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## Public service interpreting in Italy and child language brokering: two sides of the same coin / Interpretación en los servicios públicos en Italia y mediación lingüística infantil: dos caras de la misma moneda


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**Abstract:** This paper will provide an introductory overview of Public Service Interpreting (PSI) in Italy, followed by a review of the literature on non-professional interpreting in PSI with a specific focus on Child Language Brokering (CLB) in the educational setting. We will then illustrate and discuss the results of a research that used a methodology that is new to CLB studies in Italy, namely the use of narrative vignette interviews. A vignette provides a story-telling trigger that allows the respondents to reflect on what happens in the story and is a valid method for eliciting complex and sensitive accounts of CLB in our case. The results of the analysis of the narratives created with the aid of this methodology brought to the fore new aspects of the practice of CLB in the public service setting in general and in the educational setting in particular.

**Keywords:** Child language brokering; School setting; Non- professional interpreting; Public service interpreting; Vignette interviews

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**Resumen:** Este artículo proporcionará una introducción general a la interpretación en los servicios públicos (Public Service Interpreting, PSI) en Italia, seguida de una revisión de la literatura sobre la interpretación no profesional en la PSI con un enfoque específico en la intermediación lingüística infantil (Child Language Brokering, CLB) en el ámbito educativo. A continuación, ilustraremos y discutiremos los resultados de una investigación que utilizó una metodología que es nueva para los estudios de CLB en Italia, a saber, el uso de entrevistas con viñetas narrativas. Una viñeta proporciona un desencadenante narrativo que permite a los encuestados reflexionar sobre lo que sucede en la historia y es un método válido para obtener relatos complejos y sensibles de la intermediación lingüística infantil en nuestro caso. Los resultados del análisis de las narrativas creadas con la ayuda de esta metodología pusieron de manifiesto nuevos aspectos de la práctica de CLB en el ámbito de los servicios públicos en general y en el ámbito educativo en particular.

**Palabras clave:** Intermediación lingüística infantil; Entorno escolar; Interpretación no profesional; Interpretación de servicios públicos; Entrevistas en viñetas

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## 1. Introduction

In Italy, the extensive influx of migration over the past three decades have determined a surge in the need for linguistic assistance, particularly in the realm of Public Service Interpreting (PSI). However, contrary to other European countries (Valero Garcés, 2020), the pressing need for linguistic assistance aimed at allowing migrants to access fundamental services such as health, social care, education and occupation is not adequately met (Rudvin, 2006; Amato and Garwood, 2011). Italian law has tried to regulate and ensure the presence of public service interpreters by mentioning the need for this service in laws regulating migration at large. However, there are still no laws that specifically address and provide for PSI (where it must be provided, for how many hours, etc.), and only local and/or regional policies fill the gap, creating an uneven national framework (Ceccoli and Torresi, 2022). The scope and depth of policy-making and public funding of PSI is influenced, *inter alia*, by “general attitudes towards immigrants; different models of government service provision and whether specific sectors (e.g. court or medical interpreting) are favoured over others” (Antonini, 2016, p. 3). The legislative gap, together with both intrinsic factors (such as mistrust of an unknown interpreter for personal matters) and extrinsic factors (such as the impossibility of having a 24/7 interpreting service to assist those who do not yet speak the language of the host country in all their activities), has led to the accepted practice of relying on non-professional interpreting, which complements professional interpreting in all those settings and situations when the latter is not available. It is often the case that children and young people with a migrant background act as the non-professional interpreter, a practice defined as Child Language Brokering, CLB (Antonini *et al.*, 2017).

The fragmented scenario characterising PSI in Italy and the lack of a well-established professional figure comparable to that of the public service interpreter in countries with a longer history of immigration (Amato and Garwood, 2011) is also reflected by the different terminology currently in use in Italy to label this professional figure (Baraldi and Gavioli, 2016; Tonioli, 2016). Therefore, in Italian public services, “there is a (sometimes fuzzy) difference between public service “interpreters” (interpreti), who are supposed to translate at the linguistic and pragmatic level (and to occasionally manage the cultural barriers that may lead to communication failures), and “brokers” (mediatori), who are supposed to be communication facilitators between interlocutors from different cultures and language communities” (Cirillo *et al.*, 2010, p. 275).

