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Code-switching practices in English-Italian mediator-interpreted parent-teacher conferences

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Abstract

In interpreter-mediated public service encounters, when primary interlocutors can partially speak each other's language(s), they may shift into their counterpart's language, resulting in instances of code-switching. Previous research has shown that such code-switching can affect interpreter-mediated encounters by shaping role negotiation and participant communication. The present study draws on the analysis of two mediated parent-teacher meetings audio recorded in a nursery school in Reggio-Emilia and provides insights into code-switching by Italian teachers when English is used as the language of mediation with migrant parents. The data were analysed using a conversation analytical approach, to establish where within sequences teachers' code-switching occurs and with what implications. Two patterns were identified: in the first, code-switching is initiated during dyadic sequences between the mediator and the parent, often to tackle specific trouble sources; in the second, code-switching occurs just after the beginning of a sequence and serves to establish direct communication with the migrant parents. The analysis of mediators' actions during sequences involving teacher code-switching revealed that mediators orient to cooperating with teachers by either adapting their renditions to the teachers' code-switched utterances or withholding their intervention until the sequence has further developed. These findings highlight how code-switching also influences the interpreter's role and decision-making within the interaction.

Keywords

Code-switching, conversation analysis, intercultural mediation, English as a lingua franca, migrants.

Introduction

Research on interpreting has traditionally used the metaphor of a language barrier to describe the linguistic situation of primary participants, suggesting that interpreters act as a crucial link between interlocutors who do not share a common language (Pöchhacker 2004). However, this notion of a rigid linguistic boundary does not fully account for the permeability of language use in interpreter-mediated settings. Müller (1989) introduced the concept of a partially transparent linguistic constellation, a linguistic permeability which influences the dynamics of interpreter-mediated interactions, as primary participants do not always adhere to strict linguistic boundaries but instead shift between mediated and direct communication (Meyer 2012; Ceccoli/Gavioli 2025), often engaging in code-switching. Unlike spontaneous bilingual or multilingual interactions, where code-switching is a natural feature of speech, language switching in interpreter-mediated encounters is noticeable, as it deviates from the expected linguistic distribution (Knapp/Knapp-Potthoff 1985; Davidson 2002), occurring when one of the primary participants switches to the main language(s) of another primary participant. When a service provider or user communicates directly with the other participant by shifting into their language, they introduce an unexpected language shift (Angermeyer 2010). This phenomenon highlights the fluidity of bilingual communication in mediated encounters, where language choice is not solely determined by the interpreter's presence but is dynamically negotiated among all interlocutors.

Despite being a complex phenomenon that challenges the traditional role of interpreters and entails role negotiation within interactions, code-switching in interpreter-mediated encounters has been studied only to a limited extent and primarily in legal and healthcare settings. This study aims to expand the empirical scope of such research by examining two mediator-interpreted[1] parent-teacher conferences recorded in a school in the province of Reggio-Emilia, Italy (see section 3) in which English as a lingua franca serves as the language of mediation, in fact it allows for a certain degree of permeability and enables teachers to engage in code-switching. This study investigates the interactional conditions that give rise to code-switching and examines its impact on the unfolding of the interaction. Specifically, starting from the analysis of the sequential positioning of the instances of code-switching, it describes two different patterns within the sequential contexts in which code-switching by teachers occurs, and examines how mediators are involved in or react to said instances. The following two sections will provide an overview of code-switching in Interpreting Studies and a review on public service interpreting in the education sector. Section 3 will then outline the data and methodology, followed by a discussion of the findings and concluding remarks.

1 In this article we use *public service interpreting* (PSI) as an umbrella term that also covers what is elsewhere referred to as *community interpreting*. We use *interpreter / interpreter-mediated* when discussing the literature in general, and *mediator / mediator-interpreted* when referring to our data, in line with the institutional label *intercultural mediator* officially adopted in the Italian context.

1. Code-switching and public service interpreting

Code-switching refers to the linguistic phenomenon in which bilingual or multilingual speakers switch between two or more languages within a single conversation or discourse (Auer 1984; Li Wei 1994). This switching can occur at different linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, and is influenced by a range of social and communicative factors. Gumperz (1982) distinguished between situational code-switching, which occurs when a change in context (e.g. a shift in setting, topic, or participant roles) triggers a switch in language, and conversational code-switching, where speakers switch languages for stylistic or rhetorical effects (Gumperz/Hernández-Chávez 1971). A further distinction is made between inter-sentential code-switching, where the language is switched between sentences, and intra-sentential code-switching, or code-mixing, where elements from both languages are combined within a single utterance (Muysken 2000; Gardner-Chloros 2009). Auer (1995) further distinguished between preference-related code-switching, where a speaker switches to accommodate their interlocutor's preferred language, and discourse-related code-switching, which signals a change in topic, participant role, or activity.

