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Problems of children's involvement in interpreter-mediated meetings between their teachers and their parents

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Abstract: This paper focuses on six interpreter-mediated interactions between teachers, migrant parents, and their children in Italian primary schools, a topic that has not yet been widely examined in the literature on public service interpreting. The analysis draws on audio-recorded interpreter-mediated interactions collected in Italy during a European Horizon 2020 project. The paper shows the barriers that exist in engaging children in these interactions. The difficulties observed are varied and more challenging to overcome than those hindering parental involvement. While Childhood Studies shows that the important enhancement of children's agency in social contexts needs particular non-hierarchical structures of interaction, in the analysed interpreter-mediated interactions the mutual positioning of teachers, parents and mediators does not allow this enhancement. Thus, the involved children stay silent, they provide minimal responses when addressed, they show feelings of distress, and their few initiatives are not supported by the other participants. The paper shows the reasons for the failure of both teachers' actions and mediators' coordination to involve children and support their exercise of agency.

Keywords: agency, interpreter-mediated interaction, coordination, teaching, children

Resumen: Este artículo se centra en seis interacciones mediadas por intérpretes entre profesores, padres migrantes y sus hijos en escuelas primarias italianas, un tema que aún no ha sido ampliamente examinado en la literatura sobre la interpretación en los servicios públicos. El análisis se basa en interacciones mediadas por intérpretes grabadas en audio y recogidas en Italia durante un proyecto en el marco del programa europeo Horizonte 2020. El trabajo muestra las barreras que existen para involucrar a los niños en estas interacciones. Las dificultades obser-

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vadas son variadas y más difíciles de superar que las que dificultan la participación de los padres. Mientras que los estudios de la infancia demuestran que para potenciar la agencia de los niños y de las niñas en contextos sociales se necesitan estructuras de interacción no jerárquicas específicas, en las interacciones mediadas por intérpretes analizadas el posicionamiento mutuo de profesores, padres y mediadores no permite esta potenciación. Así, los niños y las niñas implicados permanecen en silencio, dan respuestas mínimas cuando se les dirige la palabra, muestran sentimientos de angustia y sus pocas iniciativas no reciben el apoyo de los demás participantes. Este artículo presenta las razones del fracaso de las acciones de los profesores y de la coordinación de los mediadores para involucrar a los niños y a las niñas y para apoyar su agencia.

Zusammenfassung: Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht sechs dolmetschervermittelte Gesprächssituationen zwischen Lehrern und Eltern mit Migrationshintergrund mit Beteiligung deren Kinder in einigen italienischen Grundschulen – ein Thema, das in der Literatur zum Dolmetschen im öffentlichen Dienst nicht behandelt wird. Die Analyse stützt sich auf Audioaufzeichnungen von dolmetschervermittelten Gesprächssituationen, die im Rahmen eines europäischen Horizon 2020-Projekts in Italien gesammelt wurden. Der Beitrag zeigt die Probleme der Einbeziehung von Kindern in diese Gespräche auf, die sich von denen der Beteiligung ihrer Eltern unterscheiden und schwerwiegender sind. Während die Kindheitsforschung darauf hinweist, dass die Erweiterung der Handlungsfähigkeit von Kindern in sozialen Kontexten besondere nicht-hierarchische Interaktionsstrukturen erfordert, lässt die gegenseitige Positionierung von Lehrern, Eltern und Vermittlern in den untersuchten dolmetschervermittelten Gesprächssituationen diese Erweiterung nicht zu. Infolgedessen schweigen die beteiligten Kinder, sie geben minimale Antworten, wenn sie angesprochen werden, sie zeigen Gefühle der Verzweiflung und ihre wenigen Initiativen werden nicht unterstützt. Der Beitrag untersucht die Gründe für das Scheitern der Vermittlerversuche, die Kinder in die dolmetschervermittelten Gespräche miteinzubeziehen und ihre Handlungsfähigkeit zu fördern.

1 Introduction

Multilingualism represents one of the basic principles of European Union language policies, which seek to protect the languages spoken by minorities and encourage both multiculturalism and linguistic pluralism (www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/142/language-policy). The importance of linguistic diversity has also been recognised by a recent European H2020 research project

(CHILD-UP, Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation, GA 822400), in which multilingualism was positively valued in six out of seven participating countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom), with the only exception of Poland. Despite acknowledging the value of multilingualism, this research project also highlighted that in the school setting, which should play a key role in supporting and promoting linguistic diversity, the measures implemented do not always harness the benefits of students' multilingualism. As shown by a survey conducted within the same research project, the highest percentage of teachers who identified and used resources to support migrant children's native languages was 34.1 % in countries such as Finland and Sweden, followed by Italy with 15.7 % and Germany with 2.5 % (Report available in the project website <https://www.child-up.eu/project-outcomes/>).

One possible way of promoting migrant children's multilingualism while facilitating their education access is through the use of translation and interpretation services. According to Cronin (2006), interpreting is an effective way to enhance positive relationships that preserve linguistic and cultural differences, promoting "dialogue across difference" (p. 72) and participating "in the strategic micro-cosmopolitan move of not making difference synonymous with disconnection" (p. 139). However, the above-mentioned survey revealed that only 34.9 % of teachers recognized interpreting as a tool to support both children's involvement in school activities and their parents' participation. The scarce use of interpreting may be considered a problem especially when communicating with migrant parents who have not had the same opportunity to learn the local language as their children. This was also highlighted by the migrant parents who participated in the survey: 34.2 % of them claimed that the lack of language skills made communication with their children's teachers challenging.

Given the self-reported perceptions of both teachers and migrant parents obtained by the survey above, which on the one hand showed the theoretical value of multilingualism, and on the other hand the actual difficulties in implementing practices that promote it, especially at school, this paper sets out to examine real-life interactions between Italian teachers and migrant parents & children. In particular, the focus is on interpreter-mediated interactions with the aim to investigate whether interpreting is an effective way not only to enhance positive linguistic relationships, but also to promote migrant children's participation and exercise of agency. The analysis draws on audio-recorded data collected during the above-mentioned European Horizon 2020 project. The corpus includes 18 transcriptions taken from interactions carried out in primary and nursery schools (respectively 16 and 2 transcriptions) in Northern Italy. Mediation is provided by professional intercultural mediators (Baraldi and Gavioli, 2012; Merlini, 2009;

Pittarello, 2009), and involves the most common languages spoken by migrants in the area: Chinese (seven transcriptions), Twi (four transcriptions), Arabic (three transcriptions), English (two transcriptions), Urdu (one transcription), and Albanian (one transcription). Mediated interactions relate to children's performance at school and during home activities. The paper focuses on the six mediated interactions which involve children: three are in Chinese, two in Arabic and one in Twi, and all occur in primary schools.