This paper explores the practice of CLB, with a focus on the educational setting. The study presents data collected for the NEW ABC H2020 project, which aims to improve the integration of refugee and migrant children and young people into host societies through education. The data were collected as part of a pilot action implemented during the school year 2022-2023 in the city of Forlì, Italy. The paper presents a thematic analysis of audio-recorded vignette interviews conducted with primary school children about their experiences as brokers. The aim is threefold: 1) to describe how children position themselves in relation to CLB in educational settings; 2) to explore the forms that CLB takes in educational settings; and 3) to highlight the effects that CLB can have on children who are involved in a child language brokered interaction.

## 2. Literature review on CLB and CLB in the public services domain

### 2.1 Child language brokering

CLB is defined as “a form of language and cultural (inter)mediation performed by bilingual children and adolescents to help their family, peers, and other involved parties interact with members of the host society in a wide variety of formal and informal settings and domains” (Antonini 2022, p. 133). The involvement of children and adolescents as language brokers is influenced by various factors related to their and their families’ pre-migration circumstances, the nature of their journey, and their post-migration experiences. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) highlight that the family’s pre-migration resources significantly shape a child’s starting point in a new country, while the journey itself, whether legal or unauthorized and involving family migration or multiple separations, further influences the child’s experience. The context into which children arrive, encompassing economic, legal, neighbourhood, and school settings, varies in its degree of welcoming and support for success. CLB arises from geopolitical, socio-economic, and institutional factors, coupled with inadequate language services and negative attitudes. The lack of professional interpreting and translation services often leads immigrant families, unable to speak the majority language, to rely on their own solutions to communication, frequently involving children and young bilingual speakers in the process (Antonini and Torresi, 2022).

CLB is a widespread phenomenon, yet no comprehensive statistics are available on its prevalence among various ethnic and linguistic groups, along with its socio-economic ramifications (Gustafsson *et al.* 2019). Nevertheless, considering available international immigration statistics, it is reasonable to infer that a significant number of children are likely to engage in language brokering activities on a regular basis, highlighting the substantial scope of the practice. Over the past fifty years, CLB studies have explored and mapped out its

sociolinguistics, settings, individuals involved, strategies employed, and its cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological impact, as well as family dynamics (Buriel *et al.*, 1998; Acoach and Webb, 2004; Dorner *et al.*, 2007; Mier-Chairez *et al.*, 2019; Ceccoli, 2022a; Phoenix and Orellana, 2022; Rubio-Carbonero *et al.*, 2022).

## 2.2 CLB in the public services domain

Studies on CLB in the public services domain generally describe this practice as the necessary evil when the contingent and unplanned need for linguistic assistance occurs (Antonini and Torresi, 2021) and ascribe the involvement of children to the lack of funding or to a missing legal framework preventing the practice. Despite the acknowledgment by the Italian government of the necessity for trained linguistic and cultural mediators and the implementation of numerous graduate and postgraduate degree courses in interpreting, translation, and linguistic and cultural mediation (Tonioli, 2016), CLB frequently emerges as the sole solution to surmount language barriers that could otherwise prevent access to essential services. However, notwithstanding the crucial role child language brokers play in facilitating interactions between immigrant families and host country institutions, these CLB activities remain invisible. Remarkably, there is no mention of CLB in any Italian law, regulation, or official document. The only notable exceptions are the guidelines published by the Ministry of Education that encourage the use of CLB to facilitate the inclusion of newly arrived children who do not speak Italian (Antonini, 2016).

