The study of child language brokering: Past, current and emerging research

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1. Introduction

This special issue of *mediAzioni*, the online journal of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies on Translation, Languages and Culture (SITLeC) of the University of Bologna at Forlì, derives from the “Study Day on Child Language Brokering” held in Forlì in 2008. The Study Day began with a morning session during which established scholars in the field of child language brokering (henceforth CLB) from different countries were invited to talk about their research and studies and share the experience and expertise they have gained within different disciplines and with a variety of methodological approaches. The morning session was then followed by a round table in the afternoon entitled “Child Language Brokering: The point of view of institutions and former child brokers” aimed at presenting the point of view of the representatives of various public institutions as well as former language brokers who had acted as interpreters for their families in their young age. The issues described and discussed by the contributors and participants to both the morning and afternoon sessions where so varied and relevant to the topic of child language brokering that we decided to put together a volume that would provide an overview of how research on interpreting and translation activities performed by children and adolescents began, and of the development of current and future research in this field of study. For this reason, this volume includes not only contributions by the participants to the Study Day but also from other distinguished and established scholars in this field of research, as well as articles by new and emerging researchers.

2. Linguistic and Cultural Mediation

As Tymoczko and Ireland aptly observed, linguists, ethnographers, and literary people alike agree that “language and culture are intimately connected” (2003: 1), this in its turn implies that cultures and societies in which two or more ethnic groups live together and in which more than one language is spoken must have “particular social issues to negotiate” (*Ibid.*: 1). One of such issues is how immigrant groups and families manage to communicate both on a formal and informal level with the host country institutions.

In a globalised world that is witness to an ever-growing movement of people migrating from country to country or across continents, the need to facilitate access to public services such as health care, legal, government and social services for individuals with language barriers has resulted in the exponential growth of the demand for linguistic mediators. In many countries immigrants can resort to the language services provided by the central and local governments, which may comprise community interpreting, language and cultural brokering, and cultural advocacy (Roberts 1997). In some of these countries (e.g., the UK, Sweden, Australia), which have a longer and more established history of mass immigration, these services are available in a variety of languages and in most public offices and institutions. However, in other countries (like Italy and other Southern and Eastern European countries for instance), this is not the case and when immigrants and foreigners need to communicate with a public officer or a doctor, very often they have to resort to a non-professional linguistic mediator, a person who belongs to their own linguistic community and who is fluent in the language of the host country. In her description of the language services offered to migrants in Italy (which can easily be applied to many other countries) Rudvin describes a bleak situation in which “the use of unqualified interpreters is the rule rather than the exception; poor recognition of the profession and need for quality training and accreditation lead to the rampant use of ad-hoc solutions” (2006: 57). This means that whenever a language communication problem arises and a professional interpreter or a mediator are not available “family members and friends will be used in hospital or social service settings, and

unqualified bilinguals as police and court interpreters" (*Ibid.*: 60). This situation obtains despite the existing legislation on immigration which in Italy[1] asserts the necessity for public offices and institutions to employ linguistic and cultural mediators to translate but also to facilitate "communication and conflict management between immigrant families and the public institutions, as well as acting as consultants in matters concerning educational, health, security, employment and administrative issues" (Antonini forthcoming).

The following section will provide a brief overview of existing literature on professional and non-professional interpreting and translation and will compare the status of both professionals and non professional translators and interpreters.

3. Visible and invisible translators

The who, what, where and how of translation and interpreting have traditionally been approached with a partial eye to "the linguistic and social interactional processes involved in an interpreted [and translated] event" (Antonini 2008: 246) ranging from the training of professionals, to interpreting and translation techniques, the language direction, the setting and the social dynamics in which the interpreting and translation take place, the quality of the service provided, the practitioners' and/or end-users' expectations of the interpreting and translation process, etc. The main focus of these studies, however, has always been professional translation.[2] In contrast, non-professional translation, despite being a huge and submerged reality which involves people translating and interpreting on a regular or ad-hoc basis in a variety of sectors ranging from tourism, the media, public services, activism, conflicts, etc., is still a widely ignored area of research. Furthermore, professional translators/interpreters and academics alike tend to regard it as a matter of concern for their professional category and thus generally and implicitly do not "see" it as a topic and area

1 Law N. 40 of 6th March 1998 and N. 189 of 30th July 2002.

2 I will hereby use the term 'translation' and 'translator' to refer to both interpreting/interpreter and translation/translator.