The analysis of these interactions will show the mediators' difficulties in engaging children in the interaction in which they formally participate. This difficulty is important for two reasons. First, several children involved in these interactions have trouble learning Italian as a second language, and this is also emphasized by the teachers' feedback. The children's limited Italian speaking skills and the mediators' difficulties in promoting their involvement in the conversation undermine migrant children's participation in multilingual interactions (parent-teacher conferences in this case) in which they would have the precious opportunity to express their views on their own education. Second, this lack of involvement is a violation of the "best interests of the child", as it has been affirmed in Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, established by the United Nations in 1989 and of their right of participation as established in Article 12 of the same Convention. In other words, children's lack of involvement in these interactions means that the strategic "move of not making difference synonymous with disconnection" (Cronin 2006, p. 139) through interpreting is not valid for children.

The first section of the paper is an introduction to studies in interpreter-mediated interactions, with a focus on the school setting. The second section examines children's involvement exercising agency in social interactions according to Childhood Studies. The three subsequent sections describe the data and methodology, the data analysis of mediations in which children do not take initiatives, and those in which they actively position themselves in the interaction. Conclusions are drawn about migrant children's and parents' participation during teacher-parent meetings.

The paper aims to show the relevant challenges of involving children in interpreter-mediated interactions. While Studies on childhood shows that the enhancement of children's agency needs particular structures of interaction, the structure underlying the positioning of teachers, parents and mediators does not allow this enhancement.

2 Interpreter-mediated interactions in schools

Wadensjö (1998) highlighted the importance of considering Public Service Interpreting as an interactional achievement, including implicit and explicit coordination of institutional interactions. Implicit coordination is achieved through interpreter's renditions. Renditions may expand, reduce, substitute or summarise the content of previous utterances. Explicit coordination is carried out through non-renditions, such as requests for clarification, comments on translations, invitations to start or continue talk.

In order to coordinate an interaction, interpreters need to exercise agency, i.e. to choose ways and contents of their actions (Baraldi, 2019). The concept of agency is in line with a pragmatic approach that analyses the use of language “from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interactions and the effects their use of language has on other participants” (Crystal, 1985, p. 240). Some studies have highlighted the various ways in which interpreters' agency can be enacted through the use of language, e.g. as linguistic, system, integration and community agency (Leanza et al., 2014), and as encouragement of side conversations, adding details, simplifying jargon, and paying attention to the patient's life world (Penn and Watermeyer, 2012). In general terms, interpreters' exercise of agency can empower migrants' actions (Angelelli, 2004, 2012; Inghilleri, 2005; Mason and Ren, 2012). However, interpreters' agency needs to be recognised and legitimised by institutional providers. This need for recognition highlights the importance of the specific social context in which the interaction takes place in defining the interpreter's tasks (Tipton, 2008a). Recognition means acknowledging that interpreters' agency can be exercised if they are attributed rights and responsibility by the other participants to access and produce knowledge, i.e., attributing epistemic authority to interpreters (Baraldi and Gavioli, 2020; Gavioli, 2015). In more general terms, this concept was originally formulated by John Heritage and Geoffrey Raymond (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006).

Interpreters' agency may be exercised through both renditions provided in triadic sequences, and non-renditions provided in dyadic sequences. Renditions show interpreters' agency since they take the forms of summaries, explications, or developments of the *gist* of the interlocutors' utterances (Baraldi, 2016). These forms of rendition provide the gist of what has been said by one participant, adapting or re-contextualising it (Baker, 2006) for another participant. Non-renditions show interpreters' agency since they are produced in dyadic sequences with either institutional providers or migrants. They are accomplished by the interpreter together with one of the participants with the aim to clarify ambiguous, complicated, or in-

complete utterances. Interpreters' agency can either facilitate or block their interlocutors' participation (Tipton, 2008b). Interpreters' agency can empower these interlocutors both through dyadic sequences in which the other participants have the opportunity to clarify their point of view, and through renditions in which they provide contextual information and enhance the opportunity of the other participants to decide how to go on. The coordination of equal distribution of agency among *all* participants is at the core of interpreting as mediation (Baraldi, 2019). The specific analysis of dyadic sequences (e.g. Baraldi and Gavioli, 2016, 2020) is functional to study monolingual negotiations between the interpreter and another participant – what Wadensjö calls “explicit coordination” – which are frequently included in triadic interpreter-mediated interactions.

Coordination and agency have been examined in different settings, but very few studies have focused on educational contexts. These few studies have analysed interpreting in teacher-parent interactions, in particular during one-to-one meetings. According to Tipton and Furmanek (2016), in these meetings interpreters display agency as involvement and social responsibility associated with the intention of supporting pupils' learning, “rather than simply being the conduit for the conversation between the immigrant and the assessor [the teacher]” (171). The few studies on authentic interpreter-mediated interactions between teachers and migrant parents – in England, Italy, and Spain – show that interpreting is provided by “cultural mediators”, who are employed for their language proficiency and familiarity with migratory histories and contexts (Baraldi and Gavioli, 2012; Merlini, 2009; Pittarello, 2009).

The first to delve into this specific context was Davitti (2013, 2015), who analysed conversations during mediated interactions involving teachers and mothers in Italy and in England. Initially, the author (Davitti, 2013) highlighted that interpreters upgrade teachers' assessments through their renditions, by adding positive discursive elements about children's performances, thus making the evaluation acceptable for mothers, and enhancing their agreement. These upgrading moves have a negative effect on migrant mothers' participation in the interaction: mothers refrain from commenting on or challenging evaluations, and from responding to teachers' recommendations. Afterwards, Davitti (2015) provided a more nuanced analysis including the possibility of positive effects of mediators' renditions on mothers' active participation.

Vargas-Urpi and Arumi Ribas (2014) analysed one interpreter-mediated interaction between a Spanish teacher and a Chinese mother. They showed that the mediator provides both different forms of renditions and non-renditions, and quasi-pedagogical intentions can emerge from expanded renditions in particular. Vargas-Urpi (2015, 2017) also showed that mediators' actions tend to exclude parents, either by substituting their possible answers or by engaging in dyadic sequences

with teachers. Additionally, the author highlighted that the mediator provides expanded or reduced renditions of the teacher's utterances, partially adapting them to what she expects the migrant mother could understand.