Early linguistic research viewed code-switching as a sign of linguistic interference suggesting that bilinguals struggled to maintain distinct language boundaries (Weinreich 1968). However, later studies redefined it as an indicator of bilingual proficiency (Poplack 1980) and as a tool for social meaning-making (Heller 1995), showing that code-switching is a highly structured and socially meaningful practice rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency (Gumperz 1982). Rather than being seen as a sign of lack of language skills, code-switching has increasingly been recognised as a pragmatic strategy used by speakers to achieve specific communicative goals, such as marking a change of topic, addressing different interlocutors or conveying social identities and group membership (Gumperz1982, Woolard 1999). Auer (1995) also argued that code-switching is a resource that bilingual speakers use to signal their linguistic identity and shape interaction, a view that has been supported by research on bilingual communities around the world, the area in which code-switching has been most studied. Recourse to code-switching thus goes beyond the mere compensation of language gaps and can be a strategic tool in discourse organisation and identity negotiation.

Although code-switching has been widely explored in studies on bilingualism, it has only recently gained attention in Interpreting Studies. Interpreting Studies have traditionally conceptualised interpreter-mediated communication in terms of a strict separation between languages, treating the interpreter as an intermediary who ensures clear transmission of meaning between speakers with mutually exclusive linguistic repertoires (Davidson 2002). However, this traditional view has been challenged, particularly in public service interpreting contexts, where service providers are often not completely monolingual but rather have varying degrees of bilingual competence (Angermeyer 2010; Ceccoli/Gavioli 2025) and where end users with limited proficiency in the dominant language may engage in code-switching, either by incorporating single lexical items from the majority language (insertion or tag-switching) or by momentarily switching between languag-

es in response to specific interactional needs (Anderson 2012; Angermeyer 2015). Although interpreters, of course, switch between languages as part of their role – making this an expected and unmarked practice – when primary participants such as service providers or users bypass the interpreter and switch languages directly, code-switching becomes a marked event. Such shifts can serve various functions, including emphasis, establishing rapport, or checking comprehension. These instances challenge the rigid boundaries of interpreter-mediated discourse, showing the dynamic and negotiated nature of bilingual communication in such settings.

Research on code-switching in interpreter-mediated interactions has focused primarily on two settings: legal (Angermeyer 2010, 2015; Anderson 2012) and healthcare (Anderson 2012), with an additional study examining its occurrence in police interviews (Tipton 2019). Code-switching plays an important role in these settings, but its use varies according to institutional priorities and interactional processes. In legal proceedings, code-switching is highly constrained because participants must conform to the institutional priority of ensuring accuracy and procedural integrity. Research on courtroom interactions in New York courts (Angermeyer 2010) found that litigants assisted by interpreters often switched to English, the dominant language of the legal system, especially when responding to closed questions. According to Angermeyer (*Ibid*.), such shifts function as strategic moves to assert agency (Baraldi 2019; Baraldi/Gavioli 2016) by allowing litigants to address arbitrators directly, gain credibility and be heard. This interpretation is buttressed by the fact that in his data code-switching is asymmetrical: while litigants adjust to the court's language, judges, lawyers, and other institutional representatives rarely reciprocate by switching to the litigant's language, even when proficient in it. In later work based on the same corpus, Angermeyer (2015) observed that when litigants switch to the dominant language, interpreters may react by echoing their utterances, thus maintaining the expected turn sequence and reaffirming their position in the interaction. Similar patterns were found by Tipton (2019) in her analysis of police interviews. She found that most code-switching stemmed from the victim-witness's effort to convey honesty, confirming a tendency for lay participants in legal settings to code-switch during moments of conflict or when 'high stakes' are involved (Anderson 2012; Angermeyer 2015).

Unlike legal settings, healthcare interactions adopt a more flexible and interactive approach, with code-switching occurring more frequently (Anderson 2012). This is due to the cooperative nature of communication in this setting (Drew/Heritage 1992), especially when considering its key institutional goals. In contrast to the rigid turn-taking constraints of legal discourse, medical consultations offer greater linguistic flexibility, allowing doctors and patients to negotiate meaning. Moreover, while in legal settings, institutional agents need to maintain neutrality in determining personal liabilities, which may contrast with the defendants' interest, in healthcare settings, all participants cooperate to achieve a common result, promoting the patients' health. In this context, code-switching serves both transactional and relational functions: clarifying medical information while building rapport and trust. Medical professionals also assume that patients possess at least basic proficiency in the host country's language, even when an interpreter is present (Anderson 2012). As a matter of fact, foreign service users (patients, clients, etc.) often switch to the host language, with these unmarked instances typically going unacknowledged by participants (*Ibid.*).

The analysis of code-switching in legal and medical settings reveals how institutional norms shape the practice, either encouraging or limiting language switching based on the perceived goals of the interaction. Code-switching can serve multiple functions, including adapting to power dynamics, enhancing communication, and fostering collaboration. In all contexts, a closer examination of code-switching structure and placement reveals that code-switching can be strategically employed by migrants to assert agency and address pressing needs, even when their proficiency in the host language is limited.