The occurrence of CLB in public service settings is still largely uncharted. CLB has been reported in a wide variety of settings ranging from healthcare (see Antonini and Torresi, 2021, for a review of CLB in this domain) to public institutions, legal settings, and social care (Lucas, 2015; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2019). The educational environment is another context in which CLB occurs, in both formal (Cline *et al.*, 2014; Crafter *et al.*, 2017; Ceccoli, 2018) and informal educational settings (Ceccoli, 2022a; Angelelli and Ceccoli, 2023). Children may translate for both teachers and parents, e.g. in school-family conferences (Reynolds *et al.*, 2015), and the consequences of this activity can be manifold. Child language brokers reported getting better marks on their report cards than they actually had (Kaur and Mills, 1993), or changing their parents' notes to teachers (Hall and Sham, 2007), or changing the information when brokering because they did not want their parents to be upset about the marks they had received or because they were trying to protect their families from concerns (Bauer, 2010). At the same time, CLB can also occur between children and can take the form of peer-to-peer teaching, where longer-term migrant students are asked to act as brokers for newcomers (Pugliese, 2016).

Following on from these studies in the educational setting, this paper will focus on CLB in the school context, discussing more in detail the forms that CLB can take in this specific setting and highlighting the effects that it can have on the children involved in a child language brokered interaction, both those who act as brokers and those who are helped by the brokers.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research setting and participants

The data reported here were collected during the pilot action 'Empowering Young Translators', which aimed to: i) co-create resources to support the social, cultural and emotional wellbeing of child language brokers, ii) frame CLB as a caring practice, and iii) raise awareness of the value of multilingualism. The activities for this pilot action took place in the Welcome Youth Centre (<https://www.welcomeodv.org/>) in Forlì, Emilia Romagna, Italy. The aim of the centre is to provide young people with a space where they can meet, exchange ideas, have fun, play sports, and do after-school activities, including afternoon homework and workshops. The number of children and young people who took part in the Empowering Young Translators action was 47, all primary school pupils (26 boys and 21 girls). There were 20 nationalities represented among the children: Moroccan, Chinese, Burkinabe, Bangladeshi, Tunisian, Senegalese, Algerian, Ukrainian, Ethiopian, Congolese, Egyptian, Italian, Nigerian, Pakistani, Argentinian, Romanian, Moldavian, French, Albanian and Peruvian.

#### 3.2 Vignette interviews and thematic analysis

One of the methods used to explore the practice of CLB was vignette interviews. Vignettes are short stories that provide a narrative trigger that allows children to reflect on what happens in the story and are a valid method for eliciting complex and sensitive accounts of CLB in this case. The vignette method allows researchers to discuss issues from a non-personal and therefore less threatening perspective (Hughes, 1998) and to systematically explore issues that may be sensitive to research participants (O'Dell *et al.*, 2012; Iqbal and Crafter, 2022). Four vignettes were created and then read to the children (divided into groups of 3/4 children per group) as if they were a story to be listened to. The vignettes told the story of four children who were asked to help someone by brokering in three different contexts: at school, at home and in the supermarket. After reading the vignettes, a group discussion was started with the children, guided by the following questions:

- 1) *How did the main character feel?*
- 2) *Would you have felt the same way in his/her situation?*
- 3) *Have you ever been in a similar situation?*
- 4) *And how did you feel? Do you remember what happened and would you like to talk about it?*

The analysis of vignette interviews was conducted by using thematic analysis, a method applied to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Guest *et al.*, 2012; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). For the purposes of data analysis in this paper, the data were coded by using NVivo, a software tool designed for qualitative data analysis, which is particularly useful for conducting thematic analysis and to explore relationships and connections between themes and sub-themes (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

#### 4. Analysis and discussion

This paper stems from the following research questions: i) How do children position themselves in relation to the practice of CLB, especially in the education setting?; ii) Which forms does CLB take in the education setting?; and iii) Which implications can it have on children involved in a child language brokered interactions?

