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LANGUAGE BROKERING FOR SPEECH IMPAIRED PEOPLE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPRETATION PROCESS AND MEDIATOR'S
PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE

Relatrice

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*A Forlì. Alla mia terra. A mio nonno Totonno.
Avete tutto il mio cuore.*

"Gli uomini sognano più il ritorno che la partenza,"
disse il ragazzo, che stava già riabituandosi al silenzio del deserto.

"Se quanto hai già trovato è fatto di materia pura, non potrà mai marcire.
E tu, un giorno, potrai tornare.
Se è stato soltanto un attimo di luce, come l'esplosione di una stella,
allora non troverai più nulla quando ritornerai.
Ma avrai visto un'esplosione di luce.
E anche solo per questo ne sarà valsa la pena."

Paulo Coelho, "L'Alchimista"

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1. Introduction

Speech is a unique and powerful tool that we all use to express ideas, needs and emotions. Not only it makes possible to convey messages and to give meaning to the reality that surrounds us, but, above all, it allows people to express their personality and to interact and connect with other individuals. It follows that, a major component of communication and, consequently, of socialization relies on the possibility to use spoken language. Nonetheless, not all individuals can rely on this same ability to express themselves autonomously. In fact, many people who suffer some kind of speech impairment due to brain injury may need assistance to communicate. In this context, as argued by Rubio-Carbonero (2021), it is the family members and caretakers that are usually in charge of helping speech impaired people (SIP) with communication. Hence, these people, who work as mediators and ad-hoc interpreters, end up assuming the role of language brokers.

This study explores the phenomenon of Language Brokering (LB) applied to Speech Impaired People (SIP): a common practice, yet often hidden, that many people perform on a daily basis. Indeed, I argue that this form of mediation, performed mostly by adults for their speech impaired relatives, is still largely unexplored. Not only it lacks public recognition, but it is also often unseen by the same people who perform it every day. Hence, the question that inspired my research is: do these individuals ever perceived themselves as mediators?

Indeed, it could be argued that, in the collective imaginary, interpretation is usually visualized as the procedure by which people who speak different languages can communicate, typically thanks to a professional mediator. Nonetheless, as usual, reality reveals to be more complex than what people think in the beginning.

Therefore, this study sets two main goals. On the one hand, in order to answer the question above mentioned, it aims to explore language brokers' perception of their role as caregivers. On the other, it aims to examine how communication is facilitated thanks to the language broker.

For this purpose, I will rely on the established literature of Non-professional Interpreting and Translation studies (NPIT) as well as on the work on Child Language Brokering (CLB). The latter, which explores mediation services performed by children of immigrants for their non-native parents (Antonini, 2017), will provide a relevant basis for part of my analysis. Hence, I argue that the non-professional and familiar nature of the form of interpreting explored in this paper allows us to draw parallels to the established literature of CLB. Moreover, I will also rely

on the research conducted by Rubio-Carbonero (2021) on the communicative strategies taking place in these ad-hoc interpreting practices.

In conclusion, the ultimate goal for this dissertation is to raise awareness on this form of LB. Through semi-structured interviews with SIP and their family members, this study aims to understand the emotional, relational, and practical dimensions of LB. While exploring the strategies employed by mediators to make communication possible, this research also sheds light on the implications deriving from their role as caregivers. These insights will contribute to a deeper understanding of the reality of language brokering within families, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of these practices and finally making them visible.

2. Speech impairment and communication

As aforementioned, speech makes it possible to express our ideas, our emotions, and ourselves. Nonetheless, the ease with which most people produce speech does not really match the true complexity of the operation that makes this act possible. Unfortunately, it is only when facing speech disorders that people come into terms with the actual “enormity of the act” (Duffy, 2020: 3).

2.1 Defining motor speech disorders

Neurologic diseases are responsible for various disorders of communication. Indeed, as argued by Duffy (2020: 3), speech requires “the integrity and integration of different neurocognitive, neuromotor, neuromuscular and musculoskeletal activities”. The combination of processes which regulate speech motor planning, programming, control and execution are referred to as “motor speech processes” (Ibid.). Therefore, when the synchronous work of these activities is disrupted by a neurologic injury, speech is consequently impaired. The most common disorders of communication associated with neurological impairment are aphasia, apraxia and dysarthria (Enderby, 2013: 273). The latter is the condition impacting the speakers this study intends to investigate. Hence, we will now provide a general overview of dysarthria.

The term dysarthria refers to a group of motor speech disorders (Enderby, 2013) caused by brain damage and subsequent impairment of the basic motor processes delegated to the muscular control and execution of speech. As Enderby highlights, dysarthria can be either congenital or acquired during birth or later in life as a consequence of, inter alia, “cerebral vascular accident, head injury, or progressive neurological disease” (ibid.). Speech intelligibility and/or speech naturalness are thus reduced as a result of this brain damage, which modifies “the strength, speed, range, steadiness, tone, or accuracy of movements required for breathing, phonatory, resonatory, articulatory, or prosodic aspects of speech production” (Duffy, 2020: 3). As a matter of fact, dysphonia (disturbance of phonation) is typical of these people, whose speech may sound abnormal (Enderby, 2013: 275). Hence, by altering speech production, dysarthria does affect people’s communication ability and, consequently, their quality of life. It follows that the severity of dysarthria represents a major determinant of the extent to which SIP will be able to autonomously and effectively express themselves. However, central to the discussion of this analysis is that people who suffer from dysarthria are still competent speakers (Rubio-Carbonero, 2021: 161). In fact, the disorder does not impair the symbolic functions of language; therefore, such people can understand what other people say to them, but, due to brain injury,

they cannot effectively talk. It follows that assistance may be necessary for SIP to communicate properly (ibid.) and to adequately participate and contribute to social life.

2.2. Facilitating communication for speech impaired people: language brokering

Therefore, some individuals, who suffer some kind of speech impairment, may need help to communicate with other people.

As argued by Rubio-Carbonero:

[speech impaired people] may need assistance in order to effectively communicate that may range from assistive devices (Engelke 2013) to interpreting usually in charge of family members and caretakers. These caretakers end up working as ad-hoc interpreters and mediators of their relatives with speech impairment. (2021:160).

Hence, by facilitating communication for their relatives on an ad-hoc basis, these people, who did not undergo professional training in the language mediation field, end up working not only as non-professional interpreters, but as language brokers.

As suggested by Rubio-Carbonero:

family members and caretakers become not only non-professional interpreters for the persons with speech impairment, but also mediators, to the point of acting as language brokers (2021:161).

In this extract, Rubio-Carbonero refers to the non-professional services performed for SIP as LB. However, much of the literature discusses this form of mediation primarily in the context of CLB; a label used to refer to those children of immigrants who translate and interpret for their families and communities that are not proficient in the dominant language of the host country.

According to Antonini, CLB is defined as:

interpreting and translation activities carried out by children who mediate linguistically and culturally in formal and informal contexts and domains between their family, friends and the members of the linguistic community they belong to and the institutions and society of the country where their families reside or have migrated to (Antonini, 2015: 48).

What emerges from this definition is, on the one hand, the non-professional nature of CLB, while, on the other, the familiar context in which the practice is embedded and its relational nature. These two aspects, which represent some of the main key areas of focus in CLB literature, will be discussed in this chapter in relation to speech impaired people.

2.2.Situating NPIT studies

The widespread phenomenon of language brokering, either performed by children or adults, is by no means a new occurrence. As Antonini, Cirillo, Rossato and Torresi highlight (2017: 2), by citing Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva's work (2012) on NPIT¹, these practices “date back to the origins of human communication itself”. Accordingly, following the necessity for communication across language barriers, people have always drawn on translation and interpretation as a means of bridging linguistic divides and fostering understanding. Furthermore, through their mapping of NPIT, Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva have managed to address the intricate realities of translating and interpreting in real-life situations. As they point out, an “increasingly heterogeneous range of agents” are actively involved in non-professional translation and interpretation (2012: 152) in diversified contexts and forms. Hence, thanks to NPIT studies, light is finally shed on the wide variety of people who, outside professional settings, perform non-professional translation and interpretation. It follows that a much larger conceptual and discursive area is addressed, which does not see nonprofessionals as an alternative to established professional practices, but as a distinctive phenomenon. Therefore, it is only over the last decades that scholars have systematically investigated the phenomenon, identifying its unique dynamics and features.