The reviewed literature shows the presence of both negative and positive outcomes of mediators' agency, exercised by providing renditions and non-renditions in dyadic sequences. The analysis of the 18 parent-teacher mediated interactions collected in the Italian corpus, and partly examined in this paper, shows that the alignment of mediators seems to be supporting the migrant parents' involvement in the interaction (Unpublished Report for the EC). The mediators' renditions mitigate negative teachers' comments and include suggestions for better parental guidance. The analysis shows the complex activity of mediators' coordination, both in dyadic sequences involving teachers and migrants, and as renditions taking the form of summaries or developments. This form of coordination displays the mediators' exercise of agency in giving migrant parents a chance to contribute to the conversation and in suggesting how they could support their children more. In other words, it shows mediators' attempt to empower migrant parents.

3 Children's agency in social contexts

The contextual effects (Carston, 2002, 2004) of interpreters' agency (Mason, 2006) are analysed here in terms of their impact on children's involvement in the interaction. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed in 1989, has introduced the right of the child to have his/her best interest assessed and taken into account as a primary consideration in all actions and decisions that concern him/her (Article 3), and the right to have his/her opinions and participation taken into consideration (Article 12). Interpreters' agency can either facilitate or block children's rights when they are involved in interpreter-mediated interactions between their teachers and parents. Studies on childhood has underlined that children's rights are based on children's exercise of agency (e.g. Baraldi, 2014; James, 2009; Leonard, 2016; Oswell, 2013). Children show agency when, in interactions where they can choose among different types of action, they choose one (Baraldi, 2014). However, these studies frequently show the structural limitations of agency within hierarchical social relations (Alanen, 2009; Bjerke, 2011; Mayall, 2002). Teaching is founded on a specific version of such hierarchical order (Gallagher, 2006; James and James, 2004; Wyness, 1999). Analyses of teaching interaction show that teachers have the primary right of conveying knowledge and of evaluating children's learning (Delamont, 1976; Mehan, 1979). Teaching is a hierarchical interaction in which teachers are assigned the right of producing knowledge and evaluating its consequences on

children, as it is shown in the interaction (Baraldi, 2021). Thus, teaching interactions tend to suppress children's agency, despite some mitigations researched in social-pedagogical studies showing how teachers can use language to support children's ability to self-express (e.g., Kovalainen et al., 2001; Mercer and Littleton, 2007; Michaels and O'Connor, 1996).

A specific study on interpreter-mediated interactions in an educational context (Baraldi, 2016) showed how interpreting can make the difference between a hierarchical order and the facilitation of children's exercise of agency. Some educators, working as ad hoc interpreters in an international organisation, provided reduced, summarised or expanded renditions of children's utterances. In certain cases, some original turns were not rendered, and some were added, thus establishing a hierarchical relation with children. These renditions were frequently instrumental to the achievement of assigned educational tasks and ad-hoc interpreting took the form of gatekeeping (Davidson, 2000), thus limiting children's agency in interactions. However, this form of gatekeeping could be avoided through (1) dyadic sequences with children that allow them to express and expand their perspectives; (2) summarised or expanded renditions of these perspectives. In this way, children's agency could be enhanced through interpreters' agency. This study showed that dyadic sequences between the interpreter and the child, in which the child produced relevant knowledge, together with the renditions of the child's knowledge, could enhance the child's agency in interpreter-mediated interactions. The children involved in this study were not migrants, the study was not conducted at school and the ad hoc interpreters were educators.

Another empirical study examining authentic interactions between migrant children, their parents, and Italian educators (Ceccoli, 2022) revealed how migrant children's greater language proficiency than their parents' can bring out their interactional agency, especially in adult-led interactions. The migrant children who participated in the study were completely ratified participants and played an active role in achieving communication. Mediators were not involved in this study, and it was not carried out at school, but at an after-school centre.

Taking all of the above into account, two interesting questions arise: what happens when migrant children participate in mediated interactions in school settings, where teachers and interpreters play their respective professional roles? Are their rights to participate respected and in which ways?

4 Data and method

The following analysis is based on six audio-recordings of teacher-parent interactions which involved bilingual cultural mediators and children. The duration of

the recordings ranged from 12 to 23 minutes. In four cases the children's family was of Chinese origin (two children were with their mothers and two children were with their fathers), in one case Moroccan (the child was with his father), and in one case Ghanaian (the child was with his mother).

These data were collected during the Covid pandemic and given the restrictive measures that also affected schools in Italy the opportunities to record school-family meetings were sudden and unpredictable. These particular conditions prevented us from collecting other specific data on the children who took part in the research, so that the only information we have on them is the school they attended and the linguistic proficiency they displayed in the recorded interactions. Since they were attending primary schools, we can say that their age range was from 6 to 10 years (and from the recordings we can also gather information about children's future attendance of higher classes).

As far as their speaking skills are concerned, we can only comment on them on the basis of the interactions we recorded and examined. Their proficiency in Italian varies, but even in cases of lower language proficiency, the children managed to communicate quiet fluently. However, they frequently talked in their parents' native language in order to involve their parents in the conversation. We have no information on the children's previous experience in similar cases during school-family meetings and in interacting with interpreters.

In the excerpts examined, Italian female teachers (indicated as TF when the teacher is alone, TF1, TF2, TF3 when more than one teachers are involved) interact with fathers (PM) or mothers (PF), and sometimes with their children, sons (CHIm) or daughters (CHIf). All cultural mediators are bilingual women (MF). All participants received information sheets and signed consent forms, according to the European regulation (GDPR 679/16) and approved by the Ethics Committee working with the Italian university coordinating the Horizon project.

The analysis was carried out in terms of participants' conversational moves, and in particular we focused on the ways in which (1) teachers, mediators and parents address children; (2) children can participate in the interaction through mediators' renditions and dyadic sequences with mediators; (3) mediators' actions are constrained by teachers and parents' actions. The aim of this analysis is to highlight the specific interactional constraints that may limit children's exercise of agency in the analysed school contexts.

The analysis is based on five excerpts that were transcribed according to conversation analysis conventions (Jefferson, 1974) and with the support of Elan annotation software. Each excerpt includes the transcription of the original turns in Italian and in the participants' native languages, and the respective English translation. The turns uttered in the participants' native languages were transcribed and then translated into Italian by professional translators. The

translation into English was later carried out by the authors and is presented in italics under the source utterance. Since this research was done during the pandemic, several mediated interactions took place on digital platforms. The comparative analysis has shown that in terms of children's participation there were not substantial differences between face-to-face and online interactions.

