

# **“I skipped unnecessary details and got straight to the point!”: Adolescents and Young Adults reflecting on their Child Language Brokering Experiences.**

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## **1. Introduction**

Despite the fact that in the last few decades Italy has experienced a strong wave of immigration, the country is not yet able to cope with the increased need for linguistic and cultural mediation that an ever-growing number of foreigners needs to access. Italian central and local governments are not addressing the provision of professional language services in a systematic and structured way, as if they considered this problem a temporary short-lived one. Resources for institutionalized community interpreting are still scarce and not evenly distributed both as regards language combinations available and public offices where these services are provided (Antonini 2010b: 5). Consequently, language and interpreting services are not always accessible when immigrants need to interact with Italian health and public offices. Lacking adequate professional interpreting services, immigrant families and Italian institutions obviously face serious communication problems that they tend to tackle with makeshift solutions. Very often migrants are forced “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” with the effect that family members or acquaintances are asked to do the job (Antonini 2010b: 2–3). Since children are taught the host society’s language from an early age at school, they tend to become proficient in the language of the host country and to adapt to the new culture before their parents (Weisskirch and Alva 2002). Hence, children are the

ones generally called upon to facilitate cross-language interactions between their parents, relatives, classmates and the host country officers, doctors, police agents and teachers.

Although other labels have been used to describe naturally occurring and non-professional, ad-hoc interpreting (cf. Antonini *et al.* 2017b: 6–8), the terms “Language Brokering” (Shannon 1987; 1990; Tse 1995) and “Child Language Brokering” (Orellana *et al.* 2003; Orellana 2009) are increasingly used by the scientific community to describe this type of ad-hoc language and cultural mediation. The term “Child Language Brokering” (henceforth CLB) captures the complexity of the practice and defines the mediation provided by children and adolescents of immigrant parents for the benefit of their own families and acquaintances (Hall and Sham 2007).

Drawing on data from in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with adolescents and young adults from migrant families, the current paper aims at highlighting the “agency” these young non-professional mediators exert during language brokering events, particularly by using strategies of reformulation, paraphrasing and censorship. While investigating how and why these manipulations occur, this paper also explores the emotional and relational impact of CLB practices on its participants. Finally, the present paper sets out to reflect on how former language brokers retrospectively re-conceptualize their role and identity within their family in relation to the CLB practice.

Section 2 will provide some theoretical background for our considerations on CLB, particularly in terms of “agency”, “adultification” and “parentification” in relation to CLB practices. Section 2.1 will briefly describe the contribution of the Italian research project In MedIO PUER(I) of the University of Bologna to the ongoing debate on CLB. Section 3 will analyze in depth and discuss some excerpts from the interviews and focus groups which were conducted within the In MedIO PUER(I) project and which informed the present study. Conclusions will be drawn in section 4.

## 2. Child Language Brokering

CLB is one of the most common ways in which migrant communities and public institutions respond to their mutual communication needs, and yet it is still a rather hidden and under-researched phenomenon. As most of the studies on the subject underline, despite being a widespread practice in all those countries where immigration rates are sharply increasing, academic literature on CLB only emerged in the mid-1990s and still remains rather sparse and limited to few language groups (Tse 1995; Weisskirch and Alva 2002; Orellana *et al.* 2003; Hall 2004; Hall and Sham 2007; Orellana 2009; Antonini 2010a; 2014; Antonini *et al.* 2017b)<sup>1</sup>. As for the emotional impact of CLB on its participants, the research available highlights that depending on the contexts, situations and personal inclinations, some individuals experience CLB as pleasurable and gratifying, while others perceive it as a burden, a stressful and frustrating practice (Hall and Sham 1998; Weisskirch and Alva 2002; Orellana 2009; Antonini 2010b; Bucaria and Rossato 2010). Some other research has focused more on the relational and cognitive repercussions of the CLB practice on its participants, again with mixed results. On the one hand, the concern regards the excessive burden of responsibility that the children are supposed to carry and the possibility of a reversal of the parent-child roles, a phenomenon that is described as “adultification” and “parentification” (Puig 2002). On the other hand, the practice of CLB seems to positively affect the parent-child bond and the cognitive, social and linguistic development of the children involved in child language brokering activities (Orellana 2009). For some brokers, their activity as language facilitators is perceived as part of a “non-standard” family organization to face the social, cultural, economic and organizational challenges that an immigrant family has to cope with in a foreign country (*ibid.*: 10).