worthy of study. Indeed, they tend to perceive it as a dangerous practice both in terms of ethical issues and of the impact it may have on the people who need to resort to the services of a linguistic mediator. The reasons adduced are not only based on the fact that when translating, the linguistic mediator "must work in both languages and often must overcome cultural barriers that block communication" (Garber quoted in Marzocchi 2003: 42), but also and particularly on the fact that, given the potentially high emotional circumstances and environments in which the mediation takes place, any "misunderstanding will expose the parties to some serious risk" (*ibid.*) since

> it may result in improper diagnosis, unneeded tests, loss of income, criminal charges being wrongfully laid or the failure to lay criminal charges when warranted. Unfortunately, most community interpreting is done by volunteers, often family members, who have had no training, whose competence is unknown, and who have had no exposure to the ethical issues inherent in this type of interpreting (*ibid.*).

However, given the nature, setting and circumstances in which non-professional interpreting in particular takes place it certainly falls within the realm of community interpreting, which is generally defined as "a special type of oral translation facilitating access to public services by mediating between service users and service providers who do not share the same language" (Jacobsen 2009: 155). While it is not the purpose of this article to discuss the terminological confusion that characterizes this branch of interpreting both in relation to how it is defined and to its scope, it is certainly worthwhile to provide a brief summary of how it is defined and of the features that make it a distinct form of linguistic mediation as compared to conference interpreting. While receiving different names, e.g., public service/sector interpreting, liaison interpreting, dialogue interpreting, ad hoc, face-to-face, or bilateral interpreting etc., according, most likely, to differences which may "reflect different needs, traditions and local specifics" (*Ibid.:* 155), community interpreting differs from conference interpreting by virtue of a number of features, the most prominent being the fact that it is a dialogic (Wadensjö 1998), face-to-face (Gentile *et al*. 1996; Carr 1997) and triadic exchange (Mason 2001) which differs from other types of interpreting (particularly conference interpreting) in terms of the context in which it takes place, the degree of (in)formality of the interpreting activities it comprises and the role played by the interpreter.

Despite the fact that in recent years many countries have experienced a strong influx foreign-based work force, many of those countries involved in this recent wave of immigration have not adapted to the growing number of foreigners needing access to public and health services, especially where the need to provide linguistic and cultural services is concerned. Indeed, as O'Rourke and Castillo observe in relation to the Irish and Spanish contexts, the lack of provision of these services reflects "the belief that the language barriers created by increased immigration […] are temporary in nature and the 'problems' linked to increased linguistic diversity in the country will be resolved, because eventually everyone will learn the host language" (2009: 45). Hence, whenever there are no professional language services available or owing to either financial or cultural reasons, immigrants are very likely to rely on the help of family members or members of the linguistic community they belong to who are fluent in the language of the host country. It is in this context, that children, who tend to become proficient in a new language and to adapt to the new culture more quickly (Weisskirch and Alva 2002), are asked to take on the role of the language and cultural mediator and to translate for their parents, relatives, friends and members of their linguistic and ethnic community in a variety of formal and informal domains such as the school, the police station, local government offices, shops, hospitals, etc (Buriel *et al.* 1998; Hall and Sham 1998; McQuillan and Tse 1995; Orellana 2009; Valdés 2003; Weisskirch and Alva 2002).

CLB has been going on for many centuries. Children have acted as translators throughout history (Harris and Sherwood 1978) and have been translating in all cultures and languages. However, as most authors writing on this topic observe, this form of linguistic and cultural mediation is still a marginal and fairly recent topic of study and research (e.g., Hall and Sham 1998; Hall 2004). One of the first studies that succeeded in drawing the attention of academia to non-professional translation and interpreting was by Brian Harris who in 1977 published an article in which he argued that the ability to translate and interpret is not the exclusive realm of professionals, but a natural aptitude. This implied that the empirical study of translation should be based on the study of how bilingual children are able to perform translating activities without any special training in translation (Harris 1980; Harris and Sherwood 1978). This standpoint,

however, has been questioned by other authors who challenge the notion that the mere fact of being bilingual allows anybody to act as a qualified translator and interpreter (Cambridge 2002; Orellana 1987; Valero-Garcés 2008). On the contrary, they argue that there are profound differences in terms of fluency, ethics, specific and specialized knowledge, strategies and techniques used to translate.

