

# Mapping the field: a systematic review of non-professional interpreting and translation in Italy<sup>1</sup>

Federica Ceccoli<sup>2</sup>  
University of Bologna   
Rachele Antonini  
University of Bologna

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/estr.101375>

Recibido: 1 de marzo de 2025 / Revisado: 14 de julio de 2025 / Aceptado: 31 de julio de 2025

**Abstract.** This paper presents a systematic review of the current research literature on non-professional interpreting and translation (NPIT) in public services in the Italian context, a critical area of research given the increasing demand for effective communication in diverse communities. Non-professional interpreting and translation, often carried out by adult and child bilingual individuals without formal training, has gained increasing attention due to its relevance in multicultural and multilingual settings such as health, legal and educational services, particularly in response to Italy's growing immigrant population. Non-professional interpreters and translators, often community members or bilingual staff, play a vital role in facilitating access to essential services, yet their work is frequently underrecognized and under-researched. This review synthesizes existing literature from the last two decades, highlighting the methodologies, contexts, and outcomes of non-professional interpreting practices across various public service sectors, including healthcare and education. The findings offer insights into the role of NPIT in Italy, highlighting its relevance for public policy and social inclusion strategies. By identifying gaps in current research and practice, this review aims to inform future studies and improve the efficacy of interpreting and translation services in public contexts, ultimately fostering better communication and equity for non-native speakers in society.

**Keywords.** child language brokering, migration, non-professional interpreting, systematic review.

## Panorama general: revisión sistemática de la interpretación y traducción no profesional en Italia

**Resumen.** Este artículo presenta una revisión sistemática de la literatura de investigación actual sobre la interpretación y traducción no profesional (ITINP) en los servicios públicos en el contexto italiano, un área crítica de investigación dada la creciente demanda de comunicación efectiva en comunidades diversas. La interpretación y traducción no profesional, a menudo llevada a cabo por adultos y niños bilingües sin formación formal, ha ganado cada vez más atención debido a su relevancia en entornos multiculturales y multilingües como los servicios sanitarios, jurídicos y educativos, especialmente en respuesta a la creciente población inmigrante de Italia. Los intérpretes y traductores no profesionales, a menudo miembros de la comunidad o personal bilingüe, desempeñan un papel vital a la hora de facilitar el acceso a servicios esenciales, aunque su labor no suele estar suficientemente reconocida ni investigada. Esta revisión sintetiza la bibliografía existente de las dos últimas décadas, destacando las metodologías, los contextos y los resultados de las prácticas de interpretación no profesional en diversos sectores de servicios públicos, como la sanidad y la educación. Los resultados ofrecen una visión del papel de la IPNI en Italia, destacando su relevancia para las políticas públicas y las estrategias de inclusión social. Mediante la identificación de lagunas en la investigación y la práctica actuales, esta revisión pretende informar futuros estudios y mejorar la eficacia de los servicios de interpretación y traducción en contextos públicos, fomentando en última instancia una mejor comunicación y equidad para los hablantes no nativos en la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** Mediación lingüística infantil, migración, interpretación no profesional, revisión sistemática.

<sup>1</sup> This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101208578 (PLURIBO).

<sup>2</sup> Although the article was jointly conceived, discussed, and written by the authors, Rachele Antonini is responsible for Sections 1, 2, and 3, while Federica Ceccoli is responsible for Sections 4, 5, and 6.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. An overview of NPIT studies in Italy. 3. Methodology. 4. Overview of key findings from the literature. 5. Insights from different methodological approaches. 5.1. Findings from surveys: quantitative perspectives on CLB practices. 5.2. Interviews and narratives: exploring subjective experiences and perceptions. 5.3. Authentic interactional data: analysing real-life CLB practices in context. 6. Implications for training and future directions for NPIT research in Italy.

## 1. Introduction

According to data from the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Istat), the resident foreign population increased from approximately 2.4 million in 2001 to over 5 million in 2020, representing 8.45% of the total population. As of January 1, 2023, approximately 5 million foreign citizens reside in Italy, representing 8.7% of the total population (Istat 2024<sup>3</sup>). In the past three decades Italy has experienced a significant increase in migration, with major changes in migration influxes, transitioning from being a country of emigration to a nation characterized by a growing presence of immigrants, with increasing implications for integration and social cohesion. Italy has thus become a linguistically and culturally “super diverse country” (Altin & Virgilio 2016, Arnaut & Spotti 2015), characterized by a highly fragmented immigration pattern, with many nationalities and ethnicities (European Migration Network 2004, Di Rosa & Tumminelli 2021). However, unlike other European countries with longer histories of immigration, Italy’s response and resources to the increased and unprecedented demand for linguistic assistance, especially in the field of public service interpreting (PSI), are not sufficient to meet the need for linguistic support to help migrants access essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment (Rudvin 2006, Amato & Garwood 2011). As a result, and in the absence of clear guidelines for managing language barriers (Antonini 2015), NPIT activities are becoming increasingly normalized in the context of Italian public services (Antonini & Ceccoli 2025). Community and family members, as well as bilingual staff frequently serve as informal interpreters and translators, playing a crucial role in ensuring access to essential services, yet their contributions remain largely overlooked and underexplored. This review synthesizes two decades of literature, examining methodologies, contexts, and outcomes of NPIT across public service sectors such as healthcare and education.

While underscoring NPIT’s importance for public policy and social inclusion, offering insights into its implications for service accessibility, this systematic review also identifies important gaps in existing research and practice, particularly in relation to the prevalence, in Italy, of studies on child language brokering (CLB) in PSI over NPIT performed by adults in the same domain. Therefore, this review will focus prevalently on the former.

After offering an overview of NPIT studies in Italy, section 3 will illustrate the methodology, research questions, and criteria adopted for the systematic review carried out through the four databases BITRA, Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB), Web of Science (WOS), and SCOPUS. Sections 4 and 5 will then present the main findings, while section 6 will offer a discussion of the results and possible avenues for future research.

## 2. An overview of NPIT studies in Italy

The study of NPIT stemmed in the 1970s from Harris’s notion of the natural translator (Harris 1977, Harris & Sherwood 1978)<sup>4</sup>. NPIT, also referred to as ad hoc interpreting or informal interpreting, encompasses the vast spectrum of language mediation activities performed by bilingual individuals, typically without formal training in interpreting, who facilitate communication between speakers of different languages in various contexts, such as community, medical and legal settings, as well as in both formal and informal social interactions (Antonini et al. 2017). All the above activities when performed by children and adolescents, generally with a migrant background, were commonly defined as child language brokering (CLB). Until recently, NPIT was an under-recognized and under-researched reality and represented a widely ignored area of research (Antonini 2017). As this practice became “not only (...) an alternative to established professional practice, but also (...) a distinctive phenomenon” (Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva 2012: 149), growing attention is being directed toward the realities of informal language mediation (Pöllabauer 2007).