5 Overwhelming or ignoring children

When children are physically present during mediated teacher-parent meetings, the teachers mainly address the parents talking of the children indirectly as “unratified participants” (Goffman, 1981). In our interactions, children are frequently, but not always, the very topic of the talk, as their school performance and/or personal character are the subject of the conversation. However, following Goffman's participation framework, which was also used by Wadensjö (1998) to understand interpreting as interaction, this article is interested in children's active participation (or lack of participation) in the interaction. Against this background, our analysis shows that children are considered for their learning problems and there is no room for or interest in their expressions of agency. Only sometimes are children addressed directly by teachers or through the mediators' initiatives, in particular when they are expected to confirm what has been said by the adults (teachers or parents). Their limited or emotionally negative reactions to their involvement show their marginal role in the interaction. The following excerpts 1–3 report the different forms of this marginalisation.

In Excerpt 1 the child and her mother are at home remotely connected with the mediator and two teachers. In turns 261–267, one of the two teachers (TF1) stresses the child's poor skills by mentioning some activities in which the child has difficulties. The mediator reacts by providing minimal answers to the teacher, but without rendering what the teacher is saying in Twi. This could be explained by the fact that in the long section prior to this excerpt, the child's learning problems had already been discussed extensively. In turn 268, despite the absence of the mediator's rendition, the mother takes the turn immediately after the teacher to invite the child to show off his drawing skills, while in turn 269 the mediator asks him the reason for such low performance. However, these two conversational moves (Mason, 2006), i.e. the call for action to show the child's skills and the request for explanations to motivate his learning difficulties, do not help the child produce specific knowledge about his struggle and do not actively engage him in the interaction. Both the parent's invitation to act and the mediator's question do not receive any response by the child. After a short pause, it is TF2 who takes the floor to solicit the child to show his performance in what he did that day at school (turn 270).

Excerpt 1

TF1: teacher (female) 1

TF2: teacher (female) 2

MF: mediator (female)

PF: mother

261	TF1	<u>però</u> <u>lui</u> (.) vedi un <pochino prova> <u>però</u> se gli diciamo che numero <u>è</u> (.) lui non:: (.) queste sono le cose che fa <u>lui</u> (.) i < i numeri a [<u>caso</u>] <u>but</u> <u>he</u> (.) you see he <tries a bit> <u>but</u> if we tell him what number is (.) he doesn't:: (.) these are the things <u>he</u> does (.) t< the numbers at [<u>random</u>]
262	MF	[y3 fre] no sein [how]is it called
263	TF1	poi tutti (.) li ri[taglia li stro] <u>piccia</u> then he (.) cuts [them all he crumples] <u>them</u>
264	PF	[(3 syll)] (0.5)
265	TF1	vedi (.) lui colora tutto (.) invece qui c'è (.) <u>sopra</u> <u>sotto</u> [<u>dentro</u>]= you see (.) he colours everything (.) whereas here there's (.) <u>on</u> <u>under</u> [<u>inside</u>]=
266	MF	[mh]
267	TF1	= <u>fuori</u> (.) lui ha colorato <tutto> = <u>outside</u> (.) he coloured <everything>
268	PF	w) di3 3noa ne se w) draw ne saa what you do is to draw it and that's it
269	MF	=na adein? w)n sua adi3 no? =but why? don't you study? (0.8)
270	TF2	M. fai vedere le schede quelle che abbiamo fatto oggi (.) oggi pomeriggio (.) dentro lo zaino (.) prova a vedere M. show the cards what we did today (.) this afternoon (.) inside the backpack (.) try to See

The interaction continues and the teachers carry on stressing the child's poor performances (turns 315–319). The mediator renders the teachers' turns and emphasizes their negative assessment by means of repetition (turn 318) and by using “instead” (turn 320) as an adverb of contrast to underline the gap between the teachers' request and expectations on the one hand, and the child's performance on the other hand. This assertive stance adopted by the mediator is also reinforced by what sounds like a further negative assessment (turn 324). Here the mediator does not mitigate the teachers' negative assessment of the child, which she does instead when the teachers express negative opinions about the parents'

behaviours. Within this climate of negative assessments by the teachers and the mediator, the mother also starts to scold the child (turns 323 and 325).

315	TF2	[dove][va cercare di:] (.) ripassa[re il tratte]ggio <i>[he had] [to try to:](.) redo [the hat]ching</i>
316	MF	[di3 wa y3 yi] <i>[this one that you did]</i>
317	TF1	[(2syll) mh]
318	MF	w)n fa [fe fa mu 3 w] se w) d3 fe fa mu no] <i>he has to [do the hatching he has to do the hatching]</i>
319	TF1	[£ ° ecco il libro ° £] <i>[£ ° here's the book ° £]</i>
320	MF	hwe di3 [w] de] 3 y3 <i>look instead [what he is] doing</i>
321	PF	[mh]
322	TF2	HH
323	PF	saa ne y3 y3 no? <i>is that how you do it?</i>
		(0.5)
324	MF	(3syll) [(.) w] hwe tv] <i>(3syll) [(.) you watch tv]</i>
325	PF	[w] w)so w) ti no] (.) na saa na[y3 y3 no] <i>[you're shaking your head](.) it's like this [how to do it?]</i>

In the following turns (496, 498, 502), the mediator urges the mother to ask the child to show off his skills. This happens frequently throughout the whole interaction, but it turns out to be an unsuccessful strategy. The child reacts by remaining silent and evidently overwhelmed.

495	PF	[3 y3 a w] twer3?] <i>[sometimes you write?]</i>
		(0.7)
496	MF	fa s[ri]v[er]e a b i c i] di <i>make him [write ei bi si] di</i>
497	PF	[but 3 y3 me ka kyere no se] <i>[but I tell him that]</i>
		(0.4)
498	MF	e u[no due e tre] <i>and o[ne two and three]</i>

499	PF	[me ka kyere no se] w) fa nkyere no w) italy kasa nso agya y3 nyinaa kasa no [y3n scheda 3nte] [I tell him to] teach him with Italian but we both don't [understand the language well]
500	MF	[na English w)] tumi twer3 di3? [but in English] can he write?
501	PF	M. b3 twer3 ei bi si di na me 3hwe adi3 M. come here and write ei bi si and let me see
502	MF	=b3 twer3 ei bi si di na me hwe (.) se lui ha un foglio così lui =write ei bi si di and let mi see (.) if he has a piece of paper so that he

The same reaction of silence can be observed when children are addressed by the mediators after translating teachers' questions or recommendations. As Excerpt 2 shows, children frequently remain silent or only provide minimal feedback (such as "yes" or "no", or "I understand"). Immediately before this excerpt, the teacher said that the child should work harder because her grades are low, especially when compared to the previous year, and suggested that this worse performance could be related to new interests the child might have. The mediator renders the teacher's turns in Chinese to the mother and engages in a dyadic sequence with her.

