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(Article begins on next page)

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Caught in the Middle: Child Language Brokering as a Form of Unrecognised Language Service

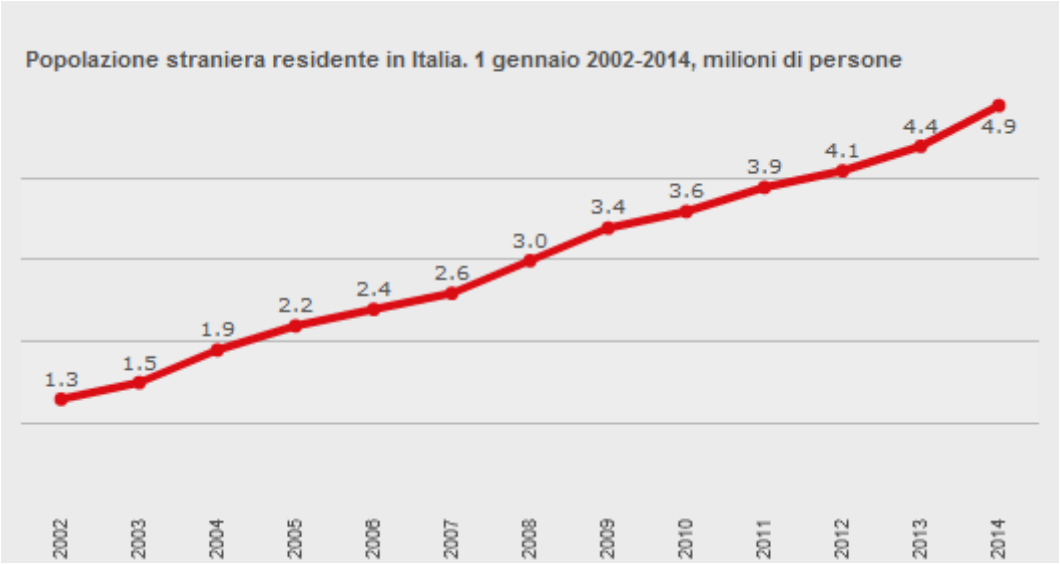
Abstract
This paper will present the findings of a wide-scale research aimed at studying the phenomenon of Child Language Brokering (henceforth CLB) in Italy. After providing a description of recent immigration patterns and the provision of language services in Italy, and an overview of current research in this field, this study will discuss narrative data obtained by means of a school contest, Traduttori in Erba (Translators in Bud). The analysis of the children's narratives on their experiences as language brokers will show the impact that this practice has on their lives and the huge contribution that these children make in order to help their families interact with the institutions of their new country of residence.
Keywords: child language brokering, language service provision, immigration, children's perceptions

1. Immigration to Italy

Mass immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Italy especially if compared to other European countries (Bevilacqua et al. 2002). Until thirty years ago, Italy could be described as "as a country of steady and major emigration as well as of internal migration from the poor southern to the northern regions" (Braun 1999: 17). In the mid 1970s, the situation was reversed and Italy's net migration rate became positive (European Migration Network 2004).
The 1990s were characterized by economic growth and demographic decline. Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece) began attracting foreign immigration, and Italy started experiencing a substantial influx of immigrants who chose to settle in those regions that were undergoing higher economic growth. Consequently, permanent immigration

to Italy is significantly and largely employment-based (OECD 2008). As of 1 January 2015, statistics from Italian National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) show that the foreign population that chose Italy as their new country of residence had been growing steadily over the past decade reaching the total number of 5,073,000 people, 8.3% of the total residing population.

Figure 1: Migration pattern 2002-2014



Source: http://www.istat.it/it/immigrati (last accessed 20 April 2015)

Emilia-Romagna, the region were the In MedIO PUER(I) study was carried out, ranks third among all twenty Italian regions in terms of the number of legal immigrants.[1]

Unlike other European countries, immigration to Italy is characterised by a predominantly fragmented pattern with "the presence of an elevated number of nationalities and ethnicities which, with the passing of the years, have become progressively more defined and intensified" (European Migration Network 2004: 10). This is also reflected by the immigration pattern recorded in Emilia-Romagna (the region where the present study was carried out) where more than 96% of the total number of legal immigrants come from countries characterized by strong migration trends (namely, Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America).

[1] However, in terms of the incidence of foreign residents compared to the number of Italian citizens, Emilia-Romagna ranks second with 7.5 foreigners per 100 residents.

In 2007 (the year in which the In MedIO PUER(I) project was initiated), in the province of Forlì-Cesena, the countries of origin of the foreign population in the area were: Albania (17.7%), Morocco (14.2%), Rumania (13.8%), and China (7.2%) (Osservatorio Provinciale sull'Immigrazione 2008).[2] Thus immigration to Emilia-Romagna has become an important phenomenon involving all spheres and domains of civil society, with a clear impact on various domains of social and civil life – notably on the educational, health and social systems, which represent the most important and sensitive frontier of the social integration process (Antonini 2011).

