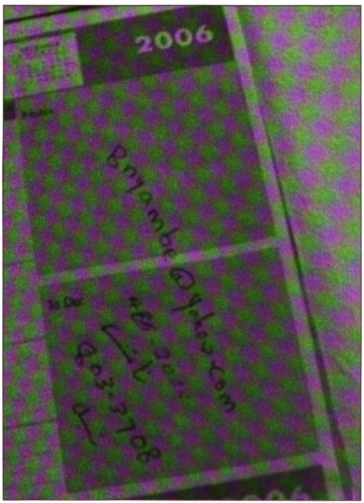
dictionary." During some of the church services I attended, passages from the Bible were read in both languages. Many Sudanese refugees attended Falabia's Lutheran church, and she explained her church conducted Arabic services twice a month, in response to the congregation's needs. Even English services, she reported, sometimes included readings in Arabic:

> Here, in America we read the Bible because they give us a chance. There is two readings, Arabic and English...I always read in Arabic in our church, Christ Lutheran Church...In the church, they read in English and we—because some Sudanese, they don't understand English, so that's why they do that, English and Arabic.

Many of the hybrid literacy practices the parents described occurred in public, as part of community life. Looking up news about Sudan or participating in church services involved literacy practices connected to the broader community. The parents, therefore, may have engaged in dual-language practices because hybrid texts were what was available. However, they also reported using both languages at home, for more personal purposes. Akhlas, for example, kept phone numbers and other contact information in ways that utilized both English and Arabic. She showed me a pocket calendar she used to organize her information, rather than using an address book. In each calendar square, she wrote a name and phone number. She wrote the person's name in Arabic and also in English. She put English names on the left side of the square, the Arabic names on the right side, and sandwiched the phone number in between. Her system was ingenious, I thought, because entries could be read in English from left-to-right, and in Arabic from right-to-left. Viola also kept records in both languages. I often watched as she jotted

appointment notes to herself on the family's wall calendar, sometimes writing a name in Arabic, and the time in Roman numbers. Other times, she wrote part of the note in English, such as Anthony's name, and the time of an appointment in Arabic numbers. Figure 4.4 illustrates one such note in which Viola used English to write an email address and two phone numbers, while she jotted other notes in Arabic.

Figure 4.4: An example of an Arabic-English hybrid language text—notes on Viola and Isbon's wall calendar.



The U.S. represented a different literacy context for these Sudanese families—a context in which a different language and different texts were read and written to

accomplish different social goals. Although they appeared to successfully read and write most texts in the U.S., they were not always able to do so. As the families adjusted to life in the U.S., they needed to learn new aspects of literacy knowledge in order to effectively engage in new literacy practices they encountered. Sometimes, the Sudanese adults struggled with the English language. Other times, they required information about U.S. culture or aspects of genres that were unfamiliar to them. In the following chapters, I describe the types of knowledge that the Sudanese parents needed in order to read and write in the U.S., as well as the brokering processes they used in order to acquire that new knowledge.


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"LOOK, YOU HAVE TO SIGN": LITERACY PRACTICES AMONG SUDANESE REFUGEE FAMILIES

VOLUME II

By

Kristen H. Perry

A DISSERTATION

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Chapter 5

"I Don't Understand These Words":

Learning about the English Language through Brokering

K: *When the school sends home things for Remaz, is it easy for you to understand what they've written, or is it hard?*

A: *Um, you know, some words is hard for me. I'm understand right now. I read, and a lot of words is hard. Some words I don't understand. Just maybe I read, but I don't understand these words. Yeah, but we call somebody to explain us, yeah, sometimes. When we know, it's easy.*

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Akhlas and the other parents who participated in my study were multi-lingual, bi-literate adults. They all could read and write fluently in Arabic, and although all had at least a beginning or basic level of literacy in English, they often viewed their own abilities with a highly critical eye. Because they felt less comfortable reading and writing in English than in Arabic, and because they lived in an American world that required them to do just that on a regular basis, Sudanese adults often sought out the help of literacy brokers who could help them with different texts. As Akhlas explained to me, Sudanese refugees sometimes had difficulties understanding the language used in the texts that they encountered in their daily lives in Michigan. As she suggested, word meanings could be especially difficult. In addition to vocabulary, I observed that they also needed help with other aspects of English language knowledge, such as English syntax or the ways in which English is encoded and decoded in print. However, although many of the brokering events I observed dealt with such lexico-syntactic and
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graphophonic issues, it is important to remember that these aspects of literacy are embedded within the broader cultural context. Although it is possible to highlight these aspects of literacy knowledge, they are inseparable from culture and genre.

Although Akhlas and other Sudanese adults often initiated brokering events because they needed assistance with a specific text, they also looked upon them as opportunities to learn more about the English language. As a result, brokering appeared to perform different functions for the parent, depending upon the parent's purpose for seeking a broker's assistance. Because they often sought brokering in order to learn as well as for translation purposes, the Sudanese community members relied upon many different brokers—including their own children. Immigrant and refugee children commonly translate for their parents; my work with these Sudanese families, however, suggests that children actively *teach* their parents as well.

Arabic & English:
Language Differences that Impact Literacy Learning

Akhlas, Falabia, Viola, and their husbands came to the U.S. as fluent readers and writers in Arabic. As I described in Chapter 4, they arrived in the U.S. with a great deal of knowledge about print, as well as information about the encoding and decoding of written language. Although they appear to be very different, written English and Arabic share some similarities. Like English, Arabic is an alphabetic language that uses letters to represent individual phonemes. Similar to upper- and lower-case letters in English, Arabic letters also change form, depending upon their placement within a given word (Ager, 2007; LexicOrient, 2006). Reflecting the cultural nature of graphophonic aspects of all languages, Arabic and English clearly differ in the alphabets they use and in the

direction in which print is read—English is read from left-to-right, while Arabic is read from right-to-left. Sudanese refugees, and others literate in Arabic, must learn a new alphabet when they learn how to read English. They also must learn to read print in a different direction.

All of the Sudanese parents in these families could read and write English to some extent when I first met them, although their degrees of fluency varied a great deal. For example, Falabia's, Viola's and Primo's English abilities were good enough to permit them to enroll in academic courses at the community college. In contrast, Amin spoke enough English to get by in Michigan, and to engage in some conversations with me, but he needed to complete a basic ESL course before he could enroll in a GED program. Some of the parents recalled beginning to learn English before coming to the U.S. Isbon, for example, explained that he took required English classes in high school. Other parents, like Viola and Falabia, reported exposure to English through their churches in Sudan or Egypt. In the U.S., however, they needed to communicate effectively in English on a daily basis. As a result, the parents all commented to me frequently on their desire to speak, read and write English fluently. As Isbon explained, "We need to practice. English is good, because we can enjoy—when it is written in English, easy for you." All of the parents had enrolled in ESL courses in the U.S. at some point—through the Refugee Development Center, through the local community college, or through workplace educational opportunities. In addition to formal classes, Sudanese adults sought out the help of brokers who informally provided much knowledge about the English language and how it functions in print.

Vocabulary, Syntax, and Encoding/Decoding:

Lexico-Syntactic and Graphophonic Knowledge in Literacy Brokering

As I described in Chapter 1, much of the scholarly literature regarding literacy brokering focuses on the lexico-syntactic and graphophonic issues involved in brokering, particularly for those who are English-language learners. This literature suggests that most brokering events involve translation between languages. My work with the Sudanese community, however, shows that lexico-syntactic and graphophonic knowledge about English is only one aspect of literacy brokering, and these aspects of brokering may be more complex than previously thought. Literal translation of meaning certainly is one important aspect of brokering, and this was reflected in brokering events that involved learning English *vocabulary.* In addition to vocabulary, however, this type of brokering involved learning about *syntax* and the *encoding and decoding* of written English. Table 5.1 illustrates the different types of language-related brokering events that I observed in the Sudanese families, or that they reported occurring on other occasions. In this section, I will briefly describe brokering that occurred around different types of lexico-syntactic and graphophonic knowledge.

Table 5.1: Total number of different types of lexico-syntactic/graphophonic brokering events.

Types of English-language Brokering	Number of Events
Encoding/decoding	20
Syntax	6
Vocabulary	27
Total	**53**

Encoding/Decoding Brokering Events

Brokering related to encoding and decoding of language, I observed, occurred as participants learned about spelling or sounding out words, and other letter-sound

relationships in English. Parents in this study typically sought out brokers who could help them spell or pronounce words. During my field visits, for example, Akhlas often relied upon me to help her with homework from ESL courses she attended over her lunch hour at work. One day, Akhlas brought home a packet of worksheets. The first page, titled "Getting to Know You", directed Akhlas to complete the sentences using her "best English". Akhlas had already completed most of the exercises herself; in fact, she usually finished (or at least attempted) much of her work before I arrived. She asked me to look over her responses, and to explain things she had not understood. Akhlas then read the entire page out loud to me—a technique she often employed to check her English pronunciation. She stumbled over only a few words, such as *attend*, *whisper*, and *shaker*. I noted that she had misspelled some words in her answers: *famli* (family), *arbek* (Arabic), *raning* (raining), *wak* (walk), *kartoun* (cartoon), and *anuf* (enough). When Akhlas encountered words such as these in her homework, or in other texts she needed to read, she explained that she turned to people who could help her with pronunciation or spelling. As a result, brokering appeared to help Akhlas learn about the English language and practice her encoding and decoding skills.

Syntax in Brokering Events

The Sudanese parents in this study, I noticed, also needed knowledge of English syntax in order to understand the texts that they read, or, more commonly, when they needed to write their own English-language texts. Often, this type of brokering appeared to be initiated when parents asked brokers to help them make their texts "sound nice" in English.

One day, Isbon asked me for help with a letter he wanted to write. He and Viola had gone to Ohio a few weeks previously, in order to help resolve a problem in the Sudanese community. Isbon's cousin, they explained, had nine children, and one of his daughters became pregnant by a Lost Boy. According to Isbon, the young man was not doing anything to help. The family wanted him to pay money and to marry the young woman. Paying money, Isbon explained to me, is an important way for husbands to show respect for their wives in Sudanese culture: When husbands do not pay the bride price, they treat their wives badly or abandon them. The young man "need to pay something to respect this girl," Isbon said. Because Sudanese family members traditionally help with marriage negotiations, Isbon explained that he planned to write a letter to the young man, asking about his intentions and explaining the family's position. He said that he wanted to write in Arabic, but the young man only was literate in English. Isbon asked me to help "correct" the letter, so that they could send it. Viola and Isbon jointly composed a letter in Arabic. Viola then dictated it to me in English, which I edited for proper syntax. Thus, in this case, syntax-related brokering seemed involved helping participants edit and proofread their writing in English. Other similar events also involved issues of *register*, or the varieties of language that are related to situational usage, which is closely related to syntax. I will further discuss issues of register in Chapter 8.

Vocabulary in Brokering Events

English vocabulary, particularly jargon or other specialized terms, also seemed to spark many brokering events that related to the English language. Once when I was visiting Viola's home, for example, she was studying for an upcoming exam in her nursing assistant certification course. Viola had tried to look up the term *nasogastric tube*

in the glossary, but could not find it. She turned to me and asked, "Kristen, what is the meaning of this?" I looked in the glossary and the index, but could not locate the term either. I explained that a nasogastric tube was a feeding tube through the nose that goes down to the stomach. *Naso* meant nose, I explained, and *gastric* meant stomach. Viola replied, "And *tube* I know."

Based upon examples such as these, I concluded that the Sudanese refugees in this study needed access to different types of English language knowledge and skills in order to read and write texts in the U.S. They needed to know word meanings, they needed to know how to sound out or spell those words, and they needed to be able to put words together to structure meaningful sentences. In addition, they needed help with reading and with writing texts—two very different processes. As a result, brokering events I observed could look very different, depending upon the parent's needs in a given situation. In some cases, they wanted help in doing something quickly, while in other cases, they wanted to learn more about the English language.

Expediting & Teaching:
Forms of Lexico-syntactic and Graphophonic Literacy Brokering

Existing literature treats brokering as mainly a matter of translation. Newer thinking, however, suggests that brokering can take other forms. Mazak (2006), for example, found six different types of language brokering in the Puerto Rican community she studied. Mazak found that language brokers in her community relied upon English brokers to (1) *double-check* their understanding of a text's meaning; (2) *help* read certain texts; (3) *translate* texts; (4) *report* on or summarize a text; (5) *spell* words in English; and (6) correctly *pronounce* words in English. Many brokering events certainly do take

the form of translation. However, my work with the Sudanese community suggests that language brokering also serves other functions, in addition to basic translation and the five other forms suggested by Mazak. Many brokering events in my data involved specific *teaching about language.* Others had very little to do with translation; in some events, such as filling in government forms, the broker simply appeared to *expedite the literacy activity.* These different forms of brokering suggest that individuals seek out brokers for a variety of reasons beyond translation.

Brokers Expedite Literacy Events

Brokering, some scholars argue, involves translation or interpretation work done on behalf of others. Orellana and her colleagues, for example, suggest that brokers "speak *for* others" (Orellana et al, 2003a, p. 508). This certainly is one aspect of brokering, and many events I observed involved Sudanese parents asking the broker to do the necessary reading or writing herself. During my third visit with Viola's family, for instance, Viola and I went to the local community college to request a transcript of her English coursework. The registrar's office had many forms students could access for various purposes. I read through several of the forms in order to locate the one that Viola needed. When I asked her if she wanted to fill it out or if she wanted me to help her, she did not answer. I held the paper out to Viola as she started digging around in her purse. Thinking that she might be looking for a pen, I pulled one from my bag. Viola waved the pen away—it became clear to me that she wanted me to write, and so I filled in the form on her behalf.

Other times, brokers might take over reading or writing in order to expedite the literacy event. During one of my after-school visits, Boni mentioned a form the school

had sent home. Together, Viola and I looked at the paper. It was an enrollment form for a dental care program, which was free for children enrolled in Medicaid. The program, I explained, sends dentists right to the kids' schools. Viola confirmed that her children received Medicaid, and she wanted to enroll the children in the dental program. I partially filled out the forms for her, providing information regarding the children's school, grade, name, and address. I then showed Viola where she needed to add the family's Medicaid number, the children's medical history, and her signature. Although she needed some help understanding the nuances of the offered program, she certainly was capable of filling in the form herself. Brokering in this event, therefore, simply expedited the writing activity.

Other expediting events occurred as parents created or composed texts themselves. Expediting occurred, for example, when Viola and Isbon sought my assistance to write the letter I described. These adults often were able explain what they wanted to write in English, but spelling the words could be a time-consuming process. The parents therefore sought brokers who could write more quickly and accurately. This kind of brokering seemed especially common when Americans were the intended recipients or readers of the text. In April, 2006, Viola and other women at her church organized a cultural festival featuring Sudanese foods, crafts, and music. Both Americans and Sudanese would attend the event. I agreed to help the women prepare for the festival. The women certainly enjoyed teaching me to prepare traditional Sudanese dishes, but they ultimately decided my English literacy skills were more useful. Viola asked me to help make a welcome banner. She acquired a large roll of white butcher paper, along with a bin of crayons and markers. We discussed what to write: Viola wanted me to write

"Welcome to the African Festival" in big letters, and then she would add the same phrase in Arabic. After I wrote this in large, block letters, Viola asked me to write "Sponsored by the Daughters of Trinity Lutheran Church". Together, we created a dual-language text that welcomed attendees in both English and Arabic (see Figure 5.1). Although Viola certainly was capable of writing out the English words herself, she explained that her spelling abilities were relatively weak, and she therefore relied upon a native English speaker to expedite the task.

Figure 5.1: Viola writes in Arabic on a welcome banner.

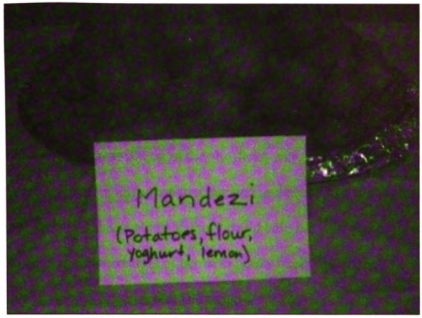


Viola and the other women prepared many traditional foods for the festival—foods with which non-Sudanese individuals might not be familiar. The women asked me to create labels, listing the name of the food and its ingredients, so that Americans would know what they were eating. When the women provided the Sudanese or Arabic name for the food, they told me to spell the word as it sounded (see Figure 5.2). In this case, brokering involved not only spelling English words such as *flour* and *yogurt*, but it also

involved transliterating Arabic words into English orthography. I seemed to me that the women felt that it would be better for an American, who understood letter-sound relationships in English, to do this task.

The expediting function of literacy brokering fits closely with traditional constructions of language brokering, where brokers act on behalf of someone else. In expediting events, the broker acts as a *mediator,* while the other party remains more passive. Many brokering events, however, did not reflect this same function or the same relationship among participants in the event. It is important to remember that, although I acted as the broker in the events I described, these parents also sought other brokers for this type of help. Viola, for example, reported that she had relied upon the American secretary at the church to help develop a flyer for the Sudanese cultural festival (see Chapter 7 for more discussion of this brokering event). In addition, while I expedited several of the brokering events, I did not initiate them—I simply responded when participants presented me with a brokering issue.

Figure 5.2: A transliterated English label for a traditional Sudanese food. The label reads: "Mandezi (Potatoes, flour, yoghurt, lemon)".



Brokers Teach about Language

Examples such as the ones I provided in the previous section appear to confirm that literacy brokering involves someone speaking (or, in some cases, writing) on behalf of another. However, this type of brokering represented only a fraction of the brokering events that I observed among Sudanese families, or that they reported to me. Thinking about brokering as speaking *for* or *on behalf of* another implies that the broker is the most active participant in the interaction. My experiences with the Sudanese families, in contrast, suggest that participants sought brokering as an active method of learning about the English language. Rather than asking brokers to speak for them, participants appeared to seek brokering, in part, in order to learn English and, thus, to speak for themselves.

I often observed that brokering occurred naturally as parents required help with their own homework assignments. Viola's question about the meaning of *nasogastric*

exemplifies this type of brokering. Akhlas most often asked for brokering in order to learn about the English language, usually in relation to her ESL homework. During these events, Akhlas requested help with various aspects of encoding English in print, such as spelling, verb tenses and conjugations, inflectional word endings, the rules for doubling consonants when adding *ing*, and capitalization and punctuation in English—aspects of English that her homework highlighted. What I found most interesting about many of these events, however, were the unofficial ways in which Akhlas used these worksheets to get help in reading, pronouncing, and understanding written English. Akhlas frequently read the worksheets aloud so that I could help her read and pronounce words—a learning strategy that the creators of her workbooks likely did not have in mind. Akhlas' use of this technique suggests that she relied upon brokers to help her *learn about* the language, rather than just to translate for her.

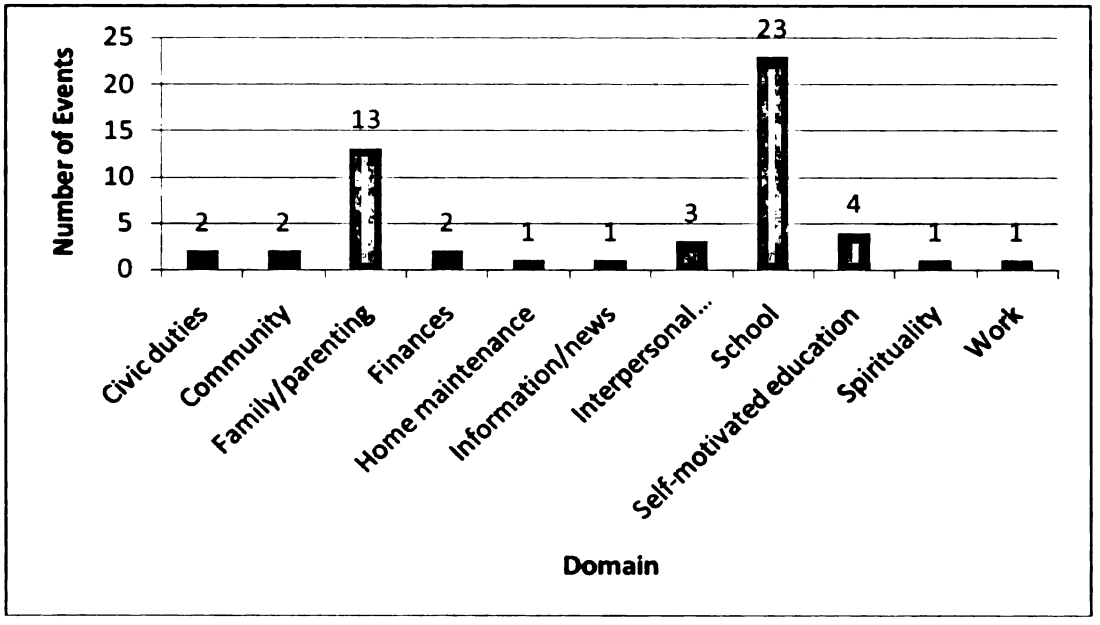
In contrast to expediting events, where the broker acted as a mediator for a client, the broker in these types of events appeared to act more as a *teacher.* The person who sought the brokering, therefore, was positioned more as a *learner*, rather than as a client. This distinction may have interesting implications for adult literacy, because it positions the participant as someone who wants to learn something new, rather than wanting someone else to do something for them or needing help because of a gap in knowledge. In these instances, literacy brokering may provide more than basic assistance with everyday literacy tasks—it also can provide opportunities for continued literacy learning and development.

Homework, Letters & Welcome Banners:

Types of Genres Brokered

As reported in Chapter 4, the Sudanese parents reported regularly engaging with a wide variety of texts in their daily lives, and the texts for which they required English-related brokering reflect some of this variety. Figure 5.3 illustrates the domains that characterized lexic-syntactic and graphophonic literacy brokering, based upon observational and interview data.

Figure 5.3: Language-related brokering by domain.



As several of these examples have shown, some of these language-related brokering events involved adults' own homework. In fact, 13 of the 20 brokering events that I coded as "Brokering: encoding/decoding" involved parents' homework—not surprising, given that the homework was intended to help adults learn to read and write in English. Most of Akhlas' homework, I noted, came in the form of skill-and-drill worksheets that emphasized different aspects of English, such as grammar and spelling rules. Viola's and Falabia's homework appeared to focus less on ESL learning, but they still required vocabulary brokering for these texts, as when Viola asked about nasogastric

tubes.

Parents' Own Writing

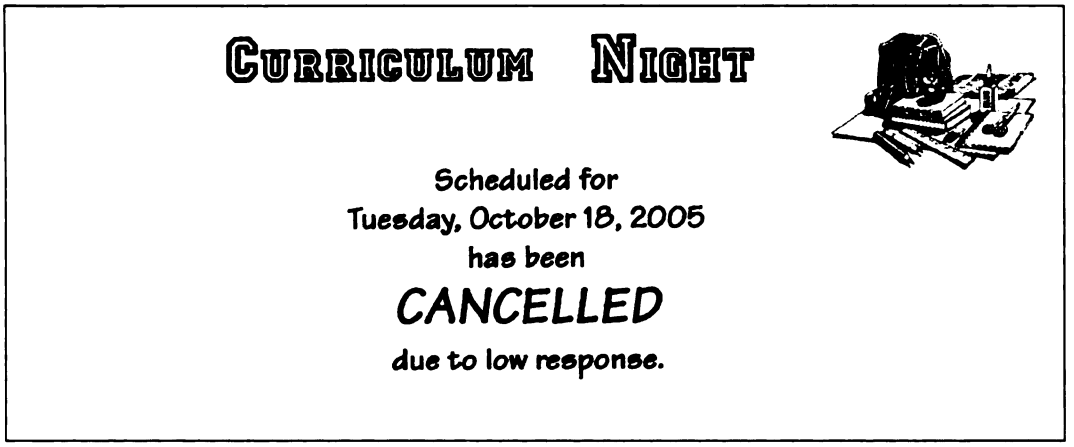
Needing to produce their own texts seemed to spark many lexico-syntactic- and graphophonic-related brokering events among the families. I observed that these Sudanese parents faced many challenges when writing, some of which may have been similar to challenges that all learners face with English, regardless of their native tongue. For example, Akhlas or Viola sometimes needed help determining which letter to use when more than one letter could make the same sound, or selecting the appropriate vowel. Other challenges, however, appeared to be more specific to the differences between Arabic and English. Akhlas, for example, struggled with certain phonemes that I had noticed other Sudanese (and, indeed, the Basotho students I worked with in Lesotho) also found difficult, such as the /th/ digraph or the differences between /v/ and /f/.

Apart from homework, much of this kind of brokering I observed involved instances where the parents were producing texts for important or official purposes: writing a career goal statement in an application for a Habitat for Humanity house; composing a note to ask the school librarian how much money a child owed for a damaged book; filling in a power-of-attorney form to request transcripts from an Egyptian university; sending a letter to a Sudanese community member about a delicate family matter. Along with official purposes, these texts also tended to involve English-speaking recipients or audiences. English syntax appeared to play an important role in these events, in addition to spelling or vocabulary. This makes sense, of course, given the differences between the receptive and productive functions of reading and writing.

Texts Sent Home from School

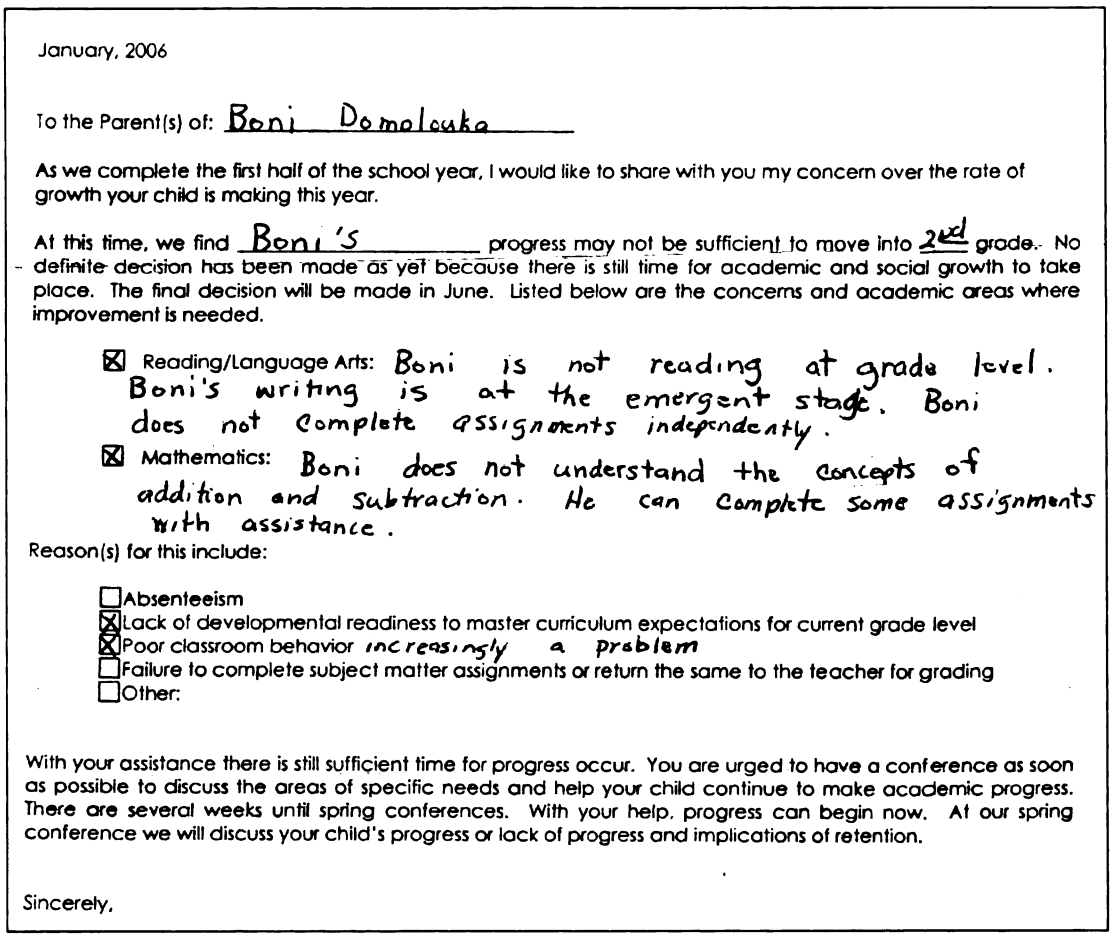
The more time I spent with in the Sudanese families' homes, the clearer it became to me that texts that came home from the children's schools sparked most of the language-related brokering events I identified. U.S. schools frequently send home information upon which they expect parents to act: notes, newsletters, flyers, permission slips, and official letters, to name a few. The Sudanese parents were aware that many of these texts were important, and—as Akhlas explained in the interview excerpt at the beginning of this chapter—they often sought brokers for help with the language of these texts. And, because I was a frequent visitor in their homes, the parents often relied upon me as a convenient source of brokering for school-based texts. On one occasion, for example, Viola handed me a bright salmon-pink piece of paper she had extracted from Boni's homework folder (see Figure 5.4). The flyer was for a program sponsored by the school district titled "Curriculum Night". It noted that the event had been "CANCELLED due to low response." Viola said, "I don't know what this means," and she wondered if it was important. I explained to Viola that *curriculum* is what the schools teach—all the lessons and the different subjects in school. In any case, I explained, Viola did not need to worry about the event because it was cancelled. I did not address the "low response" issue.