Most of the studies that followed Harris' and Harris and Sherwood's work on the translating activities performed by children focussed mainly on "the who, what, where, and how of brokering" (Jones and Trickett 2005: 6), that is on the recipients and beneficiaries of language brokering activities, on the subject matter of these interactions, the places, contexts and situations in which it occurs, and the feelings about language brokering. The mid-1990s represent a sort of turning point for the study of CLB. It was around this period that CLB began to be researched by means of different methodological approaches and through the lens of different disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. One significant shift was brought about when scholars and researchers began to focus on the effects of CLB on the educational and psychological development of language brokers (Tse and McQuillan 1996; Buriel *et al* 1998; Weisskirch and Alva 2002; Orellana *et al* 2003). Moreover, it is from this period that the literature also began to focus on child language brokers as intermediaries between cultures and on the impact that language brokering can have on children when they take on responsibilities in situations in which adults would normally be in control which can either constitute a cause of stress and a burden for bilingual children or an experience that they find enjoyable (Cohen *et al*. 1999; Hall and Robinson 1999; Parke and Buriel 1998; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Weisskirch 2007). Causes of stress could be the matters, subjects, activities, terms, discourses and situations to which the children who engage in translating activities are exposed. Language brokers may be required to translate in a variety of contexts and situations and thus be in a situation in which they have to deal with many issues minors would normally be protected from. The role and responsibility that these children have to take on may also impact significantly on family relationships, on their acculturation and learning process, on their attitudes towards their native language and culture (or that of their parents if they are second generation immigrants) and/or towards the

language and culture of the country they have moved to. Research on CLB has been generally based on descriptive and US-based studies, carried out for the most part among Spanish-speaking communities. The study of CLB in Europe began in the late 1990s and, until very recently, was exclusively UK-based. Moreover, there are still many aspects of this phenomenon that need to be further explored and which are related to issues ranging, among the others, from identity construction, to the attitudes and opinions shared by the beneficiaries of language brokering activities (family, members of the language/ethnic community, institutions, etc.), to the strategies that language brokers adopt and implement when translating, to culture brokering. The role played by language brokers is multifaceted and certainly much more complex compared to that of a professional interpreter and translator (Shannon 1990), and it certainly needs to be carried out not only with more in-depth studies covering all the aspects and issues that CLB involves, but also in all those (many) countries where CLB is not an object of study yet.

A beautiful poem by John Mateer compares translators to angels, and describes them as "perfect nobodies: nameless/voiceless, winged incandescence" who “stand beside us, hearing out thoughts, only muttering what’s necessary”. These salient verses provide a graceful rendering of the popular and highly debated concept of the invisibility of interpreters and translators who are generally expected to mediate between languages and cultures in a faithful and neutral way. The notion of the translator’s/interpreter’s invisibility has been disputed and challenged by researchers and scholars of translation and interpreting studies for many years and while still supported by some scholars, it is now increasingly challenged thanks to the recent focus of research on community interpreting (e.g., Angelelli 2000; Metzger 1999; Roy 2000; Wadensjö 1998).

The form of invisibility experienced, described and, at times, suffered by those children who mediate linguistically and culturally for adults (their parents and family) is not simply restricted to their role as linguistic and cultural mediators, but exacerbated by the mere fact that they are children and thus, according to the traditional way in which they are viewed, muted and unperceived beings and subjects. This issue, however, has become particularly relevant in the field of CLB given that, as Hall and Sham (2007) point out, regardless of the significant

impact that the role these children play in helping their families and their linguistic and ethnic communities integrate in the host society, their activities as linguistic and cultural mediators are by and large utterly unacknowledged and constitute another "invisible" area of childhood. The section that follows will illustrate an attempt to make the work performed by these children visible to all the parties involved in and benefitting from it.

3.1. Child language brokering in Italy: The In MedIO PUER(I) Project

The In MedIO PUER(I) project, a four-year project funded by the University of Bologna, aims to redress this situation and to contribute to making the activities performed by child language brokers visible and acknowledged by the public institutions and the people who benefit from them. This project represents the first attempt to describe and map out CLB in this country and bring to the fore an extremely widespread yet submerged phenomenon.