To investigate the research questions, we relied on Goffman's (1959) 'presentation of the self' and on the theory of positioning (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). Goffman's (1959) presentation of the self refers to the possibility for an individual to present him/herself in interaction with different 'faces'. This concept introduced the idea of the fragmentation of identity based on contexts, actions and moments and it facilitated the understanding of identity as multiple (Omoniyi, 2006, p. 18). The concept of multiple identity and the movements between the different positions that identity can take are well described by the theory of positioning (Amadasi, 2021). Positioning was originally defined by Harré and van Langenhove (1999) as the discursive construction of personal stories that make one's actions intelligible to other participants and to oneself (Moghaddam *et al.*, 2008). Positioning therefore refers to the communicative act through which speakers adopt, reject, accept or negotiate fluid positions (Amadasi, 2014, 2021; Amadasi and Holliday, 2017; Baraldi, 2022) that contribute to the construction of their personal stories. The positions that children adopt to reconstruct their personal stories as language brokers in the educational settings are fluid and negotiated over time (Fig. 1). Their narratives describe CLB as a fluid multilingual practice that can take the form of peer-to-peer learning and mutual and personal enrichment. Fluidity can be seen in terms of the different roles that children take on (either as brokers or brokerees), in terms of the contrasting emotions that CLB evokes (both positive and negative), and in terms of the diverse linguistic resources that they draw on to make meaning and broker (both intra and inter linguistic mediation).

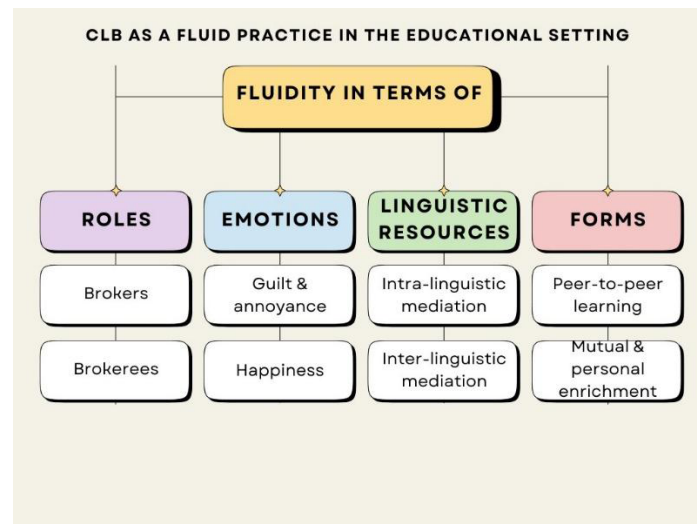


Fig. 1 Thematic map



#### 4.1 Role, emotional and language fluidity

Despite the prompting of the narrated vignettes, which described the stories and viewpoints of children who had brokered for others, the participants in the interviews positioned themselves not only as brokers, but also as brokerees, i.e. the children who were helped by the brokers. As we see in Extract 1, Anne stressed that the “opposite” of what happened in the vignette happened to her and that a friend translated for her (lines 148 and 150). The same thing happened to Marie (Extract 2), who recalled that she did not understand Italian very well during the first days of school after her arrival in Italy and that she was helped (lines 108 to 110).

##### Extract 1

148 Anne	well the opposite happened to me because my friend translated for me
149 Educator	ah!
150 Anne	it was not me who translated for him
151 Educator	okay the other way round

##### Extract 2

106 Marie	it happened to me
107 Educator	what what happened tell us
108 Marie	wh- when I had- I had arrived at school and that it was my first day but I couldn't understand Italian well
109 Educator	mh mh did anyone help you?
110 Marie	yes
111 Educator	okay