Figure 5.4: A school district flyer from Boni's homework folder.



The need to comprehend texts sent from school, including children's homework instructions, appeared to provide many common motivations for parents to seek someone who could explain what they (or their children) were expected to do with a given text. However, some texts sent home from the schools were more important than others, carrying more serious or longer-term consequences for the children and their families. When official letters or forms came home from the school, or from the district, parents appeared to actively sought out literacy brokers. For example, Boni's parents reported receiving many letters about his poor academic performance, about the likelihood of his being retained in both kindergarten and first grade, and official recommendations that he be placed in an ESL classroom. These letters, which they usually showed me, were filled with specialized language that Viola sometimes had difficulty understanding. For example, one letter discussed the possibility of retaining Boni (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5: Viola's official letter regarding Boni's likely retention.



January, 2006

To the Parent(s) of: Boni Domolouka

As we complete the first half of the school year, I would like to share with you my concern over the rate of growth your child is making this year.

At this time, we find Boni's progress may not be sufficient to move into 2nd grade. No definite decision has been made as yet because there is still time for academic and social growth to take place. The final decision will be made in June. Listed below are the concerns and academic areas where improvement is needed.

☒ Reading/Language Arts: Boni is not reading at grade level. Boni's writing is at the emergent stage. Boni does not complete assignments independently.

☒ Mathematics: Boni does not understand the concepts of addition and subtraction. He can complete some assignments with assistance.

Reason(s) for this include:

☐ Absenteeism
☒ Lack of developmental readiness to master curriculum expectations for current grade level
☒ Poor classroom behavior increasingly a problem
☐ Failure to complete subject matter assignments or return the same to the teacher for grading
☐ Other:

With your assistance there is still sufficient time for progress occur. You are urged to have a conference as soon as possible to discuss the areas of specific needs and help your child continue to make academic progress. There are several weeks until spring conferences. With your help, progress can begin now. At our spring conference we will discuss your child's progress or lack of progress and implications of retention.

Sincerely,

Before showing it to me, Viola had read over this letter, and she had underlined the word *concepts* in the sentence that Boni's teacher had hand-written: "Boni does not understand the concepts of addition and subtraction." Viola asked me about the meaning of *concepts*. Boni's teacher also had noted that Boni's behavior was "increasingly a problem". What, Viola wondered, did *increasingly* mean?

In addition to *concepts* and *increasingly*, this letter included many specialized vocabulary words that Viola may have found difficult. Boni's teacher referred to the "emergent stage" of reading, while the form letter included phrases such as "developmental readiness" and "implications of retention". Jargon can be challenging

enough for native speakers of English—and it almost guarantees that English language learners will have difficulty accessing a text's meaning. Boni's official letter was quite lengthy, but Viola's questions about the much shorter cancellation flyer also suggest that even brief texts may be problematic for parents who do not speak English as a first language. Vocabulary difficulties, however, are not necessarily limited to English language learners. Purcell-Gates (1995) and Rogers (2003) similarly documented low-literate parents' struggles with school-based texts in a White urban Appalachian family and a low-income African American family, respectively. The mothers in these families, Jenny and Vicky, were both native speakers of English, and both also relied upon brokers to help them negotiate school forms. Brokering related to lexico-syntactic and graphophonic issues, thus, may be necessary for all newcomers to literacy, regardless of whether they are becoming literate in a first or second (or more) language.

Children's Homework

Children's homework also instigated English-related brokering in Sudanese families, as I observed and as the parents frequently reported. Indeed, much of the time I spent in these families' homes involved helping Boni, Samuel, Remaz and Juana with homework or otherwise brokering school texts for the parents. Although I entered the families' homes partially as a tutor for the children, and therefore took primary responsibility for helping with homework, the parents nevertheless attempted to help their children with their studies. If I was out of town, ill, or otherwise unavailable, or if children had additional work or needed extra practice with skills when I was not visiting, Viola, Akhlas and Falabia (and occasionally the fathers) helped their children with schoolwork. These Sudanese parents could offer varying levels of homework and literacy

support, depending on their availability (due to work shifts or their own class schedules), the subject area, or their own familiarity with English. Vocabulary, particularly an assignment's instructions, often seemed to present special difficulties for parents, a phenomenon other family literacy researchers have described (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers, 2003). During one of my visits, for example, Viola asked me for vocabulary help after the fact. Samuel had not wanted to wait for me in order to do his homework—he wanted to complete it the day before my usual visit. Viola had tried to help him, she reported, but she did not know the meaning of one word in the instructions. According to Viola, the word was spelled *R-H-M.* She reconsidered and then said perhaps it had a Y in it as well. After probing for more details, I discovered that Viola meant the word *rhyme.* I explained that *rhyme* means words have the same ending sounds. I gave her the examples of *top* and *mop*, as well as *cat*, *hat*, and *mat.* "Aahhh," Viola said, and indicated that she now understood. She recalled that Samuel had told her he was supposed to circle things that "make sounds"—apparently he had confused objects that make sounds with the sound of the object's name itself. Viola said she had considered looking in the dictionary, but Samuel seemed to know what to do.

As I will describe further in later chapters, these findings may provide insights into family literacy and for parent participation in children's schooling. U.S. educators typically expect certain types of parental support for children's education, particularly helping with homework. But if parents do not understand the instructions printed on homework, they cannot help their children in the ways that teachers expect. Even more importantly, if parents do not comprehend the language that district letters or other official texts include, they will not be able to understand—much less act upon—the

information in these texts. If Viola had not approached me (or another broker) to help her understand the meaning of certain words in Boni's retention letter, she may not have known that her child was at risk of repeating the first grade, nor would she have understood why the school wanted her to schedule a conference with Boni's teacher.

Churches, Co-workers & Children:
To Whom Parents Turn for Lexico-syntactic and Graphophonic Brokering

Although many of the brokering events that I describe in this book rely upon me as the broker, Sudanese community members had access to many different brokers. Lansing's Sudanese community knew how to access a broad network of support in the U.S.—social workers, clergy, sponsoring American families, volunteer tutors, co-workers, neighbors, and other Sudanese refugees who had lived longer in the U.S. (Perry, in press). The parents reported turning to these individuals when they needed help with texts. Social service agencies, particularly Catholic Refugee Services and the Refugee Development Center (affiliated with a Lutheran church in Lansing), provided many brokering services to all refugees in Lansing, not just those from Sudan. Refugees, particularly in the few months following their arrival in the U.S., worked closely with social workers and with U.S. families affiliated with the churches that sponsored refugees. These social service agencies not only provided caseworkers for refugee families, but they paired them with tutors and other Americans who could act as community and cultural liaisons for the families. Indeed, this is how I first became involved with the Sudanese community myself. Other public agencies, such as MichiganWorks[1] also provided brokering assistance, although their services were not

[1] MichiganWorks is a state-sponsored job-assistance program that provides some job training, and also employs counselors who help job-seekers through various parts of the application process.

limited to refugees, immigrants, or other newcomers. Both Viola and Amin reported relying upon people at MichiganWorks who could help them create resumes and navigate the job-application process. Finally, these parents also relied upon their own young children to help them with lexico-syntactic and graphophonic aspects of texts. Table 5.2 illustrates the various brokers, based upon both observational and interview data, who supplied these types of brokering.

Table 5.2: Suppliers of lexico-syntactic and graphophonic knowledge for each Sudanese parent.

		Brokers		
Participant	**Knowledge Type**	**American**	**Child**	**Other Sudanese**
Akhlas	Syntax	X	X	X
	Vocab	X	X	
	Encoding/decoding	X	X	
Amin	Encoding/decoding			X
Isbon	Syntax	X		
	Vocab		X	
	Encoding/decoding	X		
Falabia	Syntax			
	Vocab	X		
	Encoding/decoding			
Viola	Syntax	X		
	Vocab	X		
	Encoding/decoding	X	X	

Church Communities

The Sudanese families in this study were very active in their churches, and they reported calling upon church members to act as literacy brokers. The parents relied upon these brokers for a variety of texts. For example, Akhlas told me that a church friend

helped register Remaz for school. Church friends also brokered specifically religious texts. Akhlas owned a bilingual Bible that presented a passage in English on one page and the same text in Arabic on the facing page. During services, she explained, she relied upon church members to help her locate the appropriate English passages in her Bible. Akhlas then could either follow along in Arabic while the text was read in English or locate the passage again later for re-reading in Arabic:

> When I have the Bible in my language and English, somebody will help me, because he know the English...He tell me the name in the Bible. I will know. I will write down in Arabic to know. Next time when they read the page, I will know.

Co-workers

Workplace colleagues also reportedly supplied English brokering assistance. Akhlas, for example, often talked about how helpful her ESL teacher was when she had questions. Peckham Inc., where Akhlas worked, was a non-profit organization that employed many refugees, adults with developmental disabilities, and ex-convicts. Part of the company's mission, therefore, was to provide job training and other educational opportunities for individuals who might otherwise have difficulty finding employment (Peckham, 2007). Peckham offered ESL courses and citizenship education to refugees and other immigrants through this program, and many employees functioned as peer tutors within this program. In fact, Akhlas' English skills advanced so quickly that her ESL teacher nominated her to be a peer tutor.

Other Sudanese Community Members

The three families also reported calling upon other Sudanese community members—particularly those who had been in the U.S. longer or whose English was more advanced—to broker different texts. Falabia explained that she and other Sudanese in Lansing helped her elderly mother, Boronika, who spoke no English and was not literate in Arabic, either. Falabia's nephews lived with Boronika, who relied heavily upon them:

> We are here. We are helping her. And Marco and Thomas, Golda's brothers. They know how to read and write...If there is something they need, they will call me. They always call me, and I always go there, every day.

In fact, because Boronika was illiterate in Arabic, she had relied upon this sort of brokering in Sudan as well: "My dad, he is the one who bring everything at home and explain to her, and she is going to follow the same directions." As Falabia suggested, adults relied upon the younger generation to help them understand texts. Although Golda's brothers were young adults and therefore much older than the focal children in this study, these Sudanese parents nevertheless relied upon children of all ages to act as literacy brokers, as I will describe in the next section.

Young Children Provide English Knowledge to Parents

Children commonly provide translation in immigrant households (Morales & Hanson, 2005; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003). However, thinking about children as brokers of language is a fairly recent development in the educational community. Educational researchers did not begin studying this phenomenon until the mid 1990s (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Studies of child language brokering are actually quite rare, especially studies that are grounded

within ethnographic perspectives (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003). As Morales and Hanson (2005) note, "Little is known, at this point, about the process of language brokering and its effect on children and their families" (p. 473). Even less is known about young children acting as brokers, as existing studies have focused exclusively on children older than 10. In addition, these studies have examined brokering almost entirely within Latino communities, while a couple of studies examined Vietnamese and Chinese brokers (Morales & Hanson, 2005).

Despite the paucity of studies regarding child language brokering, Morales and Hanson (2005) note several important points of consensus among the available literature:

- Most immigrant children and youth act as language brokers
- Children may begin to broker as soon as one year after they arrive in the U.S., and immigrants often recall beginning to translate as young as 8 years old
- Brokering occurs in a variety of settings, and children broker for a variety of people, including parents, other family members, and school officials
- Child brokers are expected to help in "very complex, 'adult-like' situations—situations that may or may not be developmentally appropriate" (Morales & Hanson, 2005, p. 472).

Impact of Brokering on Children and Families

Less consensus exists, however, about the impact of brokering on children and families. Some researchers assert that brokering can be burdensome or problematic for child brokers and for family dynamics in immigrant communities, while others suggest that brokering is beneficial to children and their families (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Tse (1996), for example, surveyed 64 teenagers and found that over 17% felt brokering to be

burdensome, 14% disliked having to broker, and nearly 11% found it embarrassing. Orellana, Dorner and Pulido (2003) also noted that popular media have given much attention to "heightened, marked, dramatic, or 'specialized encounters' that may indeed be experienced as burdensome—for example, translating for a parent during a medical exam or at the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) office" (p. 515). From the family perspective, Umaña-Taylor (2003) takes a particularly critical view of child language brokering. Child language brokering, she argues, can strain family relationships "because of the role reversal that takes place when parents become dependent on their children for communication with people outside the family" (p. 157). According to Umaña-Taylor, child language brokering disrupts adults' assumed authority over children. As a result, she claims child language brokering may lead to negative outcomes such as increased anxiety, poor educational performance, and inhibited identity formation. Umaña-Taylor certainly raises valid concerns, but her arguments are problematic in that she appears to view families—and thus any brokering that may occur—through a White, middle-class lens. As Rogoff (2003) contends, this sort of lens is not appropriate for all cultural communities.

In contrast, much of the existing research emphasizes the benefits to children and families when children act as language brokers. Although Tse (1996) found that some students disliked brokering, the vast majority of participants in her study indicated that they enjoyed brokering and that they were proud of their abilities. These adolescent participants believed that brokering helped them learn more about both English and their first languages. They also felt they had become more mature and responsible as a result of brokering. Similarly, in their research with Spanish-speaking youth brokers, Orellana

and her colleagues "came to understand that children open up access to resources in multiple, quotidian ways, and that they experience much of their translating work as 'just normal'" (Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003, p. 516). In contrast with Umaña-Taylor's assessment, Halgunseth (2003) argues that language brokering positively impacts cognitive, social, and cultural development of children who act as brokers. For example, she notes that children who broker with English-speaking professionals, such as teachers or doctors, acquire sophisticated vocabulary that can transfer to academic contexts. Halgunseth also argues that, through brokering, children often develop (1) a sense of social self-efficacy as they learn to communicate appropriately with a variety of people in different contexts, and (2) self-esteem as they positively contribute to the functioning of their families and households.

Oral Translation by Sudanese Refugee Children

In common with much of the existing research regarding child brokering, I observed many instances where the young children in these Sudanese families acted as translators for their parents. Orellana and her colleagues (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003) note that immigrant parents rely on children to translate, even when parents speak English themselves. Indeed, all of the child language brokering that I observed occurred with children whose parents spoke English—albeit with differing degrees of fluency. These parents were able to speak for themselves the vast majority of the time, and as a result, the children seemed to translate generally in response to specific requests. I observed this most often in Akhlas' home, as Akhlas consulted with five-year-old Remaz about English or called upon her to translate something from Arabic.

I also saw Remaz and the other children broker voluntarily, in addition to responding to their parents' requests to translate between Arabic and English. During one of my visits to Viola's home, Viola spoke with me about a school field trip where Samuel would be seeing the play "The Rainbow Fish". She explained, "Samuel have to go to the—what is it?...Rumbo—they have a lot of colors." From his perch at the kitchen table, Samuel called out, "Rainbow!", correcting his mother's pronunciation. He repeated the word, to ensure that she knew how to say it. Episodes such as this, where the children provided unsolicited brokering help, suggest that Sudanese children felt translating and providing English language knowledge to their parents was an important and natural activity. Remaz appeared to take her role as language broker so seriously, in fact, that she even offered Arabic-language knowledge to me! Once, when Akhlas had referred to me as the children's auntie, Remaz offered, "Do you know how we say 'auntie' in Arabic? It's the same as English."

Although I often observed young Sudanese children help their parents understand English, they were not always successful in their attempts to translate. Around the holidays, I was surprised to note that Akhlas' family had put up a Christmas tree. I wanted to know why they had decided to participate in this U.S. tradition. Akhlas attempted to explain that someone at their church had talked about Jesus and green trees in the winter, but she did not know how to fully explain this to me in English. Akhlas turned to Remaz and spoke with her in Arabic. Remaz listened to Akhlas' explanation before saying, "Because I want one?" Akhlas shook her head and said that she would get someone else to translate for me later.

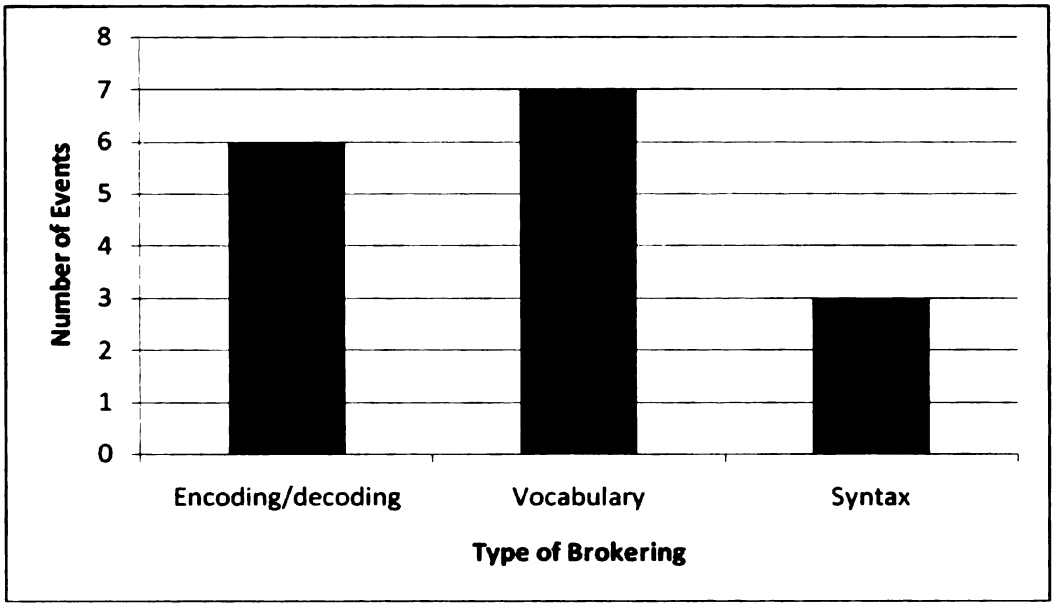
Parents' Views on Child Brokering

In contrast to some of the literature that views these translation responsibilities as problematic, child translating in these families appeared to be a normal part of everyday life. In fact, the parents often commented on their pride in their children's abilities—even when a child's attempts at brokering were less than successful. Akhlas frequently, and proudly, announced (both to me and to other visitors!) that she relied upon Remaz to help translate. I once visited Akhlas shortly after hearing that Falabia's mother, Boronika, had been hospitalized for a heart condition. I did not know the specifics, however, and I asked Akhlas what had happened. Boronika had some problem with her blood, Akhlas explained, but she did not know the words in English. She consulted Remaz, asking her to translate. Remaz thought for a moment and then tentatively said, "It's dry?" Akhlas said that might be it. "I don't know English," she explained to a Sudanese friend who was also visiting, "Remaz, she my teacher!" I observed children teaching their parents in other families as well. Isbon confirmed that Boni and Samuel also taught him English: "All of them speak English with me...For me, it's good because I want to know some words." These comments suggest that, for these parents, providing opportunities to learn about the English language may be a more important function for their children's brokering than is providing translations for others.

Young Children Broker *Written* Language: Remaz

As I have described, Remaz often provided oral brokering for her parents. I was surprised to observe the ways in which this very young girl, and other Sudanese children, brokered written English. Like adult brokers, these children provided their parents with knowledge about encoding and decoding print, vocabulary, and syntax (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6: Amounts of different types of brokering children provided for written texts.



Some of Remaz's oral translation occurred during literacy events where I brokered texts for her parents. In these instances, Remaz brokered the talk that surrounded the text. Several times, Amin asked me to help him fill in forms and other paperwork from Remaz's school and Remon's Head Start program. Remaz translated into Arabic when her father did not understand my English questions. Shortly before Remaz's sixth birthday, Amin needed to fill in some paperwork so that Remon could continue to receive nutrition benefits from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. I asked Amin questions based on the form's requirements, attempting to word them so that he could understand. Several times, Remaz answered the questions on behalf of her father, particularly when Amin did not understand what I was asking. Other times, he actively looked to her when I asked a question. Occasionally, Remaz would answer a question (e.g., about what Remon typically eats), and Amin would correct her.

In addition to providing oral translations for texts, Remaz also used texts to mediate understanding on several occasions. When I helped Amin fill in the WIC forms, one question asked about medications Remon might be taking. At that time, Remon had been taking some antibiotics, but Amin could not recall the name of the medication. Remaz jumped up and ran into the kitchen. She brought the prescription bottle to me and pointed to the label, so I could copy the medication's name onto the form. In this instance, Remaz appeared to know that she could use a text—a medication label—to broker communication between her father and me.

Using Texts to Teach English

In other literacy events I observed, Remaz actually brokered language within the text itself. This sometimes occurred when Akhlas wanted to learn about written English. During one of my initial visits to the family's apartment, Akhlas mentioned that she wanted to get some books to read. "I have a problem with reading," she said. Remaz and Remon had acquired many books from church friends, and I suggested she could practice by reading some of their books. Remon ran into the kids' shared bedroom and emerged carrying a board book called *Baby Bop's Toys* (Dudko, O'Brien & Kearns, 1993), based upon the Barney TV show. Remon nestled into her lap as Akhlas opened the book and began to read it out loud. I listened as Akhlas stumbled over some of the words, and Remaz—who had not yet started kindergarten but was familiar with the book—helped during her mother's reading. When Akhlas stumbled over the word *hug*, for example, Remaz called out that word for her.

Remaz also appeared to enjoy helping Akhlas with her ESL homework from Peckham. In September, shortly after she began kindergarten, I watched Remaz help her

mother spell by providing information about letter-sound relationships in English. Akhlas was trying sound out words she needed to include in her responses. Remaz hovered by her mother and started saying the appropriate letters as her mother sounded out different words. For example, Remaz said "B" when her mother sounded out "buh...buh", and "T" when her mother sounded out "tuh". On a similar occasion, Akhlas told me that she did not know how to spell the word *newspaper.* Remaz sat up on her knees to look at her mother's writing. She excitedly called out, "N! N! Make an N, mommy!"

As she had with Remaz's oral brokering skills, Akhlas frequently referred to Remaz as her teacher in reference to written homework. Akhlas seemed to enjoy the fact that her daughter—a young child who was just beginning to read and write herself—could provide homework assistance. On the same day when Remaz had helped her mother with letter-sound correspondences in English, I had been helping Akhlas write vocabulary words for depicted objects. Akhlas looked at one picture, but was unsure of the name of the object it represented. Before I could look at the illustration, Remaz glanced over Akhlas' shoulder and said, "Tire." Remaz continued to observe as her mother worked, watching as she read quietly to herself, "This is..." Remaz repeated, "This," and looked at her mother's paper. She said, "Yeah," just like someone who is confirming an answer. Akhlas laughed and said, "She's my teacher! She always tell me the question [*sic*]," meaning that Remaz always provides her with the answers to her homework.

As these examples with Remaz suggest, much of the child language brokering that occurred in these families appeared more related to teaching parents about the English language than to simply translating for or speaking on parents' behalf. Thus, in

addition to providing *oral* English support for their parents' literacy events, children also acted as literacy brokers. They supplied their parents with specific knowledge about *written* English. Remaz and the other children in this study seemed to provide a great deal of English knowledge to their parents. They helped them learn vocabulary, correct pronunciation, letter-sound correspondences, and—on one occasion when Remaz helped her mother with prepositional phrases—even proper English syntax.

Brokering as Everyday Language Learning

Brokering related to lexico-syntactic and graphophonic issues, the findings from this study suggest, may be more than a matter of translation or speaking on behalf of another person. This sort of brokering, especially when it occurs around written texts, may also be a matter of *learning about language*. For many of the events in this chapter, brokers acted as teachers in addition to acting as translators, and this may be true for brokering events in other communities. Brokers certainly provide translations or word meanings, particularly when they are acting to expedite a particular language or literacy event. However, they also can provide important knowledge about how a given language works and is encoded in print—knowledge about syntax, spelling, and pronunciation in addition to translations or word meanings. Brokering, therefore, may help to facilitate language acquisition as it simultaneously provides assistance to individuals during a communicative event. Language acquisition through brokering is most obvious for people who are learning to speak, read, or write in a second (or third or fourth!) language. Yet, this sort of language brokering also likely occurs between speakers of the same language—consider how often we ask, "What's that word I'm looking for?"

Although brokering can take the form of teaching and learning about language, the important point is that this teaching and learning generally occurs outside of formal school settings, as people engage in real-world reading and writing for daily tasks. As the examples in this chapter suggest, Sudanese parents learned a great deal about the English language as they participated in social activities whose primary purpose was other than learning about English. These Sudanese adults learned about English as they worshipped in church, handled community problems, cared for their children, sought information on the Internet, and generally went about their daily business. Their everyday activities provided important contexts for learning about how language functions in print, as well.

And, because this sort of brokering occurs in the everyday world, many brokers who teach about aspects of language also are everyday people who likely have no training in how to teach about language or literacy. The parents in this study, who turned to a variety of available community members to broker, also relied upon their young children as translators and as teachers, despite the fact that these children were only just beginning to be able to read and write themselves. The children in this did not always broker flawlessly. Remaz, for example, could not always supply the English words her mother needed. Yet, participating in this sort of brokering appeared to provide Remaz, and the other children in this study, with many opportunities to practice their own developing English knowledge and skills. As Remaz helped her mother attempt to spell the word *newspaper*, for example, she not only supplied important English-language knowledge to her mother, but she also practiced the same letter-sound relationships that she had been learning in her kindergarten class. Parent-child literacy activities in Akhlas' home may not necessarily fit the model that many family literacy advocates envision,

where parents provide learning opportunities for children. Rather than Akhlas teaching Remaz about language and literacy, mother and daughter learned together.

The language learning that occurred in these families, of course, cannot be separated from the cultural context in which that language was used. Although the examples that I present in this chapter highlight lexico-syntactic and graphophonic aspects of language, these aspects are shaped and informed by the cultural context in which they are situated. On one occasion, for example, Falabia had been browsing the Internet when I visited. She opened a website regarding the General Education Development test, or GED. Falabia called me over to the computer and asked what "GED" stood for. She thought the E stood for *English*. Should she obtain a GED in order to further her education? Falabia said she believed that a GED would prove that she could speak, read, and write English. *GED* actually stood for *General Education Development*, I explained, and it is for people who have not earned a high school diploma—a GED is equivalent of a high school degree. Falabia reminded me that she already had a high school diploma. She also had a degree for nursing, and she pointed to an Arabic-language certificate on the wall above her computer. I explained that she probably did not need to obtain a GED if she already had a high school diploma and had been able to take classes at the community college. Falabia asked about an acronym's meaning, and her question shows the ways in which a word's meaning is connected to the cultural context. In order to understand this term, Falabia background knowledge about how the U.S. school system is set up, as well as knowledge about beliefs, values and attitudes related to education in this country. Falabia, who certainly was asking *what* the GED was, also implicitly asked *why* someone might need or want to obtain this diploma. This sort of

cultural knowledge played an important role in many brokering events, as I will describe in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Reading Between the Lines:

Learning about Cultural Aspects of Texts through Brokering

"I don't know the rules here in America."

~~Falabia

Once, Viola told me a story about hosting some newly-arrived Sudanese refugees in her home. Like all good Sudanese hostesses, she offered the new family something to eat and drink. She produced a container of cookies that, she described, "say 'animal' on the outside." Some of her guests had been very confused and upset, Viola reported, because they believed she was serving them food for animals[1]. Cultural contexts, and the texts within them (such as animal cracker labels), could prove very confusing for refugees as they adjusted to life and literacy in the U.S. As Falabia once explained, "I don't know the rules here in America." Falabia, Viola and other refugees in this study therefore relied upon a variety of cultural brokers who could help them understand the U.S. system, and texts that they encountered within it.