Once the dyadic sequence between the mediator and the mother is completed, the teacher takes the turn (turn 47), and first addresses the child to warn her that she needs to improve her grades, then she addresses the mediator to emphasise the child's potentiality. The mediator confirms reception (turn 48) by showing consent with the teacher's assessment and acknowledging it by means of a minimal response. In turn 49, the teacher continues to stress the child's difficulties, also suggesting that she could be distracted by interpersonal relations. The mediator reacts by showing perplexity (turn 50). Without waiting for the rendition into Chinese, the mother takes the turn immediately after the mediator's exclamation to ask her daughter information about the teacher's assumption (turn 51), but the child does not answer (at least verbally). Given the child's silence, the mediator takes the turn to provide a rendition of the teacher's assessments, also including an embarrassed reference to the possible presence of boyfriends. In this rendition, the mediator tries to downplay the teacher's assumption by resorting to the mitigated speech (Gladwell, 2008): she uses the adverb of doubt "maybe" and repeats it twice, and she also adds the comment that the teacher is joking (turn 52). The interaction continues between the teacher, the mediator and the mother, and only in turn 59 the child is involved again. After a dyadic sequence with the mother (turns 54 to 58), the mediator uses a minimal non-verbal signal in order to seek the child's confirmation about her skills in Italian language. The child reacts by providing a minimal response (turn 60). The mediator signals to the teacher

that she has completed her rendition, also implying that the teacher can take back the turn (turn 61). The teacher does so, but she does not ask the mediator what the child has said or thought about the previous comments and the alleged new interpersonal relations, instead she asks a new question about the child's behaviour at home. This question is rendered by the mediator and answered by the mother, with whom the mediator starts a new dyadic sequence (turns 62–66). The child will not be involved in the interaction anymore.

Excerpt 2

TF2: teacher (female) 2

MF: mediator (female)

PF: mother

CHIF: child (female)

-
- 47 TF2 nel secondo quadrimestre questi voti devono diventare migliori L. eh? perché lei è in grado perché ha anche buona capacità linguistica
in the second term these grades must become better L. eh? because she is able because she also has good language skills
-
- 48 MF Sì
Yes
-
- 49 TF2 è logico che ci sono delle imperfezioni grammaticali a volte: sai singolare plurale ma lei ha il concetto della frase capisce sintatticamente è in grado di comprendere (.) bene quindi ha avuto un momento di:: mh quest'anno si è un po' rilassata le amiche non so fidanzati? fidanzati?
it is natural that there are grammatical imperfections at times: you know singular plural but she has the concept of the sentence she understands syntactically she is able to understand (.) well then she had a moment of: mh this year she has relaxed a little bit her friends I don't know boyfriends? boyfriends?
-
- 50 MF hhhh oddio
hhhh oh my god
-
- 51 PF 就是她朋友多起来了哈?
did you make more friends? ((addressing her daughter))
-
- 52 MF hhhh 没有, 就是说可能最近她放松下来了啊, 没有, 就是说, 好像觉得她没有压力感了可能多交了一些朋友, 或者就是交了男朋友, 老师说 [hhhhh 她开玩笑的哈 hhhhh]
hhhh nothing, she says maybe she's relaxed in the last period, nothing, I mean she feels she doesn't feel the pressure, maybe she's made some new friends, or boyfriends, the teacher said [hhhhh she's joking hhhh]
-
- 53 TF2 [hhhhh]
-
- 54 PF 是啊, 她根本: : 她在家里谈笑啊, 在那中文学校那边, 在那基督教那边
right, she absolutely does not: at home she jokes and laughs, at the Chinese school, which is there by the Evangelical Church
-

55	MF	啊, OKAY, 老师说以她的意大利语水平, 这些历史地理这三门功课她其实可更好的, 下半年 <i>ah, okay, the teacher says that according to her level in Italian, these three subjects like history, geography, she could do better in the second term</i>
56	PF	嗯 <i>em ((to say "yes"))</i>
57	MF	老师希望她的分数可以更高 <i>the teacher would like her to get higher marks</i>
58	PF	好 <i>Okay</i>
59	MF	okay?因为不是意大利语的问题, 因为她一般的::呃::内容都可以理解进去的, 是吗? <i>okay? because it's not a problem of the language, because usually she:: is:: able to understand texts well, isn't she? ((look at the girl for confirmation))</i>
60	CHIF	嗯 <i>em ((to say "yes"))</i>
61	MF	Okay
62	TF2	al pomeriggio cosa fa? va in gi- fa- ha delle attività: fa qualcosa? <i>what does she do in the afternoon? does she go ar- does- does she do activities: does she do anything?</i>
63	MF	下午回家都做些的啊? 有什么其他活动吗? <i>what does she do in the afternoons when she comes home? does she have other afternoon activities?</i>
64	PF	呃:::没有, 读中文, 还有, 还有去- <i>eh:: nothing, she studies Chinese, and then-</i>
65	MF	读中文 <i>she studies Chinese</i>
66	PF	不是, 星期二和星期四- <i>no, on Tuesdays and Thursdays-</i>

Excerpt 3 is taken from another interaction with a Chinese family and shows the child's reactions to the negative feedback she is receiving. Being overwhelmed by the accumulation of negative comments during the meeting, the child bursts out into tears. Before the beginning of this excerpt, the teacher complained that she very rarely met the child's father and stressed the considerable effort the parents should make to help their child. She implied that the parents were not working hard to support their daughter and she reached the conclusion that probably there was nothing they could do to change this situation. The mediator rendered this harsh evaluation through a dyadic sequence with the child's father, while the child only provided a few minimal responses. This excerpt starts by showing the mediator's initial collaborative feedback to the teacher's new complaints (turns 192–196). In turn 197, the mediator renders these complaints in Chinese to the

father, who, in turn, also comments critically on her daughter's behaviour at home (turn 198). These negative remarks bring the child to tears. The other participants' reactions to the child's emotional outburst clearly show the unratified status of the child. The mediator's interest in the child's outburst (turn 200) is blocked by the father's minimizing comment (turn 201), and by the teacher's invitation to stop crying (turn 203). In turn 206, the mediator tries to give the teacher an interpretation of the child's cry, but she does so engaging in a conversation only with the teacher and without directly involving the child, whose point of view (e.g., the reason for her crying) is never asked. The focus then moves to the role of the father, while the child disappears from the conversation, although continuing to manifest herself by crying.