The roles in which children are positioned or position themselves, i.e. brokers or brokerees (Ceccoli, 2022a), are joined by a variety and fluidity of sometimes contrasting emotions (Tomasi & Narchal, 2020; Antonini, 2022; Ceccoli 2022b). From the point of view of brokerees, guilt and happiness often coexist when CLB takes place at school. As shown in Extract 3, line 99, Alan reports that he felt guilty because he knew he was bothering his classmates when he asked for help, but at the same time he felt happy because he was able to do his homework on his own thanks to their help. Alan also emphasises how he could not speak any language, and no one could really understand his native language when he first arrived at school in Italy (line 101). This feeling of loneliness continued until a friend who spoke both Italian and his native language was able to help him. In the same extract, Mark adds that he felt guilty but also happy because someone was helping him understand what was happening around him (line 103), thus contributing to making him feel more included in the school social context. The coexistence of mixed feelings when positioning themselves as brokerees corresponds to the awareness that they need to bother a friend (which makes them feel guilty) in order to obtain a personal achievement, such as being able to participate in the social context of school or doing their homework.

## Extract 3

- 099 Alan **I felt bad because I was disturbing (.)** and happy because anyway I was able to do the homework the pages the teacher gave us
- 100 Educator okay and would you like to tell us about an episode that happened?
- 101 Alan the first day I arrived here in Italy that I was already born of course I was five years old I was in kindergarten and essentially I had arrived **and I could not speak any language no one! I was always speaking my language everybody didn't understand** finally after a few days **my mum** sent me- she said she **had a friend who had a son who could speak both my language the Italian language** so she told her to send him to my school **and so now I can speak Italian a little bad but I speak it**
- 102 Educator well you can speak well
- 103 Mark **eh yes it happened to me and I felt eh a** bit guilty and also happy that someone explained to me what was going on

From the brokers' point of view, the dynamic and multifaceted (Crafter & Iqbal, 2020) nature of CLB at school translates into a fluidity of emotions, ranging from experiencing CLB as annoying to highlighting the joy of helping others and the benefits associated with it, in particular the personal and mutual enrichment and learning process. Extract 4 reports a recurring pattern in our data: the brokers feel annoyed, angry and tired, both because of the daily repetitiveness of the practice (line 226) and because of the lack of behavioural engagement (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004) from the brokerees, as Amelia says the classmate she is helping is chatting and not listening to her (line 230). We can see here two main challenges of CLB as peer support at school: the everyday frequency of the practice in school lessons, and the disengagement of one of the two parties, in this case the brokeree.

## Extract 4

- 226 Amelia **and a little tired because (.) every** day every day they ask what is that what is that what lalalalala
- 227 Educator and so you have to translate? for this classmate?
- 228 Amelia yes but I felt a little bad
- 229 Educator **bad? why bad?**
- 230 Amelia I don't know because every time I help him he- he chatters and does not listen
- 231 Educator he doesn't listen?
- 232 Amelia yes



The specific time when CLB takes place at school can also affect children's feelings. For example, in Extract 5, Chris recalls being asked to broker during Parent Teacher Conferences (PTCs) and this episode evokes bad memories. Although Chris says that he likes to broker (lines 137 and 143), he does not like PTCs because of his poor academic performance (lines 139 and 140). We do not know exactly what happened during the PTCs that Chris brokered, but the negative impression of Chris' own performance could also be related to the negative amplifying effect of brokering PTCs concerning oneself. As García-Sánchez *et al.* (2011) reported from brokering in PTCs, brokers often downgrade teachers' praise and highlight teachers' criticism, and take on more responsibility than teachers had actually assigned.

#### Extract 5

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 132 Educator     | during parent teacher conferences  |
| 133 Chris        | that I hate the most in my world   |
| 134 Educator     | eh eh ((laughing)) did it bother you much?   |
| 135 Chris        | I just hate parent teacher conferences   |
| 136 Educator     | okay you hate parent teacher conferences because you have to translate everything? |
| <b>137 Chris</b> | <b>not about translations</b>  |
| 138 Educator     | no? for what? ah because the parent teacher conferences didn't go well? Or for-    |
| 139 Anne         | because you're not good at school eh eh ((laughing))                               |
| 140 Chris        | Anne put it well   |
| [...]            |  |
| <b>141 Chris</b> | <b>parent teacher conferences I want them not to exist anymore</b>                 |
| 142 Educator     | okay ((laughing))  |
| <b>143 Chris</b> | <b>but I like translating</b>  |
| 144 Educator     | okay you like translating  |