While familiarity with English certainly presented some of the impetus for participants to seek out literacy brokers, other cultural aspects of the texts they encountered in the U.S. played an equally important role in many literacy brokering events. Culture, as I described in Chapter 1, powerfully contextualizes all aspects of language and literacy. Some aspects of culture relate specifically to beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, and other issues. Thus, some of the brokering events I observed

[1] Animal Crackers are a type of cookie sold in the U.S. The crackers are shaped like animals, but they are not made from animals and are intended for human consumption.

highlighted these aspects of culture. These culture-related brokering events focused on (1) knowledge specific to the U.S. context and institutions, such as information about U.S. holidays, political symbols, the sweepstakes, or Boy Scouts; (2) beliefs, values, and practices common in the U.S., such as whether it is "better" to spend time reading a book or watching TV; and (3) expectations—the implicit "rules here in America"—such as schools' expectations for parents.

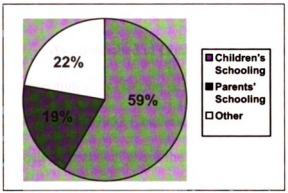
This sort of cultural knowledge may be embedded in texts in many different ways. Certain vocabulary words, for example, carry specific cultural meanings. Beliefs, values, and expectations, on the other hand, are less explicit, requiring individuals to read between, behind, and/or around the lines in order to understand a text. Unlike brokering events related to lexic-syntactic and graphophonic issues, which often had clear-cut "right" answers, the culture-related brokering I observed dealt with issues and knowledge that were far less explicit. In these events, literacy brokers responded to questions such as "Is this a good thing?" or "What should I do?"—questions that frequently had complex or multiple answers. As a result, the culture-related literacy brokering often appeared to take the form of *advising* in addition to explicit teaching about U.S. culture.

Akhlas, for example, once handed me a packet sent home by Remon's Head Start. "I don't know what to do with it," she said. The packet, titled "A Collection of Cool (and sometimes messy) Ideas for Children to Make, Create, and Eat," listed a variety of hands-on activities for young children. She did not really have to do anything, I explained, because the packet only offered suggestions for things to do with her children. Akhlas appeared to have difficulty discerning the school's expectations that were embedded within the parent packet. Were they homework activities, similar to the ones Remon

could do in order to earn points in his Head Start? Were the activities required, recommended, or just suggested?

Many brokering events that I observed, or that were reported to me, involved similar situations, where Akhlas or other Sudanese parents asked about texts sent home by schools. From observational and interview data, I counted 39 instances of brokering related to cultural knowledge, beliefs and values, and expectations, which included 36 different genres (see Figure 6.1). The majority of these texts, 78%, related to formal schooling. Of these, twenty-one related to the children's schooling, while seven related to the parents' own education.

Figure 6.1: The percentage of brokered genres that related to formal schooling.



Sudanese parents in Lansing, like their U.S. counterparts, received texts such as official letters, forms, flyers, newsletters, and consent forms from teachers, principals, school districts or Head Start programs. On one typical day, for example, I noted that Boni's homework folder included, in addition to homework:

- A flier regarding "CAFÉ Night" at his school. *CAFÉ* stood for "Caring and Advocating for Excellence". The event involved an information session, where parents could learn how to help their children do well in school.

- The weekly newsletter from Boni's teacher. Among other features, the newsletter included "Parent's Homework", which offered suggestions for helping children academically at home.

Some of the texts that came home on a regular basis actually originated with the school or district, while others came from community organizations that used schools to disseminate texts for sports, Scouting programs, and other purposes. I often found myself explaining the difference between school and non-school texts to the parents, as I did when Boni brought home a flyer from the neighborhood community center. When Viola asked, "What is this?", I replied that the flyer had come from the community center, not from the school, and it represented activities that were "just for fun."

Cultural Brokering

As I described in Chapter 1, culture contextualizes all literacy practices in any given community (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995, 2007; Street, 1995). Conversely, what people read and write, how they do so, and why, reveals a great deal about the context in which literacy practices occur (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000; Street, 2001b). Cultural aspects of interactions around texts often are what provide meaning to those literacy events (Street, 2001b)—a public reading of a few lines from the Bible make a great deal more sense, for example, when they are understood as a reoccurring event during a church service that also connects to other practices and texts within that service, such as a sermon.

When people move between cultures, they may rely upon brokers to mediate or teach about the new cultural context, just as they rely on brokers for language assistance. Cultural brokering is not a new construct, but scholars are only just beginning to pay

attention to the ways in which cultural brokering relates to texts and literacy practices. Twenty-five years ago, Gentemann and Whitehead (1983) offered one definition of cultural brokering:

> The term cultural broker is used to convey the idea of links between the mainstream culture in a pluralistic society and the various sub-cultures. The linking functions are maintained by actors who are acculturated in both the mainstream and the ethnic cultures, i.e., bicultural actors. The broker must be able to straddle both cultures, to take mainstream values and communicate them to the ethnic cultures, and communicate the ethnic culture to the mainstream. This broker must be an expert manipulator of cultural symbols, information, and people (p. 119).

Similarly, Chu (1998) describes what she calls cultural, linguistic, and informational (CLI) mediation. CLI mediators, according to Chu, are bilingual people who link different communities by: "(1) facilitating intercultural communication through the use of interpretation and the conveying of cultural cues, (2) providing cultural explanations, and (3) imparting information" (p. 3).

Definitions provided by Chu, Gentemann and Whitehead are useful in that they focus on different aspects of culture, such as symbols and information. They are problematic, however, because they define brokers as individuals who are bicultural or bilingual. Many brokers may be bicultural or bilingual, such as the children in this study and others (e.g., Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza, 2003; Tse, 1996) who move back and forth between the cultures of their families and those of the wider U.S. community. Other brokers may *not* be, or consider themselves to be, bicultural or bilingual. Mazak

(2006), for example, noted her largely outsider status in the Puerto Rican community where she often brokered. Indeed, many people who sought her as a broker had better bilingual abilities than she. Church members and other Michigan residents who brokered for the Sudanese refugees in this study spoke no Arabic. Most were firmly situated in the mainstream culture of the U.S., having little prior experience with Sudanese culture. In no way were they bilingual or bicultural, yet they still acted as effective brokers.

Remaz, Boni, Samuel and Juana, in contrast with U.S. brokers, did meet the definition of bicultural and bilingual brokers. Yet, Gentemann and Whitehead's construct of cultural brokering does not fit them because it implies expertise or fully-developed competence on the broker's part. Children may still be gaining competence in the languages and cultures they broker. But if brokers are fully competent, according to Gentemann and Whitehead, then they must have reached adulthood, or at least adolescence, in order to broker. Immigrant and refugee parents often rely upon their children to broker language, culture, and—as I argue in this book—printed texts. Brokering, I found, does *not* require full competence from the brokers, and, in fact, the act of brokering can help at least some children in the development of competence (Dorner, Orellana, & Li-Grining, 2007; Tse & McQuillan, 1996).

U.S. Knowledge, Beliefs, Values & Expectations: Cultural Knowledge in Literacy Brokering

After they moved to the U.S., the Sudanese refugees reported encountering new cultural knowledge in their daily lives. Cultural knowledge also was embedded within texts. Knowing that George Washington was the first president of America, or what the 4th of July commemorated, represented information specific to the general U.S. context.

Other types of textual knowledge, however, appeared to be far less tangible, encompassing beliefs, values, attitudes, and expectations. Beliefs, values and expectations are shaped by the U.S. cultural context, but nevertheless vary a great deal. Table 6.1 shows the number of different types of culture-related literacy brokering events that occurred during observations and interviews in this study.

Table 6.1: Total number of different types of language-related brokering events.

Types of Cultural Literacy Brokering	Number of Events
Cultural knowledge	19
Cultural beliefs/values	11
Cultural expectations	9
Total	**39**

General Cultural Knowledge: George Washington & Halloween

People who are born in and/or grow up in the U.S. learn specific cultural information simply by being surrounded by or participating in particular practices, and attending schools that teach U.S. content knowledge. Because the Sudanese refugees in this study did not have the benefit of growing up in the U.S., they relied upon brokers to learn about: American holidays, history, and national symbols; practices such as entering the sweepstakes or using sidewalk chalk; organizations like the Boy Scouts; and how to navigate public institutions and programs like libraries, schools, community centers, and social service agencies.

Children's schoolwork often presented content knowledge unfamiliar to parents, as I noted during my field work. During one of my visits, for example, Viola browsed through some work Samuel had completed in class. Pointing to where Samuel had copied the word *walrus* on one of the worksheets, she asked me what it was. Walruses live in the Arctic and have very long tusks, I explained. Akhlas, Viola and Falabia all took classes,

and their own coursework sometimes introduced them to unfamiliar cultural concepts, too. I watched Akhlas one day as she was supposed to match pictures of various tableware items with vocabulary such as *silverware, plate,* and *glass*. One picture showed salt and pepper shakers, labeled with S and P respectively. Although she easily identified the salt shaker, Akhlas did not seem to be familiar with pepper. She looked at the picture of the pepper shaker for a long time, glancing down at the word bank to see if she could identify the item. Finally, I told her that the picture showed *pepper*. "Like hot pepper?" she asked, apparently puzzled. Akhlas' ability to comprehend the assignment's vocabulary was dependent on her familiarity with U.S. table settings, I concluded. She could easily identify items such as *salt* or *spoon*, having used those items all her life. Black pepper, however, was not a common part of Sudanese cooking. A drawing of a pepper shaker therefore held little meaning for Akhlas. This episode highlights some of the ways in which culture shapes all aspects of language and literacy use—understanding the vocabulary in this ESL assignment was dependent upon familiarity with larger cultural practices.

Many Sudanese refugees in Lansing planned to obtain U.S. citizenship, and I found that the this pursuit often sparked culture-related literacy brokering. In order to pass their citizenship exams, all applicants must prove that they can speak English and demonstrate knowledge about U.S. history and government, among other requirements (Department of Homeland Security, 2007a). Falabia went through this process in 2006. After applying for citizenship, the government sent her a list of 100 potential questions she might be asked in her citizenship interview (see Figure 6.2). She needed to be prepared to answer questions such as, "What do the stripes on our flag mean?", "Why did

the Pilgrims come to America?", and "Who is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?"

Figure 6.2: Part of the review sheet Falabia used to prepare for her citizenship exam (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services — 100 Typical Questions

1. What are the colors of our flag?
2. How many stars are there on our flag?
3. What color are the stars on our flag?
4. What do the stars on the flag mean?
5. How many stripes are there on the flag?
6. What color are the stripes?
7. What do the stripes on the flag mean?
8. How many states are there in the Union?
9. Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July?
10. What is the date of Independence Day?
11. Independence from whom?
12. What country did we fight during the Revolutionary War?
13. Who was the first President of the United States?
14. Who is the President of the United States today?
15. Who is the Vice-President of the United States today?
16. Who elects the President of the United States?
17. Who becomes our president if the President should die?
18. For how long do we elect the President?
19. What is the Constitution?
20. Can the Constitution be changed?
21. What do we call a change to the Constitution?
22. How many changes or amendments are there to the Constitution?
23. How many branches are there in our Government?
24. What are the three (3) branches of our Government?
25. What is the Legislative Branch of our Government?
26. Who makes the Federal Laws in the United States?
27. What is Congress?
28. What are the duties of Congress?
29. Who elects Congress?
30. How many senators are there in Congress?
31. Can you name two (2) senators from your state?
32. For how long do we elect each senator?
33. How many voting members are in the House of Representatives?
34. For how long do we elect the Representatives?
35. What is the Executive Branch of our Government?
36. What is the Judiciary Branch of our Government?
37. What are the duties of the Supreme Court?
38. What is the supreme law of the United States?
39. What is the Bill of Rights?
40. What is the capital of your State?
41. Who is the current Governor of your State?
42. Who becomes president if both the President and Vice-President die?

ESL courses at Peckham introduced Akhlas to some information required to pass the exam, in addition to helping her learn English, and she often asked me for help with this information in her homework. About a month after I met her, Akhlas brought home a worksheet about American holidays and political symbols. It asked her to name two religious holidays, identify the holiday when children wear costumes and get treats, and so forth. Akhlas seemed easily identify religious holidays, probably due to her religious faith, and she also knew about Halloween, likely through her children. She appeared less familiar, however, with holidays such as Columbus Day or Valentine's Day. Another worksheet in this packet included drawings of American symbols, such as a bald eagle, George Washington, and the capitol building. For this assignment, Akhlas had to match each symbol to its meaning. For example, she had to identify George Washington as the first president. When Falabia, Akhlas and other Sudanese refugees encountered information so closely tied to U.S. history and cultural practices, they called upon brokers for help.

Cultural Beliefs & Values: "Turn off the TV Tuesdays!"

Cultural beliefs and values also played an important role in many literacy brokering events I observed among the three Sudanese families. Often, I noted that these beliefs and values were implicit or embedded within a text's content. Boni and Samuel's school actively promoted March as "reading month". When Samuel's teacher sent home a purple packet entitled "Turn off the TV Tuesdays!", Viola handed me the packet, confused about what to do. It suggested that Viola read with her children each Tuesday in lieu of watching television. Every Tuesday, she was supposed to fill in the chart with how long, and what, Samuel had read, and she should return the chart each Wednesday. This

particular text appeared to contain many implicit values—values that could be described as predominantly White and middle class—about reading and watching television for children. In order for Viola to fully understand the packet's meaning, she needed to know that educators often juxtapose watching television with reading books, because many people in the U.S. believe watching television can be detrimental to children's academic achievement. Without knowledge of cultural beliefs and values surrounding television, it might not be immediately obvious to Viola what turning off the television had to do with reading with her children.

Other times, beliefs and values seemed to be about texts themselves, rather than being embedded within them. During her long process of applying to law school, Viola and I went to the university together to submit parts of her application. The department's secretary gave Viola a receipt for a $30 fee, which she had paid in cash. As we walked out to the car, Viola wondered if she should save the receipt. Keeping the receipt would be a good idea, I explained. If there were any disputes, she could prove that she had paid the fee. In this instance, the advice Viola sought related to the value of keeping a receipt versus throwing it away. In the U.S., printed receipts are an important and valued method of documentation, and, thus, many Americans believe it is important to keep them.

Cultural Expectations: "This Meeting Important? I Go or Not?"

Cultural expectations were embedded within many texts. I noted many instances in which school texts, in particular, prompted brokering events. Boni, Samuel, Remaz, and Juana attended school in a different country and cultural context than their parents had experienced. As a result, their parents needed to learn new sets of expectations for families held by U.S. educators—what types of activities parents "should" do to support

their children's learning in school, how they should interact with the school and their child's teacher, or even simply knowing that they should look regularly in their child's backpack for information the school might send home.

U.S. schools generally expect (or at least hope) that parents will read and act appropriately upon the many texts they send home. Thus, culture-related brokering sometimes involved helping the Sudanese parents discern the difference between parent participation that was highly expected by schools, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, and more optional participation, such as attending a question-and-answer session with the superintendent.

When Boni was still in kindergarten, for example, his principal sent home a note about a celebration lunch for the school's teachers and staff. The letter asked if parents could donate food or help at the event. It included a form the parents could use to indicate if, and how, they could help. How, Viola wondered, should she respond? Was her participation required? "I don't think you *have* to do it," I explained, "but if you want to help with that, you can send this back." Another time, Akhlas looked carefully at a packet she pulled from Remaz's backpack. She held up one page for me to read and asked, "This meeting important? I go or not?" I saw that the paper featured an invitation from the school district for an informational meeting concerning potential budget cuts. The superintendent would be answering questions, and the district would provide light refreshments and childcare. This particular meeting, I explained, probably was not crucial for Akhlas to attend.

"Is This a Good Thing?": Brokering as Advising

As suggested in the previous examples, Sudanese parents in this study wanted to

provide good educational opportunities for their children, and they wanted to meet schools' expectations. Sometimes, however, they appeared unsure of how to go about doing so. Viola, for example, frequently asked for help discerning which school-related events she should attend with Boni and Samuel. After reading through the various papers in her boys' backpacks one January afternoon, Viola handed me a flyer for a school-sponsored Science Night event. "Is this a good thing?" she asked. The flyer explained that the local science museum would be giving some presentations at the school, and some older students would share their own science projects. Science Night, in fact, was a "good thing", I offered. I suggested that the event would be an opportunity for her boys to learn interesting things about science. Based upon my advice, she decided to take Boni and Samuel to the event. As her question suggests, Viola sought a broker in this case, not because she could not understand the language of the text, but rather because she wanted advice about the appropriateness of an extracurricular program.

Some of the culture-related literacy brokering events I observed involved factual information, such as knowledge about holidays, U.S. history, or the system of government. Others, as I have described, dealt with issues of "should I...?" Indeed, the parents sometimes initiated the two types of brokering events in different ways. In some events, I noted that they asked for *help*, just as they had with certain English-language brokering events. Other times, I found that they asked specifically for *advice,* as Viola did with a registration form for the Cub Scouts. Should she enroll Boni in this program? Cub Scouts, I explained, is like an after-school club. I suggested the program probably was fine, and I also added that it was not a required part of school—it was just for fun. If Viola decided not to sign Boni up this year, I proposed that she could always do it the

following year if he wanted to join. In similar situations, Viola and other Sudanese parents sought out literacy brokers, not for their knowledge of the English language, but rather for their familiarity with U.S. contexts. Viola's request for advice indicated that what she really needed was information about a particular U.S. institution (the Boy Scouts), how it worked, and whether it would be good for her son.

The Way Things Work in America: Libraries and Sidewalk Chalk

Different aspects of U.S. life, including texts and literacy practices, prompted other brokering requests among the families. I often found myself explaining how things "work" in the U.S.—sweepstakes mail is actually an advertising gimmick; refugees did not need to obtain a GED if they already had a foreign high school diploma that was accepted at a U.S. college; scholarship funding is only available if someone is actually enrolled in or applying for an educational program. In August, 2005, I accompanied Akhlas and her children as they visited the local public library. Akhlas explained that she had heard about the library from other Sudanese refugees who sometimes borrowed videos or DVDs. She appeared less familiar with other library resources, however. Knowing that she needed a library card to borrow library resources, she wondered how to apply for one.

During our visit, I discovered that Akhlas was unfamiliar with cultural knowledge about U.S. public libraries, particularly aspects regarding resources for children. Thus, as Akhlas and I walked around the library, I responded to her questions about the children's area and the video section. Some of the videos focused on entertainment, I explained, while others were educational, all of which she could borrow free for one week. After our tour, Akhlas went to the librarian to apply for a library card.

On other occasions, brokers helped families become familiar with common U.S. literacy practices. One afternoon in March, I noted that Boni arrived home with a large package of sidewalk chalk, which he had "bought" during Market Day (see Figure 6.3). On Market Days, a regular occurrence in Boni's classroom, children selected items based upon pretend money they had earned as rewards for certain behaviors and achievements. Viola clearly knew what chalk was, as she had reported that it was a common resource in her classrooms in Sudan. She appeared to be unfamiliar, however, with the common U.S. childhood practice of using the sidewalk as a slate for writing and drawing. When she saw Boni's chalk, she said she needed to buy a chalkboard for Boni to use the chalk. I explained that, in the U.S., children use sidewalk chalk to write on the sidewalk. The chalk rinses away when it rains, I added. "Ahhh," Viola said. She nodded toward the bulletin board in her kitchen, commenting again that she would buy a chalkboard for the children. That was certainly an option, I replied, or the boys simply could use the chalk on the pavement. Viola, who had never encountered sidewalk chalk in the Sudan, seemed not to be familiar with the ways in which it "works" in the U.S. As a result, she needed a broker to explain (more than once) about the concept of using chalk on the sidewalk.

Figure 6.3: Boni shows off his sidewalk chalk and some of the other items he acquired during Market Day in his classroom.



Values About Texts: Resumes and Letters of Reference

Literacy practices also include beliefs and attitudes *about* texts, which are shaped by context (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Falabia and Viola both requested help with creating resumes, and some of what they needed to know included values and beliefs about resumes in the U.S. The women had questions about the structure of resumes, and both also appeared to need to know *why* they should include certain elements in their resumes. Viola reported to me that a job counselor at MichiganWorks helped her create a resume. Employers, this woman had explained to her, do not like to see unexplained gaps in employment history. Viola therefore included "self-employed homemaker" in her job history (see Figure 6.4)[2]. When she later asked for help in putting together her law school application, I told her that *who* she selected to write her letters mattered a great deal to the admissions officers. Her letter-writers, I explained, should be people who could comment

[2] Viola's resume does not include her valuable experiences working in a law firm in Sudan or with a refugee agency in Lebanon—unfortunate omissions, in my opinion!

on her academic abilities and qualifications. Someone from her university in Egypt or from the office where she worked in Lebanon would be ideal, I suggested.

Figure 6.4: The resume Viola created at MichiganWorks.

Viola Lupai

Objective:
Seeking a position in a factory/assembly, hospital, housekeeping, labor or entry level clerical environment, where my experience and skills can be best applied.

Employment History:

Comfort Inn
Okemos, MI
04/2005 - 07/2005
Housekeeping
Custodian, cleaning rooms, upkeep of premises, etc.

Self - Employed
Lansing, MI
01/2005 - 04/2005
Homemaker
House wife, maternity, taking care of new-born child, etc.

Trinity Evangelical Luthern Church
Lansing, MI
06/2004 - 12/2004
Director Social Work/Refugee Assistance
Help refugees with clothes, food, job seeking, errands, etc.

Popeye's Chicken
Lansing , MI
10/2003 - 06/2004
Cook and Food Preparation
Prepared rice, biscuits, salads, etc.

Education:
Degree
Major: Law
Ain Shams University Cairo, Egypt
MI

Skills and Abilities:
Bi-lingual, Arabic and English

Notes and Other Information:
Dependable, on-time, precise in duties.

Viola and Falabia, both well-educated women with prior experience in the Sudanese professional world, might be expected to know about resumes or letters of recommendation. However, the cultural context for employment changed when they came to Michigan, and as a result, the women needed help understanding the implications

accompanying job-related texts. Had they been raised in the U.S., Falabia and Viola might have had many opportunities to become familiar with the purpose and content of resumes or reference letters. However, they reported growing up in a context where family or personal connections mattered as much as (and perhaps more than) education and experience in obtaining a job. Resumes and letters of recommendation function very differently in these two contexts, and as a result, the women could not be expected to automatically be familiar with U.S.-based values and beliefs connected to the texts. Viola, for example, apparently did not understand that—in the U.S., at least—a reference from her local church pastor would not "count" for admission to law school in the same way as a reference from one of her Egyptian professors or a lawyer with whom she had worked in Sudan.

I noted that some school-related brokering events also focused upon beliefs and values about certain kinds of texts. For example, Samuel's teacher participated in the Scholastic book-ordering program, and she encouraged her students' parents to order books, too. In November, Viola told me that she planned to order some Scholastic books for Samuel. Wanting to buy books that would support Samuel's learning, but saying that she was unsure which books were "better" for helping him learn to read, she asked me to select some educational books that were within her budget. In any given culture, certain texts and literacy practices are valued more highly than others. Viola seemed not know how to determine which books were "better" for supporting her son's literacy development—a difficulty likely related to Viola's unfamiliarity with U.S. children's books, but one which may not be limited to newcomers to the U.S.

Cultural Brokers: Navigating the System

Scholars have suggested that cultural brokers are individuals who straddle mainstream and minority communities and who are fully competent in both cultures (Chu, 1998, Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983). The data presented in Table 6.2 do not support this theory, however. These data, based upon observations and reports during interviews, suggest that the Sudanese adults in this study turned to U.S. friends for cultural brokering. They also relied upon their own young children, but I did not observe them, nor did they report, turning to other Sudanese adults for cultural help with texts[3]. Most of the locals I met who interacted with the Sudanese community in Michigan typically had little experience with Sudanese culture—or any African culture, for that matter—until they met refugees who resettled Michigan. Children in the Sudanese families in this study, in contrast, could be considered bicultural, but their expertise in both Sudanese and U.S. cultures was limited due to their young age. Samuel was the only focal child who had been born in the U.S., while Boni and Juana both came to this country as infants. Remaz, only five years old when I first observed her acting as a broker, had lived in the U.S. for just two years of her life. Despite their limited life experiences, the young Sudanese children in these families were an important source of U.S. cultural knowledge for their parents.

[3] Sudanese community members did, however, sometimes provide cultural brokering unrelated to literacy. Isbon, for example, met with local police on behalf of the Sudanese community to talk about common problems the Sudanese experienced with the law, to explain differences between Sudanese and U.S. legal systems, and to encourage police to present an informational workshop for the Sudanese community.

Table 6.2: Suppliers of different types of cultural knowledge for each Sudanese parent.

		Brokers		
Participant	**Knowledge Type**	**American**	**Child**	**Other Sudanese**
Akhlas	Beliefs/values	X		
	Expectations	X	X	
	Cultural knowledge	X		
	Specific content		X	
Amin	Beliefs/values	X		
Falabia	Cultural knowledge	X		
	Strategies of use	X		
	Specific content		X	
Isbon	Cultural knowledge	X	X	
Viola	Beliefs/values	X		
	Expectations	X	X	
	Cultural knowledge	X	X	
	Specific content	X	X	

Citizenship and Schools: U.S. Cultural Brokers

In Chapter 5, I described the different U.S. residents who brokered English-language aspects of texts for the Sudanese families. The families reported that these same brokers—church members, co-workers, neighbors, social workers, and others—also provided important cultural knowledge. Some local organizations, such as the Refugee Development Center, Lutheran Social Services, and Peckham Inc. (where Akhlas worked) offered cultural assistance to refugees and immigrants as part of their missions. Falabia and Akhlas, like many refugees, utilized cultural brokering services when they worked to earn U.S. citizenship. After Akhlas received the list of 100 possible exam questions and their answers from the Department of Homeland Security, she told me,

"Now I have it [the list of questions], I want you to sometimes to explain [to] me...I will read, I will apply myself because this for citizenship. You have to know about the stuff."

School texts, as I have described in this chapter, also prompted Akhlas and Viola to find local brokers who could help them understand values, beliefs, and expectations related to education in the U.S. Akhlas reported how helpful her church friend had been in dealing with Remaz's school. I also brokered different texts that arrived home from school. I planned my regular visits around the children's homework schedules and thus was available on days when the schools most commonly sent home flyers, forms, newsletters and other documents. Although my availability certainly played a role in how often Viola or Akhlas asked about school texts, both mothers reported that they also called upon other brokers to help them with these texts.

It is perhaps not surprising that Sudanese refugees called upon U.S. citizens to broker texts related to citizenship and schooling, domains with an enormous impact on refugees' lives. While some refugees reported consulting with Sudanese who had gone through the citizenship process already—Viola indicated, for example, that she planned to talk with Falabia about her experience—they typically brought citizenship or residency texts to native-born citizens for brokering. Ironically, U.S. citizens by birth, such as I, had little experience with green cards, applications for citizenship, or other residency documents! Misreading documents or making mistakes on official forms could have serious consequences for refugees who, as Falabia noted, already felt they did not know the rules in the U.S. Thus, native-born citizens probably were a good choice for this sort of brokering, because they likely knew more about government systems and spoke better English than did other refugees.

Navigating the educational system, like the immigration system, also required specific knowledge and carried negative consequences when refugees made mistakes. In September, 2006, I noticed that Remaz's school sent home a letter to inform Akhlas and Amin that Remaz owed $27 for lunches (see Figure 6.5). The letter indicated that Remaz had paid $1.75 for one lunch, but she needed to pay at least $20 more, or she could no longer receive school lunches. I explained to Akhlas that Remaz needed to bring money for lunch the next day. Knowing that the family received food stamps, I expressed my surprise that Remaz was not eligible for free lunches. The school must have made a mistake, I suggested, and I offered to call the office to clear up the problem. Before Remaz began to receive meals, however, Amin and I had to fill out the required free lunch application forms (twice!). Had Akhlas and Amin not found a literacy broker for the letter and forms, little Remaz might have gone hungry at school[4]—a dire consequence indeed.