As Bauer (2017) highlights, although the phenomenon of CLB has been investigated from a variety of different perspectives, very little is known about the “agency” (Goffman 1967) that children exercise during brokering interactions, and how and for what reasons they manipulate the wording and meaning of what they

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<sup>1</sup> For an extensive literature review on CLB cf. Orellana 2009; Orellana 2017; Bauer 2010; Antonini 2010b and Antonini *et al.* 2017a.

translate and interpret (Hall 2004; Bauer 2010; Bauer 2017). From a sociological perspective, “agency” is associated with concepts like intentionality, choice, purposiveness, freedom and creativity (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). As some CLB researchers suggest, the reformulation, paraphrasing and omitting strategies children use in many language brokering events suggest agency on their part. Brokers are to be seen as individuals who affect reality and purposefully produce desired outcomes, rather than merely as neutral or passive subjects in brokering situations (Bauer 2010; Hall and Guéry 2010; Bauer 2017). Orellana and her colleagues (2003) argue that in language brokering events children put things in their own words according to the cultural, cognitive and linguistic tools that are available to them in order to achieve the desired interactional or social goals. Although the expected outcome is not always achieved with the best result, because the child may feel frustrated, inhibited or embarrassed by what s/he is required to interpret, and sometimes by her/his lack of knowledge and understanding of technical terms, on the whole children manage fairly well by using their repertoire of linguistic resources to get the main message across and to facilitate a communication event that otherwise could not take place. This, argues Bauer (2017), means performing as social agents in everyday life and making significant contributions to family functioning and sustainability in the host country.

### **2.1. The In MedIO PUER(I) project of the University of Bologna**

In Italy CLB has only been investigated since 2007, when the research project In MedIO PUER(I) was launched at the University of Bologna. At an early stage, the In MedIO PUER(I) project mainly concentrated on CLB at a regional level by means of interviews with providers of public services, general practitioners and teachers based in the Emilia-Romagna region (Cirillo *et al.*; Cirillo and Torresi 2013; Rossato 2014). Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with former child language brokers in the Emilia-Romagna region and with adolescent language brokers in the adjacent Veneto region (Bucaria and Rossato 2010). Later on, data were collected through questionnaires as well as via schoolchildren’s written and visual narratives about their CLB experiences

(Antonini 2014; Antonini 2017) in different areas of the Emilia-Romagna region. More recently, the research project has expanded both geographically, to cover the whole national territory, and in terms of a broader range of informants involved.

### **3. The study**

This paper draws on data collected through 4 individual in-depth semi-structured interviews and 4 focus groups carried out between 2008 and 2009 and aimed at eliciting qualitative information from present and former language brokers on the what, where, when and how of CLB practices (cf. Bucaria and Rossato 2010). Researchers in the InMedIO PUER(I) group at the University of Bologna employed a flexible interview template that had been developed on the basis of previous exploratory interviews carried out with several representatives of Italian administrative, medical and police institutions as well as school teachers (cf. Cirillo *et al.* 2010; Cirillo and Torresi 2013; Rossato 2014). The semi-structured template allowed for changes in the order of the questions, as well as the introduction of additional subjects whenever mentioned spontaneously by the respondents. The focus groups were carried out following a similar interview protocol. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed and subsequently analyzed by the researchers.