Italy is a country that was invaded and ruled by several other national and ethnic groups (e.g., among many others, Barbarians, Arabs, Greeks, Spanish, French, Austro-Hungarians, Germans, etc.), thus its history and population are interwoven and intermixed with manifold ancestral, genetic, linguistic and cultural influxes and influences. Yet, despite its history and

> the increasingly multilinguistic, multiethnic and multicultural nature of European and Italian society […] no attention has been paid so far either by governmental or academic institutions (the latter only contributing passing remarks within studies focussed on other issues) to any aspect or issue related to CLB (Antonini forthcoming)

Until forty years ago, Italy "presented itself as a country of steady and major emigration as well as of internal migration from the poor southern to the northern regions" (Braun 1999: 17). Then, in the mid-1970s, mass immigration to Italy began and the country's net migration rate became positive (Bevilacqua 2001/2002; European Migration Network 2004; Tapia 1999).

Thanks to the economic growth and the demographic decline experience in the 1990s, Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece) began to

attract a substantial foreign-based work force that tended to settle in those regions experiencing high economic growth (OECD 2008). By January 1st of 2009 the number of foreign residents had reached 3,891,295, 6.5% of the total Italian population and 5.5% of the national workforce[3]. Emilia-Romagna, the region in which the In MedIO PUER(I) project is based, ranks fourth among all twenty Italian regions in terms of the number of legal immigrants. The widely fragmented pattern of immigration in Emilia-Romagna reflects the more general national pattern characterized by "the presence of an elevated number of nationalities and ethnicities which, with the passing of the years, have become progressively more defined and intensified" (European Migration Network 2004: 10). More than 96% of the total number of legal immigrants come from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. In more recent years, there has been an increase in the immigration from the Indian subcontinent (Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh). Furthermore, Emilia-Romagna has the highest percentage of foreign minors in primary and secondary education and the highest number of foreign pupils enrolled in its primary schools[4]. This means that "immigration to Emilia-Romagna has become an important phenomenon involving all aspects of civil society, with a clear impact on various domains of social and civil life – notably on the health system but primarily on education, which represents the most important and sensitive frontier of the social integration process" (Antonini forthcoming).

It is in this context that the In medIO PUER(I) project was designed with the three-fold purpose of 1) mapping out CLB in Emilia-Romagna and, subsequently, other Italian regions; 2) assessing how common it is in the various formal and informal contexts in which it takes place; and 3) address areas of CLB that so far have been less researched such as, for instance,

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3 Source: ISTAT, Italian National Institute of Statistics data available at http://www.istat.it. Information retrieved on March 2010.

4 In 2008/2009 there were 628,937 foreign children and adolescents enrolled in Italian schools. In Emilia-Romagna the incidence of foreign students on the total school population reached 12.7% (72,585) in 2009, with 26,879 children in primary schools alone (CARITAS/MIGRANTES 2009).

- how it is perceived by the recipients of language brokering activities (primarily the institutions and adults),
- the attitudes developed by language brokers and other parties involved in CLB,
- and the impact of CLB on the construction of the linguistic and cultural identity of language brokers.

The data gathered in the preliminary stages of this project, which are presented and discussed in Bucaria and Rossato (this volume) and Cirillo *et al.* (this volume), confirm the results obtained by previous research on CLB. The responses given by the people interviewed and by the participants of the focus groups, showed that there are a number of issues and aspects related to CLB that have not been thoroughly explored and that will be addressed in the next stages of the research project, namely the affective impact of this form of language and cultural (inter)mediation on the psychological and educational development of the child, and its influence and impact on traditional family relationships. Moreover, the In MedIO PUER(I) project will also use quantitative methods aimed at assessing variables and issues of interest about CLB in all the nine provinces of Emilia-Romagna but also in other Italian regions. As remarked elsewhere

> Because of cultural reasons, and for a host of other motives, immigrant parents will continue to ask their children to translate and interpret for them regardless of the law and of other resources available to them, such as professional interpreters and language mediators. Therefore, before ruling out completely the possibility and appropriateness of having their children mediating for them, it would be useful for these children, for their families and for the institutions they need to communicate with, to assess how this "invisible" area of childhood affects these children (Antonini forthcoming).

4. Overview of the volume

The contributions included in this special issue focus on many different issues and aspects related to the study of language brokering performed by children and present a variety of methodological and disciplinary approaches. With contributions from leading and emerging scholars in the field of educational

studies, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and conversation analysis from Europe and North America, this volume focuses on a number of themes of pressing importance in today's multiethnic and multilingual society.