Given its unique sociopolitical landscape, migration patterns, and evolving language policies, the Italian context represents a particularly compelling case study for NPIT in the public service domain. The reliance on non-professional interpreters in Italy can be attributed to several interrelated factors: historical reliance on volunteerism, lack of regulatory frameworks, financial constraints, linguistic challenges, and gaps in university training. In Italy, the role of facilitating communication between the growing migrant population and public service providers has primarily been undertaken by linguistic and/or cultural mediators rather than community/public service interpreters (Albertini & Capitani 2010, Amato & Garwood 2011). Unlike other countries, where certified public service interpreters are established professional figures, the legal standing of the linguistic and/or cultural mediator in Italy is characterized by regulatory inconsistency across regions<sup>5</sup>, leading to significant regional disparities in training and responsibilities (Favaro 2010). The growing reliance on the part of public services on NPIT or CLB is also a consequence of the limited funding for professional

<sup>3</sup> <https://noi-italia.istat.it/pagina.php?id=3&categoria=4&action=show&L=0>

<sup>4</sup> See Antonini (2011 and 2021) for an overview of the history of NPIT studies and Antonini et al. (2017) and Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva (2012) for definitions and descriptions of the role of non-professional interpreters and translators.

<sup>5</sup> [integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it](http://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it)

linguistic/cultural mediation, which is allocated by the central government to regional and local governments (Rossato 2017), which is exacerbated by the many languages spoken by migrants that are not commonly covered by professional interpreters. This leads public institutions to rely on informal solutions, such as family members or fellow migrants (Albertini et al. 2010). Finally, the several degree courses in Linguistic Mediation Studies now offered by many Italian universities (Siebetcheu Youmbi 2011), have not been able to attract and train speakers of the languages spoken by migrant communities, and have historically been too theoretical, thus not adequately preparing graduates for the practical demands of public service interpreting (Albertini & Capitani 2010).

Research on NPIT in Italy began with the In Medio PUER(I) project, a four-year project funded by the University of Bologna in 2006 (Antonini 2010, 2014). This project marked the first systematic attempt to map and analyze NPIT in general, and CLB as a branch of NPIT in particular. The focus of the project was to investigate the role of child language brokers in the country, giving visibility to an often overlooked but widespread phenomenon. In Medio PUER(I) aimed to explore CLB starting from the Emilia-Romagna region, the area where the main researchers were based and also one of the regions with the highest migration rate, by studying the presence of CLB in formal and informal settings, providing a detailed description of the participants, situations and contexts in which it takes place, and assessing the impact of CLB on various aspects of the brokers' lives and development. In Medio PUER(I) also explored the occurrence of CLB in various public service settings, including health care (Cirillo & Torresi 2013, Cirillo 2014, Antonini & Torresi 2021), correctional facilities (Rossato 2017), education (Cirillo 2017), and other related settings (Cirillo et al. 2010)

### 3. Methodology

Systematic reviews provide a comprehensive and structured approach to synthesizing research on a specific topic. By following a pre-established protocol, which includes clear inclusion and exclusion criteria along with thorough data extraction and analysis methods, these reviews aim to deliver an unbiased and exhaustive summary of the available literature (Liberati et al. 2009). This rigorous methodology enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, allowing researchers to identify gaps in the literature, evaluate the quality of evidence, and offer evidence-based recommendations for practical use and future research (Borenstein et al. 2011, Johnson & Hennessy 2019).

This systematic review summarises the findings of empirical studies published in books, journals and book chapters that use empirical methods to investigate non-professional interpreting and translation practices in general and child language brokering, in particular, in Italy. The aim of this study is therefore to assess how the field has developed and how different research methods have contributed to non-professional interpreting and translation studies. To this end, the authors formulated the following two research questions:

RQ1: How has NPIT developed over the last two decades?

RQ2: What empirical methods have been most frequently used to study NPIT and CLB?

For data retrieval, this study relied on four open access databases: Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation (BITRA) and Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB). While BITRA and TSB specialise in translation and interpreting studies, WoS and Scopus offer a wider interdisciplinary breadth and high-quality indexing. The inclusion criteria were year of publication, type of study (only empirical studies with data collected in Italy were considered), keywords. Books, articles and chapters published between 2000 and October 2024 were included. The databases were searched using a set of keywords (in titles and/or abstracts) containing a hit of any of the following three words: child language brokering, non-professional interpreting and ad hoc interpreting in any of their spelling variations. The topic of audiovisual non-professional interpreting and translation was not included in this systematic review.

The initial search yielded 80 items: 32 from BITRA, 22 from Scopus, 12 from TSB and 14 from WoS. The first screening eliminated duplicates, resulting in a total of 41 items. The full-text analysis led to the omission of three publications: one due to inaccessibility, one because it focused on representations of CLB in the media without drawing on empirical data collected in the Italian context, and one because it provided a general overview of CLB without mentioning any specific data collection in Italy.

Table 1. List of publications

Year	Title	Author(s)	Geographical area	Methodologies
2010	The Study of Child Language Brokering. Past, Current and Emerging Research	Antonini, R.	Northern Italian regions of Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Friuli Venezia-Giulia	Overview of the research conducted within the InMedioPueri project
2010	Former child language brokers: preliminary observations on practice, attitudes and relational aspects"	Bucaria, C. Rossato, L.	Northern Italian regions of Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Friuli Venezia-Giulia	Interviews Focus groups Questionnaires

Year	Title	Author(s)	Geographical area	Methodologies
2010	Institutional perceptions of Child Language Brokering in Emilia Romagna	Cirillo, L. Torresi, I. Valentini, C.	Forlì-Cesena	Interviews
2010	Language brokering among Filipino adolescents in Italy. I figli come mediatori linguistici. Studio su un campione di adolescenti filippini.	Valtolina, G.	Milan	Questionnaires
2013	Exploring institutional perceptions of child language brokering: Examples from Italian healthcare settings	Cirillo, L. Torresi, I.	Forlì	Interviews
2014	La mediazione linguistica e culturale in Italia: i mediatori invisibili	Antonini, R.	Forlì	“Traduttori in erba” school contest with written and visual narratives
2014	Il punto di vista dei giovani mediatori: osservazioni su frequenza, atteggiamenti ed aspetti relazionali	Bucaria, C.	Veneto	Interviews Focus groups
2014	Child Language Brokering: voce alle istituzioni	Torresi, I.	Forlì	Interviews
2014	Gli insegnanti e la mediazione linguistica nelle scuole italiane: tra interazione e integrazione	Rossato, L.	Forlì	Interviews Focus groups
2014	La mediazione linguistico-culturale a opera di bambini e adolescenti: lo sguardo degli operatori sanitari della provincia di Forlì-Cesena	Cirillo, L.	Forlì	Interviews
2014	“In questa scuola ci sono le lingue più diverse, ed è un tesoro immenso”: esperienze e riflessioni sulla mediazione linguistica e culturale nei percorsi di formazione professionale iniziale	Galletti, C.	Vicenza	Classroom observation and activities
2015	Unseen forms of interpreting. Child language brokering in Italy	Antonini, R.	Forlì	Interviews Narratives
2016	Ad-hoc interpreting in international educational settings The problem of renditions	Baraldi, C.	International camps in Italy, Brasil, USA	Real-life interactions
2016	Caught in the middle: child language brokering as a form of unrecognised language service	Antonini, R.	Forlì	Narratives