When Brian Harris coined the expression “Natural translation”, non-professional interpretation and translation was emerging as a subject of inquiry. Hence, it is only from the second half of 1970s that NPIT has become “an object of investigation *per se*” (Antonini et al., 2017: 4). It was, indeed, the term “Natural translation”, coined by Harris that first drew attention to how bilinguals, without any special training, provided translation services in everyday circumstances (1967: 96). Therefore, with this label, an innate ability to translate was attributed to bilinguals. Later on, in the second half of 1980s, Shannon introduced the label “language brokering”. The new term, used in relation to the “naturally occurring interpreting and translation by children” (Antonini et al., 2017: 4), represented a shift towards a broader sociolinguistic/sociological perspective of NPIT, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Hence, CLB, as an autonomous field of research, is relatively recent. As argued below:

The interpreting and translation practices and activities performed by children and youths represent a multifaceted and multidimensional phenomenon that became the object and focus of research only in relatively recent times (Antonini et al., 2017:15).

As mentioned above, the term was first introduced to refer to naturally occurring interpreting and translation activities performed by children and it was later followed by other more specific

labels such as “para-phrasing” (2003) and “family interpreting” (2003), respectively explored by Orellana and Valdés (Ibid.: 4). Nonetheless, as outlined above, even if NPIT studies have largely focused on the role played by children and adolescents (Ibid.: 5), adults too can act as non-professional translators and interpreters.

Indeed, the term “non-professional” seems to be the most accurate when framing the variety of practices mentioned above (Ibid.: 6). In fact, the label “natural translation” presupposes an alleged innate ability to translate which does not, however, apply universally to all bilinguals. Instead, the expression “Child Language Brokering”, while implying the “obvious age bias” (Ibid.: 6) discussed above, does not take into account the unique cultural background of each of these language brokers. Furthermore, as concerns the presumed informal connotation ascribed to language brokering, it does not pay justice to the complex reality of situations where NPIT is performed, such as, for example, patient consultations and immigration interviews (Ibid.: 6). Finally, the expression ad hoc implies, erroneously, an “alleged limited and unplanned” nature of non-professional interpreting and translation (Ibid.: 6); an erroneous framing of these practices, which, again, fosters a biased narrative. Indeed, most of the time, non-professionals are actually expected to translate and interpret in circumstances where professional services are not guaranteed (Ibid.: 6). Therefore, it could be argued that the reality of NPIT is way more complex than it appeared to be in the beginning. The multifaceted nature of the work performed by non-professionals is, hence, what this research aims to address.

2.3. Brokering for the family

2.3.1. *The concept of care*

Having attempted to define non-professional translation, we will now explore the role of non-professionals brokering for their family members. As pointed out by Rubio-Carbonero (2021:161), it is mostly family members that facilitate communication for speech impaired people. Indeed, what emerges from the data collected for the study ¹is that the totality of language brokers was composed by family members, either mothers or sentimental partners.

¹ Rubio-Carbonero, Gema. “*Communication in Persons with Acquired Speech Impairment: The Role of Family as Language Brokers.*” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* (2021) Vol. 32, Issue 1, pp. 161–181
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Central to our discussion is the role of these non-professional mediators as caregivers. García-Sánchez, who accurately explored the role played by children brokering in households and communities, states that:

[this body of work] allows us to recognize fully children's critical role as caregivers and brokers of care in families and other forms of social organization—a role that has been not only diminished but also very often made invisible, if not outright denied. (2018:168)

The main issue addressed here is a tendency to diminish, or even deny, the importance of children's contributions as caregivers and intermediaries in their families and communities. Therefore, a need for validation and recognition of children's contributions is called to attention; significant, yet frequently overlooked, responsibilities taken in caregiving roles. However, before exploring the forms and modalities that shape caregiving activities, we should first attempt to define the concept of care and examine how it applies to language brokering for people with speech impairments.

From a relational feminist perspective², as García-Sánchez argues, care is intended as a set of ritualized practices that “maintain and enhance relationships with political, social, and global implications” (2018: 168). It follows that, instead of being viewed as a series of goal-oriented acts driven by individual emotions (Ibid.), care is understood as relational and interdependent. From this perspective, care practices are motivated by the relationships and interdependencies that connect individuals, situating these practices in social, cultural and familiar contexts. As a matter of fact, through their work, these children facilitate communication for their relatives or members of the community: a form of “other-oriented” (Ibid.: 167) activity which, over the time, has struggled to be conceptualized as care. However, by being responsible for other people's communications, these children are, indeed, responsible for care. A family responsibility, “a form of helping out” (Ibid.: 173), “quotidian and unremarkable” (Dorner et al. 2008, Song 1997) (ibid.) which, therefore, is part of the support that these people have to provide for their family members every day. It follows that the erroneous framing of CLB as “unplanned” and “limited” does not pay justice to the expectations and sense of responsibility

² “Feminist approaches to the notion of care (Held 2006, Hochschild 2000, Tronto 1993) and from other perspectives of care as relational (Noddings 2013) and as a dynamic process of circulation (Baldassar & Merla 2014). Feminist perspectives on care help to highlight the usually unseen and unrecognized forms of labor that children do to enhance the well-being of others, often within the framework of growing global power imbalances and structural inequalities” (García-Sánchez, 2018:168).

underlying these care practices. A biased narrative, which, however, has been challenged by recent studies.

2.4.2 The concept of service

Therefore, a more conscious and truthful framing of language brokering has originated. For this purpose, greater importance has been placed on the label “work” and its more explicitly Marxist counterpart “labor” (Song 1999). As argued by García-Sánchez (2018: 174) with these terms, children’s activities are no longer to be intended as part of their moral and social development but as practices carried out “in here and now” for the benefit of others. Moreover, with the term work, light is finally shed on the economic value of these practices which, furthermore, institutions often fail to provide. With reference to this last aspect, Antonini has used the term “service” to indicate how children’s contributions often fill the gap left by the institutions in providing linguistic and cultural mediation assistance. Hence, as pointed out:

Whenever and wherever there is a lack of language services provided by professional interpreters and translators, non-professionals become the obvious and only alternative (Antonini. 2015:96).

It follows that, when the public sector fails to provide professional assistance, the non-professional counterpart comes into play. Therefore, it could be argued that the language policy-making of the countries represents a major discriminating factor in determining whether and how language services will be provided.

However, when it comes to interpreting for speech impaired people, public services may not be a viable option. Indeed, as pointed out by Rubio-Carbonero, the public sector does not offer professionals able to help these people in managing their daily communication needs (2021: 161). Nonetheless, the reasons behind this vacuum left by the institutions seem to be more complex than the ones mentioned above. As Rubio- Carbonero points out:

Apart from the economic limitations, there is a lack of professional experts able to learn the particular communicative impairments of each person in order to accurately serve as an interpreter. Therefore, family members need to learn the new communicative strategies of their speech-impaired relatives to be able to help them communicate. (2021: 161)

Hence, beside the economic constraints, the shortage of specialized professionals able to address the unique communicative needs of these individuals represents the main barrier to public

communication assistance. Indeed, in this specific case, there is not “a common standard language” that professionals can learn and then interpret (Ibid.: 161). As a matter of fact, each person with speech impairment has his/her unique communicative difficulties which need personalized support. It follows that, given the immediate proximity to their speech impaired relatives, family members represent the only available option for an adequate facilitation of communication.