Most of the contributions included in this special issue provide an introduction to CLB and a review of the literature. Many of them make reference to definitional issues and provide a description of the domains in which CLB is performed within different linguistic and ethnic communities. Although not divided into specific sections, the articles have been grouped according to their main disciplinary, theoretical and methodological approaches. Whenever possible, articles based on studies conducted in the same country have been placed in succession.

In “Child language brokering: Some considerations” Nigel Hall and Frédérique Guéry address past and current research on CLB. They present different perspectives and issues related to the study of this form of linguistic and cultural mediation by highlighting the fact that CLB happens within the realm of language brokering in general of which CLB is a significant yet small part. In its introductory paragraphs, this article focuses on various forms of language brokering in all its oral and written manifestations (including sign language and literacy brokering). What emerges from this analysis is the fact that even though language brokering is a universal practice that has been performed by adults and children over the centuries it has only relatively recently become an object of study and research. Hall and Guéry then move on to illustrate how the study of CLB began and how it has developed to include a new sociological approach, which views children as active agents in the social field who, by means of their ability to mediate linguistically and culturally in a variety of contexts and situations, make an important contribution to the social and economic life of their families.

The interpreting practices and activities carried out by children and youths constitute a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon that can only be explored by employing definite conceptual frameworks. In “From here to there: On the process of an ethnography of language brokering”, Orellana describes how, thanks to the employment of mixed-method ethnographic approaches, she

was able to demonstrate that children do not merely translate on a word-for-word basis. On the contrary, they are able to convey all the linguistic, cognitive, cultural and pragmatic nuances of both the languages and cultures between which they are mediating. Following the new sociological approach to childhood, Orellana views and focuses on children as people in their own right who are perfectly capable of expressing themselves with their own voices, and outlines how future research on CLB should develop.

Moving to another country can very often be a stressful experience for immigrant families. It entails coping with the stressful burden placed by all the practical problems and needs connected to adjusting to life and getting acculturated in a new country, such as finding a house, a job, entering the educational system, familiarizing with and getting accustomed to a new set of cultural values and beliefs, and, above all, learning a new language. In “Child language brokers in immigrant families: An overview of family dynamics”, Robert S. Weisskirch draws attention to the complexities of the language brokering activities performed by the children of immigrant families. He provides an insight into theories of family development and immigration which can help explain how having to translate for their parents can impact in a positive and/or negative way on the parent-child relationship and on the language brokers’ academic performance, but also how it may contribute to the acculturation of immigrant individuals and groups.

It is through an ecological perspective that Edison J. Trickett, Sandra Sorani, and Dina Birman address the topic of language brokering. Their contribution, “Towards an ecology of the culture broker role: Past work and future directions”, is particularly relevant for the focus they take on culture brokering a scarcely researched area of CLB. Their paper has a dual purpose: first of all it summarizes research on this phenomenon in the United States and, secondly, it outlines how an ecological perspective can help to shed light on all those factors that influence culture brokering and have an impact on family functioning and child development. With the support of data from their research the authors argue for the implementation of a broader conceptual framework and make a few recommendations regarding areas of future research related to culture brokering with specific reference to the influence on the culture broker role of

individual and family life, the school and neighbourhood and the role of the culture of origin.

The analysis of research on CLB carried out in the UK presented by Tony Cline, Guida de Abreu, Lindsay O'Dell and Sarah Crafter in "Recent research on child language brokering in the United Kingdom" is based on data from a range of small scale studies which have sought to assess the frequency of this phenomenon as well as the impact it has on both the children and their families. The authors draw our attention to four key issues: i) the need for researchers of CLB to severely abide by a series of ethical and methodological tenets; ii) the need to shift CLB research towards the new notions of the sociology of childhood; iii) the need to view CLB positively and to acknowledge the contribution made by language brokering in facilitating communication between immigrants and the host country; and iv) the need for future research to focus on the impact that CLB has on children and young people in terms of the translating strategies and techniques they implement and of the impact that this activity has on the way they interact with other people (parents, family members, other adults, etc.).

The scarcely researched issue of identity construction in relation with CLB is surveyed by Elaine Bauer who in "Language brokering: Practising multiplicity" explores the stories of former language brokers, adult individuals from transnational families who in their childhood and adolescence acted as interpreters and translators for their parents. By exploring how language brokers develop their social identities as they mediate between the languages and cultures of their native and of their new country of residence, Bauer argues that the work of language brokers should be viewed in terms of 'active' and 'multi-layered' citizenships, a more flexible concept to describe how important is the contribution these people make to their families, to society and to their country.