Although the In MedIO PUER(I) project was primarily aimed at mapping the CLB phenomenon and at providing detailed information on the participants, situations and contexts in which CLB took place in Italy, it was also useful to collect information on the relational and emotional impact of the practice on its participants (Antonini 2010a). Furthermore, some spin-offs of the project, including the one which underlies the present paper, spontaneously generated from the main research thread and provided supplementary data on the phenomenon of CLB (Bucaria and Rossato 2010). As mentioned earlier, for the purpose of the present paper, the researcher focused mainly on the reflections of language brokers on their brokering practice and the translation strategies adopted by young adults and adolescents who experienced CLB in their

childhood or early adolescence. The paper deals specifically with the respondents' views and accounts of the processes of reformulation, paraphrasing and censorship which occurred during language brokering events. The informants also provided extensive information about their attitude towards the practice, the translation strategies they implemented, the emotional involvement they experienced, and how they felt reflecting retrospectively on the CLB practice.

### **3.1. The respondents**

The subjects of individual interviews were 1 public high school student and 3 public university students who had either been contacted directly by the researchers or had volunteered for the project by answering an advert published at the Forlì School for Interpreters and Translators of the University of Bologna. The focus group participants were 26 students attending a private vocational high school in Vicenza, a medium-sized city in the Northeast of the country, which was selected precisely for the high proportion of immigrant adolescents among its students. Respondents were chosen by the secretary of the school on the basis of their family names and their supposed immigrant origin. The degree of cooperation of the participants was heterogeneous and clearly depended on many factors, ranging from the selection method that was adopted to the number of years spent in Italy by the respondents, individual inclination for interpersonal communication, familiarity with the language brokering practice, and, last but not least, respondents' knowledge of Italian, the lingua franca in which all interviews and focus-groups were conducted.

Respondents' age ranged from 16 to 27, with the participants in the focus groups aged between 16 and 19 and the participants in the interviews ranging from 16 to 27. The respondents included 8 females and 22 males. At the time of participation in the study, they had been living in Italy with their families between 3 and 18 years. They came from a large array of countries, reflecting the patchy distribution of migrant ethnic communities in Italy: 5 participants came from Morocco, 3 from Serbia, 3 from Albania, 2 from China, 2 from India, 2 from Ghana, 2 from The Philippines, 1 participant came from Bolivia, 1 from Bosnia, 1 from

Burkina Faso, 1 from Croatia, 1 from the Dominican Republic, 1 from Egypt, 1 from Ecuador, 1 from Mozambique, 1 from Romania, and 1 from Russia.

Depending on the number of years they had been living in Italy, most respondents reported having a proportionally sound knowledge of both the Italian language (written and oral) and of their mother tongue (oral) and some of them also mentioned a good competence in other languages (English, Spanish, French, Greek) and a fairly good knowledge of the local Italian dialect (particularly respondents based in the Veneto region).

Respondents reported brokering in a large variety of situations and contexts: at the post office, at the doctor's, at the hospital, at the bank, at tax offices, at shops and also at school, both at parent-teacher meetings and for their newly arrived classmates. They reported having brokered mainly for their parents and immediate family, but also for friends and other members of their language community (particularly Chinese respondents).

### **3.2. Emotional and relational impact**

Generally speaking, young adults were more inclined to report extensively about their language brokering experience than adolescents, probably because the chronological and emotional distance allowed for a more detached retrospective reflection on their performance as brokers and on the feelings attached to their CLB experience, as also highlighted in the relevant literature (Tse 1996; Orellana 2009). The selection method of respondents may also have had an impact on the respondents' degree of collaboration with the researchers. Young adult respondents had either volunteered for the interviews or had been contacted directly by their teachers, while adolescent focus-group participants had been selected to participate in the project simply on the basis of their family names and supposed foreign origin. Both the interviews and the focus groups revealed that former brokers recollected mixed feelings of pride and frustration concerned with the practice. Pride and satisfaction were mentioned in relation to the brokers' awareness of being of help to their families and communities, whereas frustration was experienced in relation to their poor language skills or insufficient