[4] When I later checked with the lunch cashier to ensure that everything had been taken care of, she assured me that she scrounges something so that children never go without food.

Figure 6.5: A letter Akhlas and Amin received regarding Remaz's lunch charges.

Date Sept. 29.05

To the Parents of Abdelhrman Remaz

Your child owes for the breakfast and/or lunch he/she ordered on 9-6-9-28

at _____ school.

Amount Due $27.00

Lunch is $1.75 Breakfast is $1.00
Lunch is .40 cents (reduced) Breakfast is .30 cents (reduced)

School District policy states that no more than 2 meals ($3.50 fully paid, 80 cents reduced) can be charged at any time.

If arrangements are not made to pay the amount due, your child may be refused hot lunch and will need to bring a sack lunch until payment is made.

Your prompt attention in this matter will be appreciated.

If you have any questions, please call me at _____.

Thank you,

I did recive the $1.75 your Child lunch tot. is at $27.00. I need at lease $20.00 By 9/30/05 Bfor I Send your Child. Hot lunch.

Cashier

Principal

A few days after solving her lunch problem, I observed that Remaz brought home another envelope marked "To the Parents of Remaz". According to this letter, the school district had not received any immunization records for Remaz. If they did not receive her records by October 19th, she would be barred from attending class. Again, Akhlas asked for help understanding the letter. When I explained the contents to Akhlas, she insisted that Remaz's vaccinations were up-to-date. I advised her to bring a copy of the immunization record to the school, and to call her doctor if she could not find the record.

Later, Akhlas reported to me that she provided the required documentation, and, happily, Remaz did not miss any school.

Viola and Isbon also received many school district communiqués with potentially serious consequences. Boni experienced many learning difficulties in school, and his parents often had to deal with official paperwork regarding his academic progress. Viola frequently expressed concern about these texts, and I observed many of them first-hand. When Boni's teacher recommended that he be retained in kindergarten, for example, Viola consulted me about her options. She felt that repeating kindergarten would not be good for Boni, but she was not sure of her parental rights. I explained the various options, and their implications, and helped Viola fill in the paperwork to refuse retention.

However, Boni's difficulties continued in first grade. Early in the year, the school assessed both Boni and Samuel and sent home a recommendation regarding placement for both in an English Language Learner (ELL) classroom. Viola and I both opposed placing the boys in the ELL program. Boni's first-grade teacher also told me that she opposed the placement, although she felt he should have repeated kindergarten. Boni's difficulties, she reported, were not with English, and she felt the district's ELL program likely would not meet his needs. Although Viola declined the ELL placement (see Figure 6.6), the school district informed Boni's teacher that he would be leaving her classroom. Viola also reported to me that a district employee had told her that she did not have the right to make this decision, because the district knew what was best for her child.

Figure 6.6: A consent form, indicating Viola's refusal to place Boni and Samuel in ELL classrooms.

Bilingual Education Department

Parent Notification for Bilingual Services

Date: October 4, 2005 School: _____

Student: Boni and Samuel Domolouka

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The School District provides the English Language Learners (ELL) Program to students who qualify based on state and federal guidelines that include assessment of a student's language and achievement levels. These services support classroom instruction and provide additional opportunities for students' academic growth and language proficiency. We recommend that your child attend the ELL Program located at Elementary School. Bus transportation will be provided for qualified students.

The ELL support services are funded by state and federal grants so that all students can learn to read, write and communicate effectively in the English language.

In addition to studying the district curriculum for each grade level, students in kindergarten through fifth grade receive the following services:

- A structured, research-based program teaching English language through science, math, social studies and language arts;
- Small group instructions that aim at developing fluency and literacy in the English language;
- Use of a student's home language to assist them in understanding and acquiring new concepts in math, science, social studies and language arts.

Please mail this letter to:
Bilingual Education Department

Or, you may return this letter to the principal at your child's school, and the school will forward this letter. If you need additional information, please call the Bilingual Education Department

Sincerely,

, Director
Bilingual Education Department

(Check Yes or No)

_____**YES, I want** ✓ **NO, I do not want** my child to receive the bilingual services listed above.

Parent's Signature: Viola **Date:** 10.7.05

Frustrated and upset, Viola called upon me to intervene. Boni remained in his first grade class, but at the end of the year, his teacher again recommended retention. When I

arrived one day, Viola showed me some information the district had sent about an intensive literacy and math program for struggling children. According to the brochure, the program would allow Boni to progress to second grade, but still receive the support he needed. Once again, Viola asked for my advice, and I accompanied her when she went to enroll Boni in the new school.

Incidents involving official school texts and serious consequences were, fortunately, not as common in my data as cultural brokering for flyers, newsletters, or other less official texts. Nevertheless, in order to successfully navigate and respond to school texts, Akhlas and Viola needed access to crucial knowledge about U.S. education in general and the local school system in particular. U.S. brokers could provide answers and advice for questions such as: Where do I obtain application forms? How do I prove that my child meets the requirements to attend school? What are the implications of retaining my child? Am I expected to attend this event? Should my child participate in this program? All parents, not just refugees, need access to mainstream cultural knowledge about schools and schooling in the U.S. Parents in minority, immigrant, or otherwise marginalized communities, however, may not have the knowledge or experience they need in order to successfully navigate the system (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers, 2003; Valdés, 2001). In addition, they may not be familiar with the beliefs, values, and expectations schools hold for them as parents. Relying upon American cultural brokers, therefore, appeared to be was one effective strategy that the Sudanese community used to understand and interact with the local schools. Many of the events I describe in this chapter relied upon me as the literacy broker. However, the parents in this

study reported calling upon others in Lansing to help them with different texts. They also relied upon their children, as I will describe in the next section.

Child Literacy Brokers: "These Papers are SO Important"

I often watched the Sudanese children brokering cultural aspects of texts, in addition to providing English assistance for their parents. And, because they attended the schools that sent home so many papers, most of the child brokering I observed occurred around school-related texts. Orellana, Dorner and Pulido (2003) described special situations where children translate for parents, including parent-teacher conferences, where "children play pivotal roles not simply in translating *words*, but in interpreting school practices" (p. 517). However, existing research tends to focus on oral interactions, rather than those that occur around print. Yet, texts could provoke cultural misunderstandings, such as the animal cracker event I described at the beginning of this chapter.

For Boni and Samuel,]handing over flyers, permission slips, and other paperwork included in their weekly homework folders appeared to be an important routine. Early in his first-grade year, I listened as Boni told his mother about an upcoming school event, although he appeared to be fuzzy on the details. Viola wondered if he was referring to a school field trip that she thought was scheduled for a different day. "Where your bag?" she asked as she took Boni's backpack and opened it, "I need to know." Samuel, who had opened his own backpack, handed Viola a little blue postcard-sized note from the school. It reminded parents about picture day being the next day. Although the boys were not reading the texts themselves, they nevertheless seemed to be able to help their parents gain access to important cultural information about school practices such as field trips

and picture days. When Boni made comments such as, "You have to read this all because these papers are *so* important," he likely helped alert his mother to the value of the texts he handed her. When Samuel noted that he might get in trouble if Viola did not fill in and sign the "Turn off the TV Tuesdays" form, he offered information about U.S. values regarding television and about his teacher's expectations regarding parent support for reading at home.

Boni, Samuel and other Sudanese children, as I have noted, resided in both U.S. and Sudanese cultures. Their bicultural status seemed to allow them to broker between the two cultures, and I noted that they also brokered occasionally for non-Sudanese as a result. Boni especially liked to share with me the African music videos and soap operas that his family watched. When I once picked up a DVD of an African music video, Boni explained that the DVD was by Koffi, an artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo. "That's his name," Boni said, pointing to the cover, "K-O-F-F-I, Koffi." The scantily-clad women who graced the cover, he added, were Koffi's "daughters".

In Viola's family, brokering by Boni and Samuel appeared to serve an important function in helping their parents understand aspects of U.S. culture. The boys alerted their parents to texts the school sent home, and they helped them understand that some texts were more important than others, such as forms that needed to be signed. As Halgunseth (2003) notes, child language brokers who act as acculturating agents for their parents simultaneously accelerate their own process of acculturation. Thus, during brokering activities related to school texts, Viola had opportunities to learn about U.S. values, beliefs, and expectations, while Boni and Samuel were exposed to the same cultural knowledge. Other researchers have reported similar findings. In their study, Tse and

McQuillan (1996) noted that brokers reported increased general knowledge about the world and broader cultural understanding. In a similar study, Tse (1996) found that 37.5% of adolescent brokers indicated that brokering helped them learn more about American culture, and 35.9% said they had learned more about their own culture.

Cultural Knowledge about Schools

Literacy brokering, thus, seemed to be an important mechanism by which these Sudanese families gained knowledge about U.S. cultural practices. During these events, brokers sometimes provided explicit information, but more often, this brokering took the form of advice. The significance of these findings, though, rests in the fact that nearly 80% of the culture-related brokering I observed, or that was reported to me, related to the formal schooling. The Sudanese families in this study were new to the cultures of the U.S. and the school system. Sudanese refugees, however, are not unique in this respect. A great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to cultural differences that exist among various communities—even those with long histories in the U.S.—and the schools that serve them (e.g., Au, 1980; Delpit, 2002; Heath, 1983; Lipka, 1991; Ogbu, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). The culture of schooling is unique, but it is far more similar to the culture of White, middle-class America than it is to the cultures of more marginalized communities. All families therefore may need access to cultural knowledge, values, beliefs, and expectations of schools in order to better navigate the system. Brokering may be one method by which families can acquire cultural knowledge.

Texts mediate a great deal of the communication that occurs between home and school, as the examples in this chapter suggest. Schools relied upon texts for important purposes such as passing information on to parents through newsletters and notes or

documenting consent for field trips or special education. Had Akhlas and Amin not received letters from the district, for example, they likely would not have known that Remaz owed money for lunch or needed to produce immunization records. All parents, not just Sudanese refugees, require a great deal of cultural background information in order to make sense of similar texts.

Chapter 7

The Fine Print:

Learning about Genres through Brokering

"I always see people use the coupons from the newspaper, but I don't know how they get it...Or how they can use it...I have always seen people, they shop and they give a lot of coupons, but I don't know how."

~~Falabia

~~~~~~~~~~

When baby Anthony was about six months old, Viola felt it was time to go back to work in order to supplement the family's income. She had picked up an application for housekeeping at the county hospital, and asked me to help her complete it. Like most job applications, this form asked Viola to include contact information for previous employers. For a time, Viola had worked in housekeeping at a chain hotel and, before that, as a cook at a local chicken establishment. When she commented that she did not know exact addresses, I suggested we consult the phone book. Viola plunked her phone book, which was in pristine condition, on the kitchen counter and started flipping through the yellow pages, muttering under her breath all the while. The book clearly had not been used much (if at all), and Viola's random page-turning suggested that she did not really know how locate information in a phone book. I helped Viola find the hotel's number in the yellow pages and the restaurant's information in the business section. After we copied the relevant information, I introduced Viola to the three sections of the phone book. The business section, I explained, provided an alphabetical listing of area businesses. The yellow pages also were business listings, but they were organized by category such as
~~~~~~~~~~

hotels or *restaurants*, and they also included advertisements. The white pages, I added, listed personal, at-home phone numbers. "Oh!" Viola exclaimed, indicating that she had learned new information about phone books.

In addition to lexico-syntactic/graphophonic and cultural aspects of texts, my data suggest that literacy brokers provide genre knowledge about the text itself, including the purpose and use of the text, or of specific features included in the genre. Always located within a specific linguistic and cultural context, written genres are social constructions that represent specific purposes for reading and writing within different social activities (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bazerman, 1988; Bhatia, 1997; Freadman, 1994; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Paltridge, 1994). The features and structure of a given genre reflect the ways in which that genre is used in the world. The purpose of a phone book, for example, is very different from that of a novel, and, although both can be embodied in book format, very different features structure each genre. The ability to effectively use a genre—to read and/or write a text to meet particular social goals—requires knowledge about the text's purpose, its features, and how to use the text and its features.

Viola, for example, appeared to know that the purpose of a phone book is to provide contact information for individuals and businesses, and she had a general idea of how to use it to look up information. What she did not seem to know, however, was how information was organized within a phone book. Navigating the phone book to find contact information for former employers, therefore, involved knowledge about the phone book's features, the purpose(s) of those features, and how they are organized. When Viola or the other Sudanese adults in this study encountered new texts, or familiar texts that were used in different ways, they turned to literacy brokers who could supply

genre knowledge.

Genre Theory

Reflecting the broader sociocultural trend in literacy studies, genre theorists increasingly view genres as socially-constructed practices (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bakhtin, 1986; Bazerman, 1988; Bhatia, 1997; Freadman, 1994; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Paltridge, 1994). Thus, any consideration of genre must take into account how people create texts, how they use texts, and for what purposes (Bazerman, 1988). Halliday's work, along with others in Australia, on functional approaches to language has greatly influenced views on genres as social practices, as has speech act theory (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bakhtin, 1986; Freadman, 1994).

Genre and Context

An emphasis on real-world uses of genres implies that genres are goal-directed and purposeful (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bazerman, 1988; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1994a). A genre's purposes are "more evasive, multiple, layered, and complex than originally envisaged" (Askehave & Swales, 2001, p. 197), and they are intimately connected with the genre's context. Indeed, Miller (1994b) sees context as so critical to the understanding of genre that she views genre as a cultural artifact—"a product that has particular functions, and fits into a system of functions and other artifacts" (p. 69). Place, or location, is one specific aspect of context that must be taken into account when thinking about genres, because some texts necessarily occur in certain specific places, defined by specific social roles for participants (Freadman, 1994). Genres are not static (Bakhtin, 1986). Instead they vary according to time, place, and situation.

Existing genres change over time, and new genres may emerge while others disappear (Bazerman, 1988; Freedman & Medway, 1994).

Contexts shape genres, but genres also shape contexts (Bazerman, 1988). Consider, for example, the nature of the Internet, which contains many different written genres. Social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook represent one genre that has dramatically shaped how many people interact with each other. Due to this interplay between genre and situated context, genre theorists also increasingly view genres as localized (Freadman, 1994; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1994b, Bazerman, 1988). As a result, people who move between contexts, such as refugees or other immigrants, may encounter new genres. Viola, for example, moved from a country where few people had access to telephones to another context where telephones are common, creating the necessity for phone books that contain contact information.

Function Shapes Form

Askehave and Swales (2001) argue that the emphasis on "text-in-context" is a particularly North American viewpoint on genre, one that emphasizes the interplay and interaction between genre and context. In contrast, Halliday's Sydney School of genre focuses on explicating and defining genres by their features. The two perspectives, however, are not mutually exclusive. Form and function are intimately connected within genres, and they are also shaped by contexts (Halliday, 1973; Miller, 1994; Purcell-Gates, Duke & Martineau, 2007). And, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, the ability to use a text in any given context relies upon knowledge of the features of that genre. The function of a genre, such as a job application, helps to shape its textual form. Job applications—at least, in the U.S.—are designed to elicit specific information that will

help an employer assess the qualifications of a potential employee. Thus, the employment context and the purpose of gathering information shape the application's form.

Genres & Power

Because genres are contextualized by culture and society (see Chapter 1), they are also inherently political (Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1994b). According to Bhatia (1997), communication

> Is possible only when all the participants share, not only the code, but also the knowledge of the genre, which includes the knowledge of its construction, interpretation and use. A necessary implication of this shared genre knowledge is that it is not routinely available to the outsiders, which creates a kind of social distance between the legitimate members of the discourse community and those who are considered outsiders (p. 364).

Bhatia writes largely about institutionalized contexts, such as academia. His comments about "sharing the code" certainly resonate with critical frameworks that examine minority or otherwise marginalized communities in relation to formal schooling in the U.S. (e.g., Delpit, 1992; Giroux, 1989, 1992; Ogbu, 1987). Not all genres or purposes will be officially acknowledged by institutions such as schools (Askehave & Swales, 2001), and those that are acknowledged may not be valued equally. Many genre theorists therefore advocate for critical perspectives that ask questions about the ideologies embedded within particular genres, and the ways in which different participants are positioned by genres: "We need to ask specifically, what does participation in a genre do to, and for, an individual or group?" (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p. 12).

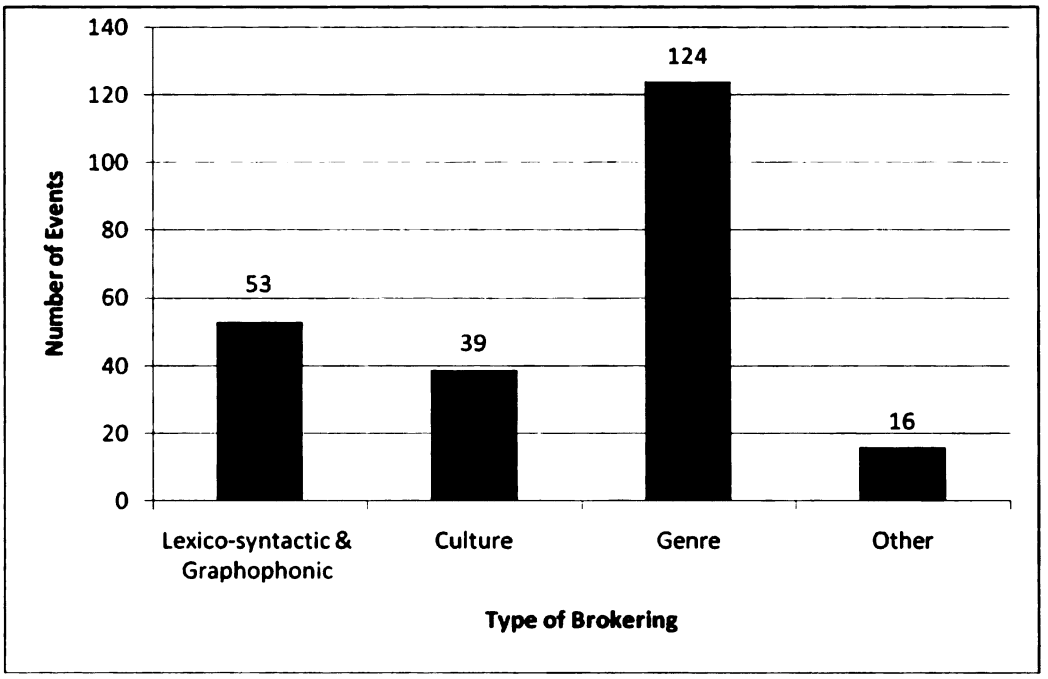
Acquiring Genre Knowledge

A critical examination of genre must also, I believe, include questions about how individuals acquire the knowledge necessary to "participate in a genre". Participants in any literacy activity must possess a great deal of genre knowledge in order to effectively use texts to accomplish goals. Some of this knowledge includes familiarity with participant structures and roles (Miller, 1994b); beliefs, values, attitudes, and expectations; the types of texts used to accomplish specific goals in specific contexts; and specific features of different text types. Genre knowledge is acquired through both educational and personal life experiences (Askehave & Swales, p. 197; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). Formal schooling certainly provides one venue for learning about genres, although scholars disagree about how genre instruction is best accomplished (e.g., Delpit, 1992; Purcell-Gates, Duke & Martineau, 2007). But what about individuals who are not in school? What about genres that are not recognized by schools? Genre knowledge also appears to be acquired in authentic situations, both in and out of school, where participants are able to interact with texts for real-world purposes (New London Group, 1996; Purcell-Gates et al, 2002; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). Much literacy learning is informal and occurs as people interact with texts during daily life (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Crosswords, Invitations & Yearbooks: Genre Aspects of Literacy Brokering

Although many of the brokering events I observed among Sudanese families, or that they reported to me, negotiated English language and U.S. culture, the vast majority of events involved a third aspect of literacy brokering—genre types and textual features (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: The observed or reported brokering events for each type of brokering.



With this type of brokering, participants needed information about the purposes, uses, and features of a genre. In some instances, participants needed very broad information about a genre as a whole. In other instances, they needed more "micro" information about specific features of a genre. Brokers provided knowledge about

- the purpose of the genre
- the use of the text
- specific features of the genre
- the features' purpose(s)
- the features' use(s), and
- how features are organized within a given genre.

Table 7.1 shows the number of each type of genre-related literacy brokering observed or reported during interviews. I will describe these types in more detail in the

following sections.

Table 7.1: Total number of different types of genre-related brokering events.

Types of Genre-related Brokering	Number of Events
Purpose of text	39
Use of text	15
Specific features of text	3
Purpose of features	8
Use of features	34
Organization of features	25
Total	**124**

Purpose of the Text

Brokers often appeared to provide knowledge about the *purpose* of a given text or genre—*why* a genre exists and what function(s) it serves in the world. In fact, I counted a greater number of brokering events involving a genre's purpose than any other sub-type of literacy knowledge, including lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, or other genre brokering types (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Total number of different types of literacy brokering events from observations and interviews.

Brokering Type	Number of Events
Lexico-syntactic & Graphophonic	
Encoding/decoding	20
Syntax	6
Vocabulary	27
Total	**53**
Culture	
Cultural knowledge	19
Cultural beliefs/values	11
Cultural expectations	9
Total	**39**
Genre	
Purpose of text	39
Use of text	15
Specific features of text	3
Purpose of features	8

Table 7.2 (cont'd).

Use of features	34
Organization of features	25
Total	**124**

Brokering about a genre's purpose often occurred, it seemed, when Sudanese parents encountered genres with which they had reported little experience before coming to the U.S. Yearbooks, sewing patterns, phone books, crossword puzzles, coupons, and various kinds of Internet websites all were new to the Sudanese. Late in the school year, for example, Viola told me that the boys' school had sent home a form for ordering books. She handed me two copies of a flyer about the school's yearbook. What kind of book was this, Viola wondered, and how many should she order? A yearbook, I explained, has pictures of all the children in the school and sometimes depicts memorable events from the year. Yearbooks are "just for fun," I explained. "Ahh!" she replied, wondering if she should just order one book in that case. Ordering one would be fine, I replied, if the boys could share. Alternately, I suggested that she could buy two yearbooks if she wanted Boni and Samuel to have their own copies. At the end of the conversation, Viola reiterated that she originally had not known what the flyer was about: "I think maybe this a special book to study." If it had been this kind of book, she added, she wanted to buy several! Knowing whether to buy a yearbook, and how many, therefore appeared to rest upon Viola's knowledge of what purpose yearbooks serve.

Use of the Text

Knowledge about *how to use* a particular genre of text also appeared to play an important role in brokering events. I noted that knowledge of a text's actual use could be separate from knowledge of that text's purpose, although they certainly are connected.

Falabia, for example, reported that she did not know how to use coupons from the newspaper. She seemed to understand that coupons allow shoppers to save money when buying specific items, but she was unsure about how to go about reaping those savings herself. When Akhlas purchased a sewing pattern to make a dress, she similarly requested brokering help from me. Akhlas, who worked as a seamstress, explained that she did not use patterns at work, because she just sewed collars in to uniforms and then passed the items on to someone else. I looked at a chart on the back of the pattern, trying to determine if she had enough fabric. The chart, however, was singularly unhelpful, and the printed instructions did not provide much help in actually using the pattern. Somehow, we managed to determine that the pattern was the wrong size and needed to be exchanged. Akhlas certainly understood the dress pattern's purpose (to tell someone how to sew something), and she also certainly knew how to sew, but she did not know how to take a printed pattern and translate it into the real act of sewing.

Specific Features/Organization of Features

All genres contain certain features that are patterned or organized in recognizable ways within that genre (Halliday, 1973; Paltridge, 1994). These features help to define a given genre, and also to distinguish different genres from each other. Other optional features also may be included, but are not necessarily always a part of that genre (see Chapter 2). In order to understand how to use a genre, I concluded, these parents needed to have an understanding of the *genre's features*.

In some cases, the parents needed to know about specific features in order to navigate a particular text. Once when I visited, Viola was preparing for an upcoming quiz on nutrition. She wanted to find definitions for different terms she needed to know. When

I asked her if she used the glossary or index in her textbook, she shook her head, explaining that she usually used a dictionary. I showed her where the glossary was in the textbook, explaining that it was just like a dictionary. Viola already knew how to look up words in a dictionary, but she apparently was not aware that her textbook included a glossary, a textual feature with a purpose similar to that of a dictionary. In addition to knowledge about *what* textual features a genre included, feature-related brokering also involved knowledge about how different genres are organized and where different features typically are located within the text: Glossaries come toward the end of the book, signatures go at the bottom of the page but above a line marked "signature", and so forth.

Purpose of Features

Familiarity with typical genre features, along with knowledge about the features' purposes within a given text, provides a great deal of information about a given text's purpose and how it should be used. When the Sudanese parents did not understand the *purpose of different features*, they could not understand the text as a whole. One of Samuel's kindergarten friends sent out invitations for a birthday party, which Viola showed me during my weekly visit. She commented that she had seen the note that asked parents to RSVP by that day's date, but she was not sure what this meant. Should she call the little girl's mother? *RSVP,* I explained, means the host wants guests to let her know if they will be coming to the party. I showed Viola that the RSVP line included contact information. Viola certainly knew what the purpose of an invitation was; on other occasions I observed her consult two different Sudanese wedding invitations to locate details about the celebrations. The wedding invitations, however, did *not* include RSVP requests (see Figure 7.2), which may reflect cultural differences in genre features. Viola

therefore probably knew about most of the typical features of an invitation with the exception of RSVPs, although she correctly assumed that the inclusion of a phone number indicated that she probably should call the host.

Figure 7.2: An invitation to a Sudanese wedding that Viola and Isbon received.



Use of Features

New genres, and new contexts for using familiar genres such as invitations,

required these Sudanese refugees to learn how to *use textual features*. Akhlas' ESL teacher once sent home a crossword puzzle intended to help students practice English vocabulary. Never having seen a crossword puzzle before, Akhlas did not seem to have the faintest idea what she was supposed to do with those little, empty squares. When she asked what to do, I explained that she should use the clue lists to figure out which words to include in the boxes. I showed her how to write the answers, including one letter per square. After a while, however, Akhlas began writing the answers in the wrong spot. I showed her how to match up the numbers on the clue lists with the numbers in the puzzle squares. "Oh, there's numbers," she said. She began to look carefully at the numbers for each item. When Akhlas became stuck on another clue, I showed her how to count the squares to get a hint about how many letters the answer had. Language learning came very easily to Akhlas, I noted throughout the study, and she also reported that she loved solving word searches and playing other word games, so she dove into this activity with aplomb. Nevertheless, this example suggests how crucial an understanding of the use of specific genre features may be for adults to know what to do with a given text.