In Extract 6, lines 53 and 57, Jack confirms the same feeling of anger at being bothered by classmates who need help. However, earlier in line 48, we see the contrasting emotions triggered by CLB when he reports feeling happy, just like his friend Julie (line 46), when he helps his classmates in English. Both Jack and Julie come from African English-speaking countries and their English is very good, so we assume that when they say they help their classmates with English, they are also referring to their classmates without a migrant background. Speaking English is also something that comes naturally to them as it is one of their native languages, so it is probably less tiring to help others with something they are good at. Their better English skills are a source of pride and using them to help their classmates makes them happy.

## Extract 6

- 033 Educator have you ever experienced a similar situation?  
[...]
- 040 Julie a little bit with our classmates
- 041 Educator ah (.) because they can't speak Italian well yet?
- 042 Julie yes  
[...]
- 046 Julie** when they write or when- **especially in English**
- 047 Educator especially in English okay and how do you feel when you have to help
- 048 Jack especially in English happy happy
- 049 Julie I feel very- how can you say that? eh not angry
- 050 Educator try to say it in your own words
- 051 Julie** **very good**
- 052 Educator very good excellent okay and you how did you feel how do you feel?
- 053 Jack** **angry**
- 054 Educator **angry?**
- 055 Jack mh
- 056 Educator why angry?
- 057 Jack** **because they always bother me**
- 058 Educator they bother you but who? your classmates?
- 059 Jack yes

As we have already mentioned, CLB was found to be associated with mixed and contrasting findings in relation to the affective attitudes displayed by child language brokers (Hua and Costigan, 2017). In the school setting, if the feeling of annoyance was described in the extracts above, at the same time our participants highlighted the feeling of happiness in helping others (as reported in Extract 6 and as we will see in the following extracts), and they showed how CLB can be a beneficial form of personal and mutual enrichment and a form of peer-to-peer learning, as highlighted by Sandro, who realised that helping his friend was a way of staying more focused during the lesson ("lui mi chiede cosa significa io ripeto la parola eh:: eh seguo anch'io un po': di più/ he asks me what it means I repeat the word eh:: eh I also follow a little: more").

In Extract 7, Stella recounts how she helped a new classmate from Morocco on her first day at school. The classmate 'didn't understand anything' and Stella had to explain to her 'what she had to do', thus not only helping her linguistically, but also helping her to settle into a new environment and showing her the social norms that govern the school context in Italy. Despite being tiring (line 152), Stella was happy to help (line 149), and while recounting this experience, she also recalls another case in which she acted as a child language broker. In line 152 we learn that the teacher made her sit next to a classmate who struggled with reading and writing, and during the tests Stella helped him by verbalising both the text to be understood and the relative possible answers from which he had to choose. Again, Stella says that she is happy to help her classmate (line 154) and compares this situation to the help she also gives her little brother. From Stella's narration, we understand that the happiness of helping others can be greater than the fatigue associated with CLB, and that in the school setting CLB can come in two forms: caring for others (Crafter, 2023) and peer teaching (Pugliese, 2016).

#### Extract 7

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 147 Stella   | one day a new classmate arrived who came from Morocco and I had to explain to her what she had to do because she didn't understand anything it was her first day   |
| 148 Educator | how did you feel?  |
| 149 Stella   | I was happy to help someone else   |
| 150 Educator | okay was it tiring? no?  |
| 152 Stella   | yes (.) because (.) in this case she wasn't really talking with- well, she didn't understand (?) like a- (?) I am next to A. who has a lot of difficulties <b>well to write and to read so the teacher put me near him because every time we do the test I have to read him the text I have to read all the answers and he marks with a pencil the right answers</b> |
| 153 Educator | okay and how do you feel?  |
| 154 Stella   | well <b>I feel happy that I helped him (.)</b> I also do this with my little brother   |