2.4.Methodology

The research methodology for this study involves the use of semi-structured interviews, consisting of closed and open-ended questions (Adams, 2015: 493). This tool provides the opportunity to investigate predefined points while ensuring the flexibility needed to explore the participants' experiences. In particular:

The dialogue can meander around the topics on the agenda — rather than adhering slavishly to verbatim questions as in a standardized survey — and may delve into totally unforeseen issues (Newcomer, Harry, Wholey. 2015: 493).

This approach allows for adapting questions based on responses and delving into crucial aspects that may emerge during the interview. Therefore, 4 individuals with dysarthria and their family members who work as language brokers were interviewed.

The interviews aimed at:

1. Providing an analysis of the three stages of the interpreting process: comprehension, interpretation, and negotiation (Rubio-Carbonero, 2021: 162), with a special focus on the interactional dynamics emerging from it.
2. exploring language brokers' perception of their role as caregivers.

For this purpose, I carried out two different interviews. In relation to the first area of research, I interviewed both the four language broker and the four speech-impaired person. The aim was to observe how communication is facilitated thanks to the language broker. Building on the analysis conducted by Rubio-Carbonero (2021), the interview served as a tool to examine how

the three stages of the interpretation process - comprehension, interpretation, and negotiation - occur. In particular, the following aspects were observed:

1. the compensatory strategies adopted by the language broker and the speech impaired person to communicate: use of non-verbal language as well as the mediator's reliance on pre-existing information determined by daily shared experiences.
2. Modulation of discourse: expanded renditions and non-renditions. How the language broker, based on prior knowledge and subjective criteria, modulates the discourse by selecting which content to render or not.
3. Negotiation: how the meaning is “co-constructed” and, when necessary, “reconstructed” between the mediator and the primary speaker.
4. The impact of interpreters on the agency of SIP: is it enhanced or diminished?

With regard to the second area of research, I interviewed the same four family members who were in charge of language brokering for SIP. The goals for this second interview were to:

1. understand how LB impacts the emotional sphere of the family members who are involved in mediating linguistically for SIP.
2. Assess the impact that LB has on various aspects of life, including the relationship with SIP.
3. Describe which family member is usually in charge of LB for SIP as well the frequency of these practices and the contexts in which they take place.
4. Reflect on the perception of family members as language brokers: do they view themselves as mediators?

Such analysis, which aims to shed light on all the involved parties in LB, makes it possible to explore both the emotional and practical dynamics of these practices. Hence, the answers to the questions are contextualized by considering the relevant literature aforementioned.

Finally, data were transcribed using Jefferson's Transcription System (see Appendix 1) through which detailed representation of spoken interactions is provided. The system made possible to document those features, like pauses, overlapping speech, repetitions and non-verbal elements, which often occur where there is impaired or difficult communication.

Table 1
Information about participants and his usual interpreters

Participant	Gender	Age at the time of the study	Usual interpreter
Antonio	Male	72	His wife
Caterina	Female	35	Her mother
Simone	Male	14	His mother
Vittorio	Male	31	His mother

3. The interpretation process

Interpreting is rendering a spoken or signed message into another spoken or signed language, preserving the register and meaning of the source language content. Usually, this process is divided into two main stages: understanding and interpreting. (Rubio-Carbonero 2021:166)

As indicated by Rubio-Carbonero, interpreting presupposes two stages where the message is first comprehended and later conveyed, ensuring that both meaning and register are maintained. However, when interpreting for people affected by speech impairment, a third stage emerges - negotiation - which Rubio-Carbonero (*ibid.*) refers to as “negotiation of meaning”.

This particular stage emerges as a distinctive feature of the type of interpretation this study aims to explore. As mentioned in §2.1, the condition which affects the primary speakers does not prevent them from understanding what other people say. It follows that, the “language and communicative awareness” of SIP (*ibid.*: 166) makes it possible for them to negotiate, challenge and even reconstruct the interpreted meaning delivered by the interpreter (*ibid.*: 170). Precisely, because the primary speakers in most cases fully understand what other people say to them, they may disagree with the way the rendition is articulated, or they may want to add further details. When this happens, they use a number of strategies to negotiate the meaning (*ibid.*: 172).

However, before investigating how the meaning is questioned and eventually reconstructed, we should first explore how the parties involved understand each other and how the meaning is initially conveyed. Hence, once the understanding and interpreting stages are outlined, we will proceed to analyse the negotiation phase.

3.1. Understanding: the alternative strategies

Understanding is the foundational stage which underlies and presupposes the entire interpretation process. Indeed, in order to deliver an accurate rendition, the interpreter must first fully understand the primary speaker, expending a level of effort varying according to the degree of impairment. Therefore, due to the limited communicative skills of the source speech,

interpreters may rely on a number of alternative strategies to understand her/him. As Vittorio's mother explains:

Extract 1 [Vittorio, his mother and researcher. Interview. August 2024]

1 RES: Vi capite sempre tra di voi?
Do you always understand each other?

2 VIT: Si
Yes

3 MOM: 99,99% delle volte. Qualche volta dice delle parole che non riusciamo a capire e lui fa lo spelling. Se si tratta di una parola nuova o particolare di cui non capiamo il contesto fa lo spelling e capiamo subito.

99.99% of the time ((laughing)). Sometimes he says words we can't understand, so he spells them out (.) If it's a new or particular word and we don't get the context he spells it and we understand immediately.

4 RES: Altri modi?
Any other ways ((to understand each other))?

5 MOM: Trova dei sinonimi, oppure spelling.
He finds synonyms, otherwise spelling.

6 VIT: Si
Yes

As we can see, Vittorio and his mother understand each other most of the time, therefore relying on communicative strategies, such as finding synonyms and spelling words, is not always necessary. However, when primary speakers suffer from a more severe form of speech impairment, drawing on extralinguistic aspects and adopting “multimodal strategies” becomes crucial to understand the source speech (Rubio-Carbonero 2021: 167). Knowing personally the primary speaker, their immediate context and experiences, as well as the kind of sounds they are able to articulate, offers the opportunity to the interpreters to better understand what is being said (ibid.: 170). These strategies may vary a lot, according to the degree of impairment. Indeed, while Vittorio and his mother opt just for verbal strategies, in cases of more severe brain injury and resulting speech impairment, the activation of non-verbal and para-verbal strategies is crucial to understand the source speech.

This is the case of Simone, whose disability allows him to articulate only a few words. As explained by his mother, it has been essential to establish a set of codified gestures which can

help communicate and create meaning. When I asked her mother how she manages to understand him, she said:

Extract 2 [Simone's mother. Interview. September 2024]

Viene tutto automatico (.) Anche rispetto agli occhi e alle espressioni, quindi lo capisco al volo (.) Anche il suono della sua voce, quando è nervoso, ha caldo o vuole essere cambiato (:). Adesso è tutto automatico (.) Cerco sempre di fargli delle domande e lui mi risponde. (1) Dice "mamma", "papà", "bere". Quando si innervosisce grida.

Everything comes automatically (.) Even with respect to eyes and expressions, so I understand him immediately (.) Even the sound of his voice, when he's nervous, hot or wants to get changed (.) Everything is automatic now (.) I always try to ask him questions and he answers me. (1) He says "mum", "dad", "drink". When he gets nervous, he shouts.

In this specific case, due to Simone's extremely limited vocabulary, non-verbal communication and deep knowledge of the primary speaker represent valid alternatives for building meaning. As explained by his mother, body language, such as eye movements and facial expressions, together with vocal tones, particularly when he gets nervous, play a significant role in understanding his needs. Posing yes-no questions also helps delimit the message which Simone tries to convey. In addition, his mother explains that he makes a kiss with his lips to signify "yes" and sticks out his tongue to indicate 'no.' These gestures allow him to express himself, to either agree or disagree with others and to answer yes-no questions. Hence, coping strategies for understanding may vary a lot from person to person. In the following extract, we will observe an example of communicative exchange with Simone.