Types of Brokering:

Knowledge about What to Do

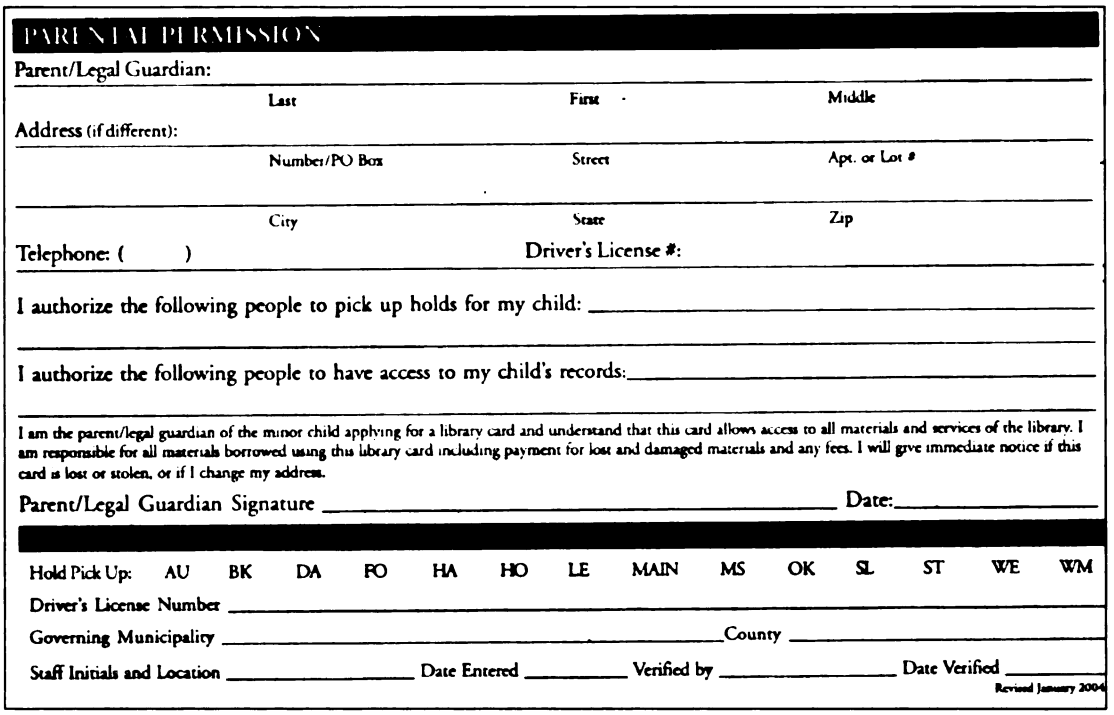
Brokering related to lexic-syntactic and graphophonic aspects of texts often took the form of *expediting* literacy events or *teaching* about language (see Chapter 5), while brokering related to culture often took the form of *advising* (see Chapter 6). Brokering events I observed that related to genre took all three forms, and I found that this teaching and advising often related specifically to *practices*—what to *do* with a text. Some genres, such as flyers, notes, and newsletters, provide general information that individuals simply

need to read, while other texts require some sort of response or action. In fact, the Sudanese parents often asked just that, "What do I do with this?" Amin asked this when he handed me an envelope from the school district. Was he supposed to sign the letter and send it back, or what? The letter asked Amin and Akhlas to confirm Remaz's attendance at her neighborhood school for the following year. It included a place for Amin's signature. He should sign the bottom of the letter and send it back to the school, I explained. Writing events similarly sparked questions about actions and practices: How do I apply for a library card? How do I make a resume?

Expediting

As they had with English-language issues, the Sudanese parents sometimes relied upon brokers to expedite literacy events related to genre. My observations often described brokers expediting the filling in of different types of forms—application forms for library cards or Habitat for Humanity housing, online resume-generating forms, or registration forms. In fact, I found that six of the nine genre-related expediting events in my observational and interview data involved forms, while a seventh event involved navigating a website to locate an Egyptian power-of-attorney form. Applications and other forms typically include blanks that elicit specific types of information, and the required information may be organized by section. Applicants are supposed to fill in most of the sections on a form, although the form may include sections marked "Office Use Only", where applicants are *not* supposed to write. Falabia, for example, wanted library cards for her younger children, and I obtained several blank applications for the family (see Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: Part of the local library card application for minors.



PARENTAL PERMISSION

Parent/Legal Guardian: _____

Last First Middle

Address (if different): _____

Number/PO Box Street Apt. or Lot #

_____

City State Zip

Telephone: ( ) Driver's License #: _____

I authorize the following people to pick up holds for my child: _____

_____

I authorize the following people to have access to my child's records: _____

_____

I am the parent/legal guardian of the minor child applying for a library card and understand that this card allows access to all materials and services of the library. I am responsible for all materials borrowed using this library card including payment for lost and damaged materials and any fees. I will give immediate notice if this card is lost or stolen, or if I change my address.

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature _____ Date: _____

Hold Pick Up: AU BK DA FO HA HO LE MAIN MS OK SL ST WE WM

Driver's License Number _____

Governing Municipality _____ County _____

Staff Initials and Location _____ Date Entered _____ Verified by _____ Date Verified _____

Revised January 2004

When I returned to the house the following week to take the children to the library, I noticed that the forms were still blank. Falabia, who was in the middle of studying for her classes, handed me the blank applications, along with her driver's license, so I could include the license number on the form. After filling in the relevant information, I handed the cards to Falabia for her signature. She began to sign in the section marked "Staff Use Only". I showed her the signature line, she signed on it, and the children and I took the completed applications to the library.

Teaching

Many of the events in which I and others acted as brokers involved specifically teaching about genres and genre features. This especially seemed to occur when the Sudanese parents encountered unfamiliar texts, such as phone books or websites. In other cases, I observed, and the parents reported to me, that brokers taught about genre features

in order to help them compose or create a text, such as when job counselors helped some of the parents create resumes. All writers need to know *what* features accompany a given genre, and they also need to know how those features typically are organized within that genre. For example, Amin, Falabia, and Viola all asked for help with creating resumes to include with job applications, for example. When Viola went to MichiganWorks, a job counselor helped her understand which features should be included in an effective resume, and why. As a result, Viola included a section titled "Skills and Abilities", where she noted that she was "Bi-lingual, Arabic and English" (see Figure 6.4 in Chapter 6).

When Amin was ready for a new job after his long recovery from surgery, he asked me to accompany him to MichiganWorks, where I helped him navigate their resume-creation software. The program automatically requested specific information that Amin should include in his resume, such as contact information, education, and previous employment history. The computer then took this information and organized it under appropriate resume headings. When Viola, Falabia, and Amin sought brokers to help them create resumes, they all learned about categories of information to include in the text (e.g., contact information, education, employment history), other specific features (e.g., headings), and the arrangement of these features on the page (e.g., the order in which the categories should appear).

Other genre teaching appeared to occur naturally, and less explicitly, in the course of community literacy practices. Viola reported that Jen[1], the secretary at her church, often helped her in many ways, including with literacy-related activities. Jen organized a women's group that read *Better Together: What on Earth Are We Here For?* (Warren, 2004), a community workbook by the author of the best-selling evangelical book, *The*

[1] A pseudonym

Purpose-Driven Life (Warren, 2002). Like Viola, most of the women participating in this study group were refugees from Sudan and Cuba.

I visited the group at Viola's invitation, and it seemed clear that Jen had provided the women with strategies to use as they read through the book and watched the accompanying video series together. The pastor had written a brief handout for the women, titled "40 Days of Community Pastoral Talking Points, Week One". As she passed around the handout, Jen explained, "Warren has a different understanding of some things than what we Lutherans believe." She then offered a brief overview of the pastor's remarks. Before discussing the week's readings, Jen reviewed the previous lesson and discussion on the topic of *Love*. Viola and the other women opened their books to follow along while Jen reviewed. As she talked, Jen constantly monitored how the women used the books, helping them find the correct page or section if they became lost.

When the group moved on to the week's new lesson, Viola handed me a packet of thin blue sticky notes. I could use the notes, she explained, if I wanted to mark something in my book[2]. Jen then popped a video, starring Rick Warren, into the VCR. In the video, Warren preached about gathering as a community. The half-hour video lesson included many references to the Biblical story of the loaves and the fishes and to various Bible verses. Each time Warren referred specifically to a verse, the text appeared on the screen. The study guide included the same verses. Warren talked about "meeting the needs of others", offering several ideas that appeared as bulleted points on the screen. Each point included an underlined word that corresponded to a blank in the study guide. Whenever Warren listed a new point, Jen paused the video so that the women could copy the term

[2] In this case, interestingly enough, Viola acted as a broker for *me*, an outsider to the Lutheran community! She helped me learn about the group's literacy practices with this devotional text.

into their study guides, again helping them locate the appropriate space in their workbooks. At one point, another Sudanese woman asked Viola a question about the book, and they had a brief conversation in Arabic. During the video, Jen must have realized that these women, for whom English was not a first language, would need extra time to copy the information on the screen.

Advising

Many of the examples that I have shared in this book illustrate advising about texts. Often, this advising occurred around a genre's function in the world and how participants could or should respond to that genre. Isbon, for example, sought advice about a sweepstakes mailing, a genre whose purpose he apparently misunderstood. Viola, too, asked my advice about texts she received in the mail. A bilingual woman with a law degree, she sometimes volunteered as a translator in court cases involving Sudanese refugees or other Arabic-speaking African immigrants. She told me she learned of a training program through the Arab-American Language Institute that would certify her as a translator, which would allow her to be paid for her services. The Institute sent Viola several packets of information. She showed me documents that she had received on different occasions, wondering how they were different. The first mailing included a cover letter, an informational flyer, and a registration form for a 2-day course in February, which cost nearly $600. The second included information about the language qualifying exam, which would be given in a few weeks' time. After I clarified the difference in the two mailings—one was for a course, while the other was for a state-given exam—Viola asked for my advice about what to do. The course would provide materials, she noted, but it was costly. Could she take the exam without enrolling in the

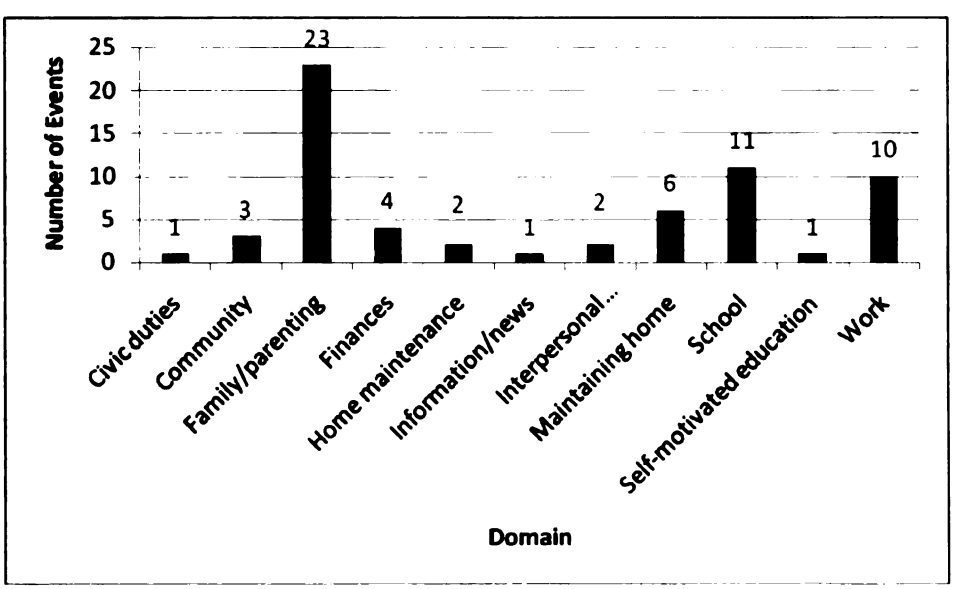
course? Not knowing the answer to this question, I suggested she call the Institute for more information.

Application Forms, Websites, and Official Letters:

Texts involved in Genre Brokering

Social worlds shape genres, and written texts mediate most social activity domains in the U.S. Genre-related brokering therefore reflected the variety of ways in which these three Sudanese families used literacy in their daily lives. Figure 7.4 illustrates the 11 social activity domains that characterized genre-related literacy brokering among these families, and the number of events within each domain, based upon my observations and interviews with the parents. The Sudanese parents most often sought brokering for texts related to family and parenting their children, followed by texts for their own schooling. Almost all of the events within the Family/Parenting domain involved texts sent home by the children's schools such as homework assignments, informational flyers, or official letters.

Figure 7.4: Genre-related brokering events by domain.



The genre-related brokering I observed, or that was reported, in Akhlas', Viola's, and Falabia's families also reflected a wide variety of different genres. Table 7.3 lists the different types of genres reflected in these brokering events. Appearing 11 times each, application forms and websites most often sparked brokering, representing nearly twice as many instances as official letters, the second most common genre. The frequency of websites and other digital texts such as online job postings, computer interface text (e.g., hyperlinks), and URLs in Table 7.3 suggests that digital genres played an important role in the lives of Sudanese families—and that they needed help understanding technology-related texts. In the following sections, I will further describe the genres and life domains that shaped genre-related brokering for Viola, Akhlas and the other parents.

Table 7.3: Types of texts in genre-related brokering events.

Genre	Number
Application form	11
Bank check	1
Banner	1
Computer interface text	1
Consent form	1
Coupons	1
Crossword puzzle	1
Exam scores	1
Flyer	1
Invitation	2
Job postings (online)	1
Junk mail	1
Letter of recommendation	1
Medication instructions	1
Medication label	1
Newsletter	2
Official letter	6
Order form	3
Phone book	1
Reading log	2
Receipt	1
Registration form	3
Resume	2
Review sheet	1
Sewing pattern	1
Teacher note	1
URL	1

Table 7.3 (cont'd).

Website	11
Worksheet	3
Yearbook	1

Parenting: Children's School Texts

Local schools sent home a wide variety of texts for different purposes, as I described in Chapters 5 and 6. The parents in this study often had trouble discerning the various purposes of these texts, as they frequently reported to me. I almost always documented the different texts in the children brought home each week. Their homework folders usually contained a variety of different textual genres: New homework to be done that week; already completed schoolwork; newsletters, advertisements, and other flyers (some of which were for non-school organizations); permission slips and other consent forms; and order forms. Many of the texts that came home in the children's backpacks and homework folders were not actually "from" the school, such as flyers about programs at the community center.

Another Michigan researcher once sent home a consent form, via the Head Start program, asking if Remon and his family would participate in a research study. The study involved literacy in Remon's Head Start classroom, but the form indicated that the researchers also planned to conduct some home visits. If Amin and Akhlas wanted, they could receive test results about Remon's literacy development. Amin handed me the form, asking what it was. I explained about the research study, indicating that he should sign it if he wanted Remon to participate and include the family's address if they wanted to receive his test results. Amin's confusion certainly was understandable: The consent form appeared to be from the school, and although it was tangentially related to Remon's

classroom, it actually came from a university. Amin needed to know that, although the school had sent home the form, participation in the study was completely optional.

Even academic work could prove confusing for parents. Once, Viola looked on as Samuel took a previously-completed classroom worksheet and began coloring in the illustration. After he abandoned his coloring, Viola picked up the paper, wanting to know what he was supposed to do next. The worksheet, which the teacher had stamped, featured a connect-the-dot activity depicting a hippo. I pointed out the stamp, a common textual feature elementary teachers use to indicate an assignment's satisfactory completion. "It's finished, because the teacher put the stamp on it," I explained, "Now, he's just coloring for fun." In this case, Viola apparently needed help understanding the difference between a worksheet that Samuel was required to finish and return to school and one that he had already completed and could keep at home.

All parents, not just Sudanese refugees, need access to important genre knowledge in order to understand, and respond to, the multitude of texts that their children's schools send home. Any parent must understand a text's purpose before s/he can determine what steps to take: Do I just read this text to gain information? Is filling in this form optional or required? Must my child return this worksheet to school, or is he supposed to keep it at home? Parents may be able to rely upon textual features to gain clues about a text's purpose, such as a stamp indicating that an assignment has been completed. Such textual features, however, are less helpful if parents do not understand the purpose or function of the features themselves.

Family Life

Other texts within daily family life also contributed to brokering events in my data, as the parents managed finances, cared for their health, or maintained their homes and possessions. Examples I have already described, such as Akhlas using a pattern to sew a dress or Falabia wondering how to use grocery coupons, certainly fit within this category.

Health literacy is an area of increasing concern in the world (Committee on Health Literacy, 2004). In writing about what he calls the "aspirin bottle problem", Gee (1996, p. 44) notes that being able to understand a medication label goes beyond the ability to decode print, and instead relies upon implicit knowledge of written discourse and social practice—in short, genre. Prescription labels or medication information pamphlets include specialized medical terminology or complex instructions that may be problematic, even for native English speakers. They typically include instructions for use, warnings, and how to deal with negative reactions or accidental overdoses. Being able to properly use medications, thus, partly relies upon the ability to read and understand labels and instruction packets.

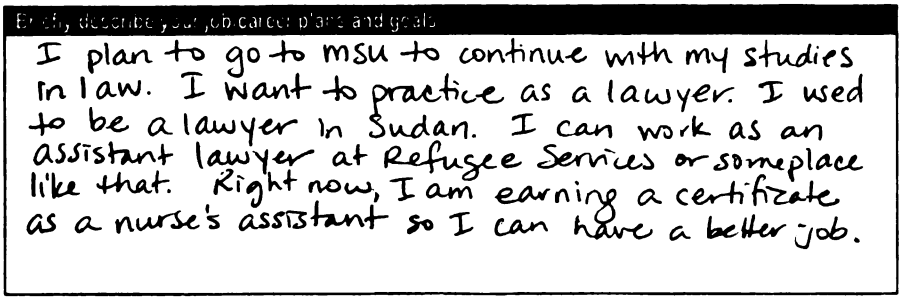
Viola suffered from severe asthma, and her physician prescribed Advair™, an inhaler-based lung medication. I happened to visit the family the same day Viola received her new inhaler, a circular contraption that needed to be primed in a specific way. When she wondered how to use the inhaler, I asked if it had come with instructions. Viola searched through the trash until she located the Advair™ box, which included a page of complicated instructions. The instructions also supplied some information intended for physicians, not patients. I read through the directions twice, fiddling with the inhaler as I attempted to make sense of how to prime it. After following what I thought was the

required procedure, but quickly realizing that the medication was not being dispensed, I read through the instructions a third time. Had Viola removed and read the directions herself before tossing the box, she likely would not have been able to utilize them without help, due to their complexity. Even I, an asthmatic familiar with different types of inhalers, had to read through the directions multiple times—and I *still* had trouble figuring out how to use that inhaler! (Had I not been visiting that day, Viola likely would have asked her neighbor or someone at her church to help her figure out the inhaler.)

Other health-related brokering events that I observed involved expediting an event, rather than teaching. Anthony and Medo inherited lung problems from their mother, and baby Anthony had been diagnosed with asthma just before I visited the family one day in late September, 2005. Viola had just picked up Anthony's medication, and she explained to me that she was not very good about giving him medication, because he squirmed so much. She unwrapped a measuring syringe and looked at the numbers on the side. To help Viola, I looked at the first bottle, an antibiotic. Anthony needed one teaspoon, and I showed her the mark on the syringe. When she squirted the liquid in Anthony's mouth, he turned his face away in disgust. Viola then opened the next medication, a steroid. She read the bottle's instructions herself and measured two teaspoons of this medication. This time, I held Anthony's head for Viola. Her ability to understand Anthony's prescription instructions, but not for her own inhaler, helps to illustrate the complexity of brokering related to everyday texts. Both events involved reading medication instructions, but these instructions were mediated by two very different texts. Brokering, in this instance, involved expediting a literacy event for a mother with a squirming infant, rather than explaining complex instructions.

Other family-life brokering events related to the home itself. All of the families lived in rental units, and they reported facing many challenges with sub-par housing and indifferent landlords, a common problem among immigrants and refugees. Viola and Isbon, like many in Lansing's Sudanese community, attended informational meetings for Habitat for Humanity. They decided to apply for a Habitat house. During one of my visits, Viola showed me the family's application and asked if I could help. The eight-page application included different features than other applications Viola had previously encountered. For example, the family had to attach proof of income, as well as copies of their most recent tax return and all of their recent utility bills. They also had to state their career aspirations and reasons why they wanted to own a home (see Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: Viola's career aspiration statement, included with the family's Habitat for Humanity application.


I plan to go to MSU to continue with my studies in law. I want to practice as a lawyer. I used to be a lawyer in Sudan. I can work as an assistant lawyer at Refugee Services or someplace like that. Right now, I am earning a certificate as a nurse's assistant so I can have a better job.

Viola and I worked on the application together; she gathered the required documentation while I filled in the form. In this example, Viola required both genre and language brokering. She reported needing assistance understanding the requirements of the lengthy application, as well as other documents she needed to supply. She also asked for help using appropriate vocabulary and syntax in her statements.

Parents' Own Homework

Although many brokering events arose as a result of family activities, I also observed some that occurred as Akhlas, Viola, and Falabia completed their own homework or studied for exams. Homework could present Akhlas and other parents with new genres or genre features, as the crossword example illustrated. Once, Akhlas' ESL workbook included a matching exercise, in which she was supposed to match a depicted street sign with its meaning (e.g., a *No Parking* sign indicates "You cannot park your car here"). She explained that she had not understood what she was supposed to do. In the blanks next to each meaning, she had written "yes" or "no". I explained how matching exercises work and then watched as Akhlas easily completed the rest of the assignment herself.

Viola appeared to encounter similar difficulties with a review sheet in her nurse's aide course. She clearly was more familiar with some question formats than with others. Viola showed me her textbook, pointing to some multiple-choice questions and commenting, "Sometimes her [Viola's teacher's] tests come like this." Other times, she explained, students had to write the definition of a word, or the teacher supplied the definition and they had to "find" the word. The review sheet also included several blank spaces in outline form; Viola said that she did not know what to do with these blanks. The instructor, I explained, probably wanted her to read the textbook and fill in the 5 factors related to the listed question.

Falabia also reported experiencing difficulties with new genre features. She wanted to take nursing courses at the community college, and in order to do this, she needed to pass a math exam. After picking up two arithmetic and algebra review sheets from the testing office, she worked on the sample questions. Answers to the questions

were listed at the bottom of the sheet, but Falabia did not seem to be aware of their existence until I pointed them out.

Significantly, all of these homework brokering events involved genre features, rather than academic content. Akhlas, Viola, and Falabia all asked for help with the purpose and use of different genre features in order to use texts for their intended purposes. Akhlas and Viola could not complete their homework without knowing how different types of questions—matching, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc—work. Falabia, who had completed a rigorous nursing degree in Sudan and who also had successfully taken classes at the community college, likely encountered many review sheets throughout the course of her education. Not all review sheets, however, include answers to sample problems, and if they do, the answers may be located in different areas of the text (and possibly upside-down!). As a result, review sheets may vary a great deal according to context—particularly the situation in which they are used, and the purpose for using them. Review sheets that include answers to sample problems, such as the one Falabia had, are intended to allow the student to practice independently, while review sheets that omit these answers may be designed for other purposes. Whether or not the women understood different textual features carried enormous implications for their coursework. Had Viola not asked about unfamiliar question formats, for example, she might not have known what to do when faced with similar questions in an exam. She might have answered exam questions incorrectly, which could lead her teacher to believe that Viola did not know the material.

Technology

Technology itself is not a genre or a life domain. Nevertheless, digital

technologies appeared to play an important role in genre-related brokering. Participants, I observed, often used computers for various tasks. Their ability to navigate websites and other computer software relied upon knowledge of features that are highly specific to digital texts, such as hyperlinks, dialogue boxes, and icons. The Sudanese families in this study had different levels of familiarity with computers. Falabia and Primo, for example, owned a working computer with high-speed Internet access, and all family members used this computer. Viola's and Akhlas' families did not have working computers, although they expressed the desire to get them. And, as the parents spent more time in the U.S., their literacy practices seemed to require greater and greater familiarity with digital texts. In these instances, brokering appeared to involved knowledge about both the use of the text and the use of the technology.

Falabia reported that she often had to use computers as part of her coursework at LCC and Davenport, while I observed that Viola and Amin used the Internet to locate and apply for jobs several times. When Viola turned in a paper application to the county hospital, she told me that they informed her that job postings were updated online each week, and she could even apply online. When she asked me how to do this, as she did not own a computer, I suggested that we use the computers at the public library. When Isbon heard this plan, he suggested Viola could teach him how to use the Internet after she learned herself.

The Internet introduced Viola to a new world of genres and genre features, and she turned to brokers for help with learning about how to interact with digital texts: How could she access the Internet? How could she find the website she needed? How should she use different features in an online form? Viola relied upon different brokers to help

her learn about computers. She reported that Jen, her friend at church, often helped her with computer tasks, and I also acted as a broker on several occasions. For example, I accompanied Viola to the library one time when she wanted to fill in an online job application. I showed her how to open up Internet Explorer by clicking on the giant blue "e" and to type a web URL into the white address bar at the top of the window. She could click on print that was in different colors to go to different pages, I explained. I showed her how to access the Yahoo™ site, to click on the Mail icon to go to email, and to set up an email address. The webmail page had many different features, I explained as I showed her how to check her email once the account was set up.

Several months later, I observed Viola at the library as she applied for jobs at Meijer, a local discount retailer. Again, she asked questions about how to use specific aspects of the website. "How you find that?", she asked, after I opened the website for her. I had simply typed "www.meijer.com" into the address bar, I explained.

Amin's interactions with MichiganWorks also involved brokering around technology. The program at MichiganWorks is largely computer-based, providing access to online banks of job postings, online job applications, and resume-creation software. Amin asked me to accompany him as he created a resume and applied for jobs. Together, we opened up a website that included a form to fill in for his resume. We also needed to supply the computer with a username and ID. The program then allowed Amin to search online and apply for jobs. Although Amin certainly needed help creating a resume, this brokering event actually focused more upon the issue of knowing how to use the software interface.

Jen, Viola's church friend, reportedly provided a great deal of help with computer and digital texts. Jen offered to let Viola use the church's computers if she wanted access to the Internet or to print documents. When she applied to law school, Viola needed to obtain copies of her Egyptian university transcripts, and she had to go through the Egyptian embassy in order to do so. The public library had blocked access to the necessary Egyptian websites, so Viola decided to head to the church, and I followed her. At the church, the pastor warmly welcomed Viola, and Jen agreed that she could borrow her computer for a while. Viola suggested that I sit at the computer, because our search would go faster that way. She produced an envelope upon which she had jotted the website, which she had written as: ww.eg2002.com. Nothing appeared when I typed the website into the browser, so I located the site through a search for "Egyptian Consulate". The website provided a list of forms, which I showed to Viola. We eventually selected the power-of-attorney forms, which were available in both English and Arabic. The forms printed in a font so small that we could hardly read them, and Jen suggested that we could enlarge them on the photocopier. In order to access and use the important forms that she needed, Viola relied upon both Jen and me as brokers. Each of us brought important knowledge and expertise to the event: Viola's knowledge of where to locate the information she needed (the Egyptian consulate's website), my knowledge of how to navigate the Internet, and Jen's knowledge of how to use the photocopier to enlarge print.

Jen and Viola also worked together to plan the church-sponsored Sudanese cultural festival I described in Chapter 5. After Viola drafted an invitation to the event, she reported that Jen helped her create a pleasing design on the computer (see Figure

7.6). Jen therefore served as an important source of knowledge about digital genres for Viola.

Figure 7.6: An invitation to a Sudanese festival that Viola and Jen created on the computer.



Workplace colleagues also appeared to be an important source of digital textual knowledge for Akhlas. Her ESL teacher certainly acted as a broker at times, but Peckham also encouraged peer mentoring, as I observed when I accompanied her to a workshop in June, 2006. This workshop trained her on a computer program she could use to help other refugees prepare for the U.S. citizenship exam. The program helped immigrants practice English and learn other important information about U.S. government and history. Akhlas reported that, prior to the workshop, her teacher had taught her how to use many features

of the Internet and of other software programs. As I watched her during the session, I noticed that she already knew how to log in to the computer and open up the Internet browser.

Akhlas' skills impressed me; she had clearly learned a great deal about digital texts through this program. I watched as Akhlas and her friend, a refugee from Cuba, navigated the educational program together. The women showed each other where to click to perform different actions, and they attempted to troubleshoot together when problems arose. Brokering seemed to have helped Akhlas learn how to use the computer, and she now was being groomed to broker for others. Peckham had nominated her to act as an official broker/peer tutor for co-workers, many of whom were fellow refugees from Sudan: "My teacher said I going to do this," Akhlas confirmed. The teacher explained, "Peckham wants as many people as possible to, number 1, learn English, and to learn the technology." She explained that part of the peer tutoring was going to involve teaching the students how to use the computers, for example, how to use the computer mouse.

Digital texts provide a telling case in genre-related literacy brokering. Technologies change rapidly, and new textual genres emerge just as quickly. All technology users, regardless of native language or cultural origin, may recall asking others for assistance in understanding how to interact with new(er) genres—such as instant- or text-messaging, wiki programs, online games, or email—and various features that accompany digital genres, such as hypertext, icons, or pop-up windows. Considering that not all individuals or families have equal access to computers and/or the Internet, digital genres also help to highlight the power issues inherent within literacy brokering. The Sudanese refugees in this study reported little (if any) experience with computers and

digital genres before coming to the U.S., and they all expressed the belief that learning about computer technology was important for success in this country. Yet, these same issues are no less true for some non-digital genres as well: All people require information about the purpose and use of genres and/or genre features, but they may not have equal access to those genres or to the necessary information.