Year	Title	Author(s)	Geographical area	Methodologies
2017	Child language brokering in private and public settings. Perspectives from young brokers and their teachers"	Cirillo, L.	Emilia-Romagna	Questionnaires
2017	From confinement to community service. Migrant inmates mediating between languages and cultures	Rossato, L.	Vicenza Treviso	Questionnaires
2017	Through the children's voice. An analysis of language brokering experiences	Antonini, R.	Forlì	Narratives
2017	Seeing brokering in bright colours. Participatory artwork elicitation in CLB research	Torresi, I.	Forlì	Artworks
2017	Tradurre per la compagna di banco: child language brokering e interazioni costruttive nella classe plurilingue	Pugliese, R.	Bologna	Real-life school interactions
2018	Child Language Brokering. La percezione degli studenti di origine straniera e dei rispettivi insegnanti	Ceccoli, F.	Ravenna	Questionnaires
2019	I skipped unnecessary details and got straight to the point! Adolescents and Young Adults reflecting on their Child Language Brokering Experiences	Rossato, L.	Forlì Vicenza	Interviews Focus groups
2019	Parents' and Children's Perspectives on Child Language Brokering: a Comparative Approach	Ceccoli, F.	Forlì	Questionnaires
2020	In italiano e in altre lingue, a casa e a scuola : le interazioni tra pari nella socializzazione linguistica	Pugliese, R.	Emilia-Romagna	Real-life interactions at school and at home
2020	Assessing Translation Practices of Non-professional Translators in a Multilingual Institutional Setting	De Camillis, F.	Bolzano	Interviews Questionnaires
2021	Child language brokering in healthcare settings	Antonini, R. Torresi, I.	Emilia-Romagna	Interviews Art contest Questionnaires
2021	Plurilingual repertoires of students with a migratory background in the Italian school system. Investigating Child Language Brokering practices	Peppoloni, D.	Perugia	Questionnaires

Year	Title	Author(s)	Geographical area	Methodologies
2021	Pratiche di mediazione non professionale degli studenti stranieri immigrati di prima o seconda generazione nel sistema scolastico italiano	Peppoloni, D.	Perugia	Questionnaires
2021	Reconstructing the experiences of child language brokering: a focus on the socio-emotional impact of the practice	Ceccoli, F.	Forlì	Interviews
2022	Bilingual children acting as language brokers in Italy: Their affective and cognitive attitudes about the practice	Ceccoli, F.	Lazio Emilia-Romagna Lombardy Piedmont	Questionnaires
2022	Migrant children on stage. Their role as language brokers	Ceccoli, F.	Forlì	Real-life interactions
2022	Children's narratives of the emotional impact of child language brokering	Antonini, R.	Forlì	Visual and written narratives
2023	Communication in child language brokering. Role expectation and role performance	Angelelli, C.V. Ceccoli, F.	Forlì	Real-life interactions
2023	Effects of Language Brokering on Psychological Well-Being. A Study on Latino Children in Italy	Valtolina, G. Gennari, M.L. Tamanza, G.	Milan	Questionnaires
2023	The changing landscape of healthcare communication in Italy: Perceptions and challenges in language brokering services	Nikitina, J. Montenovo, G.		Questionnaires
2024	Le child language brokering comme activité discursive conjointe dans un parcours de continuité éducative en maternelle et à l'école élémentaire en Italie	Pugliese, R. Zanoni, G.	Forlì	Real-life interactions
2024	The Relevance of Family Language Policy in Germany and Italy in the Development of Child Bilingualism: The Role of Natural Translation	Licari, C. Perotto, M.	Italy Germany	Questionnaires

Year	Title	Author(s)	Geographical area	Methodologies
2024	Translating in the public and private sectors: The voice of non-professional translators between Alto Adige and Marche   Tradurre nel pubblico e nel privato: la voce dei traduttori non professionisti tra Alto Adige e Marche	De Camillis, F. Farroni, C. Chiocchetti, E.	Bolzano Alto Adige Marche	Questionnaires Interviews
2024	200 years of institutional translation in South Tyrol: From civil servants to machines?	De Camillis, F.	South Tyrol	Questionnaires Interviews

#### 4. Overview of key findings from the literature

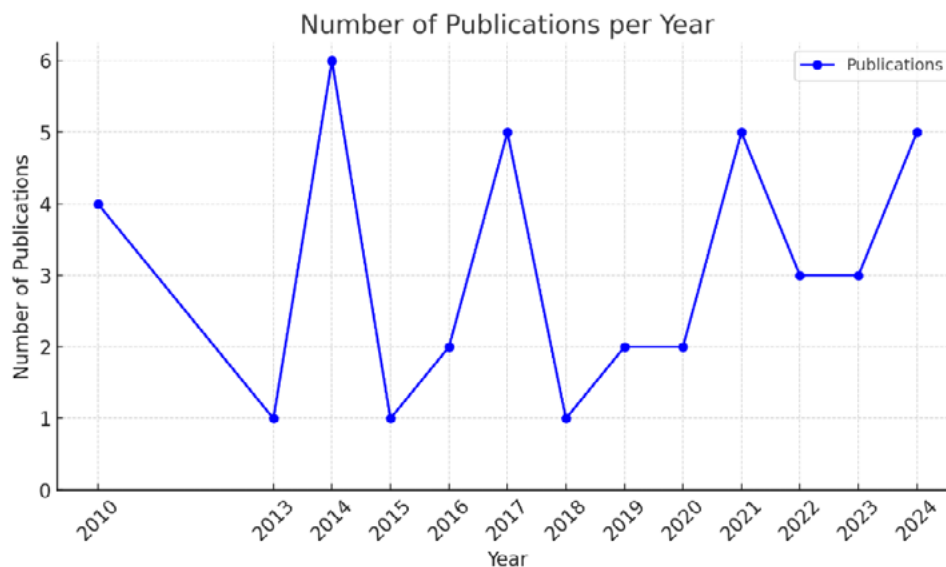
As mentioned in section 2, the In Medio PUER(I) project, funded by the University of Bologna in 2006, was the first systematic study of NPIT in Italy, with a specific focus on CLB. Over a period of almost 20 years, NPIT research in Italy has continued to focus mainly on CLB and has now expanded beyond Emilia-Romagna to Northern and Central Italy, including other regions as shown in the table below, and attracting the interest of new researchers.