#### *4.2 CLB as a form of peer teaching, peer learning and mutual enrichment*

That CLB can take the form of peer teaching, peer learning and mutual enrichment is also evident in Extract 8. Adam tells us that he acted as a broker for one of his classmates called E. (lines 36 to 43) and that a special relationship was created between them because, thanks to Adam's help, E. learnt Italian (line 42), but at the same time E., who was very good at all sports, helped Adam to improve in gymnastics (lines 47, 51 and 52). Later in the interview, Adam also adds that thanks to this relationship with E., which grew out of CLB, he also learnt a homework strategy from E.: when they finished the exercises given by the teacher, they chose others from the book - even if they were not assigned by the teacher - and did them independently. This relationship, which began thanks to CLB and developed into a form

of mutual enrichment, peer learning and peer teaching, was very positive for Adam, who continued to do additional exercises after he had finished the ones given by the teacher, even when E. changed school (line 245).

#### Extract 8

- 036 Adam            **well it happened to me when E. arrived** it was his first day at school in Italy
- [...]
- 040 Adam            and so until he learned eh Italian until he did NOT learn Italian and he was always with us but now he's moved and lives in another school
- 041 Educator        mh mh and then he learned a little bit of Italian thanks also to you
- 042 Adam            yes he learned a lot
- [...]
- 046 Educator        you were enjoying it this thing of interpreting?
- 047 Adam            yes because he's very good at- doing gym workouts
- 048 Educator        to do gym workouts?
- [...]
- 051 Educator        **and so you helped him with Italian** and he helped you with sports?
- 052 Adam            yes because I wasn't as good as him
- [...]
- 243 Adam            **but I had to translate for him until he learned and I always had to translate for him (.) and then I like because I liked E. because eh when we finish- when the teacher finishes to read something, as soon as we finish that exercise eh he I do like him because I like what he does when he finishes the exercise he does another page at random and if he does it like that on his own and he asked me if I can do it too and I said yes because I like it too in mathematics usually**
- 244 Educator        you can do this even if E. is no longer at your school you can still do it
- 245 Adam            I still do it to remember him

Extract 9 gives a further example of the mutual enrichment that CLB can provide. The brokers Omar and Alice say that they are happy (lines 54 and 55) to be able to help two classmates who do not yet speak Italian, but who speak Albanian and Chinese respectively (line 43). This happiness is also due to the desire to learn something new from their classmates, as Alice reports that she would like to learn a few words of Albanian herself (lines 58 and 60). Achieving mutual benefit is one of the strengths of peer-to-peer learning (Topping and Ehly, 1998).

## Extract 9

043 Omar	E. spoke Albanian and O. Chinese
044 Educator	okay are they in your class?
045 Omar	yes
046 Alice	yes only those two
047 Educator	okay and they still don't speak Italian well?
048 Alice	they never speak it
049 Educator	never and do you help them a little bit or not?
050 Alice	yes
051 Omar	yes we help them
052 Alice	with the teacher
053 Educator	okay and how do you feel when you help them?
054 Alice	good!
055 Omar	good!
056 Educator	good it never happened that you didn't like helping them that maybe you wanted to do something else
057 Omar	it never happened
058 Alice	I liked it eh I wanted to say hello in Albanian
059 Educator	ah! <b>you wanted to learn some words in Albanian?</b>
060 Alice	yes

This last example sheds light on another aspect of fluidity related to CLB that came up repeatedly in our data, namely the presence of both intra-linguistic and inter-linguistic mediation, as CLB can take place across languages or within the same language. Omar and Alice (Extract 9) do not speak Albanian or Chinese, but they report helping their newly arrived schoolmates from Albania and China. A similar situation can be seen in Extract 10, where Youssef and Salma, pupils of Arab origin, explicitly say that they wanted to help C., a pupil of Moldavian origin. The educator then takes the floor to point out that C. does not speak Arabic (like Youssef and Salma), and Youssef feels the need to clarify that he wanted to help C. by speaking in Italian (lines 96 and 98), both in history (line 92) and in science (line 100). This is a clear example of intra-linguistic mediation, aimed at facilitating comprehension by resorting to metalinguistic strategies such as rephrasing, using gestures, or simplifying complex concepts (Orellana and Reynolds, 2008).