2. Interpreter-mediated interactions in the educational setting

Research on interpreter-mediated interactions in educational settings is still relatively limited, with most studies focusing on school-family communication, such as parent-teacher conferences, rather than direct student-teacher interactions. The analysis of interpreted parent-teacher encounters has revealed that mediators often amplify teachers' positive evaluations of students, aiming to foster parental acceptance and cooperation (Davitti 2013, 2015). While this strategy can facilitate smoother communication, it may also constrain parents' ability to critically engage with their child's academic progress. Interpreters tend to adapt institutional discourse based on what they perceive as parents' comprehension levels, using summarised, expanded, or reduced renditions (Vargas-Urpi/Arumí Ribas 2014). Expanded renditions, in particular, reflect a quasi-pedagogical approach intended to clarify and contextualise information. At the same time, interpreters frequently omit parental remarks deemed irrelevant to the institutional agenda (Vargas-Urpi 2015, 2017), indicating a selective filtering process that shapes the flow of communication and limits parental participation. These practices suggest an underlying power dynamic in which interpreters exert control over the flow of communication, thereby shaping the extent of the other interlocutors' participation. Moreover, interpreters in educational settings often take on socially engaged roles that go beyond language transfer, including intercultural mediation, advocacy, and the promotion of equitable access to education (Tipton/Furmanek 2016).

Expanding on these studies, more recent analyses of mediator-interpreted parent-teacher conferences (Baraldi/Gavioli 2023a, 2023b) have shown that teachers tend to deliver long evaluative monologues, rarely invite parental input, and often emphasise students' weaknesses, even when overall performance is positive. These interactions typically position parents as passive recipients of institutional assessments, with the expectation that they will take corrective action rather than engage in dialogue. Mediators, while communicating these assessments, often work to soften their impact. This is achieved by highlighting positive aspects of the student's performance or behaviour, encouraging teachers to acknowledge strengths, and redirecting the conversation towards constructive collaboration. Mediators also help to facilitate parents' comprehension by breaking down teachers' speech into smaller segments or by expanding and contextualising information. Parents' contributions, on the other hand, tend to be conveyed with little modification, allowing their perspectives to come through more directly. When

interactions are characterised by teacher satisfaction, mediators intervene less and provide fewer expansions.

Children's participation in interpreted teacher-parent encounters is even more limited. Although present, they often remain silent or give minimal responses, occasionally showing signs of discomfort (Baraldi/Ceccoli 2023). When children try to take the initiative, their contributions are rarely acknowledged or supported, limiting their ability to participate actively (Ceccoli 2024). This dynamic reinforces a rigid interactional hierarchy in which the teacher retains primary authority and children's epistemic contributions are marginalised. These patterns point to structural barriers within educational settings that prevent meaningful child participation and suggest the need to develop practices that better support children's communicative rights and agency (Heritage/Raymond 2005; Baraldi 2015).

Overall, the literature on interpreter-mediated interactions in educational settings has highlighted the complex interplay between institutional authority, interpreter agency, and participant involvement. While interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating and coordinating communication, their agency is often constrained by the hierarchical structures of educational institutions, which tend to prioritise teacher authority over inclusive dialogue. No studies, however, have so far specifically examined how code-switching by primary participants comes into the picture. For this reason, as a first contribution to shedding light on this phenomenon in the educational setting, this paper examines teachers' code-switching in detail, so as to provide some insight into how code-switching is deployed by institutional agents, an aspect of the phenomenon which has been less described in the literature so far, with a particular focus on how it relates to the mediator's actions.

3. Data and methods

The data that inform this paper are drawn from a broader dataset of 28 audio-recorded, interpreter-mediated parent-teacher interactions collected as part of a European H2020 research project (Baraldi 2021) and now included in the larger AIM Corpus (Corradini *et al.* 2024). All data were gathered in Italian schools located in the provinces of Reggio-Emilia and consist of end-of-term, mediator-interpreted parent-teacher meetings focusing on students' school reports and overall school performance. Of the 28 recordings included in the dataset, 25 are from primary schools, 2 from nursery schools, and 1 from a secondary school. The parents involved in these meetings speak various languages, including Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Twi, Urdu, Turkish and English. In total, the audio recordings amount to 6 hours and 33 minutes, with an average meeting duration of 20 minutes. The interactions were audio- rather than video-recorded due to privacy concerns and the type of consent given by participants. This means that aspects such as gaze coordination could not be systematically addressed. Nonetheless, the focus on verbal behaviour is particularly well-suited for examining interpreting and code-switching practices, while occasional fieldnotes on visible actions (e.g. typing or handing out leaflets) were also used to contextualise the analysis. All data were transcribed according to the Jeffersonian conventions (see Appendix) used

for Conversation Analysis (Hepburn/Bolden 2017) by means of ELAN[2], an open-source software ensuring great precision in annotating overlaps, and inter- and intra-turn silences. Prior to conducting the research, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data protection protocols were strictly followed.

The analysis in this paper focuses on two specific interactions that stand out for three main reasons: i) they are the only interactions where code-switching by teachers was observed; ii) they are the only cases where English is used as the mediation language; iii) they are the only interactions recorded in a nursery school, whereas previous studies on the same dataset primarily analysed data from primary schools (e.g. Baraldi/Ceccoli 2023; Ceccoli 2024). These two interactions involve the same two Italian teachers and the same intercultural mediator (this is the official definition in the Italian context according to CNEL 2009), but different mothers. One of the two mothers is from Ghana, and reports speaking Twi and English at home, while the other mother is from Nigeria and reports speaking only English with her child. The mediator is second generation Nigerian. Owing to the varied situation in these two countries regarding the role of English as national language but also as a lingua franca (Agbo/Plag 2020; Rupp 2013), it is hard to determine the exact linguistic competences of the two mothers and of the mediator; we will therefore generally refer to the language of mediation as English as a lingua franca.