.Extract 3 [Simone, his mother and researcher. Interview. September 2024]

- 1 RES: Siete andati al mare?
Did you go to the seaside?
- 2 MOM: Si (.) Siamo andati al mare anche se è stato un po' compli-
Yes (.) We went to the seaside even if it was a little compli-
- 3 ((Simone and his mother look at each other))
- 4 SIM: ((shows his tongue to indicate "no"))
- 5 MOM: Si (.) A Simone non piace molto.
Yes (.) Simone doesn't like it that much.
6. RES: Non ti piace il mare, Simone?
You don't like the seaside, Simone?

7. MOM: No (.) Se Simone lascia casa sua è un casino.
 ((shakes his head)) *No (.) If Simone leaves his house it's a mess.*
8. SAM: ((makes a kissing gesture with lips to indicate "yes"))
- 9 MOM: Vuole sempre stare a casa.
He always wants to stay home.
- 10 SIM ((Smiles))

As it can be observed, the way codified gestures are used - kissing to indicate “yes” and sticking out the tongue to signal “no”- demonstrates Simone’s active participation in the conversation. Hence, he is not only following it, but making his own contributions. For example, when Simone was asked whether they had been to the seaside, he used his tongue to express his dissatisfaction with the experience (line 4), even though his mother hadn’t mentioned this aspect. By doing so, he shifts the focus of the conversation from the general question to his personal preferences and lifestyle, emphasizing his dislike for the seaside and confirming his preference for staying at home (lines 8 and 10).

This interaction shows the simple, yet effective communication mechanism used by Simone and his mum. Despite the significantly limited communication abilities, he is able to agree or disagree with others and to respond to questions without using spoken words. However, this communication system demands her mother to invest considerable effort in understanding his responses and engaging in the conversation. Accordingly, as noted by Rubio-Carbonero, in cases of severe impairment, communication mostly revolves around the basic needs of the person, such as hunger, fatigue, or pain, while more complex or abstract topics, like discussing emotions or frustrations, are addressed much less frequently (Rubio-Carbonero, 2021: 168).

It follows that, in cases of severe speech impairment, the existence of a context families interpreters “can relate to” (ibid.) becomes essential for understanding the source speech. In fact, the shared experience between the primary speaker and the interpreter makes it possible for the latter to figure out what it is being said. For example, in extract 3, Simone’s mother was first able to delimit the meaning of the gesture used by his son and then explaining why he was saying “no” (line 4). Hence, it could be argued that she was able to expand the meaning of that specific “no” only thanks to the prior knowledge she had about her son and his lifestyle. With regard to this, the participants were asked whether they relied or not on prior knowledge to understand the source speech. Unsurprisingly, in line with Rubio-Carbonero’s observations, all of them confirmed the importance of shared experience and two of them affirmed that:

Extract 4 [Simone's mother. Interview. September 2024]

Si perché provvedo a tutto io (.) a dargli da mangiare, al cambio, al lavaggio (.) anche ai rapporti con gli altri, quando mi fanno qualche domanda (.) Cioè, io sono proprio l'interprete di mio figlio.

Yes because I take care of everything (.) feeding him, changing him, washing him (.) even dealing with others when they ask questions (.) I mean, I am really my son's interpreter.

Extract 5 [Vittorio's mother. Interview. August 2024]

Si (.) Per esempio quando racconta qualcosa che già so (.) aneddoti, racconti, fatti successi.

Yes (.) For example when he tells something that I already know (.) anecdotes, stories, facts that have happened.

3.2. Interpreting: expanded renditions and non-renditions

We can now move forward the analysis of the second stage of the process: interpretation. After having figured out what the primary speaker is saying, interpreters proceed to convey that meaning to the other people. According to Rubio-Carbonero (2021: 169) when this work is carried out by non-professionals for their family members, it may often result in what Wadensjö (1998) labels as *expanded renditions* and *non renditions*.

To help understand what Wadensjö meant, we should draw on the observations made in section 3.1: the renditions delivered by family members and caretakers are not only based on what is strictly being said, but also on “the situational, contextual and personal knowledge” they have of the source speech (ibid.). In fact, as observed in extract 3, family interpreters are able to expand a few words, or even one gesture, into sentences and possibly discourses with full meaning. In the example just mentioned, the interpreter expanded and contextualized the meaning of the gesture in order to make sense of it to the researcher. However, the way interpreters modulate the meaning can also go in the opposite direction, with an omission of part of the message which, consequently, is not interpreted. This selection and modulation of the discourse can respond to various criteria, such as the contextual expectations required by the communicative context (ibid). Therefore, as pointed out by Rubio-Carbonero (ibid.: 170), the family and caretakers may feel “a sense of entitlement” to select what is appropriate or inappropriate for the purposes of the conversation and consequently influence the meaning of

the renditions. These decisions depend on each person's criteria, which might be arguable by another person. As it can be observed in the following example:

.Extract 5 [Antonio, his wife and researcher. Interview. September 2024]

- 1 ANT: Bastone camminare camminare camminare=
Walking stick ((Crutch)) walking walking walking=
- 2 WIFE: = si che cammini (.) ha capito ma-
=Yes that you walk (.) she understood but-
- 3 ANT: No (.) camminare cammina- girare girare girare (.) a macchina (.) giù.
No (.) walking walk- turning turning turning (.) the car (.) down
- 4 WIFE: Ah:: oggi che sei caduto.
Ah:: today that you fell.
- 5 ANT: Ma::naggia ↑
Da::mn ↑
- 6 WIFE: è caduto e si è tagliato il dito.
((She looks at the researcher)) He fell and cut his finger.
- 7 ((everyone laughs))
- 8 ANT: [#A pera a pera a pera# (1) #A pera a pera a pera a pera#]
[On foot on foot on foot (1) On foot on foot on foot on foot]
- 9 WIFE: [Eh ho capito (.) vabbè ma non vuole sapere questo ora ↑ (1) Lo so ma non vuole sapere che tu sei caduto oggi]
[Eh I understand (.) Anyways she doesn't want to know about this right now ↑ (1) I know but she doesn't want to know that you fell today.]
- 10 ANT: Sudare sudare=
Sweating sweating=
- 11 WIFE: =Eh:: ho capito ma lei non vuole sapere questo.
=Eh:: I understand but she doesn't want to know about this.

The people involved in this communicative exchange are a man who suffered a cerebral ischemic stroke and his wife, who assists him in communicating. Therefore, an overall impairment of speech and articulation derived from the brain injury which, however, did not alter the cognitive functions. In this particular extract, several moments of overlapping and latching can be observed, since, while Antonio attempts to share details of his day, his wife does not consider that information as relevant to the purposes of the conversation. Indeed, before

Antonio interjected, his wife had been recounting his recovery from the ischemia. As it can be observed in lines 9 and 11, the interpreter repeated that the story he was telling was not something I, as the researcher, would be interested in and that, consequently, did not align with the goals of our conversation.

Accordingly, in this case, Antonio's wife is no longer to be considered as an interpreter, but as a mediator; she is, indeed, modulating the meaning on the basis of her "perception of the contextual expectations required by the communicative situation" (Rubio-Carbonero, 2021:169). It could be argued that, while this approach might facilitate clearer and full meaning renditions, it may not always be the most correct one in ethical terms. Indeed, the Ethic codes point to impartial and objective renditions, yet the subjective criteria that underpin the selection and the modulation of the discourse could unintentionally alter the original meaning. Mitigating, ignoring or even censoring the original meaning (ibid.: 170) is the visible expression of the power inequality dynamic that can emerge from the interpretation process and that will be later discussed in the chapter.

3.3. Negotiation: co-construction and re-construction of meaning.

As noted in the beginning, people with dysarthria are competent speakers, hence, they do understand what other people are saying. It follows that, when the interpreted message is delivered, they can assess its accuracy. This awareness is what underpins the third stage of the interpreting process – negotiation- where "the interpreted meaning might be negotiated, challenged, and eventually reconstructed by the primary speaker" (Rubio-Carbonero, 2021: 170).