Table 2. Geographical distribution

Northern Italy	
	Friuli Venezia Giulia
	Alto-Adige
	Veneto Vicenza
	Treviso
	Lombardy
	Milan and its metropolitan hinterland
	Piedmont Engim vocational high schools in Turin
	Emilia-Romagna
	Forlì-Cesena
	Bologna
	Ravenna
Central Italy	
	Umbria
	Perugia
	Lazio
	Engim vocational high school in Rome

The number of publications per year on this topic has oscillated between one and six, with a positive trend in the last three years, as shown in the following graph.

Graph 1. Trend of publications



During these 20 years of research, CLB has been studied in Italy with a wide range of participants ranging in age from 6 to 42 years. The studies have focused mainly on two key settings: healthcare and education. In the healthcare sector, participants included child language brokers and healthcare professionals, such as general practitioners and service providers, who shared their experiences of CLB in medical contexts (Cirillo & Torresi 2013, Antonini & Torresi 2021). In the education sector, studies have involved child language brokers, teachers, educators and school staff (Ceccoli 2018, 2022; Cirillo 2017, Pugliese & Zanoni 2024). In addition, a small-scale study was conducted to explore the presence of CLB in prisons and inmates' perceptions of CLB, a unique setting that has rarely been studied (Rossato 2017). By gathering insights from both young brokers and professionals, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of CLB in these settings.

In terms of methods, from the very beginning, the *In Medio PUER(I)* project adopted a multi-method approach to the study of CLB, recognising the complexity of the phenomenon and the range of stakeholders involved, from children and young adults to local authorities. Given the evolving nature of research on CLB, data collection has relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the topic. Over the years, these methods have included in-depth interviews, focus groups, visual and written narratives (artworks), surveys and ethnographic observations, each of which has provided unique insights into the experiences, perceptions and interactional dynamics of child language brokers and the other people involved in the interaction (see section 5 for a detailed overview of research findings by methodology). Semi-structured interviews were a primary tool used with a wide range of participants, including both child language brokers and healthcare providers, general practitioners and educators, to gain insight into their perceptions of CLB. These interviews aimed to explore how CLB is viewed, focusing on the challenges and benefits experienced by both the brokers and the professionals involved. In addition to the interviews, focus groups were held to further explore participants' experiences, feelings and the impact of CLB on their personal and relational development. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews and focus groups were further explored using questionnaires and surveys to collect self-reported data on children's and adults' attitudes and perceptions of CLB. These tools allowed for the collection of more comprehensive, quantifiable data in different regions of Italy. To ensure the use of age-appropriate methods for very young language brokers, one of the most innovative data collection tools used in the *In Medio PUER(I)* project was the *Traduttori in Erba* (Translators in Bud) school competition, which took place during the 2010/2011, 2011/2012 and 2016/2017 school years. The competition elicited over 600 visual and written narratives from children and adolescents, providing a rich source of data on the emotional and cognitive experiences of young brokers. More recently, these methodologies have been integrated with the use of authentic child-language-brokered interactions that were recorded at home, in classrooms or in after-school centres to further enrich the study's findings and provide a micro analysis of the interactional moves involved in the practice.

Through this multi-layered research approach, CLB studies in Italy have gathered data on the attitudes and perceptions of children, parents, teachers, healthcare staff and institutional representatives, contributing to a broader awareness of the practice and its significance. CLB has now grown into a quite robust area of research in Italy, shedding light on the social, linguistic, educational, and psychological dimensions of CLB.

## 5. Insights from different methodological approaches

As mentioned in the previous section, a mixed methods approach is particularly effective for the study of NPIT, and in particular CLB, given its complexity and the multiple perspectives involved, from children to parents, from native to non-native speakers of the societal language, from lay people to educators and healthcare providers. Children's ability to express themselves varies, especially when discussing complex or sensitive

issues. While interviews and focus groups facilitate verbal expression, visual methods such as drawing and storytelling offer alternative ways of communicating experiences. This ensures that all participants, regardless of age or language proficiency, can contribute meaningfully. Research with children must also be age-appropriate and ethically sound. Relying solely on structured interviews or surveys may overlook emotional, cognitive and social dimensions. The next section provides a detailed overview of the research findings from the different methodologies implemented over the 20 years of research in Italy.

### **5.1. Findings from surveys: quantitative perspectives on CLB practices**

Research on CLB in Italy using surveys has provided valuable insights into the experiences, attitudes, and psychological effects of child language brokers across different contexts, including schools, families, prisons, and healthcare settings.

A recurring theme across several studies is the gendered nature of CLB, with female children and adolescents taking on the role more frequently than their male counterparts. Valtolina (2010), focusing on a group of Filipino adolescents in Milan, confirmed that girls were more likely to mediate due to both their superior verbal skills from an early age and cultural expectations that positioned them as more responsible for family obligations. The study found no significant negative psychological impact of CLB on these adolescents, with many perceiving it as a natural extension of their family responsibilities. Similar gender-based patterns were observed in later studies, such as Valtolina et al. (2023), who studied Latino adolescents in Milan and found that while boys often avoided CLB due to anxiety and social stigma, girls embraced it as an expected responsibility that reinforced their self-esteem and status within their families and communities. However, for boys, the social burden of brokering was associated with distress, potentially contributing to depressive symptoms.