Excerpt 3

TF: teacher (female)

MF: mediator (female)

CHIF: child (female)

PM: father

-
- 192 TF io non mi lamento perché la bimba è molto brava oggi ha fatto dei bei lavori d'italiano
I'm not complaining because the child is very good today she did some good work in Italian
-
- 193 MF sì necessita un po' di collaborazione da par- sì
yes some collaboration is needed from- yes
-
- 194 TF però necessita da parte della famiglia
but she needs from the family
-
- 195 MF sì sì
yes yes
-
- 196 TF perché è inutile affidarla allo zio se lo zio non si sa seguire il figlio può pensare alla nipote?
because there is no point in entrusting her to her uncle if the uncle is unable to follow his son can he look after his niece?
-
- 197 MF eh eh sì, 主要就是J.的爸爸, 就是他自己孩子的学习情况也是这样子了哦, 就是说, 所以就是说, 老师说她自己能力是有的, 但是老师不确定她在这个叔叔阿姨家到底是(.)有没有人真正的对她学习方面的有担心过, 因为你们也不再她身边-
eh eh sì, mainly J.'s father, and his son's learning situation is like this, so, in other words, the teacher said that he has his skills, but the teacher is not sure if at home with this uncle and aunt is (.) someone is really worried about her studies, because you are not by her side-
-
- 198 PM 那在家里天天催着她, 叫她看书怎么样的, 这些小孩子嘛, 现在(.)怎么说呢, 有时候贪玩一下啊, 在家里是每人都 (0.4) 都督促她学习嘛
that's why at home they encourage her every day, encourage her to read, they are children, now (.) how can I say it? sometimes they get lost playing games (0.4) at home everybody encourages her to study
-

199	CHIF	<i>((she bursts into tears))</i>
200	MF	怎么啦? 怎么啦? <i>what's happening? what's happening?</i>
201	PM	没没关系的 <i>no nothing</i>
202	CHIF	<i>((she continues crying))</i>
203	TF	L? L.? guarda che non è niente di grave <i>L.? L.? look it's nothing serious</i>
204	PM	non- non è niente eh <i>it's no- it's nothing eh</i>
205	TF	non è niente L. lo stiamo dicendo per farti migliorare capito? Sei brava però non- non possiamo mettere voti grandi alti ancora è il primo quadrimestre capito tata? Devi stare- devi stare tranquilla e cercare- fai una cosa a casa vediti un po' di più qualche film qualche cartone animato <i>it's nothing L. we're just saying that to get you to improve, you know? you're good, but we can't but we can't give you high grades yet. it's the first term, okay, dear? don't- don't worry and try- do something at home watch some more movies some cartoons</i>
206	MF	no secondo me è scoppiata a piangere perché papà sta dicendo che comunque lei viene sempre- cioè eh: a casa glielo dicono di andare a studiare impegnarsi di più <i>no I think she burst into tears because dad is saying that anyway she always comes- I mean eh: at home they tell her to go and study harder</i>
207	TF	ma lei si sta impegnando <i>but she is studying hard</i>
208	MF	però secondo me lei ha necessità di qualcuno <i>but I think she needs someone</i>
209	TF	di qualcuno che s'interessi a lei <i>someone who takes care of her</i>
210	MF	sì no- i genitori non posso dire a lei d'impegnarsi di più davanti a un libro cioè <i>yes no- parents cannot tell her to put more effort into a book I mean</i>
211	TF	no::: no dovete essere voi <i>no::: no it has to be you</i>
212	MF	eh è questo il problema <i>eh this is the problem</i>
213	TF	ad avere interesse di lei <i>to be interested in her</i>

6 Children's initiatives and exercise of agency

Throughout the corpus there are also some cases, albeit very limited, in which children take the initiative to speak. These initiatives display their tentative agency, i.e., their tentative autonomous production of knowledge and their attempt to change the orientation of the conversation. More precisely, there are only three occurrences in six meetings showing children's initiatives. In these cases, children step in to make specific requests to adults or to reject adults' points of view. However, since these initiatives are very rare, it is not possible to identify any pattern for their occurrences. Two of them are shown in Excerpts 4 (request) and 5 (rejection).

In Excerpt 4, a Moroccan child suddenly takes the floor after being silent for the previous phase of the meeting. Two teachers and the mediator are talking about the mediator's education (turns 239–243), when the child interrupts this conversation by taking the turn to ask for information about a test they did at school (turn 244). The teachers' answers make it difficult to understand the intention of the child's question, despite the efforts of the mediator who initiates a dyadic sequence of clarification with the child (turns 245–249). In turn 250, T3 interrupts the dyadic sequence and urges the mediator to produce a rendition of the child's question, even though the mediator may have needed more time to understand the child's request. In the following turns, the teachers' confused interventions (turns 253, 254, 256, 257) hinder the mediator's precise rendition, as it is shown by her tentative rendition (turn 258) and the tentative dyadic sequence she engages with the child (turns 263, 267–271). T3's initiative to show the test to the child (turn 272) eventually changes the trajectory of the interaction without taking care of the on-going mediation. This excerpt shows how in one of the few cases where the child takes the initiative to intervene, the teachers do not leave enough time for the mediator to fully understand the child's request, which therefore remains unfulfilled, as his question is never answered.

Excerpt 4

TF1: teacher (female) 1

TF2: teacher (female) 2

TF3: Teacher (female) 3

MF: mediator (female)

CHIM: child (male)

239	MF	però sono partita da casa mia che parlavo già francese e inglese <i>however I left my house that I could already speak French and English</i>
<hr/>		
240	TF1	eh vedi (che) <i>eh you see (that)</i>

241	MF	perciò [ci ho messo così] [poco so] [<i>it took me so little</i>]
242	CHIM	[eee]
243	TF3	[complimenti [<i>congratulations</i>]
244	CHIM	[l'emtahanet eli derna [<i>the tests that we had done</i>]
245	MF	cemen emtahanet? <i>which tests?</i>
246	CHIM	heduk lemtihanet konna derna hedek enhar heya arfehom losteda <i>those tests we had done that day the teacher knows them</i>
247	MF	Mh
248	CHIM	mtee el matematica <i>maths</i>
249	MF	[em melhom? em] [<i>what about them?</i>]
250	TF3	[cos'ha detto? <i>what did he say?</i>]
251	CHIM	[ghadi taatehom lina? <i>should she give it back to us?</i>]
252	MF	per: i: e:: le:m le verifiche che avete fatt[o <i>for t: e.. the:m the tests you have don[e</i>]
253	TF2	[oh beh prima era preoccupato per (le) verifiche [<i>oh well before he was worried about (the) tests</i>]
254	TF3	[oggi? oggi non l'abbiamo corretta ancora [<i>today? today we haven't corrected it yet</i>]
255	MF	no non di oggi le altre ha detto quelle che avevamo fatto di [matematica ma: le dovete dare? <i>no not today the other he said those we had done for [maths but: do you have to return them?</i>
256	TF2	[((?) era preoccupatissimo [<i>((?) he was very worried</i>]
257	TF3	no e::
258	MF	voleva [sapere <i>he wanted [to know</i>
259	TF3	[gliela faccio vedere [<i>I'll show him</i>]
260	MF	voleva sapere un po' com'è andata <i>he wanted to know a bit how it went</i>