"The Kids can Help You Out": Child Brokers and Genre Knowledge

Falabia's family owned a relatively new computer, and she reported that her children, who frequently used it for schoolwork and entertainment, often helped her and other Sudanese adults with it. Akhlas and Falabia were good friends, and Akhlas frequently visited Falabia's home. "She was here the day before yesterday," Falabia told me one day in June. She continued,

> She's trying to learn computer...The kids are teaching, helping her...She can send an email now...She came here the first time. I said, "I don't have problem. You can come to my house. The kids can help you out." Then she came here and they open account for her, for email.

I often observed that Juana, Remaz, Boni and Samuel seemed to play an important role in their families as they helped their parents understand the texts, and technologies, they encountered in the U.S. Despite the fact that the children still were emerging as readers and writers, my observations suggest that they nevertheless provided important knowledge about the purpose, use and features of different genres—especially those that schools sent home. Although these child brokers did not broker all aspects of genre, they nevertheless appeared to provide important genre knowledge to their parents.

Table 7.4 shows the types of knowledge that I identified these child brokers providing, in comparison with other brokers.

Table 7.4: Suppliers of different types of genre knowledge for each Sudanese parent.

		Brokers		
Participant	**Knowledge Type**	**American**	**Child**	**Other Sudanese**
Akhlas	purpose of text	X	X	
	use of text	X	X	
	location of text features	X		
	use of text features	X		
	register	X		
Amin	purpose of text	X		
	use of text	X		
	location of text features	X		
	register	X		
Falabia	purpose of text	X	X	
	use of text	X	X	
	location of text features	X		
	use of text features	X		
	purpose of text features	X		
	strategies surrounding text features	X		
	specific textual features	X		
Falabia's mom	purpose of text		X	X
Isbon	Purpose of text	X		
	location of text features	X		
	register	X		
Viola	Purpose of text	X	X	
	Use of text	X	X	
	Purpose of text features	X	X	
	Location of text features	X		
	Use of text features	X	X	
	specific textual features	X		
	register	X		

As I described in Chapters 1 and 5, most scholarly literature related to child brokering focuses on oral translations and/or lexico-syntactic aspects of language. Researchers acknowledge that brokering sometimes involves printed texts (Morales & Hanson, 2005), but the focus in these studies tends to be on lexico-syntactic aspects of the texts, rather than the genre or textual features I identified through this study. In comparison with other researchers, Orellana and her colleagues (Orellana et al, 2003) appear to focus more on textual aspects of brokering, although they have not studied young, emergent readers. Child brokering, they argue, is an important aspect of family literacy in many immigrant communities, and it is a practice that exposes children to a wide variety of genres that they might not experience in their classrooms:

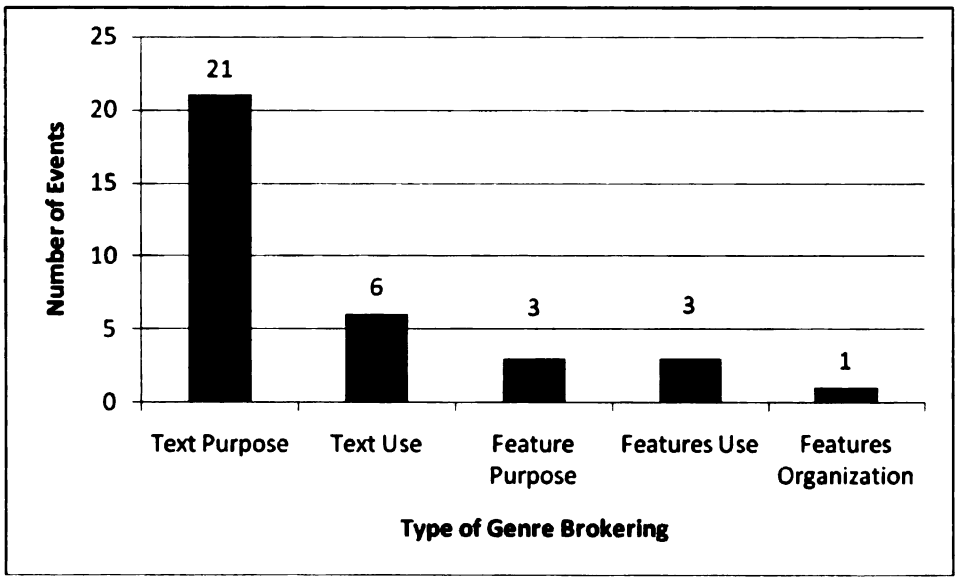
> Family literacy domains and genres of text...comprise a sometimes more challenging set of literacies for people of any age to tackle; they are not carefully designed to be age or ability appropriate, no explicit supports are written into the texts (such as definitions of key vocabulary words), and their content is not necessarily predictable by context (as perhaps, when reading about science in science texts) (Orellana et al, 2003, p. 29).

Child brokers, therefore, have opportunities engage with sophisticated genres and practices when they help their families understand texts. Emergent readers may not be able to read all of the texts they broker, but they may supply their parents with important genre knowledge about those texts, just as they provide language or cultural knowledge. However, little research attention has been paid to the ways in which "children may act as teachers and facilitators of literacy for their adults" (Orellana et al, 2003, p. 18). In the

final section of this chapter, I therefore describe the ways in which the young children in these Sudanese families taught their parents about genres and literacy practices.

Boni, Samuel, Remaz, and Juana were only just beginning to read and write when I began working with their families. Nevertheless, they already appeared to have acquired a great deal of knowledge about literacy and genres. Part of what they had learned involved the purpose, use, and features of different texts, and I sometimes observed them passing this genre knowledge on to their parents. Figure 7.7 shows the number of different types of genre-related events brokered by the children.

Figure 7.7: Types of genre-related brokering provided by Sudanese children.



The children, I found, framed literacy events for their parents by alerting them to the text's purpose, or by pointing out relevant textual features, such as signature lines. One week, for example, Samuel's kindergarten teacher sent home an order form for the school's bi-monthly Popcorn Friday event, where parents could order popcorn and other treats for their children. The class would be visiting a planetarium the following Friday, and the teacher included a permission slip and a Xeroxed note explaining the cost of the

trip and requesting chaperones. Samuel handed Viola the packet and Popcorn Friday envelope, announcing, "That's a mail." After looking through the documents, Viola replied that she would put money in the envelope for popcorn.

A Text's Purpose: "I Have Something for My Mom that She Sign"

In Viola's home, Boni and Samuel regularly emptied their backpacks as soon as they came home from school, handing over texts to their mother. The boys, I noted, often prefaced texts with explanations about what the texts were *for.* When Boni brought home a permission slip for a class field trip to a local hospital, for example, he commented to Viola in Arabic and included the English words "field trip form". Viola looked over the permission form, reading the hospital's name out loud.

The boys' talk about the papers in their backpacks suggested an awareness of the texts' purposes, which they framed for their parents. "I have something for my mom that she sign," Samuel commented one day. "I have something for my mom that she read it. It's in here," he noted as he rummaged around in his backpack. Indeed, when I later looked at Samuel's papers, I noticed that he did have two separate texts—one to sign and one to read only. Samuel's teacher had sent home a permission form for a class trip to a local pumpkin patch, along with a flier titled "Lansing Fire Department School Fire Safety Program". The texts that came home from schools were not all equal in importance. A permission slip for a field trip was far more important than a flyer about a community program, for example. Framing about different texts, provided by Boni and Samuel, may have helped Viola to better focus on more important texts.

In addition to framing texts, the children also provided explicit knowledge about a text's purpose, as Remaz did when she explained why she needed to return a permission

slip. Her class planned to visit the Michigan State University Farm toward the end of her kindergarten year, but Akhlas apparently had not yet returned the permission slip. Remaz came home one day and reminded her mother, "I have to bring the paper that you signed." She would not be allowed to go on the trip, she added, without a signed permission slip. Akhlas must have returned the signed form, because Remaz went on the trip. Because Remaz was her oldest child, Akhlas had little prior experience with U.S. school practices; permission forms likely were a relatively new genre for her. When Remaz told her mother that she needed to return the form, and explained why, she provided Akhlas with helpful knowledge about the purpose of permission forms: They allow a child to participate in a highly-valued school event.

Content: "A Paper Because We Don't Have Snacks"

The children also framed the purpose of these texts by alerting their parents to the actual content of a document. Samuel seemed to be especially good at knowing what a particular text was about. In fact, Viola commented that Samuel always knew what was going on, and I noticed that she often used him to check facts when Boni or Medo was a bit short on the necessary details. After locating the Fire Department's flyer in his backpack, for example, Samuel directed Viola's attention to the paper by saying, "Mommy, that's a fire. Read that one!" He handed her the fire department flier and again demanded, "Read!"

On another occasion, Samuel's teacher sent home a note to let parents know there was no homework that week. Handing over the note, Samuel announced, "That said, 'No homework'!" Once, when Viola was not home, Samuel handed me the weekly newsletter from his teacher. "Kristen, look!" he said, "A paper because we don't have snacks." The

newsletter announced upcoming field trips and listed which child's turn it was to do show-and-tell. At the bottom was a note asking parents to donate afternoon snacks to the classroom. Although this event did not involve Samuel brokering for his mother, it nevertheless illustrates typical brokering patterns in the family, as well as Samuel's attention to content details.

Use: "Mama, Sign this Note"

Boni pulled all of the papers out of his homework folder one day and announced, "You gotta sign this *all* today." His folder, I noted, included a variety of papers and packets:

- A newsletter from the teacher;
- a permission slip and envelope requiring $2.50 for a field trip to a local orchard;
- a "Mark Your Calendar" flier announcing in-service days and times for Parents' Night;
- a Scholastic book order form; and
- a pamphlet from the neighborhood community center.

While not *all* of Boni's papers needed to be signed, many of them required some sort of important action. The permission slip did need to be signed, for example, and Viola also had to send money for the trip. Parents also needed to be aware of days when school was not in session, and they should fill in the Scholastic form if they wanted to purchase books for their children. Thus, Boni and the other Sudanese children sometimes alerted their parents to what should be *done* with texts from school. Remaz, for example, once handed her mother a half-sheet of paper her teacher had sent home, asking her parents to sign to indicate that Remaz had done her daily required reading. "Mama, sign this note,

too," she said. Akhlas took it and said, "Okay, I will sign." Thus, just as they had framed the purpose of different texts for their parents, the children also appeared to alert their parents to the expected use of school-related texts.

Textual Features: "Look, You Have to Sign"

Boni and the other children also seemed to understand different features of texts they brought home, and I found that they frequently pointed these out to their parents. Boni once handed over a YMCA flyer that advertised a Friday-night sleepover program. He pointed to the detachable form on the bottom and said, "You gotta sign." The schools sent home many texts that needed to be signed, and the boys must have quickly learned that this was an important function of these texts. Pointing out forms to be filled in or signed therefore became an important brokering activity for both Boni and Samuel, as I frequently noted this during my visits to their home.

In addition to providing explanations about textual features, I found that the boys used certain features to help illustrate the overall purpose of the text. When I arrived one day, Boni pointed up at the family's bulletin board. "Do you see this paper up there?" he asked. His teacher, he explained, "gave it to everyone." He pushed a chair over to the bulletin board, took down the paper (a registration form), and showed it to me. The form advertised a race that was part of the school district's walking-for-fitness program. "We are racing," Boni explained. Students in the program would be walking downtown to the capitol, and both boys claimed that they wanted to enter the race. Boni pointed to the registration part of the form and said, "Look, you have to sign."

Samuel also introduced his parents to important textual features in some genres. Viola and Isbon had become increasingly worried about Boni's literacy development as

Boni continued to make little progress in first grade. Viola often asked me for advice about how to help Boni with his reading, and she reported that she and Isbon often talked about Boni's reading difficulties. Boni's teacher, she said, suggested that she check out simple children's books from the library, and she asked me to help her find some of these books. Sensitive Samuel apparently had picked up on his parents' concerns about Boni. One day, I listened as Viola and Samuel talked about an easy-to-read children's book that Samuel had brought home from the library. He opened the book to the last page, which contained a list of all the words used in the text. Pointing out the word list to Viola, he told her that she should use the list to help Boni practice reading. "Samuel now worried about Boni," Viola explained when we later discussed the incident. In his own kindergarten class, I observed that Samuel was exposed to word lists, leveled books and easy-to-read texts that often contained similar words or lists. He knew, probably based upon his school experiences, that these texts helped children learn to read, and he wanted to alert his mother to their existence.

Part of emergent literacy learning includes knowledge about the reasons why people read and write in their lives, and about different types of textual genres and features (Clay, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). While Boni, Samuel, and other young refugee children may not have been able to read much (if any) of the print in the texts they brokered, they certainly appeared to be aware of the purpose of those texts and how to use them to accomplish important goals, such as providing consent to attend a field trip. The children, I concluded, could use their emerging knowledge of texts to help their parents filter important school texts from less-important ones. Sometimes, Remaz and other children

provided explicit genre knowledge, as Remaz did when she explained why she needed to return the permission slip to her teacher or when Falabia's children showed Akhlas how to set up an email account. Other times, they seemed to frame their parent's understanding of the text's purpose by broadly alerting them to content, as Samuel did when he described texts about fire safety programs or lack of classroom snacks. School-related texts, as I have suggested throughout this book, played a major role in literacy brokering in these Sudanese families. Their young children—non-fluent readers and writers—appeared to perform an important function by brokering these texts for their parents.

Learning About Genre

Participating in literacy, and effectively interacting with different textual genres, requires knowledge about how texts fit with everyday social activities (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bazerman, 1988; Bhatia, 1997; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Street, 1995). Some of this knowledge, my findings suggest, is specific to issues of genre: What functions do different genres serve? Which features define a genre, and for what purposes are they used? How do individuals read, write, or otherwise interact with different texts—and why? As social and cultural practices, textual genres and their uses are shaped, and defined, by the contexts in which they exist. New contexts, thus, may require new genre knowledge, and learning about genre knowledge can be one way in which individuals learn about the practices of literacy in their communities.

Falabia's comments about coupons at the beginning of this chapter suggest that simply observing a literacy practice may not be enough to be able to effectively use a text. Observing coupons-in-use seemed to have provided Falabia with knowledge about

the purpose of that genre, but she could not actually engage in the practice of redeeming coupons herself until she learned other genre-specific information, such as how to acquire coupons or how to ascertain if the coupons were still valid. Individuals may be able read and write, but actually *participating* in literacy practices requires knowledge of the functions genres serve in the world—what people *do* with genres.

As social practices, genres also are associated with power. As Bhatia (1997) noted, genre knowledge, such as how genres are constructed, interpreted, and used, may not be readily available to outsiders to a given community. Individuals may have easy access to some genres, but not others. Sudanese refugees, for example, often cannot afford computers or Internet access in their homes, and, because they tend to work in menial, low-wage jobs, their workplaces offer little access to technology, as well. As a result, refugees—and other similarly marginalized people—may have limited access to the digital genres that are becoming increasingly important in the U.S. in the twenty-first century.

School-related genres also reflect important power issues. Schools play an enormously important role in the lives of families in the U.S. The education system can have a significant impact on children's futures, often reflecting inequalities present in wider society (Giroux, 1989, 1992; McLaren, 1989). Notes, newsletters, flyers, official letters, and other texts represent one major source of communication between parents and schools. In order to advocate for their children, parents need to understand these genres, to discern which texts are crucial for their children's education, and which are less important. All school texts are not equal: Ignoring a flier about a community program, for example, probably carries few consequences. An unsigned field trip permission form may

cause a child to miss out on a valued trip, but ultimately would not matter a great deal (except, of course, to the child!). But ignoring or misunderstanding official letters, such as those about Remaz's lunch and vaccination record, or those regarding retaining Boni or placing him in an ESL classroom, could have a potentially enormous impact on a child and his or her family.

Thus, literacy brokers also appear to provide access to power. As they teach and advise about genres, brokers may provide essential knowledge about how genres *work* and what people *do* with them, helping people begin to effectively use those genres and take on new literacy practices. Even very young children can broker for their parents, suggesting that brokering may be a significant, but overlooked, aspect of family literacy. Genre knowledge, therefore, seems to play a central role in shaping literacy practices. Being able to read, write, or otherwise use a text requires much more than the ability to decode print. Knowledge about vocabulary, encoding or decoding print, and syntax appear to be necessary, but not sufficient, for being able to practice literacy. As I have demonstrated throughout this book, cultural knowledge and genre knowledge also appear to shape literacy practices. In the following chapter, I will describe the ways in which these three types of literacy knowledge connect, relate to, and overlap with each other.

Chapter 8

Practicing Literacy:

Knowledge Needed to Use Texts in the World

"If you don't know how to read or write, you can't do anything."

~~Falabia

Near the end of the study, Falabia successfully completed a course in phlebotomy. Tired of working in housekeeping, and hoping to obtain a job related to her nursing experiences, she applied for a phlebotomy position. After being told she would be hired, Falabia approached me: "I want to tell you something," she said, "I don't know the rules here in America. Can I ask you a question?" The housekeeping supervisor apparently had given her an unfair evaluation, which had jeopardized Falabia's new job. What did it mean, she wanted to know, if someone said that you are "not committed to your job"? The supervisor had written this on Falabia's most recent evaluation. *Committed* is a big word, Falabia noted, and she did not know what it meant. I explained the term and asked if she had signed the evaluation. "She made me sign it," Falabia replied, "and she didn't give me a copy." Later, she went back to ask for a copy and questioned the negative assessment. The supervisor claimed Falabia never smiled at work, so she must not enjoy her job. "Smiling doesn't have to do with my job," Falabia reported to me, "because I'm not dealing with patients," and she does not have to smile to clean. Everybody in the department knew that she worked hard, Falabia explained. She was always on time and never called in sick. "Everybody knows I am the best in my department," she said, "I am always doing my job."

The supervisor's evaluation reportedly ruined Falabia's chances for a new job in the phlebotomy department. That morning, the phlebotomy supervisor had called Falabia to explain that she would no longer be hired because of the evaluation. "I was so mad when the supervisor of phlebotomy called me this morning!" Falabia exclaimed. She wondered if it would be acceptable to talk with the department manager about this unfair evaluation—Falabia never would have signed the evaluation had she understood the meaning of *committed.* Would it be okay, she wondered, "if I say I did not understand because it's not my language?" I agreed that this seemed like a reasonable plan. Perhaps the manager could intervene with the phlebotomy department to explain the evaluation had been unfair, I suggested. "This will be a problem in the future," Falabia sighed. "It will go on my record."

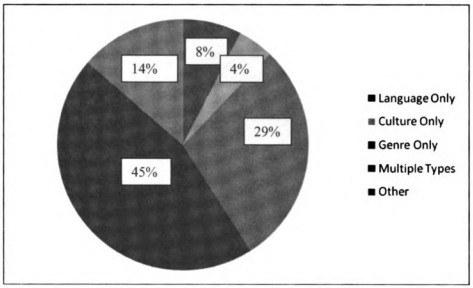
Falabia's unfortunate experience illustrates just how powerful texts, and literacy practices, can be. A single written evaluation apparently held the power to keep Falabia out of a better-paying job for which she was truly qualified. She already had tried to deal with the situation on her own by requesting a copy of the document and questioning the supervisor's assessment, but these actions did not seem to have accomplished much. Not knowing quite how to proceed, she sought a broker who could help her understand the evaluation's broader implications. This particular example illustrates the inseparability of the various aspects of literacy knowledge. In addition to knowledge about vocabulary, in this case, Falabia also needed cultural knowledge and strategies related to "participating in a genre" (Freedman & Medway, 1994): What does *committed* mean? What are the "rules" in America? How could she challenge a job evaluation? What were her rights?

Literacy Practices: Overlapping Knowledge

Falabia's job evaluation, and the brokering she sought regarding it, illustrates the relationships that exist between language, culture, and genre knowledge in any literacy practice. Some of the literacy events I observed, or that were reported to me, among these Sudanese families, highlighted one single aspect of the text, such as vocabulary (see Table 7.2 in Chapter 7). Many events, however, emphasized simultaneous brokering of several types of knowledge—some combination of lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, and genre aspects of texts.

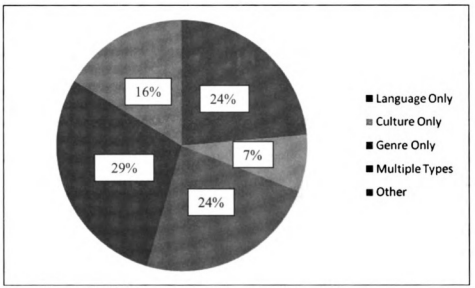
Through observations and interviews, I identified a total of 162 brokering events in these families, but these events reflected 257 instances of different types of brokering. Falabia asking about her job evaluation, for example, involved brokering around *vocabulary, cultural knowledge,* and *strategies of use.* While it was possible to highlight individual aspects of literacy knowledge within specific events, these aspects nevertheless connected with and informed each other during brokering. Brokering events in my data occasionally involved only one type of knowledge, but not often. Also, adult brokers appeared to be more likely than child brokers to provide multiple types of brokering within a single event. Figure 8.1 shows the percentage of observed or reported brokering performed by adults in this study that I coded for only one type of knowledge, versus those that involved multiple types of brokering. The greatest percentage of these brokering events, 45%, involved multiple types of brokering. Genre alone accounted for 29% of events, while lexico-syntactic/graphophonic and cultural aspects of brokering comprised 8% and 4% of events, respectively. Other types of brokering, typically events that only involved expediting done by brokers, accounted for 14% of events in my data.

Figure 8.1. Types of brokering performed by adult brokers.



The children, in contrast, appeared more likely to broker during events that included only one type of brokering at a time (see Figure 8.2). Genre-only and lexico-syntactic/graphophonic-only brokering each accounted for 24% of child brokering events, while culture-only brokering comprised just 7% of events. Among the events that I observed, 29% of child brokering involved multiple types of brokering within one event, while 16% of events involved other types of brokering, such as reporting on the content of a particular text.

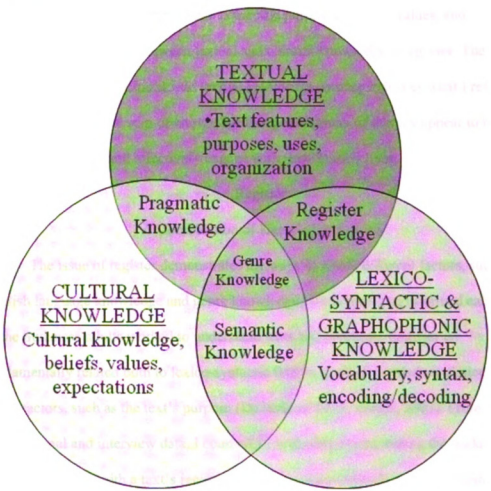
Figure 8.2. Types of brokering performed by child brokers.



In Chapter 1, I described the nested nature of the relationship between culture, language, and genre. As I analyzed the data from brokering events in this study and saw that multiple types of brokering so often occurred in a single event, it became clear to me that this relationship could be more explicitly theorized. Figure 8.3 shows a useful heuristic for describing the ways in which I saw different aspects of literacy overlapping during brokering events. Literacy brokering appeared to involved three broad categories of knowledge, as I have described in this book: *lexico-syntactic and graphophonic* knowledge (specifically ESL knowledge, in the case of the Sudanese families), *cultural* knowledge, and *genre* knowledge. Each category involved specific sub-types of knowledge. In my findings, the lexico-syntactic and graphophonic category included knowledge about English vocabulary and syntax, as well as the ways in which English is coded in print. The cultural category related to knowledge specific to the U.S. cultural context, as well as to cultural beliefs, values, and expectations. The genre category

included knowledge regarding the purposes and uses of a genre, as well as specific textual features of a genre and their purposes and uses.

Figure 8.3: Aspects of knowledge parents needed in order to engage in literacy practices.



Overlapping areas within the diagram illustrate knowledge about how language is used in the world to accomplish certain social goals—in this case, how the Sudanese adults used literacy and texts in the U.S. *Register knowledge* sits within the overlap between lexico-syntactic/graphophonic knowledge and textual knowledge. Register is a term used in many different ways, sometimes synonymous with rhetorical modes, dialect, or even with

genre itself (Halliday, 1973; Hymes, 1994; Valdés, 2003). Following Valdés, I use *register* to refer to varieties of language that are connected to situational usage. *Semantic knowledge*—how language encodes cultural meanings in America—sits between the cultural and lexico-syntactic/graphophonic categories. *Pragmatic* knowledge about texts—the ways in which texts relate to specific purposes, beliefs, values, and expectations—is located between textual and cultural knowledge categories. The central area where language, cultural, and textual knowledge overlap indicates what I refer to as *genre knowledge*—the sum of knowledge that practitioners of literacy appear to need in order to understand and effectively engage with texts in their lives.

Register:
A Combination of Knowledge Aspects

The issue of register demonstrates the ways in which different factors, such as English language knowledge and genre knowledge, overlapped and informed each other as the Sudanese adults worked to understand texts and practices. Register is fundamentally related both to lexico-syntactic factors, such as vocabulary choice, and to genre factors, such as the text's purpose (DeStefano, 1978; Valdés, 2003). From my observational and interview data, I counted 30 brokering events among the Sudanese families that dealt with a text's register. The sweepstakes episode at the beginning of this book provides an excellent case of the importance of register. As I shared with Viola, sweepstakes mailings often include what I called "tricky language". The sweepstakes letter claimed Isbon would win "*if* you have the winning number," for example. Isbon seemed to clearly understand the main idea of the mailing—indeed, his credulous response probably was exactly what the sweepstakes company hoped for. In order to

understand what the letter truly meant, however, Isbon needed to be able to read between, behind, or even around the lines—to go beyond actual vocabulary and access the text's deeper meaning.

Register Within School Texts

To be able to make sense of a text's register, readers not only need to understand specific vocabulary, but they also must attend to nuances of language within the text. Not long after the misunderstanding between the school district and Viola regarding ELL placement (see Chapter 6), I noted that Boni brought home another letter in a sealed, official envelope. Viola looked it over before handing it to me. The letter was from the school's Title I Reading Teacher, explaining that Boni had been recommended for extra reading services. Viola and Isbon, the letter explained, had a right to refuse the services. If Boni participated in the program, assessment information would be sent home regularly. The letter included a permission form with boxes for "may participate" and "may not participate" in the program (See Figure 8.4). Following the district's mistakes regarding ELL placement, Viola seemed (understandably) wary about other services for Boni. The program, I explained to Viola, was one in which a reading specialist would take Boni out of his classroom for a short time each day to do extra reading work. As she had with other official school recommendations regarding Boni, Viola asked my advice: How did the program work? Did I think extra reading services would be helpful? What were her rights as a parent? Ultimately, she decided to consent to extra help for her son.

Figure 8.4: An official school letter regarding Title I reading services for Boni.

Boni Domolouka

Oct. 19, 2005

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Your child has been recommended for Title I service in reading. Title I is a federally funded program that is locally administered by the School District. It is designed to address learning needs of students who are performing below grade level in one or more subject areas, or are at risk for doing so as determined by the IOWA Test and other assessments.

While we believe that your child will benefit from this placement, you have a parental right (now and at any time during the school year) to refuse Title I services. If you have questions or concerns related to this placement, please contact your child's teacher or the Title I Literacy teacher. Title I recognizes the vital role that parents play in promoting school success for children. We encourage you to arrange a visit or make a call to learn more about how the program may help your child.

Student assessment information is used to guide instruction. We will share both regular reports on your child's progress and the results of annual assessments with you. Your student will be given additional reading group support as well as individualized intervention. We offer this information because we want you to know what you can expect from us as well as what the support we hope to get from you in our partnership for your child. Please sign and return the bottom part of this letter to let us know that you have gotten this information and that you consent to Title I service as described here for your child.

Sincerely,

Title I Literacy Teacher

Please print:
Teacher name: _____ My child, _____,
(check one)
☐ May participate in the Title I program. ☐ May not participate in the Title I program at his/her school.

Date: _____ Parent / Guardian Signature _____

This episode helps to illustrate the various aspects of literacy knowledge people need to make sense of texts. In order to understand what she was supposed to do with the recommendation letter, Viola needed English vocabulary knowledge, cultural knowledge about her parental rights versus expectations schools hold for parents of struggling learners, and genre knowledge about letters that solicit parent consent. Boni's Title I

letter included highly specialized vocabulary, such as *locally administered* and *individualized intervention*. Many sentences used complex syntax such as, "It is designed to address learning needs of students who are performing below grade level in one or more subject areas, or are at risk for doing so as determined by the IOWA Test and other assessments." Nowhere did the letter explain that Title I is a pull-out program from the regular classroom, in contrast with the self-contained, permanent ELL placement. Finally, the letter originated from a federally-funded government program, and the text's vocabulary and syntax reflected governmental and legal registers. For example, the letter referenced legal rights and responsibilities as it informed parents of the program and elicited official consent for their child's participation. As a result, the letter used what many refer to as *legalese*—a register that even native speakers of English may find difficult to navigate!