competence in Italian culture or lack of technical vocabulary. Embarrassment and discomfort were also mentioned by eight of the respondents, particularly in relation to their involvement in complex brokering events (at the hospital, for example) or in relation to their parents not knowing Italian. Conversely, brokers also showed development of protective and defensive attitudes towards their parents in situations where they had to translate contents that they felt could offend or hurt the parents or other members of their language community. At a relational level, our survey highlighted ambivalent feelings and mixed opinions about the influence of CLB on the respondents' the family structures and parent-child relations (cf. Bucaria and Rossato 2010). On the one hand, the large majority of the respondents (24 out of 30) admitted that they simply felt they had to help their family as part of their family duties, which was not especially imposing; in fact they felt rewarded by their involvement. On the other hand, they could not avoid feeling embarrassed for the parent-child relationship imbalances. All respondents wished that their parents had taken some Italian courses to become more independent. One respondent admitted that at one point she refused to translate for her parents, because she felt that they had to learn to stand on their own feet. However, the same respondent admitted that she felt rewarded by the respect that her parents showed her precisely because of her brokering activity. She also admitted that she was proud that her parents still thought highly of her and often asked her for advice, even after she had stopped brokering and moved on to study at university and live on her own.

### **3.3. Agency: reformulation, paraphrasing, censoring information**

Drawing on the answers respondents gave about the contexts, situations and brokering strategies of CLB they had experienced it was possible to infer that, as language and culture brokers, children made independent decisions as to what and how to translate to the benefit of themselves and their parents and communities. As also highlighted in the literature, depending on the context of the interaction, our respondents tended to apply different communicative and translation strategies to report what was being said in another language. They admittedly “summarized”, “explained”, “reformulated”, “paraphrased”, “adapted”,



and to some extent even “omitted” part of what was being said on the basis of what they thought was appropriate or useful to convey in order to attain what they judged was the required outcome.

A 27-year-old Albanian woman<sup>2</sup> reported for example that as a child brokering for her parents she tended to omit unnecessary details in order to get the main message across and facilitate the communication between her mother and a civil servant who suggested filling in a specific form to get a tax reduction. The event was quoted as an example of how, as a broker, she used to manage complex and lengthy interactions, and how she had developed translation strategies that helped her enhance the fluency of a triadic communication process. However, although the interaction was not reported in its entirety and no word-for-word account of the event was provided to the researcher, the former broker reported skipping unnecessary detail in discourse containing a potentially hurtful message both for herself and her mother, when the civil servant said, “I understand you don’t speak Italian very well”:

*(1): Quello che mi diceva la signora in italiano veniva riportato a mia madre secondo me correttamente, ma sicuramente veniva perso qualche elemento, non importante, però, insomma... e quella mi diceva “dobbiamo compilare questo modulo perché serve per avere un’agevolazione nel pagamento delle tasse” e magari ci aggiungeva altri elementi “eh, sai com’è, io capisco che voi non parlate bene, però dovete farlo...” allora quello che era superficiale lo escludevo, andavo al dunque. A parte che mi piace concretizzare molto, quindi... se mi devi dire 300 parole per esprimere un concetto di 200 parole tolgo quello che è superfluo, no? e quindi riferivo a mamma sicuramente con una terminologia più semplice, un lessico molto più chiaro e diretto, in modo tale che anche mia madre avesse subito chiaro cos’è che voleva sapere la signora. E lei lo stesso, mi rispondeva in modo composito, le sue cose... eh, ma sai, di qua e di là... e io riportavo, sempre nelle mie intenzioni, con la stessa... la sintesi del discorso.*

I told my mum what the lady had said in Italian correctly, at least according to my understanding of it, but some elements of course were lost, nothing important, but you know ... she said “we must fill in this form because you need it to get a tax reduction” and maybe she added “you know, I understand you don’t speak Italian very well, but you need to do it all the same”, so I skipped unnecessary details and got straight to the point. By the way, I like

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<sup>2</sup> As agreed with respondents, all the names of the participants in the study have been either omitted or substituted with pseudonyms.

to be pragmatic, so for example if you use 300 words where 200 would do to express the same idea, I cut out what's not necessary, you see? So simplified the wording when reporting to mum, using more direct and clearer terminology, so that my mother could understand at once what the lady was asking for. And in the same way for her, when she replied in a complicated way, with her things, ... you know, this and that ... and I reported, my intention was, to give the same ... the synthesis of what she had said.