The issue researched by Lisa Del Torto is quite an unexplored area of CLB. In "Child language brokers all grown up: Interpreting in multigenerational Italian-Canadian family interaction" she illustrates the findings of her research on family interpreting practices within an Italian-Canadian family. Based on a mixed-method approach, Del Torto's article affords a valuable contribution to

the scant literature on bilingual interaction, non-professional translation and language brokering analyzed through the lens of conversation analysis and within the theoretical approach provided by language shift and maintenance studies. Del Torto's findings demonstrate how the language brokering performed by second-generation family members during multigenerational interactions is used as a means for shaping their roles and identities within the family and for asserting their Italianness.

The article by Inmaculada M. García Sánchez "(Re)shaping Practices, (Re)drawing Boundaries in Translation: How Immigrant Children Navigate Continuity and Change" is one of the very few studies on CLB carried out in Europe. By drawing on a sixteen-month ethnographic language socialization study, she examines how Moroccan immigrant children in a rural Spanish community are involved and cope with the cultural and linguistic mediation activities that they perform on a daily basis in different settings and venues. The originality of García's study resides in her analysis of the processes by which immigrant communities endeavour to maintain their cultural heritage while adjusting to the culture and societal norms of the host country. Based on video-recordings taken at a local health centre in a rural community in Spain, this article shows how language brokering activities reshape and transform the traditional divisions of labour according to gender and generation.

Alejandro Morales and David Aguayo's article "Parents and children talk about their language brokering experiences: A case of a Mexican immigrant family" illustrates how immigrant families deal with the stressors of acculturating to mainstream culture and how this process is experienced differently by parents and children. The analysis of the findings presented in the article leads the authors to categorizing the data gathered by means of a qualitative case study of a Mexican immigrant family with a language broker, into five main themes: Language Brokering Situations, Challenges of Language Brokering, Family Relationships, Feelings about Language Brokering, and Pursuing an Education. Moreover, through their own reflections on their personal experience as language brokers, Aguayo and Morales also argue the implications for the development of future research on CLB, theoretical constructs, and public policy.

The two articles that follow provide a description of the preliminary and pilot stages of the In MedIO PUER(I) Project, a four year project financed by the University of Bologna and carried out in the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy. In “Former child language brokers: Preliminary observations on practice, attitudes and relational aspects” Chiara Bucaria and Linda Rossato illustrate the results of one of the pilot stages of the project and report on and aspect of CLB that has been only partially touched upon in the literature, namely the emotional and relational impact on former language brokers, that is by bilingual adolescents and young adults who acted or, in some cases, still act as mediators for their families or other members of the same minority immigrant community who are not fluent in Italian. By illustrating the data gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, the authors provide an account of the mixed feelings and levels of stress experienced by the informants when mediating in different settings and situations which ranged from a perceived sense of normalcy with regard to their role as a linguistic mediator to the feeling of pride and of being helpful in facilitating their family/relatives’ integration in the host community, but also the burden represented by the responsibility and sometimes the frustration they felt in certain circumstances. Particularly interesting in terms of responsibility burden and of children adultification are the reports on self-censorship in sensitive situations, practiced in order to prevent their interlocutors from unnecessary suffering or uneasiness caused by racist comments or offensive language.

The topic of the impact of CLB on one of the other parties involved in child-mediated events, those institutions with which immigrants come more often into contact, is explored in “Institutional perceptions of CLB in Emilia Romagna”. The authors, Letizia Cirillo, Ira Torresi and Cristina Valentini, aim to fill a gap in a scarcely researched aspect of CLB and, by means of the results gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews with managers and officials of local authorities and service providers located in the Forlì-Cesena area (in the Emilia-Romagna region), they provide an analysis of how the representatives of such institutions interface with language brokers and their families. Their analysis reveals how operators are sensitive to the fact that children should not be exposed to conflictual or sensitive issues, especially when they are related to important aspects of their children’s lives such as translating conversations

about eviction orders or medical concerns. One of the interesting outcomes of this study is related to perception adults have of the translating and mediating skills employed by language brokers in institutional settings.