In fact, I often noted that Viola and other Sudanese parents appeared to find the register of many school texts challenging. Especially difficult texts seemed to be official letters regarding: bomb threats, children not being up-to-date on vaccinations or free-lunch paperwork, special programs and services for ESL students and/or struggling learners, parent-teacher conference scheduling, and parent workshops and informational sessions. Register also played a role in brokering with other less official texts that came home from the schools, including enrollment forms for low-income dental care programs or the Cub Scouts, and flyers for community events.

Register and Writing

The parents asked for help in producing the appropriate register when they wrote texts in English. In November, 2005, I accompanied Viola to the boys' parent-teacher

conferences. During Boni's conference, his teacher explained that he owed money to the school library for a damaged book. Medo had accidentally ripped the book, but Boni returned it to the library without telling Viola: "I don't know he take the book back, because he just come tell me the story," she explained to Boni's teacher. "They're pretty strict about that at this school, the library books," the teacher replied, "They won't let him check out a book until you pay for that library book." However, she did not know how much money Boni owed, and the school librarian already had left the building. When we returned home, Viola asked me to help her compose a note to the librarian so that Boni could begin to borrow books again. I wrote: "To the [School] Library: How much money does Boni owe for the book that he ripped? His mom would like to pay it so that Boni can borrow books again. Viola Lupai". I placed the note in Boni's folder and told him to give it to the library. Viola reminded Boni that he needed to bring books home every week so that she could read them with him. Later, she reported that the librarian had communicated the amount, they paid the fine, and Boni once again could bring books home. In this case, Viola asked for brokering, not because she could not write in English, but probably because she wanted a note that would appropriately address a school official who clearly held power over her child. Being able to compose this text involved, among other things, knowing acceptable ways to approach a school professional in writing. Moreover, it also involved knowing that acceptable ways to approach school officials even exist.

Frequently, Viola and the other Sudanese adults commented that they wanted to make sure that the texts they wrote "sound nice" in English, one indication of the importance of register. For example, Viola wanted to compose an invitation to the

Sudanese cultural festival at her church, a text that both Americans and Sudanese would read. "I have something I want to write down," she began, "and I want to make sure the spelling is right." Viola composed the text in Arabic on a sheet of scratch paper. After she had written it down, she asked me to write it for her in English, commenting that I always make things "sound so nice". As Viola explained what she had written in Arabic, I re-composed the invitation in English, which she later took to Jen at the church for assistance in typing on the computer. As was typical of many brokering events I documented, Viola asked for help with a variety of different aspects of the writing of this text—with spelling words in English (encoding), with how it "sounded" (syntax, register, etc), and with ensuring that she included the appropriate information (genre features).

Sharing Complex Knowledge: Brokering as Negotiation of Meaning

The ability to engage in literacy practices, my findings suggest, involves complex, multifaceted knowledge about language, culture, and genre in relation to written texts. Sociocultural theories view knowledge and expertise as distributed across communities of practice (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978); all individuals possess some, but not all, of the knowledge necessary to engage in their community's practices. Many of the brokering events in this study reflect the distributed nature of literacy knowledge. As Mazak (2006) noted in her study of language brokering in Puerto Rico, "What was striking is just how participants shared linguistic resources in language brokering interactions" (p. 123). Brokers, Mazak argued, were not all-knowing individuals who simply provided information to others who lacked that information. Rather,

> brokering practices could be placed on a continuum from most reciprocal and negotiated, where both broker and client worked together, pooling their knowledge of both languages, to least reciprocal and negotiated, where a broker was called on simply as an expert or authority in English, with little negotiation or mutual contribution to textual meaning-making (Mazak, 2006, p. 103).

As Mazak suggests, brokering often represents a negotiation in which both parties bring knowledge and expertise to the brokering event. Much of the brokering I have described in this book represents one end of Mazak's continuum. That is, the Sudanese community members in this study often called upon brokers to act as experts and to supply them with new knowledge. In other events, however, brokering seemed to represent a mutual negotiation of a text, where both parties supplied important knowledge.

Navigating an Egyptian Website

As Viola prepared her law school application, she needed to acquire copies of her transcripts from Ain Shams University in Egypt. After I suggested that we try to request the documents online, Viola and I attempted to access the university's website from the public library's computers. The library's Internet filter, however, blocked our access to the Egyptian site. Later, we opened the website from my home computer. The university's website used both Arabic and English. The home page, http://net.shams.edu.eg, was written primarily in English. I showed Viola how to click on the link for the Faculty of Law, whose page was written entirely in Arabic. Because I could not read Arabic, Viola pointed to different hyperlinks on the page, explaining what they said. Together, we decided which links to follow, and Viola continued to translate

the content of these pages. The first page, for example, outlined the course schedule for the different years of the law program. Another contained information for students, describing how many people were enrolled in each year of the program. As she read through these pages and translated for me, Viola added information from her own experiences at the university. 3000 students enrolled in the first year, she explained to me, but they were weeded down to about 500 by the second year. As she translated from the screen, Viola expressed surprise that the university now offered a Master's program. Wearing a huge smile, she exclaimed, "Wow! I'm so excited to read this!" After reading through the website together, we determined that Viola could not request a transcript via the Internet. I showed her how to navigate back to the page with contact information, and I jotted down a phone number and address she could use to contact the university.

Neither Viola nor I alone could make sense of the university's website. While we both brought different expertise to the event, each of us lacked other important knowledge and skills. I could not read (or, for that matter, speak) Arabic, while Viola was still learning how to use textual features to navigate a website. Viola could easily read the Arabic words on the screen, while I knew how websites generally are structured. Both of us also brought important contextual knowledge to the event. I knew, for example, that universities generally provide some system for requesting transcripts and other records, while Viola had direct experience with Ain Shams. Only by working together could we make sense of the website and determine how to request a transcript.

Sending a Letter

Negotiation of mutual expertise also occurred when the Sudanese parents and their brokers composed different texts. When they created resumes, for example, Falabia

and Viola reported supplying knowledge about their own background and experiences, while their brokers provided knowledge about how to structure a resume to highlight their experiences. Together, the women and their brokers merged both bodies of information to create appropriate resumes. Isbon, Viola, and I collaborated on the content and structure of the letter they sent to Isbon's cousin regarding his pregnant daughter's marriage negotiations. Viola and Isbon composed the letter in Arabic, Viola orally translated what they had written, and I re-wrote the same letter in English. Viola then read what I had written to Isbon, in English, occasionally pausing to translate or comment in Arabic. Together, Isbon and Viola suggested some changes, which I included in the final, typed version (see Figure 8.5). This event involved a great deal of distributed expertise. Viola and Isbon, I observed, knew how to compose a letter in Arabic, but the recipient of this letter was not literate in that language. I brought English language expertise to the event, while the letters' content reflected important Sudanese cultural traditions, provided by Isbon and Viola. Together, the three of us composed a letter in English that reflected Sudanese cultural knowledge.

Figure 8.5: Isbon and Viola's letter regarding marriage negotiations for Isbon's cousin's daughter.

June 30, 2006

Dear Mr. ,

My name is Isbon Domoulouka. I am a brother of Mr. . I live in Lansing, Michigan with my family. I know that the daughter of my brother lives with you. Our family wants to meet with you. We need to know the kind of life you are living with her and what kind of person you are. We need to know if you want her to be your future wife because you have a baby together. We need to talk with you, because this is important for our culture. Traditionally, we have to know you and talk together. The girl has a lot of relatives, and they want to know you.

We want to talk with you soon. I want to come there to make an introduction and support you with the girl's family. I will be there on Saturday, July 22nd. We will meet with you at 6:00 at the house of . You must tell your family to be there, too.

Thank you,

Isbon Domoulouka
Phone number:

Addressing the envelope also involved negotiation. I saw that Viola had written down the address of Isbon's cousin, along with his phone number. However, the letter had been addressed to Joseph[1], the young man in question, rather than Isbon's cousin. Which name should go on the front of the envelope, I wondered? Viola consulted Isbon, and they decided to send the letter to Isbon's relative, who could then pass the letter on to Joseph. After supplying the cousin's name, Viola jotted down the percent sign, %, and

[1] A pseudonym.

suggested that I include that in the address. Momentarily perplexed, I finally realized what Viola meant. "Oh, 'care of'?" I asked. Yes, she confirmed, I should put Joseph's name on the envelope, in care of Isbon's cousin. Once again, Viola, Isbon and I each contributed important knowledge to the act of addressing an envelope. Viola knew the address of Isbon's cousin, but not of the intended recipient of the letter. Isbon knew that his cousin could get the letter to Joseph. Viola apparently had seen other letters addressed in care of a second party, but she did not seem sure of how to describe this process to me, while I knew how the U.S. postal system expects letters to be addressed.

Thus, some brokering events in this study involved expertise-based "client"-broker relationships, such as most of the events I have described in previous chapters. Others involved negotiation of meaning. Differences in brokering relationships may reflect the nature of texts brokered. Many brokered texts, as I have described, represented the official world—schools, workplaces, or the U.S. government. With texts from official institutions, which may have important consequences, people may seek brokers who can provide quick answers. Alternately, an expertise-based brokering relationship may reflect the availability of different types of brokers. With the exception of their own children, I found that the Sudanese refugees little access to bilingual, bicultural brokers. Although most of the U.S. citizens they approached to broker were those who tended to be more accepting and interested in learning about Sudanese culture, they nevertheless spoke no Arabic and knew little about Sudanese contexts. These findings suggest that brokering may be more likely to be negotiated the more both parties share linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The findings in this study suggest that an individual's ability to effectively engage in literacy practices requires multiple and overlapping bodies of knowledge. Some of this knowledge may actually involve an awareness of what knowledge is missing—knowing what one does not know about language, culture, or genres—along with the ability to appropriately identify people who may be able to supply the missing knowledge. Falabia, for example, appeared to be well aware that she did not know enough about the "rules in America", and she therefore sought a broker who was well-versed in those rules when she needed help contesting an unfair job evaluation. In the last chapter of this book, I will discuss insights that the findings of this study suggest for educational theory and practice, as well as for future research.

Chapter 9

Learning about Literacy Through Brokering:

Insights

"If you don't know how to read, you read with your friend,

and [if] your friend know how to read, you read with them."

~~Boni

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Akhlas sat on the couch, pencil in hand. A children's "Bible Activity Book" lay open in her lap, filled with religious-themed word searches, puzzles and other games. Bent over the book, she carefully circled words such as *savior*. When I questioned what she was doing, Akhlas showed me the word search, mentioning that she enjoyed them. Across the room, Remaz had been working on her kindergarten assignments. "Mommy," she said, leaping up, "I want to see what you did!" For a moment, she watched her mother scan the letters in the puzzle before returning to her own work. Akhlas circled another word. "Remaz," she announced, "I found one more!" Circling a final word, she triumphantly said, "Finished!" and handed the book to Remaz. "See if I do these right," she requested. Using her pink eraser as a pointer, Remaz touched each word in the puzzle, primly noting "Yes...yes" for each found word. Akhlas laughed to see her daughter "correcting" her work. "My teacher!" she announced with a giggle, before telling Remaz, "Okay, do your homework. Give it back."

Akhlas reclaimed the activity book and flipped to a new page while Remaz settled back on her own couch. Paging through the book, Akhlas occasionally paused to practice reading out loud in English, just as she often did with her ESL workbook pages.
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Stumbling over the words *message* and *different*, she turned to me to confirm her pronunciation. She reached a page featuring the story of Noah's Ark. Written for children, the story included line drawings that could be colored. Akhlas showed me the page, asked how to pronounce Noah's name in English, and spoke at length to Remaz in Arabic. Apparently conscious that I could not understand the conversation, Akhlas turned to me and explained, "I want to tell her the story of Noah in Arabic."

Akhlas' Bible activity book seemed to serve several important purposes as it mediated different literacy events. The book clearly was a source of pleasure for Akhlas, as she engaged with the word search for fun. It also offered her an opportunity to learn about the English language, as she practiced reading aloud and learned the English pronunciation of *Noah.* As Akhlas worked on the word search, Remaz was able to observe her mother reading and writing for a real-world purpose. When Akhlas invited Remaz to participate in the activity by "checking" her work, she positioned her daughter as a knowledgeable English speaker and a competent reader. And, finally, the Bible activity book mediated a teachable moment, as Akhlas shared an important Bible story with her daughter. Brokering, in this case, was only one small part of a much more complex literacy event, in which both mother and daughter appeared to be positioned as teachers and learners at different times.

I chose this episode to begin my final chapter, because it illustrates many of the themes I have presented throughout the book. The Sudanese refugees in these families participated in many literacy practices, using many texts (and different languages), for a variety of purposes in their daily lives. They relied upon brokers who could help them with different aspects of the texts, including the English language, U.S. culture, or genre

features. Different brokers, such as tutors or church friends, and including me, introduced the refugees to new texts and practices. The children in these families also played an important role in many family literacy events, as they taught their parents or translated for them.

A Note on Generalizability

The findings I present in this book are the result of an ethnographic case study. As such, they describe a particular group of people in a particular setting in a particular time frame. The families in this study do not represent all families everywhere, nor do they represent all Sudanese families, although they do reflect the diversity of the Sudanese community in Lansing in many ways. Although the findings of ethnographic studies are not generalizable in the same ways as those of other research designs, they may nevertheless reveal important social processes and/or contribute to theory-building (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). And, as Stake (2000) notes, qualitative researchers choose cases not only for what is particular and unique about them, but also what they may have in common with other cases. Thus, drawing upon similar studies within the same field may help to establish the representativeness of a given study's findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake, 2000). In the following sections, therefore, I offer insights gained from this study's findings, particularly as those findings are situated in relationship to those of other similar studies.

What Can These Sudanese Refugees Teach Us?

Texts and literacy practices were threads in the fabric of these Sudanese refugees' everyday lives in Michigan, just as they are for millions of other literate people around the world. Already experienced practitioners of Arabic literacies, Akhlas, Viola, Falabia

and their families embraced English texts and U.S. literacy practices, weaving them into their daily lives, although not always seamlessly. And, like all children in literate societies, Remaz, Juana, Boni, and Samuel had opportunities to learn about literacy as they observed and participated in literacy activities in their home, community, and school settings.

Texts and literacies mediate a great variety of social activities in the world, but in order to effectively engage with literacy practices, individuals must have access to different aspects of literacy knowledge, including language, culture, and written genres. The findings of this study suggest that families, not just Sudanese refugees, likely draw upon a variety of resources to understand texts. These findings may provide important insights about the ways in which people take up new literacy practices and learn about unfamiliar genres. Literacy brokers may be one resource people can draw upon to learn about lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, and genre aspects of texts. Even very young children may help others learn about texts and literacy practices.

Literacy as Social Practice Revisited

The findings of this study may help expand current theories about literacy as a social practice. As I described in Chapter 1, social, cultural, and political factors shape literacy practices. Different sociocultural contexts therefore imply different practices. When people move to new contexts, they may choose whether to adopt or reject the practices they encounter (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005). Choosing to take up a new practice, however, does not mean that the practice appears out of thin air—it must be learned. As Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič (2000) note, "Any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired

through processes of informal learning and sense making as well as formal education and training" (p. 14). This study's findings help to develop our understanding of how—and what—individuals learn as they take on new literacy practices.

Knowledge Involved in Practicing Literacy

When newcomers arrive in a new context, they need access to many types of knowledge in order to effectively practice literacy there. Some newcomers, such as refugees or other immigrants, may need to learn a new language in order to participate in the literacy practices of their new home. Regardless of whether or not the new context involves a new language, newcomers also may need to learn about that context's culture(s), and about its genres, in order to participate in literacy practices. However, new contexts do not always involve a change of physical location. Sometimes literacy itself can be a new context, as Purcell-Gates (1995) demonstrated in *Other People's Words:* Jenny and her family lived in a world that was virtually print-free, and, for them, becoming literate involved entering a new world. In cases like Jenny's, learners may not need to learn to speak a new language, but they nevertheless require knowledge about how language is encoded in print (Purcell-Gates, 1995). They also need access to the ways in which cultural beliefs, values and expectations are embedded within texts, and they need to know about genres.

How Literacy Practices are Learned

As Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič (2000) suggested, literacy learning is an important consideration within theories about literacy as social practice. New practices may be learned in both formal and informal ways (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2000; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). In formal settings, such as classrooms,

literacy learning occurs through many processes, including explicit teaching. But how, exactly, does informal learning occur? In Chapter 7, Falabia indicated that she had watched many people use coupons at the grocery store, but she had not figured out how to do so herself. Observing texts in use appears to be a necessary, but clearly not sufficient, aspect of learning about literacy practices. How do people learn about literacy practices if observation is not enough? Participation in meaningful, authentic activities appears to be key (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). Sociocultural theories, supported by research findings, suggest that much learning occurs as individuals participate, even peripherally, in authentic social activities that are guided by more knowledgeable individuals (Lave & Wenger, 1992; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Participating in practices around texts, thus, is one way in which individuals learn about literacy. Sometimes explicit teaching also occurs within these social activities, and brokering appears to be one method by which people learn explicit knowledge about language, culture, and genres. Brokers can act as more knowledgeable others, in the Vygotskian sense, during the process of learning about literacy practices.

Learning about Literacy through Brokering

Brokering, as the events in this book suggest, involves a great deal more than translation of language or interpretation of cultural practices. It can provide complex and multifaceted knowledge about texts, including lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, and genre knowledge that is embedded within texts. The results in this book also suggest that brokering appears to take many forms beyond translation, such as teaching or advising. And, as a result, I want to argue that *literacy* brokering is fundamentally different from other forms of language brokering.

Brokering Involves Complex, Multifaceted Knowledge

As I discussed in Chapter 1, much of the extant literature treats brokering as a matter of language translation or interpretation, with some brief attention to culture. If they consider texts at all, researchers tend to view them through the lens of translation. Brokering, however, is not only an oral language practice. It is also a literacy practice, as many brokering events occur around printed texts (Orellana et al, 2003). Literacy brokering activities, as my data suggest, involve much more than translation alone. In addition to helping with written language, literacy brokers also appear to support and teach about literacy practices. Shaped by culture, and by textual genres, literacy practices involve complex and multifaceted knowledge about beliefs, values, attitudes and so forth (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Brokering, therefore, may address cultural and genre aspects of texts, in addition to the languages used within texts. Thus, brokering events may be just as complex as the literacy practices that shape them.

Researchers who address texts as part of brokering also have focused almost entirely on the process of reading, and they have not looked at brokering related to writing. For Orellana and her colleagues, brokering is a matter of interpreting written texts, such as mail or school documents, that come into the home, rather than a matter of writing texts. Indeed, their choice of the term *para-phrasing* to describe brokering indicates that brokers are reading and reporting on what they read. In contrast, very little attention has been paid to writing within brokering events. Researchers do note that child brokers may engage with writing to help their parents fill in forms or other similar activities (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). In her study of brokering in Puerto Rico, Mazak (2006) similarly found that language brokers sometimes

were called upon to help people spell words, "especially when clients were trying to search the internet or a computer graphics database and precise English spelling was required to meet their communicative goals" (p. 114). However, these examples appear to be the extent to which most researchers consider writing within brokering events, and they also may treat writing as one component of a larger *reading* event, such as reading a form or website.

My findings, in contrast, suggest that writing, in itself, could form the basis of brokering events. Like participants in other studies, the Sudanese adults in these families regularly sought brokers for writing activities such as filling in forms or spelling individual words. However, they also asked for help when they needed to compose entire texts themselves, such as resumes, letters, notes to teachers, invitations, or welcome banners. Brokering, therefore, seems to help people read texts they receive and also write their own texts.

Brokering Takes Many Forms

Earlier studies suggest that brokering is a matter of translation or interpretation, whether of language or culture (Chu, 1998; Halgunseth, 2003; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Tse & McQuillan, 1996). More recent thinking, however, treats brokering as more complex and multifaceted than previously assumed, involving a great deal more than translation alone. Child brokers "do not simply animate their parents' words," note Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido (2003). For example, Valdés (2003) shows that, in addition to providing oral translations, young brokers advise about cross-cultural interactions, contribute to important family decisions, and actively manage the impressions their parents make on the outside world during brokering events. Similarly, Mazak (2006)

identified six functions of language brokering in her Puerto Rican community: double-checking, helping to read, translating, reporting/summarizing, spelling, and pronouncing. Like Mazak and Valdés, I found that brokering took many forms in the Sudanese community. Brokering could involve teaching, advising, or simply expediting a literacy activity on behalf of a participant.

My findings also differ from other studies in important ways. Other researchers view brokering through a bilingual lens, and their work therefore focuses on lexico-syntactic aspects of language. While they recognize that printed texts often spark brokering, their studies primarily address the ways in which brokers act as translators. In contrast, I approach brokering from a literacy perspective. Based upon my data, I suggest that *literacy brokering* and *language brokering*, while related, are not the same. In the latter, languages are central to the event, while other aspects, such as culture or texts, appear to be secondary. Also, this type of brokering event almost always involves two languages, such as Spanish and English, which is why translation and interpretation have been so central to the concept of language brokering.

Literacy brokering events, in contrast, focus on texts. Language, like culture and genre, is only one aspect of a text that may be brokered. While some brokering events may involve two languages, such as the ones in which church friends helped Akhlas locate passages in her Arabic-English Bible, other literacy brokering events involve only one language. For example, most of the brokering that I observed, or that was reported to me, among these Sudanese families utilized English alone. Literacy brokering, like language brokering, certainly addresses issues of meaning and communication. However, it appears to differ from the ways in which other researchers treat brokering, in that it also

deals with issues of *practice*—that is, the ways in which people purposefully use texts to accomplish specific social goals.

Brokering, as I have suggested, often takes the form of *teaching*. Brokers in this study sometimes taught about language, as they supplied the meaning of words such as *nasogastric* or helped with letter-sound correspondences. They taught about culture as they shared information about U.S. history or explained the way things "work" in the U.S. They taught about genre as they explicated genre purposes and features, such as topics to be included in a resume. Not all teaching, though, involves brokering. Brokering is one type, or subset, of teaching that may differ from other types in important ways. Teaching through brokering appears to occur informally, in the context of everyday life. Individuals in this study sought out brokers for the texts they encountered as they went about their daily business. The teaching and learning that occur through brokering therefore seem to occur outside of formal educational contexts. As a result, brokers can be teachers who may have little, if any, special training to teach. This appears to be especially true in the case of child brokers.

Another significant difference between brokering and other types of teaching may be the purpose, or goal, of brokering. With other types of teaching, such as that which occurs in classrooms, learning is generally the primary goal. With brokering, however, the primary goal is the social activity itself; learning can be a secondary outcome that occurs during the course of the activity. For example, when Falabia, Amin, and Viola wanted to create resumes, the primary purpose of brokering was to help them compose a resume so that they could apply for new jobs. As they wrote to accomplish this real-world

goal, they also likely learned about a new text. Teaching that occurs through brokering therefore may be both informal and authentic.

Brokers May be Learners, Too

The findings of my study support newer theories about the nature of brokering relationships. Some scholars imply that those who ask for brokering assistance lack knowledge, and brokers possess, and supply, the necessary expertise (e.g., Chu, 1998; Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983). Extant literature regarding cultural brokering, for example, still assumes that brokers are "experts" in both of the cultures they broker (Chu, 1998; Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983). More recent scholarship, however, has challenged this unilinear expertise model of brokering. Some researchers who study language brokering, for example, have shown that brokers do not necessarily have to be fully fluent in the languages they broker (Mazak, 2006; Valdés, 2003). As Mazak argues, some brokers may have limited competence in some aspect of the knowledge or activity they are being asked to broker.

Orellana et al (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza, 2003) similarly challenge the notion that brokering events, especially those including children, involve a one-way transmission of knowledge from broker to client. They suggest that both (or all) participants bring some sort of expertise to the event. When a Spanish-speaking parent receives a summons for jury duty, for example, her child might bring knowledge of the English language. The parent might have knowledge of different court systems and therefore understand what a jury summons implies. By combining their different types of expertise, they may be able to make sense of the summons together. Because of this distributed expertise, brokering events can be ones where meaning is negotiated

(Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza, 2003). That is, the broker may not simply translate the words on the page, and the person seeking help does not just passively receive information.

Brokering, therefore, sometimes involves a process of negotiation of meaning that is based upon different bodies of knowledge participants bring to a literacy event. Particularly regarding child brokering, Orellana et al (2003b) note, "We saw that this weighting shapes the nature of participation (who asks questions, who answers them, how meaning is negotiated, and the nature and degree of support children receive for their efforts)" (p. 24). Mazak (2006) noted a similar negotiation in the language brokering events she observed, and in which she participated, among adolescents and adults in Puerto Rico:

> The relationship between language broker and client (the person seeking help) was not one-way or hierarchical, but rather recursive...Those who sought help from English language brokers often had a lot of English skills, and the broker may have limited Spanish skills (like me). Thus, I saw brokering not as a transaction, but as a mutual building/sharing of knowledge that is recursive (p. 43).

Like Mazak (2006), Valdés (2003), and Orellana et al (2003b), I found that participants bring different types and amounts of expertise to literacy brokering events. However, some events can involve much more negotiation of meaning than others (Mazak, 2006). Episodes such the one in which Viola and I jointly navigated the Arabic-language website for Ain Shams University required a great deal of collaboration. In contrast, events in which participants asked about word meanings such as *increasingly* or

walrus appeared to need very little negotiation, because they primarily involved simple transmission of knowledge. Brokering events in which parents sought advice about a text, such as when Falabia and Viola asked for help in creating a resume, seemed to occupy a middle ground. In such cases, the broker might transmit some knowledge—e.g., how to organize a resume—while both participants might negotiate which life experiences to include or omit when writing the resume. My data, thus, appear to support Mazak's claim that literacy brokering involves a continuum of sense-making from basic transmission of knowledge to mutual negotiation of meaning.

Literacy brokers, my findings suggest, teach, advise, and expedite literacy events. Because brokering can involve negotiated meanings and distributed knowledge, brokers also may have opportunities to learn when they broker (Tse, 1996), as I discovered first-hand when I brokered within the Sudanese community. As Viola and I sat together at the computer, jointly reading through the Ain Shams website, I learned about differences between U.S. and Egyptian universities. When I created labels for Sudanese foods for the cultural festival, I learned the names and ingredients of traditional foods. When I helped Isbon compose a letter to a community member, I learned cultural knowledge about marriage customs in Sudan. As I helped Falabia and other refugees apply for U.S. citizenship, I learned a great deal about the process of becoming a citizen—knowledge that I, as a native-born citizen, might not otherwise have encountered. I suspect that other brokers probably had similar experiences with learning as they brokered for these parents.

Young children also may have opportunities to learn about language, culture and written genres as they broker for their families and communities. The Sudanese children

in this study often acted as couriers for texts between school and home, as I described in Chapter 7. Although they could not read most of those texts independently, they nevertheless seemed to have been made aware of the texts' contents. When Samuel announced that a teacher note requested snacks, or when Boni told his mother to sign a permission slip, the boys demonstrated their apparent knowledge about different purposes for reading or writing—to convey information or indicate consent, for example. Similarly, as Remaz recounted a message from her teacher to remind Akhlas to return a permission slip, she probably learned about the purpose of that text. Brokering may also reinforce literacy concepts that children learn in schools. For example, when Remaz helped her mother spell different words, she had an opportunity to practice the same letter-sound correspondences that her class had been learning. Child brokers therefore may be both teachers and learners within a single event.

Literacy Brokering Revisited

Literacy brokering, thus, appears to be distinct from other types of brokering discussed in the scholarly literature. Based upon the findings of this study, I propose the following definition: *Literacy brokering occurs when an individual seeks help from another regarding lexico-syntactic/graphophonic, cultural, and/or genre aspects of a printed text in order to read or write that text. All participants involved in the brokering event can bring knowledge and expertise to the event, which may be transmitted in different ways, such as teaching or advising, or may be negotiated by participants. A broker does not necessarily straddle both of the languages or cultures involved in a brokering event. In fact, brokers may not be fully competent in any aspect of the brokered knowledge.* For example, U.S. citizens who broker may have limited experience with

Sudanese culture and may not speak, read or write Arabic at all. Similarly, child brokers may not be fully fluent in one or both of the languages involved in brokering, and they still may be in an emergent stage of literacy development.