The main analytical methodology chosen for this study is Conversation Analysis (CA), which aims at describing how social interaction is constructed through language on a turn-by-turn basis through conversation. One of the practices on which CA is based and which has been fundamental for our analysis is the idea that the turn-taking system is governed by rules which imply that each next turn-at-talk is designed by speakers on the basis of their understanding of the prior turn(s) (Sacks *et al.* 1974). CA also takes as a given the practice of *turn design*, i.e. the idea that speakers format their turns-at-talk to implement specific actions (Drew 2013). As analysts, these principles guided us towards examining in detail the sequential positioning of all instances of code-switching, so as to determine the role of all speakers within the participation framework. Our analysis has also been guided by the assumption that interaction in educational settings is fundamentally cooperative, given the specific institutional goals at hand (Drew/Heritage 1992). Although our main analytical focus is on teachers' code-switching, we have thus decided to consider how such instances are both correlated with the mediator's actions or reacted to by the mediator herself, in order to ascertain whether teachers' code-switching aligns with or hinders the mediator's course of action.

4. Analysis

The analysis of all the instances of code-switching in the two encounters we have considered for this paper has allowed us to single out two different patterns in

2 ELAN (Version 7.0) [Computer software] (2025) Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive. Retrieved from https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan

which teachers shift from Italian into English in order to achieve different interactional aims. Before examining these two patterns in detail, it seems worth commenting on a common aspect which is shared by all cases of code-switching by teachers that we have found in our data. In both encounters analysed for this paper, all instances of code-switching occur in sequences in which teachers are gathering information. It is remarkable that they seem to orient to shifting into English only while requesting information. In other words, no instance of account, offer, assessment, or any other type of action carried out by the two teachers includes cases of code-switching, possibly indicating a correlation between the teachers' interest in communicating directly with the parents and their special concern with the exactness of the gathered information.

As regards the two patterns described in this paper, in order to understand the role of code-switching in interaction and the logic behind its deployment, we have decided to start our analysis by considering its sequential positioning. By looking at where, within a sequence, teachers shift into English, we have been able to single out two patterns which seem to shed light on the role that these shifts have, both in defining the cooperation between teachers and mediators, and in allowing direct contact between primary speakers. In the first of these two patterns, teachers shift into English either while a mediator is rendering their previous utterances, or the parent is providing information after the rendition of a request. When this pattern is found, teachers' code-switching appears to be correlated with instances of trouble sources in interaction. In the second of the two patterns, instead, teachers shift into English after initiating a new sequence but before the mediator has begun her rendition. In these cases, teachers appear to be seeking direct interaction with the parent when their linguistic competence allows them to do so. The two subsections below are dedicated respectively to these two patterns.

4.1 Code-switching as a trouble management resource during renditions

During interpreter-mediated encounters, interpreters often alternatively engage in monolingual dyadic sequences with one of the primary speakers, in order to clarify the meaning of what each primary speaker wants to communicate to their counterpart. In so doing, they construct the conversational common ground which allows for successful interpreter-mediated interactions (Davidson 2002; Baraldi/Gavioli 2012). When teachers are gathering information from parents who speak a different language, after clarifying the piece of information they want to obtain, they usually wait until the mediator has translated their utterance to the parent, who then responds with the required piece of information, within a monolingual dyadic sequence. The following two extracts will illustrate cases in which teachers shift into English within the boundaries of monolingual dyadic sequences in order to deal with emerging trouble sources.

Excerpt 1 presents a case in which the teacher's shift into English is caused by the absence of a piece of information in the mediator's rendition of her words. Code-switching here is thus used to cooperate with the mediator in order to obtain the mother's confirmation of a previously known piece of information.

TEA1 = teacher 1; TEA2 = teacher 2; MED = mediator; PAR = Ghanaian mother

```
1   TEA1   allora Martha, (0.6) oggi parliamo di Farrel, (0.6) che a
             so   Martha,   today we're talking about Farrel  who in
2          settembre va alla scuola (.) Marco Loi (.) okay?
          September is going to the school  Marco Loi    okay?
3   TEA2   sì (.) adesso tra-
           yes     now   tra-
4          (1.4)
5   MED    °okay°
6          (0.6)
7   MED    so we will talk about Farrel (.) that in September will go to to
           school (.) okay to the primary school
8   TEA1   eh< #e- eh# primary school Marco Loi (.) giusto?
                                                     right?
9   MED    Marco Loi is the name of the school? (0.3) for [ Far]rel?
10  PAR                                                   [this]
11         (0.4)
12  PAR    this (year)?
13  TEA1   n[o! ]
14  MED     [for] September
15  TEA2   sì
16  PAR    September okay
17         (0.4)
18  MED    do you [know the] name of the [school?]
19  TEA1          [  s  ì ?]
20  PAR                                  [ mh no ] I don't know
21  MED    =okay
22  TEA1   l'ha iscritto il papà
            his dad enrolled him
```