261	TF2	ma l'hai vista questa [Cm! <i>but you've seen [this</i>
262	TF3	[lui l'ha vista l'ha anche corretta lui da solo <i>[he saw it and he corrected it himself</i>
263	MF	maci:: cioftiha enta? <i>no:: have you seen them?</i>
264	TF3	non puoi fare questo <i>you can't do this</i>
265	MF	aah?
266	CHIM	eh <i>yes</i>
267	MF	w makhassekce tsahah bwahdek <i>and you didn't have to correct yourself</i>
268	CHIM	eh <i>yes</i>
269	MF	liana he[ya lighadi tsahah <i>because her who had to correct</i>
270	CHIM	eh <i>yes</i>
271	MF	wa alken raki sahahti ci haja bwahdek enta lkayti ci haja meci edika he:: <i>but you corrected something yourself you found something that is not that and ::</i>
272	TF2	la maestra l'aveva già corretta <i>the teacher had already corrected it</i>

In Excerpt 5, the child contradicts the teacher's and her father's analysis of her performances. This is the only case in which a child shows agency by contradicting the point of view of the other participants. At the beginning of the excerpt, the mediator first provides minimal responses to the teacher's usual disapproval of the child's performance (turns 173–188). Then, she provides a mitigated summarised rendition of this contribution for the father (turn 189). At the end of the first part of this rendition, the mediator addresses the child with a non-verbal signal (turn 191), receiving back a minimal response (turn 192). However, after the second part of the rendition, the child takes the floor to contradict the position of the teacher and of the parent claiming that she is not interested in getting better grades (turn 194). This claim is not taken seriously by her father who engages in a dyadic sequence to convince her that she is wrong (turns 195–202), concluded with a laugh (turn 203). At the end of this sequence, the mediator's rendition for the teacher (turns 205–211) shows her neutrality in the father-child dispute, since she reports what has been said without adding any comment or taking any position. However, as soon as the teacher takes the turn after the mediator's rendition,

she only focuses on her own evaluation method (turns 212–220), thus completely ignoring and not commenting on the father-child dispute, and without giving value to the child's claim. The mediator provides a new mitigated summarised rendition of this second teacher's contribution (turns 222, 224), receiving minimal feedback from the child (turns 223, 225) who seems to give up on her claim.

Excerpt 5

TF: teacher (female)

MF: mediator (female)

PM: father

CHIF: child (female)

173	TF	allora io eh:: è bene che sappia che io ho capito che la- la bimba è preparata <i>then I eh:: you should know that I understand that the- the child is prepared</i>
174	MF	mh mh
175	TF	però la modalità con cui sono state fatte qu- le verifiche non le hanno dato piena soddisfazione <i>but the way in which the tests were done did not give her full satisfaction</i>
176	MF	Certo <i>of course</i>
177	TF	quindi il voto rappresenta quello <i>so that's what the grade represents</i>
178	MF	mh mh
179	TF	è sulla verifica non sulla preparazione lo dico sempre eh quello <i>it's about the test not the preparation I always say that</i>
180	MF	certo okay <i>of course okay</i>
181	TF	quindi ho notato che forse con lei è troppo presto quindi è meglio eh: cam- utilizzare insieme alla verifica dei bimbi della sua classe l'altro tipo la- la- che non è semplice <i>so I've noticed that maybe it's too early with her so it's better eh:to chan- to use together with the test of the children in her class the other type the- the- which is not easy</i>
182	MF	Certo <i>of course</i>
183	TF	non è semplificata <i>it's not simplified</i>
184	MF	okay mh mh
185	TF	è solo cambiarla la modalità in modo che lei può scrivere poco <i>it's just to change the type of test so that she can write less</i>
186	MF	mh mh

187	TF	ma deve capire molto in base a quello che chiedo <i>but she has to understand a lot based on what I ask</i>
188	MF	ok va bene <i>ok it's fine</i>
189	MF	然后就是说这:以这种方式, 因为老师知道她在家里很用功的去复习老师布置的作业啊, 功课啊, 考试的时候她提前做好准备, 但是主要这些分数老师是按照她的试卷打分的嘛, 哦, 试卷毕竟, 就是说(.)呃(.)这意大利语方面她还是有点(.)对她来说还是有很多错误的嘛, 没办法 - <i>so then: in this way, the teachers understood that she works hard at home for the assigned homework, when there is a test she prepares in advance, but all the marks they gave her are based on the marks of the tests, that is (.) eh (.) for the problem of Italian she is still a bit (.) she still makes a lot of mistakes, unfortunately-</i>
190	PM	是啊, 难度, 难度还是很大的 - <i>it is true, there are still many difficulties-</i>
191	MF	对, 就是没办法完全的解释出来她脑子里面=就是学习到的那些信息, 就是没办法写上去, 对吗? <i>yes, precisely because she is still not able to express the information she has in her head, =I mean, the theories she has learned she is not able to write them down, right? ((looks at the girl for confirmation)</i>
192	CHIF	嗯 <i>Yes</i>
193	MF	嗯, okay= 所以就是说这样子, 可能这个分数老师觉得==就是==不是==她实际==知道的那些信息, 不符合, okay=所以想到这种方式来, 就是让她尽量可以回答的时候写的时候不用那么长==那么长, 只要简单的一句话啊, 或者选择题啊, 这样子让老师更方便的知道她的理解水平, 就是程度到了哪个阶段 <i>yes, okay= and so in this way, according to the teacher the grades=do not really reflect= really=what she knows, they don't match, okay=so she thought about this type of test, during the tests she is facilitated to write her answers not so long== long, a simple sentence would be enough, or with multiple choice, in this way the teachers can get to know better her level of understanding, I mean the level she has reached</i>
194	CHIF	呃我想说的是==其实, 打什么分我不介意, 其实, 就是能及格就好了因为我知道::我- <i>eh I would like to say that== I don't care about grades, actually, as long as I get the pass mark because I know that ::I-</i>
195	PM	<u>hhhh</u>
196	CHIF	自己::呃::能::写完就不错了, 而且, 还有人比我更差, 所以我::呃::并不是很在乎::就是分数啊这些东西, 我能及格就好- <i>I:: eh:: if I manage to finish writing it's already a lot, and then, there are people worse than me, and so:: eh:: I don't give so much importance:: to things like grades, it's fine if I get the pass mark-</i>