The last three articles are all based on empirical studies carried out in Germany. The article by Ortrun Kliche, Bernd Meyer and Birte Pawlack “Family members as ad-hoc-interpreters in hospitals: good reasons for bad practice?” brings to the fore a serious discrepancy between how the academic world perceives the involvement of and the role played by bilingual family members as linguistic mediators, and the actual need to use such non-professional translators on behalf of families and the institutional service providers. By referring to the transcriptions of recorded interpreter-mediated interactions in hospitals and socio demographic data from the German socio-economic panel (SOEP), Kliche *et al.* argue that this situation originates from the high degree of linguistic and cultural diversity with which German medical institutions are usually not prepared to deal since they cannot provide an interpreting service to help these patients communicate and interact with doctors and nurses. The most immediate effect of this situation is the need to rely on bilingual family members as interpreters.

Iris Guske’s article **“**Familial and institutional dependence on bilingual and bicultural go-betweens – Effects on minority children” shows how language brokers not only have to master their native or heritage language and the language of their host country, but they also must act as socialisation agents, thus enabling all the parties involved in the linguistic mediation to partake in each other's norms, beliefs, and expectations. Her study, based on interviews with former and current language brokers, explains how CLB can be perceived both as a positive and successful experience or as a burden. Moreover, it argues that the stress and press experienced by language brokers is very often unperceived by their host-culture peers Guske advocates for increased awareness among migrants and host-society authorities and the provision of professional language and culture brokering services in order to relieve these youths from those parentification and adultification issues that can negatively impact on the language brokers’ personal development.

In “Child and youth language brokering in Berlin-Neukölln (Germany)” Janna Degener presents the results of a study based on ethnographic interviews and a questionnaire survey carried out in the multicultural district Neukölln of Berlin among Arabic and Turkish speaking pupils. The relevance of her study lies in how the children and youth that took part in her study described how they view and perceive their experience as language brokers. Contrary to most adults’ concerns with regard to potential mistakes and misunderstandings caused by the minors’s incorrect translations, Degener’s results show that children and youths involved in language brokering perceive it unemotionally and see it as a normal part of their lives. Moreover, only a small part of the youths she interviewed judge language brokering in negative terms. The analysis of the transcripts of a recorded event from a conversational analysis standpoint gives an insight into the strategies implemented by all the parties involved in the linguistic mediation to ensure and achieve a successful communication.

The questions at the heart of the contributions to this special issue are all relevant and fundamental in order to understand not only “the who, what, where, and how of brokering: Who did the adolescent broker for, what was it about, where did it occur, and how did they feel about language brokering” (Jones and Trickett 2005: 6) but also to understand where research into CLB stands, what it holds for the future and where it needs to head.

As the contributions to this special issue show, individual researchers have taken the study of CLB in their own area of research to a level of excellence. Nonetheless, Despite the quality of their methodological and theoretical approaches, all the studies that were and are being carried out represent a drop in the ocean. As already mentioned in this article, in many countries the study of CLB is still quite fragmented and dispersed and, in some cases, utterly neglected. Thus, it is not possible to make a comparison between the different disciplinary and methodological approaches implemented in Northern America and those put into practice in Europe since the latter is a clear example of the situation depicted above. While in Northern America, particularly in the US, the study of CLB spans across a wide array of disciplines, methodological approaches and language and ethnic communities, in Europe, with the exception of the UK, very rarely studies on linguistic and cultural mediation have

focussed or, at least, included an analysis of non-professional interpreting and translation, let alone CLB.

Part of the concern in this volume is to illustrate how CLB takes place in different countries and within different language communities. By giving voice to both established and emerging scholars committed to the study of child interpreters and translators, this special issue introduces the reader to a plurality of methodological and disciplinary approaches to the study of child language brokering. Therefore the variety of topics dealt with by all the articles, as well as the findings they present and describe, provide students and scholars who are developing an interest in this field of research with an introduction to the topic of CLB as well as to a wide variety of research methodologies and disciplinary perspectives.

It is important to note, however, that even within the well-defined objectives and scope of these articles, there are areas of interest relevant to CLB studies which this special issue does not cover and which, therefore, did not receive proper attention. Possible shortcomings notwithstanding, it is sincerely hoped that this volume will not only enhance our understanding of language brokering but will also initiate an interest in this area of research in all those countries where it is still in its infancy or lacking completely.

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