As a young child (reportedly between 10 and 11 years old), this Albanian girl had elaborated a kit of communication tools that enabled her both to facilitate the communication event, allowing her mother to understand “what the lady was asking for” and to protect her mother from potentially unpleasant or discriminating experiences. Later on in the interview, she also underlined that when her family arrived in Italy in the 1990s, with the first wave of immigration, there were not as many foreigners as there are today in Italy and she could not recollect any episode of hostility or racism towards her or her family. She maintained that her family was actually well-known in the small town where they lived and she felt they received support and help from the Italian authorities. This Albanian woman, however, admitted that she felt a sort of defiance, mixed with curiosity, especially towards her brokering activity for the family. When she mediated for Italian authorities, she could sense that her Italian interlocutors doubted that she, a 10 or 11-year-old child, could actually translate correctly into Albanian what was being said in Italian.

A similar episode, where an act of censorship was even more explicitly admitted, was reported by a young Chinese man who confessed refusing to translate the racist comments against Chinese people expressed by a train ticket officer. As a pre-adolescent he had taken this decision autonomously without informing the person he was assisting, on the basis of what he judged was not appropriate to translate. When asked by the researcher to give reasons for his choice, the former broker motivated his conduct by saying that he felt personally offended, as these comments were not addressed only to the person he was helping, but to Chinese people in general including himself, and so he felt the comment did not deserve to be translated. Although we can infer that his independent decision was partly aimed at shielding the person for whom he was translating from discrimination, we may also argue that it was taken also as a demonstration of his own control of the bilingual interaction (while the monolingual officer did not

have the same kind of control), or it may simply be understood as an attempt to tone down a potentially provocative and dangerous comment.

A young Italian-Spanish bilingual woman who, at the time of the interview, had lived half her life in Italy and half in Spain, acknowledged manipulating the contents of an interaction between her Italian grandmother and a Spanish police officer in an attempt to protect her grandmother. Although she did not provide a description of the interaction that took place, she admitted that by omitting some details her grandmother wished to tell the police, and vice versa by withholding some of the comments and questions by the policeman, the Italian-Spanish woman managed not to hurt her grandmother's feelings while also avoiding getting her grandmother into trouble.

Instances of omissions, were also reported in the case of interactions between parents and teachers in which the broker had to report about her/his own school results. A young Moroccan boy admitted that, for fear of reprimand, at parent-teacher meetings he felt free to paraphrase and tone down some of the expressions his teachers used to talk about either his or his brothers' performance at school, but he also added that this was done without ever altering the main contents.

Not only did respondents in the present study acted as agents in that they purposefully omitted and modified part of the wording and contents of the brokering events, but they were also aware of some of the consequences their decisions could have and took responsibility for those. All these examples seem in line with what Bauer (2017) reports about former child language brokers' agency.

Quite different is the case of those respondents who motivated their choices not to translate or to summarize and paraphrase the content of the messages they had to convey because of either practical or linguistic reasons. A 16-year-old boy from Serbia explained that he refused to translate texts that were too long and wordy. He stated simply that whenever he translated the daily news or a film on TV he did not produce a word-for-word translation, but summarized the main discourse and "gave the gist" because, he admitted, he became upset when

brokering in those situations as he was unable to follow the TV programme himself. A boy from Morocco said he refused to translate at the mosque as he did not understand the Arabic of the Koran. A Filipino teenager who had to broker for the mother of a friend who had been hospitalised said he did not feel at ease with his performance as he skipped many details and did not receive much help from the adults. He felt sorry he could not help more, because his competence in both Italian and Filipino was not “technical” enough for the situation.