Emilia-Romagna is the Italian region with the highest percentage of foreign minors in primary and secondary education (14.6%). The data for the latest available data on school enrolment show that in 2011/2012 there were 86.944 children and adolescents enrolled in schools in Emilia-Romagna (Osservatorio Regionale sul Fenomeno Migratorio 2013). The distribution of foreign pupils in Emilia-Romagna's schools[3] shows that the main countries of origin are Morocco (17.9%), Albania (14.6%), Romania (10%), Moldavia (5.4%), China (4.9%), Tunisia (4.8%) and Pakistan (4.4%) (ibid.: 24; see also Rossato 2014 for a detailed analysis of these statistics).

The immigrant background of children who end up acting as language brokers comprises three possible case scenarios: i. they were born in another country and moved to the host country as children or adolescents; ii. they were born from foreign parents' in their new country of residence; iii. they were born from parents belonging to a linguistic minority. In the first case, they either arrive in the new country to join one or both their parents or enter the country as unaccompanied minor, and they are very likely to have no previous knowledge or competence of the language spoken in the host country. In the second instance, they are born in their family's new country of residence and one or both their parents are foreign. In this instance children may acquire first the language(s) spoken at home by their parents and then be exposed to Italian once they access the educational system or they may acquire both Italian and the language(s) spoken by their parents at home before enrolling at school. In the third scenario, scenario children are born from parents who are native citizens of a specific country but belong to a different linguistic community (e.g. from deaf parents who use sign language).

[2] The latest statistical data provided by Osservatorio Regionale del Fenomeno Regionale (2013) show that in 2012 the four main countries of origin were as follows: Rumania, Albania, Morocco, China.

[3] Italian citizenship is currently regulated by Law no. 91/1992, which is based on *ius sanguinis*, whereby children inherit their parents' citizenship. Children of foreign origin who are not of Italian descent and who were born on Italian soil can claim Italian citizenship after continuous legal residence in Italy up to legal age (18) (http://www.esteri.it/mae/en/italiani_nel_mondo/serviziconsolari/cittadinanza.html).

The present study will analyse the language brokering experiences described by children who were not born in Italy.

2. Provision of Language Services in Italy

In countries with a more established immigration history (e.g., in Europe, the United Kingdom and Sweden) the implementation of integration policies by the central and local governments led to the creation of linguistic services (in the form of community interpreting) aimed at facilitating access to a range of services in a variety of languages (Roberts 1997).

A comparative study of interpreting service provision around the world (Ozolins 2000) showed that there is

> a spectrum of response, ranging from those countries that deny the existence of multilingual communication issues, to reliance on ad hoc services, to generic language services, to fully comprehensive responses (21).

Ozolins identifies four macro factors that affect provision of public service interpreting:

- "Increasing linguistic diversity
- Reliance on public sector finance
- Institution-led, rather than profession-led standards and practices
- Cross-sectoral interpreting needs that conflict with usual sector-specific policy development." (2010: 194)

These factors influence language policy-making in all countries, however countries differ widely in how they respond to linguistic diversity in terms of a variety of factors that include general attitudes towards immigrants; different models of government service provision; and whether specific sectors (e.g. court or medical interpreting) are favoured over others. It is also worth mentioning that even in those countries like the UK or Sweden, where the provision of language has always been enforced and promoted, the political climate might influence whether linguistic services may survive or not.

In Italy, as in other European countries, despite the increasingly multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural nature of contemporary Italian society, and regardless of the urgent and enormous need for linguistic and cultural mediation services aimed at allowing migrants to access fundamental services such as health and social care, education and occupation is met

(Antonini 2014), in the belief that the language barriers created by increased immigration would/will be transitional in nature and that problems related to increased linguistic diversity in the country will decrease and eventually disappear with the acquisition, eventually, of the host language (O'Rourke and Castillo 2009; Meyer *et al*. 2010), this demand is generally not met by an adequate provision of linguistic services that would enable foreigners to fully access all these services.

Consequently, despite the opposition expressed by professional interpreters and translators, professional categories and associations, which consider non-professional linguistic mediation as a practice to be discouraged and condemned, the use of non-professionals is the rule rather than the exception (Rudvin 2006) and this form of linguistic mediation is generally considered a necessary evil.

This implies that whenever a language barrier to effective communication emerges and it is not possible to resort to the services of a qualified interpreter/translator "family members and friends will be used in hospital or social service settings, and unqualified bilinguals as police and court interpreters" (Ibid.: 60). To date, this situation still obtains notwithstanding current legislation on immigration which establishes that public offices are required to resort to the services of linguistic and/or cultural mediators not only to interpret and translate for foreign families, but also to facilitate conflict management, as well as to provide counselling and assistance in a variety of settings, such as the school, health care, police stations, local employment and administrative offices.[4] Indeed, the reality is radically different. The current situation in terms of the training of professional linguistic and cultural mediator and the actual use of these figures is again contradictory. As Youmbi observes:

> tre decenni dopo le prime ondate d'immigrazione in Italia, l'attività di mediazione culturale, entrata nel sistema socio-formativo italiano con l'avvento dell'immigrazione, non gode ancora di uno statuto giuridico anche se in alcuni enti locali esistono degli albi professionali. Inoltre, in questi anni ci sono state anche delle diffidenze nei confronti dei mediatori operanti in diversi settori quali l'educazione, la sanità, la giustizia, l'amministrazione, ecc. A partire dal 2001,

[4] Laws N. 40 of 6 Marzo 1998 and N. 189 of 30 July 2002 establish that «the State, the Regions, the Provinces and Town Councils within their competencies promote the establishment of conventions with occupational agencies, and inside their structures, for the training of foreigners holding a residence permit valid for at least two years, as intercultural mediators, with the purpose of facilitating interactions between individual administrations and foreign people belonging to different ethnic, national, linguistic e religious groups» (Law N. 40/98, art. 40, par. 1). Furthermore, Art. 36 of the same law envisages the need to establish "communication criteria and modes with the families of foreign students, even with the aid of qualified cultural mediators".

> molte università italiane hanno istituito dei corsi di laurea in mediazione linguistica e culturale tra le loro offerte formative per formare delle figure qualificate, di nazionalità italiana e straniera, e scientificamente preparate per affrontare il fenomeno migratorio. L'istituzione di questi corsi di laurea ha segnato un salto di qualità rispetto ai corsi professionali, quasi esclusivamente riservati ai cittadini immigrati, e hanno consentito di ridurre le diffidenze e le distanze riguardo alla figura del mediatore. Tuttavia questa professione continua a confermarsi come un'attività precaria con caratteristiche volontaristiche e richiamata spesso in caso di emergenza (2011: 7).[5]

Hence, despite the acknowledgement on behalf of the Italian government of the need for trained linguistic and cultural mediators, the establishment of several graduate and postgraduate degree courses on interpreting, translation and linguistic and cultural mediation, be it for economic or cultural reasons or trust issues, members of immigrant groups have to rely on non-professional mediators, who, very often happen to be their children. This means, as a consequence, that very often child language brokers represent the only option in overcoming those language barriers that would otherwise determine unequal access to fundamental services. Despite the essential role played by child language brokers (with all the consequent economic and social repercussions) in facilitating interactions between their families and the institutions of the country of residence, the invisibility of their mediation activities is even more striking. Indeed, in Italy there is absolutely no mention of CLB whatsoever in any law, regulation or official document. As a matter of fact, there are no available guidelines that provide guidance in relation to the regulation of language brokering activities performed by children. The only official and direct reference to CLB in schools is contained in a circular on the integration of foreign pupils published in 1989 (http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm301_89.html), and which encourages the

[5] Three decades after the first migration waves to Italy, the activity of cultural mediation, which entered the Italian social and educational system with the inception of immigration, is still not regulated by any juridical norm even though some local bodies have created professional associations. Moreover, in the last few years, there has been diffidence towards mediators working in sectors such as education, health, justice, administration, etc. Since 2001, in order to tackle the new immigration trends, many Italian universities have been offering degree courses in linguistic and cultural mediation aimed at training qualified professional figures of both Italian and foreign nationality. The creation of these degree courses represented an improvement on the existing professional courses, which were almost exclusively aimed at training foreign citizens, and contributed to redress diffidence issues towards the figure of the mediator. Nonetheless, this profession is still seen as a precarious and voluntary activity that is used only in emergency situations. (My translation.)

involvement of pupils of different ethnic origins, who have some competence in the Italian language, in assisting their peers who do not speak Italian.

What is even more striking is the fact that the new guidelines for the welcoming and integration of foreign students published in 2014 by the Ministry of Education, University and Research[6], only provide clear indications on how to welcome and assist foreign students who enrol in Italian schools, but do not even acknowledge the existence of CLB and the fact that in the majority of cases it is the only available option to help teachers, students and their parents overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.

This paper will try to provide an overall picture of the language brokers' experience by framing it within the wider context of how they experienced moving to another country.

3. Literature review

CLB can be defined as those "interpreting and translation activities carried out by bilingual children who mediate linguistically and culturally in formal and informal contexts and domains for their family, friends as well as members of the linguistic community to which they belong" (Antonini: Forthcoming).[7] The first term used to refer to this form of linguistic mediation, natural translation, was coined by Harris to describe "the translation done by bilinguals in everyday circumstances and without any special training for it" (1977: 6). Other terms that over the years have been introduced and used are "family interpreters" (Valdés 2002) and "para-phrasing" (Orellana et al 2003). The term that became more widely used, child language brokering, was introduced by Shannon (1990) in order to provide a more accurate description of the wide and complex social role played by children who interpret/translate for their families.