In this phase, primary speakers may first question the interpreter's rendition if it does not align with the original meaning, and later intervene to correct or adjust the interpretation. As it can be observed in the following extract:

Extract 6 [Vittorio, his mother and researcher. Interview. August 2024]

- 1 RES: Quindi quelle poche volte in cui non vi capite c'è un po' di frustrazione
So those few times when you don't understand each other, there's a bit of frustration.
- 2 MOM: è normale perché=
It's normal because=

3 VIT: = No no
= *No no*

4 ((Vittorio and his mother look at each other))

5. MOM: Da parte nostra più che frustrazione, mi dispiace che lui debba ripetere più volte la stessa frase, la stessa parola (.) Però lui non demorde, è uno tosto, quindi non c'è problema.

As for us, it's not exactly frustration (.) I feel bad that he has to repeat the same sentence, the same word multiple times (.) But he doesn't give up, he's determined, so there's no problem.

In this extract we can clearly observe how the meaning is first challenged and then reconstructed between the parties involved. Indeed, in line 3 Vittorio displays his disagreement with what his mother was saying, which, in turn, was referring to the moments of lack of understanding as moments of frustration. Consequently, Vittorio interrupts his mother by interjecting with “No no”, indicating the different perspective. Apparently, his mother suddenly understands what he means and proceeds to rephrase her thoughts, shifting from the idea of shared frustration to her own personal feelings. Indeed, in line 5, she does not talk as a “we” but expresses her own discomfort in watching her son repeating himself.

What emerges here is a negotiation of meaning between Vittorio and his mother, with Vittorio challenging the initial interpretation of their communication experience, leading his mother to adjust her response and ultimately reconstruct the meaning in a way that better aligns with his perspective. This process illustrates the dynamic nature of interpretation, where meaning is co-constructed through dialogue.

3.4. Power dynamics and agency

As pointed out by Rubio-Carbonero (ibid.: 174) the power interpreters have to lead the conversation is “quite obvious”. This is particularly the case of interpreting for people with severe speech impairment. In fact, when people don't have the ability to use words to express themselves and make personal contributions, leading or actively participating in the conversation becomes, if not impossible, at least very difficult. Consequently, the extent to which SIP will be able to actively participate in the conversation depends on the capacities, but also on the will, of the interpreter to give voice to these people. As observed in section 3.1, engaging in the conversation with people severely impaired, requires a great amount of effort

which the interpreters can not or may not always want to expend. The different capacities to express oneself autonomously and to lead, monitor and coordinate the conversation creates a dynamic of power inequality which can be either balanced or reinforced by the interpreter (ibid.: 175).

However, diminishing the agency of the primary speaker is not something interpreters generally do on purpose to impose themselves (ibid.). Indeed, family and caregivers may not always be conscious of the dynamics just observed. Sometimes it happens that, while trying to help their relatives, interpreters can actually end up diminishing the agency of these people, increasing SIP's degree of dependence on them (ibid.). With regard to this last aspect, Vittorio's mother explained that:

Extract 7 [Vittorio's mother and researcher. Interview. August 2024.]

Se lui fa in autonomia ne sono più felice perché comunque è più autonomo. Cerco di farlo fare in autonomia anche quando sono presente (.) Subentro solo quando lo vedo in difficoltà, oppure se vedo che le persone dall'altra parte non capiscono ciò che dice (.) Tipo quando mi chiedono: "come si chiama?", io mi giro verso di lui e gli dico "dici come ti chiami". (1) Quindi non rispondo alla domanda, ma cerco di invogliare le persone a rivolgersi direttamente a lui e non a me come intermediario. Poi quando fanno fatica a capire intervengo e ripeto quello che lui dice.

If he does it autonomously, I am happier because in this way he is more independent. I try to make him do it autonomously even when I'm with him (.) I only take over when I see him struggling or if I see that the people on the other side don't understand what he's saying (.) Like when they ask me "what's his name?", I turn to him and say: "Tell them what's your name" (1) So, I don't answer the question, but I try to get people to address him directly and not me as an intermediary. Then when they struggle to understand I intervene and repeat what he says.

However, in order to provide a comprehensive outlook of her approach to interpreting for her son, through the following question, she was invited to reflect on the situations in which she could potentially anticipate her son and complete what he was saying.

Extract 8 [Vittorio, his mother and researcher. Interview. August 2024]

- 1 RES: Quando capisci cosa intende ancora prima che lui finisca, lo fermi?
When you understand what he means before he finishes, do you stop him?
- 2 MOM: Capita, soprattutto verso terzi. Dico "Vittorio vuoi dire questa cosa?". Lui mi conferma e io continuo (.) Dipende, a volte lo lascio finire fino alla fine senza problemi. Dipende dal contesto in cui siamo. Se stiamo facendo la spesa oppure se siamo tra amici. ((In questo caso)) lo lascio finire tranquillamente (1) Dipende dal momento, dal contesto e dai tempi che abbiamo.

It happens, especially ((if he's speaking)) with third parties (.) I say 'Vittorio do you want to say this?'. He confirms and I continue (.) It depends, sometimes I let him finish until the end without any problems. It depends on the context we are in. If we are shopping or if we are among friends. ((In this case)) I quietly let him finish. (1) It depends on the moment, the context and the time we have.

3 RES: Quindi mi dici che in base alla necessità di essere più o meno veloci tu decidi se modulare o meno quello che lui sta dicendo?

So you're telling me that depending on the need you have to be more or less fast you decide whether or not to modulate what he's saying?

4 VIT: Esatto
Exactly

5 MOM: Sì
Yes

It could be argued that, overall, his mother's approach as an interpreter is to provide him with as much agency as possible. As a matter of fact, when people do not ask questions to Vittorio, but to her, she decides not to directly answer for him. Indeed, even if she knows the answer, she still lets him talk for himself, no matter if he may have difficulties communicating. It could be argued that, in this way, she is not only showing that she trusts his capacities to make himself understandable, but also the ability of other people to understand him. Furthermore, by offering help only when strictly necessary, she is giving him the opportunity to increase his degree of independence. However, she also affirms that sometimes she may interrupt and anticipate her son. She highlights that the necessity to intervene and lead the conversation is shaped by practical needs such as time constraints (lines 3-5), which Vittorio seems to agree with (line 4). This demonstrates an adaptive and collaborative approach to language assistance, where meaning is co-constructed according to the context.

However, as noted above, the degree of agency is also connected to the degree of impairment of the primary speaker. In fact, the overall balance which emerged from the collaborative dynamic just observed, is also possible thanks to Vittorio's ability to use spoken words and make full meaning sentences. Indeed, while the articulation is inevitably slowed down and the pronunciation is altered, he is still able to make himself understandable and actively contribute to the conversation.

4. Language brokering for speech impaired people

As already argued in §2.2, this research stems from the belief that some of the dynamics which characterize CLB can also be applied to the analysis of LB performed by adults for their speech impaired family members. As Antonini points out (2022: 135), over the past decades, studies have contributed to investigate various aspects of CLB, including feelings attached to CLB, perception of the role and impact that this practice has on various aspects of children's life.

Along these lines, as indicated in §2.5, this study aims to explore language brokers' perception of their role, with particular attention to the emotional sphere and to the impact that LB has on the different aspects of life, including the relationship with SIP. Hence, by investigating contexts, feelings and relational dynamics of LB performed for SIP, this research aims to address the question which inspired it in the beginning: do family members view themselves as mediators?

For this purpose, Language Brokers were interviewed. Through the interviews, these people had the possibility to describe their experience as language brokers for their speech impaired relatives, illustrating the relational and emotional dynamics which emerge from this practice. With reference to this last aspect, the answers to the interviews confirmed the expected results in terms of "multi-layered" emotional dimension of such practice, as addressed by Antonini in relation to CLB (2022: 134). However, while emotions and feelings attached to LB may vary according to contextual factors and personal variables, all the participants of this study agreed on one major feeling revolving around the perception of their role: sense of responsibility.