Child Literacy Brokering

Turning to the specific issue of child brokering, my findings also add new insights to current understandings about brokering. Brokering activities of children younger than 10 have not been significantly addressed in extant research. In surveys, bilingual individuals report beginning to translate and interpret for their parents when they are as young as eight or nine years old (Morales & Hanson, 2005), but researchers primarily focus on older children. Orellana, Dorner and Pulido (2003), for example, studied language brokering among a sample of 18 children from the Chicago area. Of these children, 14 were in the fifth and sixth grades, two were in the third grade, while the remaining two were in the eighth and ninth grades. The authors noted:

> We primarily selected pre-adolescents because other research (Buriel et al. 1998; McQuillan and Tse 1995; Tse 1996) and our own ethnographic work suggests that this is the age at which bilingual children are beginning to take on increased responsibilities as para-phrasers (p. 509-510).

Young children clearly played a role in the brokering that occurred among the Sudanese refugee families I studied in Michigan. Moreover, I observed that young children's brokering involved *written genres* as well as culture and oral translations. As I have already suggested, this textual aspect is new for thinking about brokering. Like adult brokers, young children in this study provided important knowledge about texts, especially knowledge about a text's purpose, its use, and its various features.

Child Brokering is a Natural Activity

Other researchers have claimed that child brokering may be problematic in many cultural communities (Morales & Hanson, 2005; Tse, 1996; Umaña-Taylor, 2003). Problems arise, they suggest, for two reasons: (1) child brokering may disrupt traditional family hierarchies when children possess knowledge or skills that their parents do not and thus are placed in positions of power over them; and (2) children often broker in sensitive and potentially embarrassing situations, such as medical examinations, government agencies, or parent-teacher conferences. Because I did not observe the children brokering in sensitive situations, the data in my study do not speak to the latter point. However, my findings do help to challenge researchers' claims that child brokering can be problematic for family relationships. In Chapter 5, I noted that most research on child brokering has been conducted in Latino-American communities, with a few studies among Asian-American communities. Family roles and relationships do not look the same across all communities, however (Rogoff, 2003), and we cannot assume that what is problematic in one community is necessarily so in another. Based upon what I saw in these three families, I suspect that child literacy brokering may be a natural extension of Sudanese children's roles, responsibilities, and contributions to household functioning.

In many African cultures, children take on great responsibility within their families very early in life (Rogoff, 2003). Even young children are expected to help with cooking and other household duties, as I experienced during my two years living in Lesotho. It was not uncommon for me to see four- or five-year-olds caring for infant siblings—and doing so quite competently. I observed that the children in the three Sudanese families also reflected this cultural pattern, taking on responsibilities that may

differ from children in other cultural communities. On my second visit to Viola's home, for example, she reported that Samuel, who was only four years old at the time, was very good with two-month-old Anthony. When Anthony woke in the middle of the night, Samuel often got up to give the baby his bottle: "He never calls me," Viola said, noting that Samuel fed the baby and went right back to sleep. Indeed, I often observed Samuel cuddling with Anthony or making sure he was warmly covered. Boni also appeared to like helping his parents. Medo once brought home a video about car safety, and Viola reported that she was supposed to sign a form to indicate that he had watched it. Medo had not been interested in the video, she recalled, so five-year-old Boni watched it with him and explained the proper way to wear a seatbelt.

In Falabia's home, I often noted that Golda did much of the cooking for the family; both Julia and Golda performed much of the family's housecleaning; and the older children all cared for the younger children. Thirteen-year-old Chris seemed to have a special, and voluntary, role in caring for little Diana. When Diana and Juana once argued over a library book, for example, Diana burst into tears and crawled into Chris' lap. I watched him gently cradle her in his arms and carry her upstairs, while she wept over his shoulder. Other times, Falabia or Golda would call for Chris to come and take Diana away if she pestered her siblings while they did homework. And, just as Viola had noted regarding Samuel, Falabia reported that Chris often got up in the middle of the night to see if Diana needed something, rather than waking Falabia.

In many cultures, children actively contribute to household functioning (Orellana, 2001; Rogoff, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela (1999), for example, found that Mexican immigrant youth served as tutors/teachers, advocates, and surrogate parents

within their families. Children in the three Sudanese families appeared to fulfill a similar important role in household functioning by cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings. Literacy brokering—helping parents with household literacy tasks—seemed to be a natural, and potentially important, extension of family responsibilities for the young children in these Sudanese families. As Orellana (2001) suggests,

> Translating work makes particularly evident the fact that the work children do is not trivial. Children are not minor players or "peripheral participants" (Wenger, 1998) gradually being integrated into cultural practices that adults in their community have mastered. In many ways *they* are the experts, and their ability to engage successfully with the complex demands of modern life matters for their families' well-being and integration into U.S. society (p. 378).

Orellana's work, of course, dealt with children who were older than 10. My findings, however, suggest that this claim may apply to even young children who are not yet fully literate.

Parents Position Children as Teachers: "You Have to Teach Your Father"

Not only did the Sudanese children naturally take on literacy brokering as part of their normal family responsibilities, but their parents appeared to actively position them as teachers, further suggesting that this practice likely was not problematic or disruptive in their families. As I described in Chapter 5, the parents often commented on the ways in which their children acted as translators. More importantly, they positioned their children as *teachers,* not just as interpreters. More than any other parent, Akhlas often referred to Remaz as her teacher: "She's my teacher," Akhlas mentioned to me early in our relationship, "She always tell me the question [answer]!" Remaz, Akhlas reported, was

teaching her much about speaking well in English. "I like to speak English with them [Remaz and Remon] because I learn," she explained, "I'm learning from Remaz a lot!" Over dinner a few months later, Akhlas listened as Remaz shared information that she had been learning at school. "Fruit has a little bit of sugar, sugar that's good for you," Remaz explained. In response, Akhlas exclaimed to me, "She teaches me. My best teacher—Remaz!"

Isbon and Viola similarly positioned Boni and Samuel as their teachers. One June afternoon, for example, I helped Boni write his own little book so that he could practice reading over his summer vacation before first grade. His book focused on color words. When I asked if he liked yellow, Boni replied that he did not, which sparked a discussion between Boni and Viola about gender associations for different colors. "Yellow is for the boys," said Viola. Boni replied, "Yellow? No! It's for the girls!" Viola responded, "I don't know—you teach me!" She did not know about things in America, she explained to him, so he should teach her.

A few months later, Isbon reported to me that Samuel had been teaching him the English names of colors. When Isbon did not know the words for certain colors, Samuel reportedly said, "You don't know nothing." Isbon recalled explaining to Samuel, "I don't know. You have to teach me. You have to teach your father." To me, he added, "When the refugees come to America, all the kids teach the father." At that point, Viola proudly chimed in, "All the kids [who] come from Africa help their moms."

The Sudanese parents in this study, thus, appeared to expect their children to share new knowledge with them: "They teach us everything," Akhlas reported. At the end of the study, I went back to Akhlas to share my emerging findings about brokering

with her. Is it normal, I wondered, for Sudanese children to help their parents? Even in Sudan, she replied, children sometimes knew more than their parents:

> In Sudan, we learn in Arabic. The mother help the kids, because when you are in school, you're learning and you must teach your daughter. [But] some kids are smart. When you don't know something, they know better than you and they're helping. [Our] kids here, they're so smart, because we are in a different culture and a different language. Kids, their minds are so fast! That's why they help us here in America. The kids, they help a lot.

When I questioned how she felt about her children's help, she responded, "It's really good thing...It's good thing for me. It's not bad thing. I'm really happy about that." I explained that some people believe it is a problem for children to teach parents, because then they do not respect their elders. For Akhlas, this appeared to be a non-issue. If parents raise their children well, she believed, it does not matter if children act as teachers: "In Sudan, the kids always respect. When you teach the kids the good thing, they always respect you. My daughter, she tell [teach] me, [and] it's not a bad thing. Some culture is different. But, I know when you teach your kids good thing, they always respect you."

These findings help to complicate previous conceptions of child brokering. Child brokering very well may be problematic in some contexts, when brokering disrupts traditional family hierarchies or when children are asked to broker in sensitive situations. But, we cannot assume that all cultural communities respond to child brokering in the same way. Within these Sudanese families, for example, brokering appeared to be a natural extension of other expected roles and relationships for children.

Adult Literacy, Family Literacy, and Parent Participation

My findings regarding literacy brokering among the three Sudanese families also suggests several important insights for education. These insights relate to adult literacy/ESL learning, family literacy, and parent participation in schools.

Adult Literacy/ESL

In order to effectively read, write, and otherwise engage in literacy practices, adults must be able to access multiple bodies of knowledge about languages, cultures, and genres. Learning basic skills, such as decoding or encoding print, is only one aspect of becoming literate. Literacy development also involves learning about literacy practices, the ways in which reading and writing are meaningfully used in the world as part of goal-oriented social activities. However, research suggests that the majority of adult literacy programs consist of activities and materials that are appropriate only for literacy instruction (Purcell-Gates, Degener & Jacobson, 2001)—that is, these programs help adults learn the basic skills of reading and writing, but they spend little, if any, time utilizing real-world texts or addressing the ways in which literacy is authentically used in everyday life outside of school.

Akhlas' ESL homework assignments that I observed reflected the limited authenticity of many adult literacy materials and programs. Her workbooks focused upon basic skill-and-drill types of exercises, such as changing verbs from present to past tense. The assignments made an attempt to provide students with language and life skills they would need in the U.S., including exercises where students needed to read simulated classified ads, menus, or banking deposit slips. However, the purpose of these activities appeared to be mostly about practicing language skills such as vocabulary, abbreviations,

or typical conversation patterns, rather than learning about actually using the texts themselves.

Everyday literacy events I observed also seemed to provide parents with similar opportunities to learn about language, but in much more meaningful contexts. It was important for Viola to learn vocabulary such as *increasingly* or *concepts*, because these terms were written in relation to her son's academic struggles. Some language learning, therefore, occurred in this study as brokers drew upon meaningful "teachable moments." Other researchers have suggested that curricula which include real-world texts, used in authentic situations, may enhance adult literacy learning (Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 2001). The findings of this study support that recommendation.

In addition, the Sudanese parents' involvement with literacy brokering also suggests that adult learners, whether they are learning to read and write in a new language or becoming literate for the first time, may need access to more than lexico-syntactic and graphophonic knowledge. As I described in Chapter 1, language is always contextualized by genre and culture. For that reason, adult literacy and ESL programs could consider explicitly teaching about genre and culture in addition to teaching basic literacy skills such as decoding print, vocabulary, and syntax. Adult educators could address questions such as:

- How are different texts put together? Specifically, what features does a given genre include?
- What is the function of different genre features?
- How are different genres used in the real world? For which purposes?

- What sorts of cultural knowledge might learners need about the content and use of different texts?

Family Literacy

Literacy brokering, as my data suggest, is often a matter of family literacy. The Sudanese children and parents in this study sometimes gathered around different texts, working together to make sense of them. As parents relied upon children to help them with texts, they drew them into authentic literacy practices, exposing the children to multiple texts and real-world purposes for reading and writing. Such exposure to uses of print is an important component in emergent literacy development (Clay, 1998; Edwards, 1995; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Literacy brokering, therefore, may be mutually beneficial to both parent and child: Children can gain experience with print, while parents can learn about language, culture, and genres.

Such findings about literacy brokering also help to expand our current conception of *family literacy.* Most constructs of family literacy are based upon primarily White, middle-class definitions of literacy (Anderson, Smythe & Shapiro, 2005; Heath, 1983), often focusing on storybook reading events between parents and children. However, findings from the Sudanese community in Michigan suggest that families engage in many literacy practices, with a variety of texts, beyond reading storybooks. Brokering allows children to be active participants in these practices, giving them experience with important real-world texts at a young age. As Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner and Meza (2003) note, brokering practices may be

> different than typical middle class practices like bedtime storybook reading, but they may be no less significant for children's literacy development. Arguably,

> they may be *more so*, in that these activities expose children to a much wider array of genres, domains, and forms of written texts than do storybooks (or, for that matter, than do school literacy activities). Para-phrasing also engages children actively in the interpretation of texts, for real purposes, rather than positioning them as the passive recipients of the readings (p. 31).

These findings about literacy brokering also challenge the one-way transmission model of family literacy, instead offering support for intergenerational models (Gadsden, 2000). Child brokering activities demonstrate that literacy learning can be multidirectional. That is, parents certainly influence children's literacy development, but children may also influence their parents' literacy practices as well.

Literacy also may be impacted by more than just the family members living in a particular household. In addition to their own children, the Sudanese parents in this study relied upon a variety of different brokers to help them with texts. They turned to church friends, social workers, colleagues, tutors and other Sudanese community members, and to me, for help with reading and writing. According to a traditional family literacy model, most schools likely would consider Akhlas's, Viola's, and Falabia's families to be "deficient" because they are still developing their English language and literacy skills, and because they have limited experience with the U.S. educational system. Yet, the families had access to an extensive network of community resources for literacy. Thus, these findings suggest that the concept of family literacy could be broadened to include community resources such as brokers who clearly provide literacy support for families. In some cultural communities, in fact, *family* literacy and *community* literacy may be deeply entwined or even indistinguishable.

Parent Participation in Schools

Many, many brokering events in this study involved texts that came home from the Sudanese children's schools. U.S. schools regularly send home reams of papers. The parents needed to be able to differentiate and make sense of flyers, newsletters, permission forms, notes, official letters, homework and other texts. Some of these texts were more important than others; indeed, some—such as Remaz's letter about lunch money or Boni's multiple retention letters—carried potentially serious consequences for children and families. Although the Sudanese parents occasionally had difficulty with school texts due to their developing English abilities, cultural and genre issues played a significant role in their struggles, as well.

Difficulty understanding papers that come home from schools is not limited to the Sudanese community, however. Even native English-speaking parents may struggle to understand what texts mean or what schools expect (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers, 2003). Educators often express frustration that parents are not more involved in children's schooling. The findings from this study may help to explain some patterns of parent participation—or lack thereof—in U.S. schools. Rather than being disinterested or even lazy, parents actually may not understand the purposes of different texts that are sent home, or they may be unfamiliar with cultural expectations for parent participation that are embedded within those texts.

Schools therefore could more carefully consider the texts they send home, particularly in communities where many parents may have limited proficiency with literacy and/or English. Some schools already provide translations for important texts in languages that parents can understand. This is an important step, but it is not enough.

Language may be only part of the challenge for parents in understanding what they are supposed to do or how they are expected to respond—or it may not even be the problem at all, if parents do not understand what the text is *for* or what schools expect. In preparing texts to send home, educators may wish to ask themselves:

- What is the best way to communicate with parents?
- Is this genre familiar to parents in my school? Are the purposes of different textual features clear?
- What vocabulary might be difficult for parents? Am I using jargon?
- How accessible is the register of this text? Can I cut down on the amount of reading between, behind, or around the lines that parents need to do?
- What cultural assumptions are embedded within this text? How can I make my expectations for parents more explicit?

In addition to thinking more carefully about the texts they send home, educators also can actively rely upon children to help their parents with these texts. Children often are the primary couriers for written communication between schools and parents. My study's findings also suggest that they effectively broker texts for their parents, providing useful information about a text's contents, its purpose, and different features. When they send texts home, teachers could spend a few minutes explaining a text's content to children, along with what parents should do with it. Many teachers already do this, but they may wish to more carefully prepare their explanations. If teachers go over the content of the text, highlight specific textual features, and explain the text's purpose, child brokers might be better equipped to help their parents make sense of the text. If

child brokers are better able to broker texts for their parents, parents may be better able to respond to school communications in hoped-for ways.

Many Questions: Directions for Research

My study of literacy and Sudanese refugee families answered some of the questions I had about literacy practices, but it raised many, many more. Researchers are only just beginning to look closely at the issue of brokering in connection with literacy and texts. Much work remains to be done regarding the basic construct of literacy brokering, how it may vary across communities, and how child literacy brokering may impact academic achievement. Also, research should continue to explore the different aspects of knowledge individuals need in order to effectively engage in literacy practices.

Does Brokering Vary Across Contexts?

Findings from this group of Sudanese families have challenged current assumptions about brokering that are based upon research in Latino-American and Asian-American communities. Future research should continue to examine literacy practices, and literacy brokering, in other cultural contexts. Researchers should explore questions such as: What aspects of brokering are similar across multiple contexts? How might brokering differ across communities?

Brokering is clearly a phenomenon in immigrant and refugee families, where family members must negotiate a new language and/or navigate a new cultural context. However, we do not know if, or how, brokering occurs in so-called "mainstream" families that grew up in the same context and speak the same language as dominant groups in society. I suspect that brokering does occur in these contexts as well—just consider how often White, middle-class children help their parents with programming the

VCR or navigating other new technologies! No literate person is equally comfortable with all genres, and brokering is likely an important means by which *all* people learn about new texts and contexts. (I, for example, desperately needed my realtor's help in understanding the required paperwork to sell my own house!) Again, further research may find interesting similarities and differences in brokering, depending on which type of community is involved in the brokering.

What is Effective Brokering?

Not all brokering events are successful, and not all brokers may be equally effective. Although Boni and Samuel were brothers, for example, the nature of their brokering appeared to differ greatly. Samuel often seemed to know much about the content of different texts, while Boni appeared good at pointing out where his parents needed to sign or fill in information. I noted that Boni, however, also made far more mistakes in brokering than other Sudanese children in the study, and Viola therefore seemed more likely to turn to Samuel for textual help. Further research needs to delve more deeply into the phenomenon of effective brokering. What does effective brokering look like? What counts as effective in differing cultural communities? Is child brokering qualitatively different from that done by adults, or is it simply an emergent form of brokering?

How Does Brokering Impact Achievement?

Research also should continue to examine the impact of brokering on young children's literacy development and school achievement. In her survey research, Tse (1996) found that bilingual youth believed brokering helped them learn about language(s), culture(s), and academic content. Valdés (2003) even argues that brokering

is a form of giftedness among bilingual students. Dorner, Orellana and Li-Grining (2007) recently demonstrated that bilingual child brokers had better scores on fifth- and sixth-grade standardized reading tests than their peers who did not broker. However, researchers have only just begun to explore the potential academic impact of child brokering. Researchers may want to further examine the relationship between literacy brokering and literacy development, particularly among young children. Does brokering impact academic achievement? Does it impact literacy development? If so, how?

Knowledge about Genre and Literacy Practices

Finally, researchers concerned with literacy as social practice must delve more deeply into questions about *how* people take up or learn new literacy practices. Many researchers who view literacy through this lens have described the multiple literacies of different cultural communities. They also have explored beliefs, values, and attitudes about literacy to create a fuller picture of *why* individuals adopt some literacy practices but reject or resist others. However, we know very little about how the acquisition process actually occurs. Brokering clearly is one method by which people learn about new practices and new texts, but it is undoubtedly not the only mechanism for doing so. Important questions to pursue include: How do people learn about new texts or new literacy practices? Besides brokering, how do people learn the knowledge(s) necessary to participate in literacy practices, either in their native communities or when they migrate to new contexts? How can formal instruction address issues of practice in literacy instruction? How can genre and cultural knowledge be effectively taught to adult learners? To children?

Throughout this book, I have shared the stories of three Sudanese refugee families. These families' stories have much to teach us about literacy practices and literacy brokering. I wish to conclude this book by repeating words of wisdom from Boni, who struggled with learning to read. Despite his struggles, or perhaps because of them, Boni clearly recognized the importance of literacy brokers and other informal teachers. "If you don't know how to read, you read with your friend," he said, "and [if] your friend know how to read, you read with them."

Appendix A:

Literacy Practices Interview Protocol

This interview protocol is based upon one designed by Victoria Purcell-Gates for the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS). For more details about the CPLS study, please refer to *Cultural Practices of Literacy: Case Studies of Language, Literacy, Social Practice, and Power* (Purcell-Gates, 2007).

Start the interview with this narrative elicitation: "What does literacy mean to you?"

As the interview progresses, use interviewee's responses to elicit further information about cultural and historical context (e.g. "What was life like in the refugee camp?", "What kinds of things did you do in school?", "How do people share information in Sudan?", "What kinds of storytelling did you do?", "Would you tell me a traditional story?", etc)

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LITERACY

Current Literacy Practices

I. What kinds of things do you **read** in your life (that are not part of any school you might be attending)? For each text or practice mentioned, elicit information about why (purpose of reading), social context (as part of what type of activity, like work, church, committees, shopping for family, etc.). (Ask which language these activities happen in, if you are not sure.)

PROMPTS (with each of the following, you can give example texts but don't ask about any one specifically):

- for daily tasks?
- with your children? with your spouse? with your friends? with your co-workers?
- for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit?
- at your job?
- for entertainment/fun/relaxation?

- for information?
- for shopping?
- for worship (or religious purposes)?
- Internet?

II. What kinds of texts do you **write** in your life (that are not part of any school you might be attending)? For each text or practice mentioned, elicit information about why (purpose of writing), social context (as part of what type of activity, like work, church, committees, shopping for family, etc.) and how important and/or enjoyable/fulfilling is it (Don't belabor this; the goal is to remain conversational and informal).

PROMPTS (with each of the following, you can give example texts but don't ask about any one specifically):

- for daily tasks?
- with your children? with your spouse? with your friends? with your co-workers?
- for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit?
- at your job?
- for entertainment/fun/relaxation?
- for information?
- for shopping?
- for worship (or religious purposes)?
- Internet?

Historical Literacy Practices (For adults)

I. When you were a child in Africa, what kinds of texts (or 'things') did people in your family (or house) **read** regularly (except for those things that kids or adults read for school assignments) (use questions from above to prompt)?

For each text or practice mentioned, elicit information about why (purpose of writing), social context (as part of what type of activity, like work, church, committees, shopping for family, etc.) and how important and/or enjoyable/fulfilling is it (Don't belabor this; the goal is to remain conversational and informal).

PROMPTS (with each of the following, you can give example texts but don't ask about any one specifically):

- for daily tasks?
- with the children? with their spouses? with their friends? with your co-workers? With brothers/sisters?
- for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit?
- at your job?
- for entertainment/fun/relaxation?
- for information?
- for shopping?
- for worship (or religious purposes)?

II. When you were a child in Africa, what kinds of texts did your family **write** regularly (except for those things kids or adults wrote for a teacher in school as an assignment) For each text or practice mentioned, elicit information about why (purpose of writing), social context (as part of what type of activity, like work, church, committees, shopping for family, etc.) and how important and/or enjoyable/fulfilling is it (Don't belabor this; the goal is to remain conversational and informal).

PROMPTS (with each of the following, you can give example texts but don't ask about any one specifically):

- for daily tasks?
- with your children? with your spouse? with your friends? with your co-workers?
- for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit?
- at your job?
- for entertainment/fun/relaxation?
- for information?
- for shopping?
- for worship (or religious purposes)?
- Internet?

III. What kinds of texts did other people in your community when you were a child read or write? (these should be texts that the participant remembers seeing people use, not those that he 'supposes' people used)

PROMPTS (with each of the following, you can give example texts but don't ask about any one specifically):

- for daily tasks?
- with your children? with your spouse? with your friends? with your co-workers?
- for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit?
- at your job?
- for entertainment/fun/relaxation?
- for information?
- for shopping?
- for worship (or religious purposes)?

IV. How was life different for you in Egypt/Lebanon?

V. How was reading different or the same in the various places you have lived? How was writing different or the same?

VI. How do you think the reading/writing you did is similar to or different than the reading/writing your parents (or children) do now?

SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES

Current School Literacy Practices

I. What kinds of texts do you read in your school as part of the school instruction/assignments? (e.g. textbooks, novels, basal readers, encyclopedias, internet, short stories, poetry, worksheets, picture books, information books), etc.?

II. Which of these literacy practices/texts do you particularly enjoy? Dislike? Find Difficult? Boring? Why? Examples?

III. What kinds of texts do students **write** in your school as part of the school instruction/assignments? (e.g. stories, poetry, spelling practice, reports, worksheets, essays/compositions, journals, class books, etc)?

IV. Which of these literacy practices/texts do you particularly enjoy? Dislike? Find Difficult? Boring? Why? Examples?

Historical School Literacy Practices

I. What kinds of texts did you read in your school as part of the school instruction/assignments? (e.g. textbooks, novels, basal readers, encyclopedias, internet, short stories, poetry, worksheets, pictures books, information books, etc.?)
PROMPTS (for each of these, it will help to conduct a brief conversation about the grade-level like where the participant lived then, do they remember the school, teacher, etc.?:

- During Kindergarten?
- During Grades 1-3?
- During Grades 4-6?
- During Grades 7-8
- During Grades 9-12
- During post High School education (technical school; college; education classes in the military, etc. (for this, be sure to elicit what type of education/school they connect to specific literacy practices)

II. Which of these literacy practices/texts did you particularly enjoy? Dislike? Find Difficult? Boring? Why? Examples?

III. What kinds of texts did students **write** in your school as part of the school instruction/assignments? (e.g. stories, poetry, spelling practice, reports, worksheets, essays/compositions, journals, class books, etc)?
PROMPTS (for each of these, it will help to conduct a brief conversation about the grade-level like where the participant lived then, do they remember the school, teacher, etc.?:

- During Kindergarten?
- During Grades 1-3?
- During Grades 4-6?
- During Grades 7-8
- During Grades 9-12
- During post High School education (technical school; college; education classes in the military, etc. (for this, be sure to elicit what type of education/school they connect to specific literacy practices)

IV. Which of these literacy practices/texts did you particularly enjoy? Dislike? Find Difficult? Boring? Why? Examples?

V. When you were in school, do you remember how you felt about what you think about learning to read? About learning to write?

VI. Do you think the reading and writing you did at school prepared you for the kinds of things that you read and write now? Why or why not, or in what ways?

VII. How do you think the reading/writing you did at school similar to or different than the reading/writing you do now as an adult? How do you think it is similar to or different than the reading/writing your parents (or children) did/do?

Appendix B:

Demographic Survey

Date: _____ Researcher: _____

(1) Name: _____

(2) Age Range: 0-7____; 8-12____; 13-18 _____; 19-30 _____; 31-55 _____;

55-70_____; 70+ _____

(3) Gender: Male Female

(4) Ethnicity: _____ (5) Country of birth: _____

(6) Native language: _____

(7) Language(s) spoken in the home: _____

(8) Are you currently a student? Yes No

(8a)If yes, where do you attend school? _____

(8b)What type of school is it? (e.g. elementary, high school, university, community college, etc) _____

(9) Highest level of schooling you have **completed**:

- ❑ Some elementary/primary school
- ❑ Primary school (8th grade)
- ❑ Some high school
- ❑ High school/12th grade
- ❑ Vocational training
- ❑ Some college
- ❑ College degree (B.A./B.S.)
- ❑ Master's degree
- ❑ Graduate degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc)
- ❑ Other: _____

(10) Highest level of schooling your **mother** completed: (somewhere in here a question about WHERE this schooling occurred (i.e. what country? What location in the country (like rural village; capitol city; major city?)

- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Some elementary/primary school
- ❑ Primary school (8th grade)
- ❑ Some high school
- ❑ High school/12th grade
- ❑ Vocational training
- ❑ Some college
- ❑ College degree (B.A./B.S.)
- ❑ Master's degree
- ❑ Graduate degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc)
- ❑ Other: _____

(11) Highest level of schooling your **father** completed: (see above for location of schooling)

- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Some elementary/primary school
- ❑ Primary school (8th grade)
- ❑ Some high school
- ❑ High school/12th grade
- ❑ Vocational training
- ❑ Some college
- ❑ College degree (B.A./B.S.)
- ❑ Master's degree
- ❑ Graduate degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc)
- ❑ Other: _____

(12) Your occupation: _____

(13) Your **mother's** occupation: _____

(14) Your **father's** occupation: _____

(15) Number of people who live in your household: _____

(16) Number of people **under age 18** who live in your household: _____

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