However, it is important to note, as Weisskirch remarks, that "regardless of the label placed on this practice, these children and adolescents perform sophisticated metalinguistic and cultural transformations in conveying meaning between two or more adults and/or in translating text for others" (2007: 546). Indeed, when children interpret/translate they are not merely conveying a message from a language into another because they

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6 http://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/linee_guida_integrazione_alunni_stranieri.pdf

7 However, as observed by Antonini (Forthcomin) it is important to note that "while CLB is generally perceived and studied as a phenomenon involving members of immigrant groups and communities, […] it is also a practice performed by children who belong to specific minority language groups, such as children of deaf adults (CODAs), who have grown up learning and using a signed and a spoken language (Preston 1996; Napier 2008).

> have to communicate the sense of what is being said, but they also have to be responding to the power relationships, the cultural backgrounds, the ages and experiences of the other speakers, as well as many wider contextual issues such as the degree of trust by the adults in the child, the short, medium and long-term consequences of what is brokered, the number of other speakers involved (Hall and Guéry 2010: 34).

The study of CLB is relatively young, yet, following Harris (2008), it is possible to distinguish three main stages. The first one, the precursors, can be identified with the decades that preceded the publication in 1973 of the seminal paper by Brain Harris on natural translation. Until then any reference and analysis of CLB was usually a by-product an observed phenomenon that occurred within studies of bilingualism in sociolinguistic and educational research. However, even though "the precursors made valuable and sometimes copious observations, […] they did not realise the significance of what they were observing". (Harris 2008: 3). By the mid-1990s "despite there being a large literature on bilingualism, and despite the phenomenon of child translators being readily acknowledged by people working in various fields, with a few exceptions the topic appears only peripherally in the research literature" (Hall and Sham 1998). The publication of an article by McQuillan and Tse in 1995 marked the beginning of the second phase which was characterised by an upsurge in the publication of studies on CLB on a variety of issues and topics, which focussed primarily on the who, what, where, and how of brokering; the quantification of prevalence rates of CLB; the effect on children's cultural identities, language development, school achievement, and affective responses. (e.g. Tse 1995a, 1995b; McQuillan and Tse 1995). Until very recently, research in this field was still very fragmented in nature and dispersed across many disciplines. The beginning of the third stage could be identified with the will of and need to bring together scholars dealing with CLB from different disciplinary perspectives and it may also represent the coming of age of CLB studies. It is a phase in which scholars are acknowledging the research that is being carried out across many disciplines and, as Orellana observes,

> dialoguing across disciplinary and methodological boundaries allows us see aspects of the phenomenon that may be as invisible as the phenomenon itself once was. They may help us to ask questions that we might not otherwise have been addressed, and to interpret our own findings in more complex, nuanced, and robust ways. (Forthcoming)

One of the main outcomes of this new shift in the study of CLB is that in quite a short time span this practice has become visible to those “political, educational, research, policy and, inevitably, adult perspectives" (Hall and Guéry 2010: 29) that until a few years ago were not aware of its existence, even though they were benefitting from it.

Thanks to the work that has been done so far, it is possible to rely on substantial data that help us understand some fundamental facts about CLB.

In general terms, research on CLB has highlighted the fact that prevalence rates of CLB range from 57% to 100% across studies (with the majority of studies reporting percentages above 80%) (Straits 2010). There is, therefore, agreement on the fact that children belonging to a linguistic minority, at some point in their lives, are likely to be involved in language brokering activities. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that CLB is common among a variety of ethnic communities/groups, and that it involves children from both first and second generation status.

Research has shown that children usually start brokering between 8 and 12 years of age (Morales and Hanson, 2005; Tse, 1995; 1996). Results on when first generation immigrant children start language brokering indicate that they usually start doing so within one to five years of their arrival in the country (although data from the In MedIO PUER(I) project found that children may start language brokering just after a few months). The contexts in which children language broker (by interpreting oral exchanges/interactions and translating a variety of documents and printed material) are wide-ranging and include all the formal and informal places and situations in which their families come into contact with people and institutions of their new country of residence: their homes, shops, on the streets, schools, post offices, banks, doctors’ offices, trade unions, job centres, etcetera.

Studies that have focussed on the effects of CLB on the educational and psychological development of language brokers (McQuillan and Tse 1995; Buriel et al. 1998; Weisskirch and Alva 2002; Dorner et al. 2007) have shown that when child language brokers are required to take on responsibilities in situations in which adults would normally be in control they may experience mixed feelings and perceive CLB either/both as a cause of stress and a burden and/or an experience that they find enjoyable (Cohen et al. 1999; Hall and Robinson 1999; Parke and Buriel 1998; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Weisskirch 2007) and which they are proud to undertake (Love and Buriel 2007), but also, as Pimentel and Sevin (2009) point out, a practice with a positive impact in terms of academic achievement (Dorner et al. 2007), developmental outcomes (Halgunseth 2003), cognitive and metalinguistic abilities

(Acoach and Webb 2004; Orellana and Reynolds 2008) and bilingual/bicultural development (Acoach and Webb 2004; Buriel et al. 1998; Tse, 1996). Research has also shown that by taking on such responsibilities and by mediating linguistically on a regular (often daily) basis, these children may develop cognitive, social and sociolinguistic skills in advance and more rapidly as compared to children who do not language broker (Morales and Hanson 2005; Shannon 1990).