## Extract 10

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 092 Youssef  | I wanted to help C. in history   |
| 093 Educator | but C. does not speak Arabic   |
| 094 Youssef  | in- in- no!  |
| 095 Salma    | no! he speaks Moldovan   |
| 096 Youssef  | no but in Italian!   |
| 097 Educator | but have you acted as interpreters?  |
| 098 Youssef  | <b>in Italian together-</b> I wanted to help C. in Italian (.) all in Italian<br>eh in science |

The positions taken by the participants in this study in relation to their experiences of CLB are fluid and variable, depending on many factors. We found role, emotional and linguistic fluidity that is negotiated according to both personal and external factors. The negative impact of the daily frequency of CLB has already been confirmed by other studies in other settings (Love and Buriel, 2007; Oznobishin and Kurman, 2009) and was reiterated by the child language brokers interviewed here, who linked the high frequency of CLB at school with a feeling of annoyance and burden. The practice seems less burdensome when they can help by doing something they feel good at, such as for native English speakers from Africa helping their classmates with English. On the other hand, the negative feelings experienced by the brokereeers are related to the guilt they feel at having to bother other people. However, these negative feelings are counterbalanced by positive feelings resulting from the joy of helping others and the mutual benefits that CLB can bring, such as being able to communicate with others and being included in the school social context (for the brokereeers) or learning new languages and new learning strategies (for the brokers). The narratives presented also position CLB as a practice of peer learning in the school context (Pugliese, 2016), where the brokers take on the role of tutors and the brokereeers take on the role of tutees (Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel, 2014). However, in order for this practice to be effective and beneficial as a form of peer learning for all parties involved, it must be carried out according to common rules given by the teachers, who must scaffold and regulate it and who can place it within educational projects aimed at improving and promoting multilingualism (especially given the increase in these projects in recent years, Sordella, 2015).

## 5. Conclusions

The narrations provided by the participants in this study confirm the complexity of CLB already found in the literature and show the fluidity associated with this practice. In the educational context, on the one hand CLB can be seen as a form of positive peer help and mutual enrichment, on the other hand as a form of annoyance and distraction from school activities. CLB is a natural form of translation and mediation that is difficult to avoid (Antonini, 2010), even in the school context. However, it is important for teachers to monitor what happens in the classroom and CLB should not take place as a hidden form of peer help. Making it visible is the only way to prevent it from becoming a source of annoyance and distraction, and to ensure that it takes place with the consent of all the children involved (either as brokers or brokereeers). When CLB takes place in the classroom, it should be scaffolded and monitored by teachers as a practice of peer learning (Canevaro and Ceccoli, 2021), and it should be recognised as an activity of plurilingualism (Lüdi, 2016; Piccardo,

2018) as conceptualised and valued in language education by the CEFR Companion Volume. The extracts reported here confirm how the brokering activities children perform in general, and in the education setting in particular, are aligned with the concept of mediation that was introduced to language education in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), stating that (our emphasis):

In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities (e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90).

Mediation is now at the heart of the descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Piccardo, 2023), and when CLB takes place in school, what brokers do is mediate a text, mediate concepts and mediate communication, and these activities should be duly valued.

The presence and support of professional mediators is necessary, irreplaceable, and should be a right afforded to all students who need this form of support. Once it is established that the provision of mediation services in Italian schools should be granted and better regulated by law, CLB in school can take place as a complementary form of support and integration for newly arrived pupils and should be duly valued by teachers and educational staff, also by virtue of the recognition of mediation practices given by the Council of Europe, while always ensuring access to psychological consultation and assistance to help students process their emotions and experiences associated with CLB.

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