In the educational setting, Cirillo (2017) and Ceccoli (2018, 2019, 2022a) explored CLB among junior high school and vocational school students, highlighting its frequent occurrence, particularly in interactions between immigrant families and school institutions. Teachers acknowledged an increase in CLB occurrences, often relying on bilingual students to assist with communication despite the presence of professional mediators. However, educators also expressed concerns about inappropriate brokering in sensitive matters. Cirillo (2017) and Ceccoli (2018) found that CLB was widely practiced in the schools where they administered their questionnaires, largely due to the inadequacy of formal mediation services and families' preference to rely on their children. Both studies also highlighted students' metalinguistic awareness, as they adopted specific translation strategies to bridge linguistic gaps. Interestingly, students reported a higher comfort level brokering within their families than in school settings, yet in both contexts their perceptions were predominantly positive. Ceccoli (2022a), who surveyed 150 bilingual high school students across northern and central Italy, further explored the affective and cognitive dimensions of CLB attitudes. Students who associated CLB with positive feelings, such as pride and responsibility, also tended to recognise its cognitive benefits, including improved linguistic skills. However, stress was more prevalent among recent migrants, who lacked the necessary vocabulary and experience to navigate mediation tasks with ease. Peppoloni (2021) expanded on these findings by examining the experiences of first- and second-generation migrant students in Perugia. The study highlighted the universal nature of CLB across different ethnic groups, emphasising its role as a linguistic and cultural bridge between immigrant families and Italian institutions. Participants reported conflicting emotions: while recognising the linguistic and cognitive benefits of CLB, they also experienced difficulties, reflecting the complex and sometimes burdensome nature of the practice.

A unique perspective on CLB emerged from research conducted within the prison system. Rossato (2017) investigated CLB among 12 migrant inmates in Vicenza and Treviso and found that informal interpretation was a common practice, particularly for newly arrived prisoners. While this ad hoc mediation played a crucial role in facilitating communication, the study also highlighted the precarious nature of linguistic support in prisons, where professional interpreters are scarce and reliance on fellow inmates often leads to ethical and accuracy concerns.

The family context remains central to the CLB experience, as illustrated by Ceccoli (2019), who compared the perspectives of 12 migrant parents and their 13 children in Forlì. Both groups reported overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards CLB, with children feeling proud to help their families and parents expressing deep gratitude for their children's linguistic support. However, despite these positive perceptions, both parents and children acknowledged a preference for not having to rely on CLB, seeing it as a necessary but temporary strategy for integration. This study reinforces the idea that when parents value their children's mediation efforts, children in turn experience greater confidence and comfort in their brokering roles.

Beyond educational and family contexts, CLB has also been studied in the healthcare sector. Nikitina & Montenovio (2023) conducted a survey examining healthcare communication in Italy, particularly the reliance on informal language brokers. Their findings highlighted the challenges of using untrained mediators in medical settings, including ethical dilemmas, trust issues and the inconsistency of professional interpreting services. The study highlighted the need for better collaboration between healthcare professionals and language mediators, as well as improved training programmes to effectively address communication gaps.

Overall, the survey-based research on CLB in Italy paints a nuanced picture of this widespread phenomenon, highlighting its presence in different settings, while also shedding light on the emotional and psychological dimensions of the experiences of child language brokers. Despite the challenges associated with CLB, including stress and anxiety, most studies suggest that children and young people perceive CLB in a largely positive light, especially when their contributions are valued by their families and communities.

Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that structured support systems and formal mediation services are needed to reduce the burden on child language brokers and to ensure more equitable communication practices for migrant populations.

### **5.2. Interviews and narratives: exploring subjective experiences and perceptions**

While the surveys described above have provided quantitative data by mapping patterns across larger numbers of participants, interviews, focus groups and written and visual narratives have also been used to gather qualitative insights, allowing for in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perceptions.

Research using semi-structured interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders involved in CLB has highlighted different perceptions of the practice. Studies by Bucaria (2014) and Rossato (2019) have analysed the experiences of adolescents and young adults involved in CLB, showing how child language brokers develop a strong metalinguistic awareness and use adaptive translation strategies, such as paraphrasing and censoring, to facilitate communication and protect their families from potentially embarrassing or discriminatory situations. Ceccoli (2021) showed how CLB generates mixed emotions among young migrants, who oscillate between a sense of responsibility and satisfaction for providing support and anxiety stemming from language difficulties or the context in which they are asked to broker.

Healthcare professionals and institutional stakeholders also offer a contrasting perspective on CLB. Interviews conducted by Antonini (2015) with healthcare providers highlight a significant gap between the adult perception of CLB, often viewed as a natural and stress-free activity for children, and the lived experiences of child language brokers, who report the task as emotionally burdensome, especially in medical contexts. Cirillo & Torresi (2013) and Torresi (2014) further reinforce this discrepancy: while medical professionals tend to perceive child brokers as confident, the children themselves describe healthcare brokering as a stressful and emotionally intense responsibility. Institutional representatives, although recognizing the prevalence of CLB, raise ethical concerns, particularly regarding the involvement of children in sensitive medical conversations. Research by Cirillo, Torresi & Valentini (2010), as well as Cirillo & Torresi (2013) and Torresi (2014), reveals a widespread lack of awareness and absence of guidelines within Italian institutions concerning CLB. Despite professionals' preference to avoid relying on child brokers, they acknowledge its inevitability when professional interpreters are unavailable.

Other studies have provided in-depth insights into the perceptions and emotions of children and young people involved in CLB, based on written narratives and visual representations. The "Traduttori in Erba" school competitions (Antonini 2014, 2016, 2017, 2022) collected hundreds of texts and drawings from primary and lower secondary school students, illustrating how CLB is perceived as a daily activity with both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, participants reported improved language and academic skills, but on the other they expressed anxiety, frustration and a premature sense of responsibility towards their families. These narratives also underlined the role of CLB as a tool for inclusion and peer support, emphasising empathy as a key element of linguistic mediation. Their emotions ranged from pride and excitement at mastering new words to embarrassment, frustration and even resentment, particularly when they felt their efforts went unnoticed or unappreciated. Many stories highlight the shifting power dynamics within families, where children become temporary decision-makers, tasked with filtering or softening messages to protect their parents from distress. The narratives also reveal an acute awareness of institutional shortcomings—children express, often implicitly, a recognition that their role exists because of systemic gaps in professional language support. Using artwork elicitation to analyse the artwork produced during the school competitions, Torresi (2017) confirmed that child language brokers are aware of the power dynamics inherent in their role and describe CLB as an integral part of their daily lives.

Finally, Antonini & Torresi (2021) used a combination of questionnaires, interviews and school competition artwork to examine CLB in healthcare settings. Their findings reinforced the stark discrepancy between healthcare professionals' perceptions and children's lived experiences, with young brokers often reporting stress and anxiety when mediating in medical contexts.

Taken together, interviews, focus groups and narratives revealed the emotionally contrasting dimensions of CLB, adding depth to the quantitative trends identified in surveys. These studies provide a comprehensive picture of CLB as a deeply embedded social practice in Italy and highlight the need for structured policies that recognise and support child language brokers, ensuring that their contributions are acknowledged without placing undue burdens on their young shoulders.