Despite the progress and expansion of research on CLB, there are still many aspects of this phenomenon that are under researched and which would contribute to elucidating this practice in all its complexity, which "include gender- and family-related dynamics, identity construction, attitudes towards this practice held by all the parties involved, the strategies that language brokers adopt and implement when translating, and culture brokering" (Antonini Forthcoming).

In Italy, notwithstanding the increasingly multilinguistic, multiethnic and multicultural nature of European and Italian society, particularly in some regions such as Emilia Romagna, no attention has so far been paid either by governmental or academic institutions to CLB. Before the beginning of the In MedIO PUER(I) project in 2007, the only mention to any aspect or issue related to this practice was in the form of passing remarks within studies focussed on other topics.

The In MedIO PUER(I) Project aimed at bridging this gap and to produce the first in-depth and broad-based study of the phenomenon of CLB in Italy and Europe.

4. The In MedIO PUER(I) Project and Traduttori in Erba

The In MedIO PUER(I) Project was designed to study CLB in with the purpose of

- mapping out this phenomenon and confirming its practice among all the linguistic and ethnic communities that live in Emilia Romagna;
- providing a detailed description of all the participants involved as well as the situations and contexts in which children are likely to language broker;
- assessing how CLB influences various aspects of the life and development of language brokers;
- gathering data on the children's, parents', teachers' and institutional representatives' attitudes towards this practice.

The targeted population included former language brokers, primary and secondary level education teachers, representatives and operators of a variety of public institutions. Moreover,

contrary to most studies carried out in this field, the In MedIO PUER(I) research project did not target a specific ethnic or linguistic community/group. This study of CLB in Italy relied on a multi-method approach, comprising semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation in classrooms, questionnaires, and the collection of written and graphic narratives. The collection of narratives, which will be the focus of this paper, was carried out by means of two editions of a school contexts which involved pupils attending primary and secondary (middle) schools in one of the region's provinces, Forlì-Cesena.

The school contest entitled *Traduttori in Erba* (in English, Translators in Bud) was initially devised to make the project known to teachers especially in primary and secondary (middle) schools. However, thanks to the success it obtained among children and teachers and the high number of visual and written narratives that were submitted, it became one of the main sources of data of the research project.

The school contest was organised with a set of rules and an official jury which had the task of selecting the winners. The rules of the contest were explained to the classes by the teachers without the presence of the researchers. The rules stated the topic of the contest (to describe a CLB event that the children had either performed or witnessed) and how the visual and written narratives were to be submitted (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Description and rules of the contest

traduttori in erba

il progetto

Il gruppo di ricerca InMedIO PUER(I) del Dipartimento di Studi Interdisciplinari su Traduzione, Lingue e Culture dell'Università di Bologna compie attività di ricerca sulla (inter)mediazione linguistica e culturale ad opera di bambini e ragazzi figli di immigrati, un fenomeno estremamente diffuso nella realtà sempre più multilinguistica, multietnica e multiculturale delle società europee, in particolare di quella italiana ed emiliano-romagnola.

Il Concorso TRADUTTORI IN ERBA è stato pensato per sensibilizzare insegnanti, famiglie e allievi riguardo ad un fenomeno che molto raramente riceve l'attenzione che merita, nonostante il valore e l'importanza che queste attività hanno per l'integrazione delle comunità di immigrati nella nostra società.

Il gruppo di ricerca InMedIO PUER(I) promuove un concorso di disegno e di composizione di temi rivolto agli alunni delle scuole primarie e delle scuole superiori di primo grado del Comune di Forlì.

Gli alunni delle classi delle scuole primarie e delle scuole superiori di primo grado di Forlì sono invitati ad elaborare e proporre un disegno accompagnato da una breve didascalia e/o un tema che descriva una qualsiasi situazione in cui hanno potuto osservare o hanno di fatto tradotto per i genitori, per un familiare o per un amico una lettera (o un qualsiasi testo scritto) o una conversazione (in banca, dal medico, in un negozio, a scuola).

COME SI PARTECIPA

SCUOLE PRIMARIE I CICLO (I, II)
è richiesto ai ragazzi di realizzare un disegno con didascalia.

SCUOLE PRIMARIE II CICLO (III, IV, V)
è richiesto ai ragazzi di realizzare un disegno con didascalia o un elaborato.

SCUOLE SECONDARIE I GRADO
è richiesto un elaborato.

la selezione

Un gruppo di 10 esperti, individuati dai promotori tra i docenti della Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori e da rappresentanti delle istituzioni della città di Forlì, costituirà la giuria del concorso che segnalerà, attraverso una apposita scheda, una rosa di quattro temi/disegni vincitori.

La premiazione dei temi/disegni vincitori, aperta alle scuole partecipanti ed al pubblico, avrà luogo nel mese di giugno 2011 presso la Sala Comunale del Municipio di Forlì.

Le scuole dovranno comunicare l'adesione al progetto e il numero delle classi che aderiscono, specificando anche il numero complessivo dei bambini partecipanti per ogni scuola, entro e non oltre il **20 marzo 2011**.