Excerpt 1: Primary School

Here we are at the beginning of the encounter, where teacher one (TEA1) announces that the reason behind the meeting is to talk about the mother's son, Farrel, who in September will be progressing to primary school (lines 1-2). In line 2, TEA1 specifically mentions the name of the future primary school, namely "Marco Loi", and finishes her utterance with an interrogative "okay?". TEA1's first utterance is followed by both a confirmatory "yes" and a self-interrupted statement uttered by TEA2 (line 3), which are then followed by a long 1.4 second gap (line 4). Such a gap would suffice to allow one of the two teachers to add extra requirements or clarify the content of what they have already uttered, but no integration or correction is made by the teachers. Accordingly, after uttering a soft "okay" (line 5) the mediator (MED) proceeds to translate the utterance (line 6-7), however substituting the name of the school (line 7) previously mentioned by TEA1 with the type of school ("primary school" rather than "Marco Loi school"). This choice triggers TEA1's shift into English (line 8): she first utters a series of interrupted and prosodically altered interjections "eh< #e- eh#", possibly indicating hesitation or indecision, and then goes on to repeat "primary school" in English, followed by the school's proper name "Marco Loi", finishing her utterance with a confirmation token "giusto?" ("right?") uttered in Italian.

By repeating the same words which the mediator had uttered, namely "primary school", followed by the addition of the school's proper name, TEA1 is achieving two interactional aims. The first one is showing that her utterance is recognisable as an appropriate next action (Drew 2013: 136), since repetition is one of the four ways via which speakers show the connectedness of their utterances to previous talk. The second one, given that modified repetitions are a device deployed by speakers to highlight elements which are deemed problematic in interaction (Kitzinger 2013: 251-252), is indicating that the element in question is a trouble source. By adding "Marco Loi" to the repetition, TEA1 is, first of all, highlighting that this piece of information was missing in the mediator's rendition and, secondly, implying that receiving confirmation of the school's proper name was one of the aims the teacher wanted to achieve. By immediately asking the mother if "Marco Loi" is the name of her son's future primary school (line 18), the mediator both shows that she has grasped the teacher's aim and aligns conversationally with it. To sum up, Excerpt 1 shows an instance of code-switching through which a teacher is able to highlight which necessary piece of information was missing from the mediator's rendition, thus managing to both tackle a trouble source in the rendition and to cooperate with the mediator by taking part directly in the mediation process.

Unlike the previous excerpt, the trouble source present in Excerpt 2 is produced by the mother (PAR) and not by the mediator. In the following excerpt, what TEA1 wants to confirm is the child's date of birth. When the mother seems to hesitate in recalling the exact year in which the child was born, TEA2 shifts into English to try to solve this impasse directly.

As we can see from the excerpt below, the sequence begins with TEA1 asking for the child's place of birth (lines 1-2), followed, first, by the mediator's rendition of the request (line 3), second, by the mother's answer (line 5), finally, by the mediator's (line 6) and teacher's (line 7) repetition of the information provided by the mother. Then a second question about the child's date of birth is asked by TEA1 (line 9), by simply saying the day and month, followed by the year with rising intonation. The mediator renders this utterance with a general request about the child's date of birth (line 10), and the mother replies by recalling the day in which the child was born (line 11), which is acknowledged by TEA1 with her "okay" (line 12). The mediator goes on to ask "two thousand and?" (line 13) implicitly inviting the mother to complete the piece of information, in what would be defined in CA as a collaborative completion (Lerner 2004). However, such prompt is followed by a 0.5 second gap (line 14), then by the mother's repetition of "two thousand and" with suspended intonation (line 15), which may signal potential problems in recalling the exact year. The existing literature has highlighted how patients from sub-Saharan Africa often struggle to recall the exact year in which children are born, finding it simpler to remember the number of years which have passed since a child's birth (Gavioli/Wadensjö 2021). Various temporal features in the turns that follow appear compatible with this explanation: the mother's repetition with suspended intonation in line 15 is followed, respectively, by a 0.8 second gap (line 16), by her uttering of the interjection "ehm::" (line 17), usually signalling indecision or difficulty in recalling information, and by a total of 1.7 seconds of silence (lines 18 and 20).