### **3.4. Adultification and parentification**

In some cases that were reported in both interviews and focus groups we conducted for our study, agency was exerted to the extent that children decided to take on the role of an adult person, or at least they tried to appear grown up. Some of the respondents recounted how they took the liberty of manipulating their role and position as interpreters, at times interfering with the perception that their interlocutors may have had of their role as child brokers. The respondent in excerpt (1), for example, also said she would regulate turn-taking, so that she could have enough time to elaborate what was being said before translating it. She also stated that she tried to take on the authority of an older girl in some circumstances when she judged this to be necessary to obtain the respect and consideration that she was convinced she deserved as a cultural mediator, but that she felt she was lacking as a child broker. She reported that when she started brokering, at the age of 10, she tried to speak as if she were older, particularly when she was brokering over the telephone, in order to both overcome a feeling of embarrassment due to her poor translation skills and obtain the respect of an unknown and invisible Italian interlocutor:

*(2) Dovevo fare anche delle telefonate in comune, quindi per telefono era ancora più imbarazzante. Non c'è il contatto diretto e allora non sai mai chi hai dall'altra parte. E quindi lì cercavo con il mio linguaggio da bambina di 10 anni di erigermi a una posizione più adulta. E anche quello mi ha aiutato a crescere.*

I also had to phone the local council, so brokering over the phone was even more embarrassing. You can't see who you are talking to, so you don't know

who is on the other end. So with the language skills of a 10-year-old I tried to take on the position of an adult. This kind of thing has helped me grow up.

24 out of 30 respondents tended to describe in a rather positive way the fact that they had to make up for their parents' poor language skills and had to help them with both spoken and written brokering practices. They framed CLB practices in the context of a collaborative role within the family, as part of their everyday duties within the family organization. Some of them even highlighted the advantages of CLB practice in terms of improved language skills, as explained by a Romanian adolescent.

*(3) Ricercatore: Secondo voi, questa pratica ha cambiato qualcosa nel rapporto con la vostra famiglia, intendo il fatto che faceste da ponte oppure no?*

*Intervistato: Il rapporto è sempre quello solo che parlo meglio l'italiano.*

Researcher: In your opinion did this practice change something in the relationship between you and your family, I mean the fact that you acted as mediator, or not?

Respondent: The relationship is always the same, only my Italian is much better.

However, excerpt (2) above, as well as excerpts (4), (5) and (6) below, could be seen as evidence of those “adultification” and “parentification” processes of immigrant children (see section 2 above) that are observed when children are required to broker on a regular basis. A young Albanian woman explained:

*(4) Durante l'adolescenza, quando siamo un pochino tutti più ribelli, mi sentivo estremamente a disagio ogni volta... anche perché magari io ero a studiare o dovevo semplicemente uscire con le mie amiche e molto spesso mi ritrovavo mia madre che mi chiamava “vieni a casa che ci devi aiutare a fare una cosa, a compilare un modulo per il comune”. E quindi mi scoccavo tremendamente e appunto mi ribellavo, non volevo farlo. Però poi alla fine lo fai perché sai che serve magari anche per la tua scuola, stanno facendo una cosa per te e allora li aiuti. E quindi il rapporto che io ho avuto con loro non è mai stato loro genitori quindi aiutano te. No, ci aiutiamo a vicenda perché loro avevano la responsabilità dell'età adulta, io avevo la competenza linguistica... siamo cresciuti più come amici.*

When one is a teenager, one is always more prone to rebellion, I felt extremely ill at ease each time... also because I was maybe studying or I simply wanted to go out with friends and very often my mum called me, “Come home you have to help us doing something, we need your help to fill

in a form for the local council". And this annoyed me very much and at that point I rebelled and did not want to do it. But in the end I did it, because you know that it is required, maybe for your school, they are doing it for you and so you help them. So the relationship I had with my parents was never of the kind that they are the parents so they help you. No, we helped each other, because they had the responsibility of being the adults and I had the language skills... we grew up more as friends.

In excerpt (4), the fact that the former broker refers to mutual help and a team-like family organization when describing the relationship she had with her parents in relation to the CLB practice is of particular interest. Especially revealing is the fact that she speaks of growth also with reference to her parents, although she mentions that their relationship was one of friendship rather than a parent-child one: "We grew up more as friends".