The children carried out the task of drawing/writing their narrative in class, so that teachers could give further explanations and help those children with weaker writing skills in Italian write down their experience. After the announcement of the winners, the prizes (consisting in vouchers for school material for both the children who had won and their schools) were awarded at an official ceremony officiated by the mayor of the town of Forlì at the presence of many local authorities and the local press. The winners received a plaque engraved with *Traduttore ad Honorem* in front of their class mates and teachers.

5. Narrative Data Analysis: An Holistic Description of CLB

As highlighted in the literature review, studies on CLB generally approach this phenomenon by analysing particular aspects and issues and by focussing on specific ethnic and linguistic communities. The present study will attempt to provide a holistic description of child language brokers' (from a variety of ethnic and linguistic communities) experiences since the day they first arrive in Italy. Hence, it will focus on children and adolescents who were not born in Italy. The analysis of the narratives collected through the school contest showed that these children are not only dealing with the positive and negative impact of having to

language broker for their families, but that they are required to deal with a wide array of demanding and difficult situations and experiences. The issues and themes gathered from the narratives can be summarized as follows:

a. moving and adapting to life in a new country;
b. the first day of school;
c. literacy brokering;
d. the who, what, where and when of CLB;
e. identity issues related to biculturalism;
f. bi/multilingualism;
g. emotional and psychological impact;
h. the use and awareness of interpreting/translating strategies;
i. parent-child relationship, e.g. parentification and adultification issues;
j. the role played by Italian child language brokers.

With the aim of showing how complex and multifaceted is the experience of being a child language broker, the analysis presented in the present paper will focus on issues a, b, d, and g.

5.1 Moving and Adapting to Life in a New Country

Some of the most poignant narratives that were submitted for the school contest contain descriptions of the impact and cultural shock represented by moving to Italy and experiencing and adapting to life in this new country. Examples 1 and 2, depict the first encounter with a new place, a new environment, different colours, smells and temperatures as compared to the children's country of origin.

(1) This wonderful life brought me in country that is more modern than Burkina Faso: Italy. In this country I ended up in Forlì. I feel lonely and desperate. From that moment my life changed. I didn't know anybody, I couldn't understand what people said, I cried out of sadness and fear and it was full winter. Some white stuff was falling from the grey sky. Snow. My life has now changed in this new land without the smell of warm earth that I could smell in my small and poor village. […] In this new and strange town I never met anybody like me. Thanks to God's help I met a true friend. […] A friend who had my same skin colour and who came from my country. […] Mazou, my little personal translator, became like a brother to me.

(2) This is my fifth year in Italy: I like it here, but it was really hard to get to this point; I still get the shivers when I think about my first months in Italy! 27 April 2005 was my first day in Italy. I was amazed when I stepped out of the airport because everything was different from what I had imagined. When I was in China I thought that the city where to which I was going to move would be like Milan, Rome, Turin, with skyscapers, but it wasn't like that. When I arrived in Forlì, I thought we were in the countryside and not in a town. The first ten months were the worst and most tiring period of my life because I didn't know Italian, I didn't have any friends and didn't get along with my parents: I hadn't seen them in years, so to me they were like strangers, I couldn't even remember what my mother looked like. It was a difficult period: I wasn't used to eating Italian food.

5.2 The First Day of School

Quite a few narratives contain very touching descriptions of how these children felt on their first day of school, when they were introduced to the class and they could not understand a word of Italian. The images used by a 14-year old girl from Rumania (in Example 3) give a very clear idea of how frightening the experience of the first day in a new school in a new country can be, especially when the child cannot communicate in the new language and is still adjusting to the new culture:.

(3) I entered my new and still unknown school for the first time, and that was the most difficult day of my life. I didn't know the language, I didn't know anything about this school, the teachers, not even about this country. I was confused, scared. I felt really bad. Then I stood alone in front of 25 class mates and I thought that the world was about to come to an end. It was very strange for me. I had no words. Everybody was looking at me but I felt like a naked tree in late autumn. I thought that the sun would never be in my life again. There was a Romanian boy who spoke my language and that had given me some hope but it turned out that I didn't find in him what I hoped I would find. I can't remember anything else about that day because I really don't know how I got through it. However, a step at a time I began to study the language with the help of my Italian language teacher. My school mates were friendly.

A similar experience is recounted by a 12-year old Moroccan girl:

(4) The first day I arrived [in Italy] I found myself in another reality, everything was different from what I had imagined, it felt like being on another world and I felt disoriented. On my first day of school, since I felt detached from my world, I purposely glared at all my new class mates. But after a few weeks I had already become used to my class and felt at ease, thanks to a classmate who came from my same country and who helped me by translating everything my teachers said.