### **5.3. Authentic interactional data: analysing real-life CLB practices in context**

Research on CLB in PSI in Italy has also relied on real-life data, including transcribed video and audio recordings of authentic interactions, to analyse the linguistic, social and educational implications of CLB. Galletti (2014) investigated CLB within a technical institute in Vicenza, where students engaged in activities designed to promote intercultural dialogue and metalinguistic awareness. By reflecting on their linguistic repertoires and their role as brokers, students developed a deeper understanding of CLB, demonstrating how it can be integrated into formal educational frameworks to enhance linguistic and cultural awareness. Baraldi (2016) conducted an in-depth analysis of CLB in international camps across Italy, Brazil, and the USA, examining interactions between Italian children, junior counsellors, and educators. Through 11 extracts from video and audio recordings, the study found that ad-hoc interpreting in these contexts often acts as a gatekeeping mechanism rather than a means of facilitating true multilingual communication. Educators acting as informal interpreters often provided reduced, summarised or expanded renditions of English

discourse, thereby limiting children's participation and reinforcing pre-determined educational goals. However, when children were allowed to engage in conversational exchanges in their L1, with the gist reformulated in English, their agency in communication increased, fostering a more dialogic and participatory environment. Pugliese (2017, 2020) explored CLB in multilingual primary and middle school classrooms in Bologna, focusing on the peer-brokered interactions of Chinese and Filipino students and highlighting how CLB functions as a form of peer teaching. Child language brokered interactions were not merely translation exercises but moments of knowledge co-construction, where children appropriated and processed information autonomously. The research also examined how plurilingualism acts as a bridge toward L2 acquisition and classroom participation. Ceccoli (2022b) examined the conversational strategies of child language brokers in interactions between migrant children and their parents in an after-school centre in Forlì. Using a dataset of four recorded meetings, the study highlighted the agency of child language brokers who not only translated but also actively shaped communication by managing, filtering and reconstructing information. By shifting between different modes of production and reception, children assumed roles that went beyond mere linguistic transfer, becoming decision-makers in communication. Their strategic choices – such as modifying messages to avoid misunderstandings or to maintain their family's social standing—revealed the complex social dynamics underlying CLB and challenged traditional views of children's roles in communication. Angelelli & Ceccoli (2023) further explored CLB in educational contexts, analysing interactions between two Italian educators and two eight-year-old Chinese students in Forlì. Their research focused on the communicative strategies employed by young brokers, particularly their use of replacement (speaking on behalf of others) and summarising (condensing monolingual interlocutors' turns). The findings exposed a misalignment between educators' expectations—who anticipated a more faithful, professional-style interpretation—and the children's pragmatic, autonomous approach to brokering. Additionally, the study highlighted educators' attempts to control and guide CLB interactions, often imposing their understanding of professional mediation on the children, thereby restricting their agency. Finally, Pugliese & Zanoni (2024) analysed CLB from an interactionist perspective in kindergartens and primary schools in Forlì-Cesena. The study emphasised that CLB is not simply a matter of linguistic transfer, but a coordinated, reciprocal activity in which participants influence each other. Children's collaborative efforts in multilingual exchange showed how CLB contributes to a complex, situated learning ecology. The study also proposed the integration of CLB sequences into teacher training programmes, enabling educators to recognise and use CLB as a pedagogical resource that fosters collective participation and dynamic language use in the classroom.

By examining authentic interactions, this body of research provides a nuanced understanding of CLB and of the micro communicative and linguistic strategies implemented by child language brokers.

## 6. Implications for training and future directions for NPIT research in Italy

The findings reviewed in this paper have highlighted how different methodological approaches provide different insights into NPIT and CLB in particular, which can also offer valuable insights for training programmes aimed at educators, healthcare professionals and interpreters. The quantitative findings can help shape policy recommendations by highlighting widespread problems (e.g. lack of professional mediation in schools and healthcare), while the qualitative findings can be useful for training professionals in interpersonal dynamics to ensure they understand the lived experiences of young brokers and the emotional complexities of CLB. As teachers often rely on bilingual students for mediation, training should focus on ethical considerations, boundaries and best practices to ensure that students are not placed in inappropriate situations. Teachers should also develop strategies to support students' metalinguistic awareness and translation skills while minimising emotional distress. Training should include insights into the affective and cognitive aspects of CLB, ensuring that professionals recognise both the benefits (e.g. language development, confidence) and challenges (e.g. stress, anxiety, social stigma). Particular attention should be paid to recent migrants who may need additional language support. By incorporating these findings, training programmes can better equip professionals to deal ethically and effectively with CLB dynamics, while reducing the potential burden on young brokers.

This paper has reviewed the main research on NPIT in Italy from its inception in 2006 to 2024, showing that the primary focus has been on the CLB branch within NPIT studies. Over time, studies on CLB have expanded beyond the University of Bologna, which pioneered the field, although researchers from other institutions remain relatively few. Moreover, most scholars studying CLB come from Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS), with only a handful of contributions from other disciplines. Broadening the scope to include perspectives from different academic fields would greatly enrich the research. Future studies should also move beyond educational and healthcare settings to explore a wider range of contexts, such as refugee camps and migration centres, where CLB is likely to be prevalent but remains largely under-researched. Furthermore, research has mainly focused on northern and central Italy, while southern regions, which are often the first point of entry for migrants, have yet to be explored. Expanding research both geographically and thematically would provide a more comprehensive understanding of CLB in Italy. In addition, with a few exceptions, most studies have examined CLB in general without focusing on specific migrant communities. Targeted research on specific communities, such as Chinese or Albanian migrants—similar to studies of Latino CLB in the US—could provide deeper insights into the linguistic and cultural dimensions of brokering within these groups. Integrating findings with research on the language and culture of these communities would not only enhance theoretical understanding but also provide practical benefits for teachers working with these children in schools. There is also a lack of longitudinal studies that could help to understand the