197	PM	你这种想法不对, 你这种想法不对- <i>this way of thinking is not good, this way of thinking is not good-</i>
198	CHIF	但我知道, 我=我- <i>I know, but I=-</i>
199	PM	你要更加努我跟你说- <i>I'm telling you that you should try harder-</i>
200	CHIF	我知道 <i>I know</i>
201	MF	嗯嗯, 呃::: okay <i>yes yes eh::: okay</i>
202	CHIF	我不想给自己太大的压力, 你知道吗? <i>I don't want to put too much pressure on myself, you know?</i>
203	PM	<u>hhh</u>
204	MF	<u>hhh</u>
205	MF	no perché lei ha detto- detto guarda per i voti alti o bassi lei non è che ci tiene- cioè non dà molta importanza <i>no because she said – she said, look, high or low grades, she doesn't really care – I mean she doesn't give much importance</i>
206	TF	certo certo certo certo <i>of course of course of course of course</i>
207	MF	perché ha detto sa di averlo impegnato e quindi <i>because she said she know she worked hard so</i>
208	TF	certo certo ma lo so pure io infatti <i>of course of course but I know that too</i>
209	MF	papà ha detto ma no secondo lui non è- non è giusto pensare così dovresti impegnare di più ha detto lei invece gli ha risposto ha detto non voglio darmi troppo peso ha detto <i>dad said, but no, he doesn't think it's right to think like that you should work harder instead she answered him she said I don't want to put too much pressure on myself she said</i>
210	TF	certo <i>of course</i>
211	MF	gli ha risposto così <i>that's how she answered</i>
212	TF	ma è quello che- eh ma io lo so ma io l'ho capita che lei si è impegnata però purtroppo nelle verifiche scritte eh- la- la cosa rimane è la modalità che deve essere diversa <i>but that's what- eh but I know but I understood that she worked hard but unfortunately in the written tests eh- the- the concept is the same is the type of test that must be different</i>
213	MF	mh mh

214	TF	nel suo caso non perché lei non s'è impegnata <i>in her case it is not because she did not work hard</i>
215	MF	mh mh
216	TF	è la modalità di richiesta che deve essere diversa <i>it's the type of test that must be different</i>
217	MF	mh mh
218	TF	proprio per dare eh: mh:: per dare adito a quello che lei sa eh <i>just to give eh: mh:: to give credit to what she knows eh</i>
219	MF	mh mh
220	TF	perché lo so che lei lo sa ma me- me lo deve dimostrare allora devo- devo trovare il canale giusto per dimostrarlo <i>because I know she knows but she has to show it to me so I have to find the right channel to let her show it</i>
221	MF	okay
222	MF	这是老师的，就是她老师用她的::就是想到这种方来式更好的去(.)就是说(.) 呃::来给你打分嘛 <i>this is the teacher's, I mean the teacher has used her type of test:: I mean using this type of test (.) I mean (.) eh:: to assess you and give you marks</i>
223	CHIF	啊我知道 <i>yes I know it</i>
224	MF	知道你那个学习的内容，就是说，不是说你比别人差，这个你要注意，老师说 希望能理解她，不是说你意大利语不行干嘛，或者是用这些简单的，这些不简 单，老师说内容水平就是说难度是一样的，okay==只是换一种方式而已 <i>to know what you have to study, I mean, it does not mean that you are less good than the others, be careful, the teacher would like you to understand her choice well, it doesn't mean that your Italian is not good, or that you use simple texts, they are not simple, she said that the topics and the level of difficulty are the same, okay==it is just applied differently</i>
225	CHIF	啊我知道 <i>yes I know it</i>
226	MF	okay
227	TF	bene okay <i>well okay</i>

7 Conclusions

In the analysed mediated interactions, children are unrati ed and unaddressed participants, since they are considered as learners rather than agents. The focus of teachers' evaluations is mainly on children's school performance and on the

parents' commitment in their children's education. Children are almost all the time silent or give minimal feedback in the infrequent cases in which they are rather weakly addressed by the mediator. They manifest reluctance to participate in the interaction, or sufferance as in the case in Excerpt 3, when the child starts crying. When children take initiatives, showing their agency, these initiatives are not supported by the other participants.

Mediators' attempts to involve the children as agents are weak, since mediators are harnessed in the teacher-parent, or parent-child, interaction, and they try to follow the flow of the interaction, rather than supporting children's autonomous initiatives. Mediators' renditions are generally addressed to parents and dyadic sequences are produced between mediators and parents or mediators and teachers. Mediators' primary concern – and exercise of agency – is the mitigation of teachers' negative evaluations addressed to parents, as they show in their renditions and contribution in dyadic interactions.

These interactions involve all participants acting both autonomously and interdependently. Teachers tend to assess negatively both parents' support and children's performances by means of long monologues; they do not propose any form of collaboration to parents. Parents focus on teachers' negative assessments about their children's performance and react defensively when accused of giving little support to their children. They do not encourage their children to provide explanations about their performances. Within this context, mediators try to include the parents in the interaction by mitigating the teachers' assessments and by providing parents with support and advice. However, they are not able to facilitate children's agency. When such an agency is exercised and challenged by the father (Excerpt 5), the mediator decides not to confront the father. By opting for this non-intervention, the mediator does not support the child nor the exercise of her agency. In the only case in which the mediator gets involved in a dyadic sequence with the child (Excerpt 4), the teachers interrupt it and reclaim the floor, thus ignoring and underestimating the on-going mediation, which would have been precious to fully understand the child's request and allow his agency to be exerted.

The hierarchical structure of teacher-parent conferences and the power imbalance between the teachers, who lead the interaction through monologues, and the other participants (parents, children, and mediators) do not facilitate the recognition of the mediator's agency. This lack of recognition in turn prevents mediators from being able to support children's agency and ensure that their voices are heard.

The excerpts examined make manifest that children's rights, in particular the right to speak and the right to participate in multilingual adult-led interactions which concern their own interests, are not respected, since children's agency is

neither constructed nor supported. This leads us to an important question related to interpreter-mediated interactions in the school context, that is the way in which mediators can encourage and support multilingual interactions while respecting children's rights and agency. This issue is in turn related to the problem of how mediators themselves can be agents in these circumstances. Our data show that on the one hand the mediators exercise their agency more frequently with parents than with children, and on the other hand that children's limited rights and agency cannot be – or are not – easily enhanced through mediation.

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