Example 4 illustrates the fundamental role played by child language brokers in helping other children become adjusted to life in a new country and to a new school system. However, as the next two examples show, helping other children, even when they have gone through the same experiences, is not always an easy task, and language brokers may feel at a loss and not know how to help. The narratives in examples 5 and 6 were written by two Chinese children who on different occasions were asked to language broker for the same girl. They describe her behaviour and how they are at a loss to help her:

(5) I'm 12, I come from China and I've already been living in Italy for three years. Ling and I some times help children from the first year. The teacher tells us what I have to translate and I tell Elena who is a Chinese girl. Elena often does understand words because she does not know their meaning, for instance "snow" is a term she does not know because she has never seen snow. Some times, when she doesn't know that word, she cries. She is a very shy girl, she doesn't speak with her classmates and she doesn't speak much with me either. She can't read Italian, and Ling and I help her a lot, but she still cannot read because she cannot understand what they ask her. She cannot write in Chinese and she doesn't understand the meaning of what I tell her, so it is difficult for me to help her.

(6) I am 12, I was born in China and I've been living in Italy for two and half years. Some times teacher Gianni asked Shu Bin and I to go to his classroom to help a Chinese girl who has just arrived in Italy. Her name is Elena, she's five, she doesn't speak Italian and her classmates think that she is very stupid. Her classmates think that she is stupid because she doesn't want to do anything, but she behaves like this because she can't understand what they ask her and she would rather stay at home. I

> explain many things in Chinese, but it is difficult for her to speak Italian and she only reads her Mickey Mouse book. I keep putting it under her desk but she takes it out again and that makes me very angry.

Italian schools can resort to a limited number of hours of professional linguistic and cultural mediation provided by the local governments or by NGOs on the basis of the number of foreign children who are enrolled there, which, however are not sufficient to cover the need for this kind of service. When professional help is not available the only alternative is to have a school mate from the same or another class (and/or year) interpret for newly arrived foreign children who cannot communicate in Italian. When even this option is not available, these children (as the narrative in Example 3 clearly shows) are on their own.

There are some noteworthy initiatives that have been put into place in the UK and Canada that are aimed at helping child language brokers deal with newly arrived children. One initiative in particular is the Young Interpreters Scheme, a programme devised by Hampshire Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) to provide

> bilingual children and young people with the very tools, help and guidance needed to interpret and help others more effectively. The scheme also aims to raise the profile of these pupils by giving them a valued role in their school setting so that their skills are given the recognition they deserve (http://www3.hants.gov.uk/education/emtas/goodpractice/ema-hyis.htm).

The websites of this initiative also provides guidelines as per the dos and don’ts related to using children as interpreters and provides a link to research carried out in schools in the UK which resulted in the development of a Guide to Good Practice for the use of CLB in school settings (Cline et al. http://child-language-brokering.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/9/3/14938884/clbis_support_good_practice_guide_v.3.1.pdf).

5.3 The Who, What, Where and When of CLB

Both the visual and the written narratives submitted by the children who took part in the school contest provide a detailed description of the situations and settings in which they had language brokered. The drawing in Figure 1 was submitted by a ten-year old girl and illustrates very well the variety of contexts and situations in she interpreted which include: At the hospital, at school in pizzerias, at the butcher’s, at the baker’s, at the bank, chemist’s and

supermarket. Primary-school age children generally describe having brokered in both formal and informal situations which include peer-to-peer (for friends and school mates) and child-to-adult (for their parents and/or family members and teachers, for instance) interactions.

Figure 2: CLB contexts

(7) The main place where we play this role is obviously the school and three of us remember that, at the beginning of our school experience in Italy, there were other Chinese kids who were our first personal translators because they helped us understand what our teachers and classmates said to us. At the beginning of the school year, for instance, a new Chinese boy who could not speak Italian arrived. Since then, every time a teacher asks us to translate into Chinese the things he is supposed to do and that he does not understand, we help him in any possible way even though it is not easy because we also need to follow the lesson that is taking place in the classroom.

Another situation is when our family members or friends or acquaintances ask us to go with them to the doctors'. We are glad to help them, but it is not an easy task because we have to answer the doctor's questions who asks the patient what the

> problem of the person we are helping is and what are their symptoms. At the end of the consultation the doctor prescribes the medicines and we have to explain to the patient how to take them; and it is exactly in that moment that we feel the burden of our responsibility as translators because we cannot make mistakes since health is no laughing matter!

Example 7 above is an excerpt from a narrative written by three 14-year old Chinese girls who language broker on a regular basis for their families and for other members of their community. As language brokers grow older the interactions which they are required to mediate linguistically become more complex and formal. Such interactions may take place at the hospital, at the police station, at the lawyer's, but also at the trade union, and they may involve the translation of complex forms and documents. This also means that they are confronted with texts and situations that even an adult native speaker of Italian would find quite demanding in terms of the vocabulary and knowledge required (Antonini Forthcoming). Indeed, as Hall and Guéry aptly observe:

> the demands made upon children when literacy brokering can range from the relatively trivial, maybe just writing out a note for the milkman, to the massively complex, like helping a father fill out a tax form, but at the higher level the children are responding to challenges that their fellow students are unlikely to meet until they are adults (2010: 41).