4.1. LB as a family responsibility: the caregiving continuum

As anticipated, all the interviewees expressed a strong sense of responsibility in their caregiving roles. Specifically, these people perceive the activity of language brokering for their relatives as a direct and inevitable consequence of their role as parents or sentimental partners. It could be argued that, in most cases, the two roles almost overlap, making for them impossible to trace a line between when they act as mediators and when as caregivers. Indeed, as already discussed in § 2.4, the activity of LB represents part of the support that these people provide for their family members every day. It follows that, by being responsible for their relatives'

communications they are responsible also for their care. Examples 1, 2 and 3 show how language brokers perceive their role:

- 1) First of all I feel like a mother. It's part of my responsibility as a mum. When I undertake the role, I feel like a mum, and as a mum, I feel obliged to do everything in my power to help my child.
- 2) I feel that in that moment, I am helping my son to make himself understandable as I can. The same way I can help my second child with homework or when I teach my nephew a game. It is part of my responsibilities as a mother to help and support my son. Today it might be translating, tomorrow it might be something else. Just as I help him wash or eat, so it's just part of my responsibilities.
- 3) You do it without even realizing it. It's a normal thing, it's part of what you would normally do every day. You do it because you're in the relationship, it's normal. But if you stop and think: why? Is it mandatory? Who tells me to do all these things? It's become part of the routine, and he expects me to always do it.

All three examples clearly describe how acting as a language broker is seen as part of the family responsibilities. Brokering for their relatives is neither an option, nor a task they can choose not to undertake. The comparison between helping with communication and other parental duties, such as assisting with homework, shows that LB is perceived as a natural extension of caregiving (examples 1 and 2). Therefore, the role is normalized; it is so integrated into daily life that it becomes automatic and unremarkable. In example 3 the speaker stresses how LB has become a "normal" part of the daily routine and of the responsibility she has as a sentimental partner: "You do it because you're in the relationship, it's normal". However, unlike the other examples, speaker in example 3 questions this exact normalization by asking: "But if you think about it: why? Is it mandatory?" Therefore, while in the first moment she refers to her role as a natural part of partnership, she later reflects on the expectation that herself and her partner have about this role.

4.2. The emotional impact of LB

4.2.1. positive and mixed feelings

The second feeling shared among many of the participants is feeling helpful. Moreover, they all seemed to agree on the positive emotions deriving from helping their relatives and watching them being able to communicate. As examples 4 and 5 show:

- 4) I'm glad that I act as a mediator, right? Because in some situations, it's the only way he has to make himself understood.
- 5) Positive emotions because, in any case, my son is able to communicate in some way, regardless of how he does it, and that's a good thing. And I feel useful.

Both extracts highlight the sense of fulfilment which comes from making communication possible. By recognizing that without their help effective communication wouldn't occur, speakers reinforce the idea that their involvement is essential, as it can be noted in example 4.

However, this sense of accomplishment may be accompanied by mixed feelings, as language brokers also grapple with the reality that they might represent the only possibility their speech impaired relatives have to communicate properly. In particular, one participant expressed conflicting emotions in relation to the importance of her role. Indeed, while being happy to help her son in situations where otherwise communication wouldn't be possible, discomfort also may derive from watching him in need of someone who can help him communicate.

- 6) I associate the positive emotions with the fact that my son is able to make himself understood through me; otherwise, the message wouldn't get across. But at the same time, this is negative because he needs me, and as a mother, I would have wanted him to be completely independent. I wouldn't have wanted to act as a mediator for my son, for him to be dependent on me. It's a bit like two sides of the same coin.

Along these lines, another participant also expressed the satisfaction deriving from seeing her daughter being able to communicate on her own, without needing assistance.

- 7) When I see that sometimes my daughter is able to communicate on her own, it's wonderful. It's satisfying to see that she understands and that she is able to show it, despite her limitation.

4.2.2 Negative feelings

Negative emotions are also associated with other feelings such as frustration (3), anger (4), sense of burden (2), helplessness (2), awareness (1) and resignation (1).

Lack of understanding represents a major determinant factor for frustration.

- 8) He always finds a way when we don't understand him; if he needs to say something important, we find a way to understand it. However, there is a bit of frustration at first because we don't understand him immediately, but it happens rarely.

- 9) Especially at the beginning, after the stroke, he spoke very little. It was very frustrating because there was no way to understand him. Slowly, things improved, but even today, sometimes I still don't understand him.

LB was also associated with a sense of burden twice, since in both cases the speakers are the only one in the family undertaking the activity.

- 10) I'm tired; I do everything on my own. It weighs on me to be alone in this. Others don't help me; they say, "You do it because you're the only one who understands her", or others tell me that she doesn't understand.
- 11) It weighs on me because I'm alone now; everyone else has left. It's heavy because I do everything myself; I have to be constantly with him. I never have time for myself. I can never stop and do something for myself because I'm always around with him.

The two extracts reveal the sense of burden deriving from emotional and physical exhaustion. They both complain of being left alone carrying the responsibility of helping their speech impaired people with communications. Indeed, they feel overwhelmed due to lack of support from others which, in turn, are either physically absent (example 12) or dismiss the situations assuming that they are the only one to understand (example 11). Further to this, one of the speakers addresses the absolute absence of time for herself and her needs which, consequently, have been placed second to her caregiving responsibilities. Hence, example 12 clearly demonstrated how, by prioritizing the communicative needs of others, her own well-being was sacrificed. Along these lines, feelings of resignation and helplessness were also reported as a direct consequence of lack of understanding of the source speech. In particular, one speaker affirmed:

- 12) I admit, sometimes I don't understand her either. It's frustrating, but what can you do... you can do little, sometimes nothing. You feel helpless.

These feelings were not shared by all the language brokers participating in the study. In fact, only one speaker reported feeling helpless and resigned at the same time. It's important to note that she was assisting the person with the most severe form of speech impairment among all the participants in the study, since completely unable to articulate words, but only basic sounds.

Moreover, this speaker was also the one who most frequently described her role in negative terms.

Conversely, a common sentiment shared by all the language brokers was a feeling of anger. Specifically, the four speakers reported experiencing anger when dealing with people who either failed to provide necessary support, by denying assistance, or displayed ableist behaviours when interacting with the family members they assist.

- 13) Paradoxically, one of the most difficult things is dealing with other people. When they maybe approach Vittorio and address him as if he were a child. They come close, kiss him, touch him without asking for permission. By now he understands who is in front of him, but as a child it was difficult. Often people would see him and ask: “Uh poor thing, does he understand?” Or: “What a disgrace, what happened?” And then I would get angry, but I didn't have to display it so as not to mortify my son. So then, once we were alone, I had to explain to my son that those people didn't understand, they were ignorant. At some point we were the ones making fun of them. When it happened, I would wink at him, he would immediately understand, and we would laugh about it.
- 14) I often get angry with my husband when I have to keep reminding him to be mindful of what he says and does in front of our daughter because she understands. I also get upset with other people when they don't address Caterina and act as if she isn't there. But I can't let it show. I always have to repeat them: “Don't say things to me, say them to Caterina”.
- 15) Sometimes I get angry with those we call “the show-offs”. We enjoy doing live streams on the internet, which my son really likes, but sometimes these people leave offensive comments. Among the many insults, they say that he doesn't understand. They think they're the ones making fun of us, but we end up making fun of them.
- 16) Many people we thought were friends have distanced themselves after the accident. They would see him on the street and wouldn't even greet him anymore. They ignored him as if he had disappeared. Why not even approach and ask: “How are you?”. Even though he has trouble speaking, he finds a way to make himself understandable. I get annoyed in these situations.