TEA1 = teacher 1; TEA2 = teacher 2; MED = mediator; PAR = Ghanaian mother

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1  TEA1   e:::h mh: (.) sì (.) e::h  ci servirebbe sapere, (.) dove è nato
          e:::h mh:    yes   e::h it'd be useful for us to know     where Farrel
2         Farrel
          was born
3  MED    where was da- eh Farrel born,
4         (0.9)
5  PAR    in Ghana
6  MED    in [Ghana]
7  TEA1      [in Gha]na (.) okay
8         (4.4)
9  TEA1   il trenta settembre? (0.4) duemila e quindici?
         the thirtieth of September?  two thousand and fifteen?
10 MED    the date of birth?
11 PAR    is thirtieth Septem[ber]
12 TEA1                      [ o]kay
13 MED    two thousand and?
14        (0.5)
15 PAR    (    ) two thousand and_
16        (0.8)
17 PAR    ehm::
18        (1.1)
19 ???    ehm
20        (0.6)
21 TEA2   fif-
22        (0.4)
23 PAR    fif[teen.]
24 TEA1      [  fif]teen. [eh]
25 TEA2                  [fif]teen.
26 MED    fif[teen.]
27 TEA1      [o : ]kay
28        (0.5)
29 MED    okay
```

Excerpt 2: Fifteen

All these elements foreground a potential trouble source for the gathering of the required information, that is the mother's difficulty in remembering her son's year of birth. What TEA2 proffers after the hesitations and long silence between line 16 and 20 might indeed be interpreted as an attempt at making a partial collaborative completion (Lerner 2004): after shifting into English, she utters the first syllable of the word "fifteen" (line 21). In doing so, she provides the mother with the beginning of the word which might complete her unfinished answer (line 15). The proposed beginning of the word is recognised by the mother, who utters the whole number "fifteen" (line 23), thus both accepting the collaborative completion and confirming TEA1's previous hypothesis (line 9). Now, TEA1 shifts into English as well, producing an exact repeat with falling intonation of the mother's utterance (line 24), in doing so showing receipt of the information (Schegloff 1997). Receipt is then also signalled by TEA2 (line 25) and MED (line 26), both by means of an exact repetition with falling intonation. By repeating the number in English through code-switching, the two teachers are not only showing their understanding of the unfolding of the present sequence but also their ability and willingness to interact directly with the mother.

4.2 Code-switching as a teacher initiative preceding renditions

In the second pattern identified in the two encounters, code-switching occurs soon after the beginning of a new sequence, before the mediator has started to render the primary interlocutors' utterances. Excerpt 3 presents a clear example of this type of sequence. Here the two teachers would like to gather more information about a person who seems to play an important role in their pupil's life but whose name, as pronounced by the little boy who often mentions her at school (line 1), they struggle to understand. In the end, this person will turn out to be one of the mother's friends, who usually looks after the little boy when the mother needs help.

TEA1 = teacher 1; TEA2 = teacher 2; MED = mediator; PAR = Nigerian mother

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1  TEA1   e Michael oltre della mamma ci parla sempre di (1.0) auntie Sada?
         and Micheal apart of his mum he always mentions       auntie Sada?
2  TEA2   auntie?
3         (0.5)
4  PAR    okay (.) my (.) friend
5  TEA1   y- (.) [YEah?]
6  MED           [a h ]
7  PAR    (we came new) (.) (same time) in this town
8         (0.4)
9  TEA2   sì
10 TEA1   =okay e come si ch(h)iama? (.) [ Sada?]
          okay and what's her na(h)me?     Sada?
11 MED                                   [Sa- Sa]da (.) what is [the name,]
12 PAR                                                          [A s a d a]
13 MED    Asa[da   ]
14 TEA1      [Sada?]
15 TEA2   [[Asada]
16 TEA1   [[Asada] okay
```

Excerpt 3: Auntie

In Excerpt 3 a new sequence begins with TEA1's account that their pupil always mentions another person in his life (line 1), whose name the teachers seem to understand as "auntie Sada". This name is uttered with rising intonation, as an interrogative, perhaps to elicit a confirmation or a correction by the mother, an orientation which seems to be strengthened by the one-second pause preceding it. Before anyone else's reaction, TEA2 shifts into English and repeats only the word "auntie?" with rising intonation (line 2). In analogy with Excerpt 2, this repetition with rising intonation can arguably be understood as inviting the mother to a collaborative completion by adding the name of the person her son always mentions.

However, before proceeding with the analysis of the rest of the excerpt, it might be appropriate to clarify the basis for identifying TEA2's utterance in line 2 as an instance of code-switching, rather than, for example, the repetition of a proper name she does not understand. Due to space constraints, it is not possible to include a later stage of the interaction in which the teachers ask the mediator about the meaning of the word 'auntie', noting that the child uses it to address them and suggesting it may function similarly to the Italian term 'tata', which in the geographical area where the

data were gathered can refer both to members of the family (usually aunts or elder sisters) and teachers at nursery school.

By referring this instance, both teachers show their awareness of the fact that ‘auntie’ is not a proper name. Therefore, when TEA2 utters the word ‘auntie’ in line 2, she is deliberately using an English word, which she seems to deploy to engage in direct conversation with the mother. After a brief gap (line 3), the mother recognises who the teachers are talking about and defines her as her friend (line 4). TEA1 responds with a “yeah?”, with rising intonation (line 5), after which the mother adds some details (although the transcription is partly uncertain) about the experiences that led them to bond as friends (line 7). After a brief gap (line 8), both TEA2 with a “yes” (line 9) and TEA1 with a “okay” (line 10) acknowledge the receipt of this piece of information, after which TEA1 goes on to ask the mother’s friend’s name (line 10). Unlike the confirmation check in line 1, which was phrased as the beginning of an account, here TEA1’s query is posed in canonical question form (Hayano 2013), thus making it recognisable as a question and therefore immediately translatable. Between lines 2 and 10 there are no interventions by the mediator, who seems to be simply a bystander (Anderson 2012; Monteolive-Garcia 2020) to the exchange between the mother and the two teachers; her only utterance is the interjection “ah” (line 6), overlapping with TEA1’s “yeah” (line 5).