5.4 The Emotional and Psychological Impact of CLB

Affective responses on behalf of children towards the CLB activities in which they are involved vary consistently according to the contexts and situations, as well as the people who are involved in these linguistically mediated interactions.

Primary school age children, hence younger children tend to express more carefree and happy feelings towards their roles as language brokers, which may be a result of the fact that they have not yet been involved in complex and emotionally burdensome situations.

A 10-year old girl from Tunisia explains in her narrative how an increasing number foreign kids enrol at her school and the fact that when they arrive they cannot speak Italian and thus cannot express themselves or understand the subjects explained in class. At this point she takes charge of the situation and translates for this kids and for the teacher. As can been seen in Example 8, another important aspect that emerges from this narrative is the fact that she

actually reflected on her role as a language broker only when she had to write this composition, and this also made her understand that one small gesture is extremely important for the people who benefit from it.

(8) When I do it, I feel afraid because I'm afraid of making mistakes and if I made a mistake it would be very embarrassing, (even if I don't think that anyone would notice it), but anyway, everyone would exclaim: "Ah, ah, ah…, she doesn't even know her own language!" But this is not the only thing I feel when I translate, there are others: I feel important at that moment, I understand how useful my act is (without me there would be total chaos because the teacher would not be able to communicate with the pupil and vice versa). Another example which might seem trivial regards the kid who has just arrives and who, by not understanding the rules of the game, might get excluded.
By writing and thinking about this topic I have realized how a small gesture can have such a big impact.

However, children who are involved in more challenging situations and settings where sensitive issues are likely to be raised tend to report mixed or negative feelings.
Negative feelings are usually associated with the fear of making mistakes when speaking either Italian or their other language(s), the fear of mistranslating, the fear of the consequences of mistranslating or misunderstanding what is being said, the fact that often they translate for family members, people they love, and have to deal with sensitive issues (health-related) from which children are generally shielded.
Example 9 is an excerpt from a narrative submitted by a 14-year old girl from Bangladesh. who arrived in Italy when she was 11. She translates mainly for her mother and grandmother and even though the feelings she expresses convey how hard it is for her to perform the role of the language broker she states that she is glad to do it because her mother is always grateful:

(9) I have some times helped my mother at the doctor's, but when I talk to him I am afraid of getting thing wrong, so I listen, I listen in silence until my head aches because I am concentrating so much. When I tell my mother what he said, she always asks me the same question because she is not sure that I have understood correctly. But I do understand, it's just that I can't really find the words in Italian.

The same level of anxiety is expressed by a 13-year old boy from Bangladesh who at the time of his writing had been in Italy for less than two years. He reports language brokering for family members in contexts that include at the hospital, the police station, and the bank and he sometimes has to skip school because many offices are open only in the morning. He accepts this task because he is the eldest child and he must help his parents. In the following excerpt he talks about when he had to assist his grandmother at the hospital and he was asked to translate what the doctor had prescribed:

(10) Once the doctor told me that my grandmother was very ill and that she had to take important medicines: he started saying all these difficult words and I got very confused, I was afraid for my grandmother's health.

The same three girls who described their CLB activities in Example 7 also describe the impact that this practice has on their lives. As shown in Example 11, children and adolescents who language broker are always very aware of the responsibilities they have when interpreting in specific contexts and do not take their role as language brokers lightly as they are fully aware of the implications and consequences that may result from a mistranslation.

(11) In this situation we feel all the burden of the responsibility that our parents give us, because they do not speak Italian or don't speak it very well and, thus, they are not able to understand what they are required to do.
Our experience helps you understand that being "translators" means doing things that boys and girls of our own age would not normally do. It is not easy to spend a whole afternoon at the trade union's or at the Police station, because we have to do something important for our family; but we have to do it because it is our duty! We are really sorry when we have to miss a day or a few hours of school, but we can't say no to our parents or friends who need our help!

6. **Conclusions**

The main aim of this paper was to provide a description of language service provision in Italy and of the reasons and circumstances that determine how and why children end up interpreting and translating for their families.

CLB is not a practice that can be studied and addressed in isolation from the whole immigration which starts, as is the case of the children who took part with their narratives in the school contest, when they live the country where they were born and arrive in Italy.

The narratives that were presented in this paper where chosen with the purpose of giving an insight into child language brokers' opinions and feelings on their experience as linguistic and cultural intermediaries.

Research on CLB has covered many aspects of this practice, yet there are still many areas that are unchartered and that need to be made the object of extensive research.

Studies on CLB should include a wider variety of immigrant communities; they should develop methodologies to assess the accuracy and proficiency of language brokers; they should psychosocial variables; and, as indicated in 5.2, it should work alongside institutions with the objective of informing and training children and all the other parties involved on how and when it is appropriate for a child to interpret, thus empowering the children and guiding them in making the right choices for their and other people's benefit because

> Whatever anyone may feel about whether or not children 'should' do this work, or how we might view their competencies, they *are* doing it, and in new immigrant communities, the practice is *normative*. It is one of many "translanguaging" practices (García 2008) that bilingual and multilingual youth engage in every day (Orellana Forthcoming).

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