The examples 13, 14, 15 and 16 outline different experiences of ableist behaviours. Ableism is a form of prejudice and discrimination rooted in the belief that disabled people are inherently inferior to nondisabled people (American Psychological Association, 2021). This kind of discrimination can take different forms; in these examples infantilization, marginalization, and dismissal of individuals' abilities emerge as ableist behaviours. Therefore, all the speakers report

feelings of anger and frustration facing this kind of discrimination. What is more, when these people experience feeling angry, they also need to regulate their emotions. Extracts 13 and 14 clearly explain the difficulty behind trying not to display that feeling in order not to influence their children. It could be argued that this exact regulation of emotions can be ascribed to the relational nature of LB. When mediating, language brokers do not just translate words; they also have to navigate emotional and social dynamics, which can emerge from mediating for their relatives. However, what also emerges in examples 13 and 15, is a sense of closeness between the language broker and the speech impaired person. Indeed, both the mothers used humour as a coping mechanism to deal with these situations. Making fun of those who discriminated against their son not only helped dispel the feelings of shame or sadness which could potentially derive from being discriminated, but also strengthen their bond.

4.3. The impact of LB on the relationship with SIP

One of the assumptions underlying this research is the ability of LB to influence the relationship between language broker and speech impaired person. In fact, as observed above, some of the experiences shared between the language broker and the speech impaired person, may influence their bond and bring them closer. Therefore, the participants to the study were asked whether, according to their opinion, this practice had influenced this relationship and, if so, in which direction. Some of the participants affirmed that:

- 17) It's like a symbiosis. Sometimes it feels as if I'm in Simone's body, as if I can even feel when he is in pain or when he has a problem. Even his siblings sometimes don't understand certain situations and say to me, "Mom, look what's wrong with Simone". Even my husband sometimes doesn't understand the discomfort he might be experiencing.
- 18) I've become much more protective. Every morning I wake up and the first thing I think is: "How is Caterina?" So yes, over the time, the role I've taken on has made me more protective.

The two examples clearly illustrate the emotional closeness which derives from this kind of relationship. Indeed, as previously discussed, the activity of LB is often perceived as part of the caregiving continuum which some people undertake for their family members. It follows that, caring for other people's communication becomes part of the wide range of duties and responsibilities language brokers perform on a daily basis. As it can be noted in example 1, the

language broker becomes the interpreter of Simone's needs, experiencing a symbiotic relationship where she feels as if she is almost "inhabiting" the other person's body. Along similar lines, the second speaker highlights an increase in protectiveness to the point that her daughter became the first thought in the morning. Therefore, while LB may have fostered the emotional connection between language broker and speech impaired person, this also confirms the conceptualization of the activity as a caregiving practice.

4.4. Language brokers' perception of the role: Do you see yourself as a mediator?

As discussed in the introduction, the question which inspired this dissertation was whether people who assist speech impaired ever perceived themselves as mediators. Therefore, at the end of the interview I posed the following question to each of the language brokers: "Do you see yourself as a mediator?" These are some of the answers:

- 19) Yes, I am my son's interpreter. I'm not just his mum. Depending on the child's needs and personality, you behave differently, and thus, your approach changes. But the point is that I do everything for him. I am a nurse, therapist, psychologist. I do everything for Simone. So, it's true, I'm not just a mom.
- 20) From an outside perspective, yes, because I communicate my son's message when others may not understand him. In that sense, yes, but I don't perceive it that way. I feel like a mum who translates what her son says.
- 21) Well... thinking about it, yes, because I help others understand what he says. So I first have to make an effort to understand, and then I help others understand.

The three examples show different perceptions of the role of language broker. However, what I would really like to draw the attention on are the extracts 19 and 20. Indeed, even if they undertake the same role, the two language brokers seem to have completely opposite perceptions of *who* they are. While agreeing on *what* they do (helping their respective sons communicate), the two speakers give a different meaning to their role of mediator. On the one hand, the speaker in extract 19 firmly states that she is "not just a mum", that her role goes beyond that; she is "a nurse, therapist, psychologist". On the other, the speaker in extract 20 affirms: "I feel like a mum who translates what her son says". In this case, while Simone's mother in extract 19 clearly draws a line between

the different role(s) she undertakes, in extract 20 these role overlaps. Indeed, she identifies as a mum in the first place; translating for her son is just a consequence of her being mother and, therefore, part of her parental responsibilities. These different perspectives may also suggest a different awareness of themselves and of their role as language brokers. In a similar vein, the example 21 also offer some interesting insights. The speaker reflects and says that “well... thinking about it, yes”, she sees herself as a mediator; she does what normally a mediator would do: understand and interpret. However, her initial hesitation to affirm her role might suggests that she needed some time to reflect before fully agreeing. This hesitation might imply that this woman had never deeply reflected on her role as a language broker before the interview. If so, these words would confirm the normalization and consequent invisibility of such practice largely addressed in this dissertation.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the phenomenon of LB applied to SIP. The research delved into the emotional, relational and practical dimensions of LB with a particular focus on the modalities employed to facilitate communication and on the perception that language brokers have of their role. All the participants were males, while all their usual interpreters were females, either mothers or sentimental partners. They all agreed to carry out two different interviews. The first aimed at investigating how the interpretation process takes place, while the goal of the second interview was to give a comprehensive outlook of the perceptions and emotions attached to LB.

Therefore, we started by investigating the three stages of the interpretation process: understanding, interpretation and negotiation (Rubio-Carbonero, 2022). Consequently, through the interviews, it was possible to observe the various communicative and relational dynamics which emerged from the communicative exchange with SIP. We observed that, in order to understand the source speech, language brokers often relied on the prior knowledge they had about the primary speaker. As confirmed by the participants, shared experience also represents a helpful factor for understanding and, consequently, interpreting. In cases of more severe forms of speech impairment, it was also possible to observe uses of paralinguistic and nonverbal language, such as codified gestures and facial expressions.

We discussed how the interpretation delivered by family interpreters may result in expanded renditions and non renditions, either by expanding or eliminating part of the original meaning once interpreted. Consequently, the practical and ethical implications of this subjective form of interpretation were addressed. We argued that, while this approach may be useful to deliver clearer renditions, it also might inevitably influence the original meaning of the utterance. However, we also observed how these people, despite their speech impairment, can still fully understand what other people say. They are indeed “competent speakers” who, consequently, can verify whether the renditions delivered by the interpreter align with the original meaning.

It follows that, according to the degree of speech impairment, these people employ different strategies to call the attention of the language broker and reconstruct the meaning together. Therefore, in this stage meaning is negotiated. Consequently, the renditions delivered are challenged and eventually reconstructed between the primary speaker and the interpreter.

Moreover, we discussed the power dynamics which emerge from the impairment and the dual role of the language broker, as both interpreter and participant. Due to the impossibility of the primary speaker to actively participate in the conversation in the same way interpreters do, the agency of

the source speech is inevitably compromised. Therefore, while enhancing or diminishing the degree of participation of SIP in the conversation, the interpreter is actually determining their agency. We also noted that sometimes, while trying to help, interpreters may negatively impact source speech's agency and foster dependence.

The second interview aimed at exploring the emotions attached to LB alongside the perception that language brokers have of their role. In particular, all the participants agreed on the sense of responsibility deriving from the role of language broker. This confirmed the conceptualization of LB as a quotidian form of caregiving undertaken by family members for their speech impaired relatives (García-Sánchez, 2018).

We also observed the emotional impact that LB may have on people who undertake the role. The findings, which highlighted the complex and multi-layered emotional dimension of LB, aligned with what had been noted in CLB literature (Antonini, 2022). Helpfulness deriving from assisting SIP, but also frustration due to lack of understanding, are the most common feelings reported among the participants. In addition, language brokers expressed feelings of anger when dealing with people who display ableist behaviours, such as infantilization, marginalization, and dismissal of individuals' abilities. With regards to whether this practice had influenced the relationship between language brokers and SIP, the participants reported an increase in emotional closeness and sense of protectiveness, alongside a “symbiotic” bond.