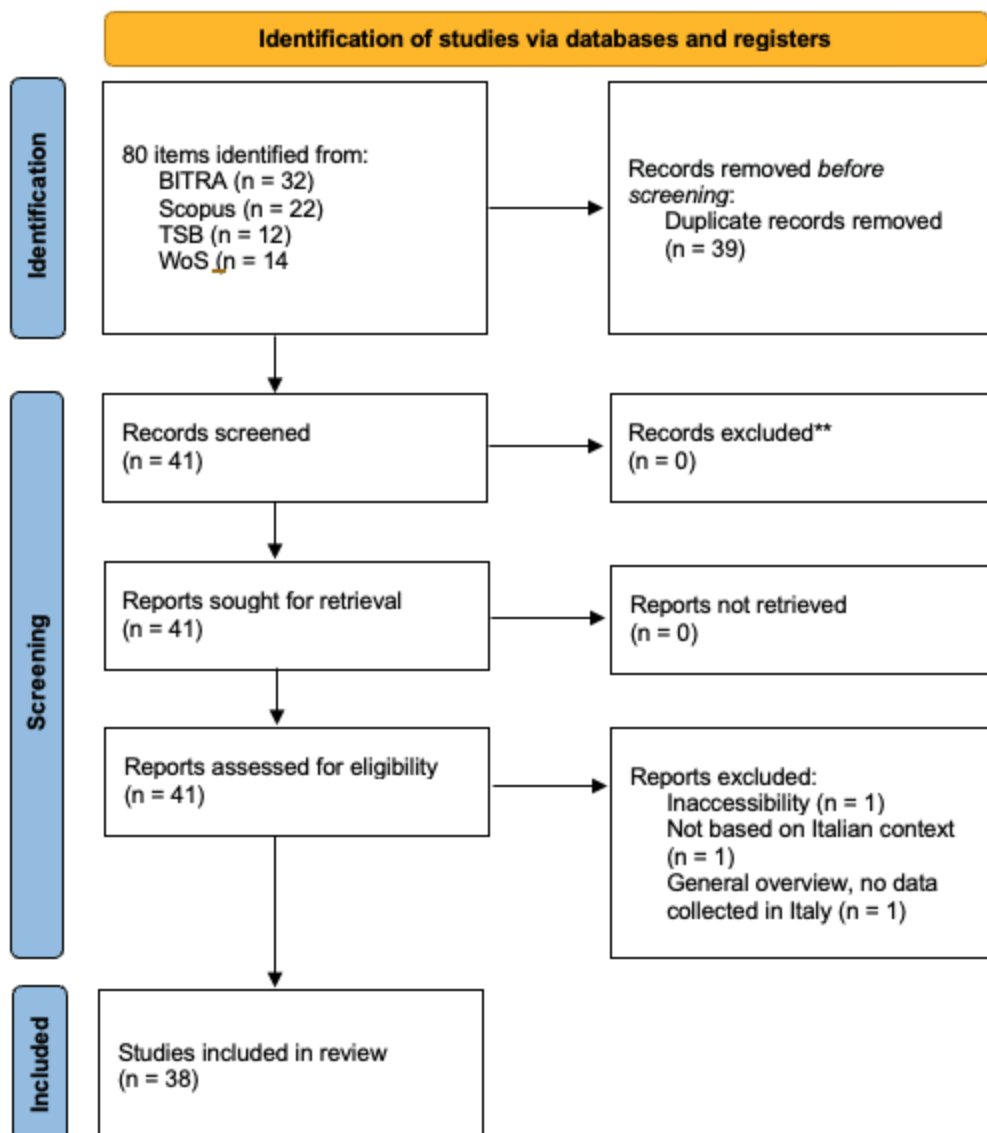
long-term effects of CLB on children's language and cognitive development and their future adult lives and career choices. While much research has been done on CLB, there has been little focus on non-professional adult interpreters, apart from De Camillis' work (2020, 2024) on non-professional translators in Alto Adige. This leaves an important gap to be filled regarding non-professional adult interpreting and translation, such as bilingual staff or other informal mediators, whose role in facilitating communication in different institutional settings remains largely understudied in Italy.

## References

- Albertini, Valentina & Capitani, Giulia (Eds.) (2010). La mediazione linguistico-culturale. Stato dell'arte e potenzialità. *I Quaderni del CESVOT*, 47.
- Altin, Roberta & Virgilio, Flavia (2016). *Sconfinamenti. Intercultura in Area Transfrontaliera tra Protocolli e Pratiche*. EUT.
- Amato, Amalia & Garwood, Christopher (2011). Cultural Mediators in Italy: A New Breed of Linguists. *inTRAlInea*, 13.
- Angelelli, Claudia Viviana & Ceccoli, Federica (2023). Communication in Child Language Brokering: Role Expectation and Role Performance. *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 18(2), 167-190. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.21084.ang>
- Antonini, Rachele (2010). The study of child language brokering: Past, current and emerging research. *MediAzioni*, 10, 1-23.
- Antonini, Rachele (2014). La mediazione linguistica e culturale in Italia: i mediatori invisibili. In Rachele Antonini (Ed.) *La mediazione linguistica e culturale non professionale in Italia* (pp. 7-32). Bononia University Press.
- Antonini, Rachele (2015). Unseen forms of interpreting: Child Language brokering in Italy. *CULTUS*, 8, 96 -112.
- Antonini, Rachele (2016). Caught in the middle: child language brokering as a form of unrecognized language service. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(7), 710-725.
- Antonini, Rachele (2017). Through the children's voice. An analysis of language brokering experiences. In Rachele Antonini, Letizia Cirillo, Linda Rossato & Ira Torresi (Eds.), *Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation: State of the Art and Future of an Emerging Field of Research* (pp. 315-336). John Benjamins.
- Antonini, Rachele (2022). Children's narratives of the emotional impact of Child Language Brokering. In Greta Zanoni & Serena Zuccheri (Eds.) *Emozioni: sentirle, parlarne, tradurle, MediAzioni*, 33, 132 -154. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15269>
- Antonini, Rachele & Torresi, Ira (2021). Child Language Brokering in Healthcare Settings. In Susam-Saraeva Şebnem & Eva Spišiaková (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Health* (pp. 184 - 197). Routledge.
- Antonini Rachele & Ceccoli, Federica (2025). Public Service Interpreting in Italy and Child Language Brokering: two sides of the same coin. *FITISPos International Journal*.
- Arnaut, Karel & Spotti, Massimiliano (2015). Superdiversity discourse. In Karen Tracy, Todd Sandel & Cornelia Ilie (Eds.). *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (pp. 1-7).
- Baraldi, Claudio (2016). Ad-Hoc Interpreting in International Educational Settings: The Problem of Renditions. *Interpreting*, 18(1), 89-119.
- Bucaria, Chiara (2014). Il Punto di vista dei giovani mediatori: osservazioni su frequenza, atteggiamenti, ed aspetti relazionali. In Rachele Antonini (Ed.), *La mediazione linguistica e culturale non professionale in Italia* (pp. 91-116). Bononia University Press.
- Ceccoli, Federica (2018). Child Language Brokering: la percezione degli studenti di origine straniera e dei rispettivi insegnanti. In Carmel Mary Coonan, Ada Bier & Elena Ballarin (Eds.) *La didattica delle lingue nel nuovo millennio. Le sfide dell'internazionalizzazione*. Edizioni Ca' Foscari.
- Ceccoli, Federica (2019). Parents' and Children's Perspectives on Child Language Brokering: A Comparative Approach. In Adele D'Arcangelo, Chiara Elefante & Valeria Illuminati (Eds.) *Translating for Children Beyond Stereotypes. Traduire pour la jeunesse au-delà des stéréotypes* (pp. 71-82). Bononia University Press.
- Ceccoli, Federica (2021). Reconstructing the experiences of child language brokering: a focus on the socio-emotional impact of the practice. *The Translator*, 27(2), 216-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2020.1864894>
- Ceccoli, Federica (2022a). Bilingual children acting as language brokers in Italy: Their affective and cognitive attitudes about the practice. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 26(3), 334-350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069211058268>
- Ceccoli, Federica (2022b). *Migrant Children on Stage: their Role as Bilingual Brokers*. Fondazione Bologna University Press.
- Cirillo, Letizia (2017). Child language brokering in private and public settings: Perspectives from young brokers and their teachers. In Rachele Antonini, Letizia Cirillo, Linda Rossato & Ira Torresi (Eds.), *Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation: State of the Art and Future of an Emerging Field of Research* (pp. 295-314). John Benjamins.
- Cirillo, Letizia & Torresi, Ira (2013). Exploring institutional perceptions of child language brokering: Examples from Italian healthcare settings. In Christina Schäffner, Krzysztof Kredens & Yvonne Fowler (Eds.), *Interpreting in a Changing Landscape* (pp. 149-163). John Benjamins.