A close analysis of turns 2-10 makes it possible to identify three elements through which the mediator suspends direct intervention in this sequence. First, the beginning of an account by TEA1 (line 1), which is not clearly formulated to be translated as such, second, TEA2’s instance of code-switching (line 2), and third, the mother’s autonomous understanding of the gist of what the two teachers were talking about (line 4), which allows her to reply coherently. Only when a question clearly formulated as such is asked by TEA1 in line 10, does the mediator step in and provide her own rendition (line 11), which eventually contributes to the attainment of the missing piece of information. In short, while this instance of code-switching temporarily fosters direct communication between the primary participants, the mediator is not provided with clear enough material to produce a rendition and waits until her next possible opportunity to rejoin the interchange.

Excerpt 4 presents another case in which code-switching occurs at the beginning of a new sequence, in this case coinciding with a major shift in topic. Here the information the teachers want to verify is whether the mother’s second son was born in the year two thousand and eighteen or in the following year, a difference which may determine whether he is old enough to attend nursery school or not.

Like Excerpt 3, Excerpt 4 features a transition to a new sequence whose opening is not clearly phrased as an utterance which the mediator can translate as such. Here the excerpt begins with a question about the second son’s age (line 1), followed by the mother’s answer (line 3), and TEA1’s receipt acknowledgement (line 4). These three lines can be considered a complete sequence. However, after a relatively long gap (line 5), TEA1 makes a statement which raises a doubt about the information gathering process (line 6). If we focus on the way this statement is produced from a prosodic point of view (with softer delivery and falling intonation), we may agree on the fact that the way it is uttered makes it sound more like a feedback comment addressed to her colleague than as a statement to be translated by the mediator. It is

thus perhaps not surprising that the mediator does not react and, after a 1.8 second gap (line 7), TEA1 decides to ask the mother directly by shifting into English and uttering the sentence "when he was born" (line 8). It should be noted that this sentence, arguably meant to gather a piece of information from the mother, is syntactically and prosodically phrased as a statement. This non-canonical phrasing is followed by a 1.1 second gap (line 9) which can be interpreted as a sign that the mother is encountering difficulties in interpreting TEA1's utterance. As a matter of fact, in overlap with the mother's interrogative feedback token (line 10), TEA1 repeats the name "Philip" (line 11), as to disambiguate who the "he" in line 8 refers to. This prompts the mother to repeat the name with interrogative intonation and then immediately provide the answer, "May" (line 12), to what she now understands to be a question. After a one second gap (line 13), TEA1 repeats such answer with interrogative intonation, looking for a confirmation of her understanding (line 14). Consequently, the mother provides a clear confirmation introduced by a "yes" and completed with the exact day in which the child was born (line 15).

TEA1 = teacher 1; TEA2 = teacher 2; MED = mediator; PAR = Ghanaian mother

```
1   TEA1    quanti anni ha Philip,
            how old is Philip,
2           (0.7)
3   PAR     ehm two:_
4   TEA1    =due (.) okay.
            =two     okay
5           (2.1)
6   TEA1    però (.) °secondo me (.) è un duemila e diciotto.°
            but    °in my opinion   he was born in two thousand and eighteen°
7           (1.8)
8   TEA1    when he was born.
9           (1.1)
10  PAR     [[(uh?)]
11  TEA1    [[P h i]lip.
12  PAR     Philip, May.
13          (1.0)
14  TEA1    May?
15  PAR     [[yes seven]th May.
16  MED     [[what year.]
17          (.)
18  MED     [[s e v e n  M a y]
19  TEA2    [[°no allora ha fa]tto due anni° °°>adess-<°°
            °well then he's just turned two° °°>now-<°°
20  TEA1    ah okay
            oh okay
```

Excerpt 4: When he was born

The mediator, who has so far been silent, picks up on the content of TEA1's initial comment (line 6) and utters "what year." (line 16), in overlap with the mother's confirmation. Then, realising that the mother has provided a more specific answer, she repeats the answer (line 18), while TEA2 is producing a comment which deems the mother's confirmation sufficient for the teachers to obtain the information they

need (line 20). As with Excerpt 3, the sequence begins with an utterance which is not immediately recognisable as something requiring to be translated, followed by an instance of code-switching deployed by a teacher so as to communicate directly with the mother. However, unlike Extract 3, this last extract shows that this language shift is not communicatively as successful as the previous one, since TEA1 inadvertently designs her question as a statement, both syntactically (lack of subject-verb inversion) and prosodically (lack of rising intonation) (line 8), which leads to a series of perturbations and potential misunderstanding in the unfolding of the interaction.