As for the adultification process, excerpt (5) by the same respondent as excerpt (4) is also very eloquent:

*(5) Ho iniziato fin da subito, quindi già all'età di 10 anni mi occupavo di cose che i miei amici non facevano. Quindi andare in comune, soprattutto all'inizio per ottenere tutti i documenti, il dottore, il medico di base, poi chiaramente anche il permesso di soggiorno e quindi anche in questura. [...] Questo è un fattore che ha anche cambiato il mio carattere. Da una personalità timida, dove chiaramente mi vergognavo a parlare con persone più grandi di me, istituzioni e tutto quanto, sono riuscita nel corso degli anni a svilupparmi, quindi da questo punto di vista è stata un'esperienza positiva, però nel contesto in quel momento mi metteva in difficoltà perché non me la sentivo quindi ero obbligata, dato che i miei genitori non potevano comunicare in italiano perché non lo parlavano correntemente, ero obbligata a mediare per conto loro.*

I began right from the start, when I was just 10 I used to deal with things my friends didn't do. I went to the town hall, especially at the very beginning, in order to get all the documents, I went to the family doctor, then we needed the permit of stay, so I went to the police headquarters [...] This was a factor that changed my personality. From the shy girl I once was, obviously embarrassed to talk to adults, to institutions, and all that, I managed to change, so in this respect it was a positive experience, but at that time, in that context it was hard for me and I didn't feel up to it, but I was obliged to do it because my parents were unable to communicate in Italian as they couldn't speak fluently, I was forced to broker for them.

A Romanian adolescent boy, talking about his father's linguistic autonomy, stated:

*(6) Mio padre se deve andare a scuola si perde. Se deve ritirare le pagelle si vergogna se deve chiedere o altro, lo aiuto io.*

My father gets lost if he has to go to school to fetch school report cards, he feels embarrassed if he has to ask for something, or else, I help him.

Drawing on these examples, adultification and parentification phenomena seem to be an extreme consequence, or a side-effect, of the agency our respondents were used to exert on a regular basis during CLB activities.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The examples illustrated in the present paper show that manipulation and censoring of information were implemented by language brokers for a number of reasons. Lack of vocabulary, lack of technical and specific knowledge, lack of understanding of the context or content of what they were asked to broker are some of the reasons why child language brokers, particularly in complex situations, such as in medical contexts, altered, paraphrased, and abridged part of the content or the wording occurring in the brokering event. Another reason for shortening or skipping information, mentioned by some of our respondents, was the impossibility to render a long, wordy and complex text such as a TV programme or a newspaper article word for word. Some respondents made it clear that, in order to enhance communication, they skipped redundant details and simply gave what they thought was the gist of the discourse, thus enabling communication to occur in a more effective and fluent way. Interestingly, they adopted this strategy deliberately, showing independence in the mediation practice and awareness of the interaction's expected communication goals.

Some participants also admitted censoring information in particularly sensitive brokering events in an effort to shield their parents, or other members of their language community, from embarrassment, discrimination, or from what they perceived as potentially troublesome situations. It is particularly in this respect that both agency and adultification can be observed. In selecting what to omit, children took responsibility to withhold some pieces of information according to their judgement of what could be a potentially dangerous, hurtful, embarrassing

or problematic situation for the person for whom they were brokering. In autonomously deciding how and what to convey to both parties, not only did they transfer meaning, but they also mediated and rendered meaning creatively to protect the person they were assisting. The examples discussed show that child brokers' agency may be a way to produce the best possible result for themselves (e.g. the Moroccan boy brokering at parent-teacher evenings), for their parents (e.g. the Albanian girl translating for her mother how to complete a tax form) or for other members of their family or language community (e.g. the Italian grandmother at the police headquarters in Spain). However, the choices that children make when brokering may be limited by their lack of vocabulary or knowledge of the world (as in the case of the Filipino boy translating at the hospital), or by their judgement of what is appropriate for their role (as in the case of the Albanian girl pretending to be more grown up than she was), and may thus produce burdensome and stressful situations for the children.

The enhanced ability of language brokers to take on more responsibility in comparison to their Italian peers was described by some of the young adult respondents as a positive side-effect of their language brokering activity, and as a positive, cooperative way to tackle the challenges that an immigrant family inevitably has to face in a foreign country and one that they cherish as adult citizens in the host country. However, they did not deny that at the time of brokering, CLB was not an easy, light-hearted task, as highlighted in some of the excerpts.

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