- Cirillo, Letizia; Torresi, Ira & Valentini, Cristina (2010). Institutional perceptions of Child Language Brokering in Emilia Romagna. *MediAzioni*, 10, 269-296.
- European Migration Network. 2004. *The Impact of Immigration on Italy's Society*. IDOS – Italian National Contact Point.
- Di Rosa, Roberta Teresa & Tumminelli, Giuseppina (2021). Diversification of diversity: Migrations, cultural pluralism and urban transformations in Palermo (Italy): a case study. *Current Sociology Monograph*, 70(2), 275-290.
- Favaro, Graziella (2010). Trasformare le linee di confine. *Famiglia oggi*, 2.
- Galletti, Chiara (2014). "In questa scuola ci sono le lingue più diverse, ed è un tesoro immenso": esperienze e riflessioni sulla mediazione linguistica e culturale nei percorsi di formazione professionale iniziale. In Rachele Antonini (Ed.), *La mediazione linguistica e culturale non professionale in Italia* (pp. 133-160). Bononia University Press.
- Harris, Brian (1977). The importance of natural translation. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 12, 96-114.
- Harris, Brian & Sherwood, Bianca (1978). Translating as an innate skill. In David Gerver & H. Wallace Sinaiko (Eds.) *Language Interpretation and Communication* (pp. 155-170). Plenum Press.
- Nikitina, Jekaterina & Montenovò, Giulia (2023). The changing landscape of healthcare communication in Italy: Perceptions and challenges in language brokering services. *Language and Health*, 1(1), 77-85.
- Peppoloni, Diana (2021). Pratiche di mediazione non professionale degli studenti stranieri immigrati di prima o seconda generazione nel sistema scolastico italiano. In Michele Daloiso & Marco Mezzadri (Eds.), *Educazione linguistica inclusiva. Riflessioni, ricerche ed esperienze* (pp. 235 – 252), SAIL, 17, Edizioni Ca' Foscari.
- Pérez-González, Luis & Susam-Saraeva, Şebnem (2012). Non-professionals translating and interpreting: Participatory and engaged perspectives. *The Translator* 18(2), 149-165.
- Pöllabauer Sonja (2007). Interpreting in asylum hearings: issues of saving face. In Cecilia Wadensjö, Birgitta Englund Dimitrova & Anna-Lena Nilsson (Eds.) *The Critical Link 4: Professionalisation of Interpreting in the Community* (pp. 39-52). John Benjamins.
- Pugliese, Rosa (2020). In italiano e in altre lingue, a casa e a scuola: le interazioni tra pari nella socializzazione linguistica. *LEND-Lingua e Nuova Didattica*, 1, 25-39.
- Pugliese, Rosa (2017). Tradurre per la compagna di banco: child language brokering e interazioni costruttive nella classe plurilingue. In Loredana Corrà (Ed.), *Educazione linguistica in classi multietniche* (pp. 63-86). Aracne.
- Pugliese, Rosa & Zanoni, Greta (2024). Le child language brokering comme activité discursive conjointe dans un parcours de continuité éducative en maternelle et à l'école élémentaire en Italie. In Sandra Tomc & Valeria Villa-Perez (Eds.), *Plurilinguismes et école maternelle. Croiser regards et pratiques en France et ailleurs* (pp. 162-185). Lambert Lucas.
- Rossato, Linda (2017). From confinement to community service: migrant inmates mediating between languages and cultures. In Rachele Antonini, Letizia Cirillo, Linda Rossato & Ira Torresi (Eds.), *Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation: State of the Art and Future of an Emerging Field of Research* (pp. 157-176). John Benjamins.
- Rossato, Linda (2019). "I skipped unnecessary details and got straight to the point!": Adolescents and Young Adults on their Child Language Brokering Experiences. *MediAzioni*, 24, 1-19.
- Rudvin, Mette (2006). Issues of culture and language in the training of language mediators for public services in Bologna: Matching market needs and training. In Danielle Londei, Donna Miller & Paola Puccini (Eds.) *Insegnare le Lingue/Culture Oggi: Il Contributo dell'Interdisciplinarietà* (pp. 57-72). Asterisco.
- Siebetcheu Youmbi, Raymond (2011). Identità e ruolo del mediatore linguistico-culturale in Italia. *The Journal of Cultural Mediation*, 1, 7-16.
- Torresi, Ira (2014). Child Language Brokering: voce alle istituzioni. In Rachele Antonini (Ed.), *La mediazione linguistica e culturale non professionale in Italia* (pp. 55-90). Bononia University Press.
- Torresi, Ira (2017). Seeing brokering in bright colours: Participatory artwork elicitation in CLB research. In Rachele Antonini, Letizia Cirillo, Linda Rossato & Ira Torresi (Eds.), *Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation: State of the Art and Future of an Emerging Field of Research* (pp. 337-358). John Benjamins.
- Valtolina, Giovanni Giulio (2010). I figli come mediatori linguistici. Uno studio su un campione di adolescenti filippini. *Rivista di Studi Familiari*, 1: 113-124.
- Valtolina, Giovanni Giulio; Gennari, Maria Luisa & Tamanza, Giancarlo (2023). Effects of Language Brokering on Psychological Well-Being. A Study on Latino Children in Italy. *Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202309.0441.v1>

## Appendix



Source: Page MJ, et al. *BMJ* 2021;372: n71. Doi:|10.1136/bmj.n71.

This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>