5. Conclusion

Through a conversation analytical approach this paper has contributed to shedding light on the understudied phenomenon of code-switching by teachers in educational settings. While previous research on educational interpreting has mainly concentrated on the mediators' strategies and their role in shaping participation, this study shifts the focus to how and when teachers themselves engage in language switching, and with what interactional consequences for interpreter-mediated interactions.

Our analysis of the full corpus of 28 encounters revealed that teachers engaged in code-switching only when English was the language of mediation. This indicates that the use of English in interpreted encounters facilitates linguistic flexibility by allowing greater permeability between languages, which in turn supports the effectiveness of the interaction by enabling smoother communication and fostering a more collaborative exchange, even in interpreter-mediated interactions.

By looking at the sequential positioning and turn design of instances of teachers' code-switching, two patterns have been identified. Within the first, teachers shift into English when a trouble source emerges during a dyadic sequence between the mediator and a mother in which a rendition has been produced and information is being gathered. Within the second, teachers shift into English immediately after the transition to a new sequence.

In particular, Excerpt 1 provides an example of a trouble source emerging when the mediator omits a piece of information in her rendition which is deemed essential by a teacher, who consequently resorts to code-switching to integrate the piece of information in the rendition. Excerpt 2 presents a trouble source introduced by the mother's difficulty in remembering a specific piece of information which causes the progressivity of the sequence to stall. Both problems are tackled and solved by teachers through code-switching, which safeguards the outcome of the information gathering process by directly compensating for the problems emerging in interaction.

On the other hand, Excerpts 3 and 4 present cases of code-switching which is initiated straight after the transition to a new sequence, showing the teachers' orientation to communicating directly with the mothers. These extracts show that direct communication between primary interlocutors is feasible but that mediation is often fundamental to smoothly reaching common ground more easily. A characteristic that both excerpts have in common is that the transition to the new sequences is marked by teachers' utterances which are designed in such a way as to make them less clearly translatable, which appears to prompt the mediator to wait for a clearer slot to rejoin

the communication. In these cases, direct communication between teachers and parents not only facilitates the immediate progress of the interaction but also enhances participants' agency and supports relationship-building, thereby showing that primary participants (teachers and parents) can take up more space, interact directly, and build relationships even within mediated encounters – an aspect often overlooked in traditional models of public service interpreting.

Interestingly, the analysis also shows that teachers' code-switching is absent in sequences where the interaction involves accounts, offers, or evaluative actions such as assessments. This pattern suggests that direct contact with parents is actively sought when the primary goal is informational or transactional, while it is avoided in contexts that involve evaluation or issues of face. Such an asymmetry points to a careful orientation by teachers to the potential relational risks of face-threatening actions, for which they seem to prefer relying on the mediator's management of the interaction.

Building on this, the analysis further highlights the mediator's orientation to cooperating with the teachers when trouble sources are tackled through code-switching. Moreover, when teacher code-switching is deployed at the beginning of a sequence, mediators orient to withholding their contributions, allowing direct interaction between primary speakers and waiting for the sequence to progress before their next intervention.

With regards to the role of mediators in this type of interaction, the analysis has also shown a correlation between how utterances are designed by teachers at the beginning of new sequences in terms of their clear translatability, and the consequent prompt production (or lack thereof) of renditions by mediators. However, for reasons of space and since the focus of this paper is on teachers' code-switching, this line of investigation should be the object of future studies.

In sum, this study shows that code-switching by teachers in mediated parent-teacher conferences is neither marginal nor random. Instead, it is a strategic practice that contributes to managing trouble sources and facilitating information gathering. By identifying the sequential environments where code-switching occurs, this study broadens the scope of Interpreting Studies, which have so far concentrated on legal and healthcare settings, and provides a first empirical account of how teacher-initiated language switching interacts with mediators' actions in an educational context. The analysis shows that teachers' code-switching practices align with the cooperative nature of the institutional goals of the educational context, facilitating the resolution of interactional issues and promoting direct communication between primary participants. Future work can extend the line of inquiry presented in this paper by examining in more depth how parents' own language choices co-construct these interactional encounters.

APPENDIX: Transcription conventions

Transcription of vocal conduct follows the Jeffersonian conventions used for Conversation Analysis (Jefferson, 2004; Hepburn/Bolden, 2017). The symbols used for the data in this paper appear below:

Symbol	Meaning
[	Onset of overlapping talk.
]	End of overlapping talk.
[[	Beginning of a new turn overlapping the beginning of another speaker's new turn.
(0.5)	Duration of a silence in seconds.
(.)	Minimal silence, usually <0.2 seconds.
=	Latching between the turns of different speakers.
wo:rd	The sound followed by a colon is stretched (colon ≤ 0.2 seconds).
wor-	Word cut-off.
wo(h)rd	Laughter or breathing within a word.
>word<	Faster delivery.
°word°	Softer delivery.
°°word°°	Whispered delivery.
#word#	Creaky delivery.
WORD	Marked increase in volume.
word?	Terminal fully rising intonation.
word,	Terminal slightly rising intonation.
word_	Terminal flat intonation.
word.	Terminal fully falling intonation.
( )	Inaudible or indecipherable speech.
(word)	Transcriber's best guess of uncertain speech.
word	Letters in bold are used to highlight code-switching.

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