Finally, all the participants answered to the question which inspired this dissertation: *Do you see yourself as a mediator?* The results revealed contrasting perceptions of the role of language broker; some participants viewed it as a direct extension of their caregiving responsibilities, while others saw it as a distinct role, with its own unique tasks and challenges. What emerges from the contrast of these perspectives, alongside the hesitation of other speakers in identifying themselves as mediators, is the lack of recognition that language brokers suffer from. As observed, the tendency of the language brokers is to normalize this practice as part of their family responsibilities. Therefore, not only it lacks public recognition and institutional support, but it remains largely unacknowledged by the mediators themselves. However, this underappreciated, yet critical form of help gives voice to millions of people, in conditions where, otherwise, it wouldn't be possible for them to express their identities and needs. Making this role visible means giving dignity to the people who undertake it, but also those who benefit from it. Acknowledge the importance of language brokers is the first step towards raising awareness and finally provide the recognition that these individuals, and the people they assist, rightfully deserve.

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7. Index

Appendix 1

Jefferson's transcription system. Symbols used:

SYMBOL DEFINITION

Roman font TCU in original language

Italics TCU translated into English

[word] Overlapping talk

[word]

= End of one sentence and beginning of next with no gap/pause in between

(.) Brief interval

(1) Time (in absolute seconds) between end of a word and beginning of next

(()) contain analyst comments or descriptions

#word# Approximate transcription of the sounds uttered by speech-impaired persons

↑ Rise in intonation

Excerpts Chapter 4 in original language

- 1) Io prima di tutto mi sento mamma. È parte delle mie responsabilità come ruolo di mamma. Quando svolgo questo ruolo mi sento mamma, e in qualità di mamma, mi sento in dovere di fare tutto ciò che è nelle mie possibilità per aiutare mio figlio.
- 2) Sento che in quel momento sto aiutando mio figlio a farsi comprendere come posso. Così come posso aiutare il mio secondo figlio a fare i compiti o come posso insegnare un gioco a mio nipote. Rientra nelle mie responsabilità di mamma aiutare e supportare un figlio. Oggi può essere tradurre domani, domani un'altra cosa. Così come lo aiuto a lavarsi o a mangiare, quindi è solo una parte delle mie responsabilità.
- 3) Lo fai e non te ne rendi nemmeno conto. È una cosa normale, è parte di quello che faresti normalmente ogni giorno. Lo fai perché sei nella coppia, è normale. Però se ci si pensa: perché? è obbligatorio? Chi mi dice che devo fare tutte queste cose? È diventato parte della normalità, lui si aspetta che lo faccia sempre.
- 4) Sono contenta che faccio da mediatore tra virgolette no? perché in alcune circostanze è l'unico modo che lui ha per farsi capire.

- 5) Emozioni positive perché comunque mio figlio in qualche modo riesce a comunicare, indipendentemente da come lo fa e quindi è una cosa positiva. E io mi sento utile
- 6) Le emozioni positive le ricollego al fatto che mio figlio riesca a farsi comprendere tramite me, viceversa il messaggio non passerebbe. Però allo stesso tempo ciò è negativo perché lui ha bisogno di me e io invece come mamma avrei voluto che lui fosse completamente indipendente. Non avrei voluto fare da mediatore per mio figlio, che fosse dipendente da me. Sono un po' le due facce della stessa medaglia.
- 7) Quando vedo che mia figlia ogni tanto riesce anche a comunicare da sola è bello. È soddisfacente vedere che ha capito e che lo dimostra, nonostante i suoi limiti.
- 8) Lui trova sempre la strategia quando non lo capiamo, se deve riferire qualcosa di importante il modo lo troviamo. Però sì, c'è un po' di frustrazione all'inizio perché non lo si capisce subito, però succede poche volte.
- 9) Soprattutto all'inizio, dopo l'ischemia, lui parlava poco e niente. Era molto frustrante in quella situazione non c'era modo di capirlo. E allora piano piano le cose sono migliorate, però ancora oggi alle volte capita che non lo capisco.
- 10) Sono stanca, faccio tutto io, mi pesa il fatto di essere sola. Gli altri non mi aiutano, mi dicono "fai tu che sei l'unica che la capisce" oppure altri mi dicono che non capisce.
- 11) Mi pesa perché ormai sono sola, gli altri sono tutti andati via. È pesante perché faccio tutto io, devo essere sempre con lui, ormai non ho mai tempo per me. Non posso mai fermarmi e fare qualcosa per me perché devo stare sempre in giro con lui
- 12) Lo ammetto, alle volte nemmeno io la capisco. È frustrante, però che fai... puoi fare poco, a volte nulla. Ti senti impotente
- 13) Paradossalmente una delle cose più difficili è avere a che fare con le altre persone. Quando magari si avvicinano a Vittorio e si rivolgono a lui come se fosse un bambino. Si avvicinano, lo baciano, lo toccano senza chiedere il permesso. Ormai lui capisce chi ha davanti, ma da piccolo era difficile. Spesso le persone lo vedevano e dicevano: uh poverino, ma capisce? Oppure: che disgrazia, cos'è successo? E allora io in quel momento mi arrabbiavo ma non dovevo darlo a vedere per non mortificare mio figlio. Quindi poi, una volta soli, dovevo spiegare a mio figlio che quelle persone non capivano, erano ignoranti. A un certo punto eravamo

noi a prendere in giro loro. Quando capitava gli facevo l'occhiolino, lui subito capiva e ridevamo della cosa.

- 14) Spesso mi arrabbio con mio marito quando gli devo ripetere di stare attento a cosa dice e fa di fronte a nostra figlia perché lei capisce. Anche con le altre persone. Mi fanno arrabbiare quando non si rivolgono a Caterina e fanno finta che non ci sia. Ma non posso darlo a vedere. Devo sempre ripetergli: le cose non ditele a me, ditele a Caterina.
- 15) A volte mi arrabbio con quelli che noi chiamiamo "i fenomeni". Noi ci divertiamo a fare le dirette su internet, a mio figlio piace molto, però alcune volte queste persone commentano offendendo. Tra le tante offese, dicono che non capisce. Pensano di prenderci in giro, ma siamo noi a prendere in giro loro.
- 16) Tante persone che pensavamo essere amici si sono allontanati dopo l'incidente. Lo vedevano per strada e nemmeno lo salutavano più. Lo ignoravano, come se fosse scomparso. Perché nemmeno avvicinarsi e chiedere: come stai? Anche se ha problemi a parlare, un modo di farsi capire lo trova. Mi innervosisco in queste situazioni.
- 17) È come una simbiosi. A volte è come se stessi nel corpo di Simone, cioè addirittura io lo sento quando ha qualche dolore o quando ha qualche problema. Anche i fratelli a volte non capiscono certe situazioni e mi dicono: "Mamma, vedi Simone che ha". Ma anche mio marito a volte non riesce a comprendere qualche disagio che può avere.
- 18) Sono diventata molto più protettiva. Io mi sveglio ogni mattina e la prima cosa che penso è: "come sta Caterina?". Quindi sì, nel tempo il ruolo che ho ricoperto mi ha portata ad essere più protettiva.
- 19) Sì, io sono l'interprete di mio figlio. Non sono solo sua mamma. Sicuramente in base ai bisogni dei figli e dei caratteri ti comporti in modo diverso e quindi hai un approccio diverso. Però il discorso è che io faccio tutto per lui. Io sono infermiera, terapeuta, psicologa. Tutto gli faccio a Simone. Quindi è vero, non sono semplicemente mamma
- 20) Se lo vediamo dall'esterno sì perché io faccio passare il messaggio di mio figlio perché gli altri magari non lo capiscono. Quindi in questo senso sì, però io non lo percepisco così. Mi sento una mamma che traduce quello che dice il figlio.
- 21) Mah... se mi ci fai pensare, sì, perché aiuto gli altri a capire quello che lui dice. Quindi mi devo impegnare prima io a capire e poi faccio capire agli altri.