1 Introduction

Child language brokering (CLB), a form of ad hoc translation and interpreting (T&I) also grouped with studies in non-professional T&I, is frequently observed in education, emergencies and disaster aids, hospitals and clinics, religious experiences and church, social services, immigration, among other settings. Studies on CLB and ad hoc translation and interpreting are reported from Europe (e.g. Austria: Pollabauer 2017; Germany: Meyer 2012; Greece: Apostolou, Yannopoulou, and Papahadjopoulos 2018; Italy: Antonini 2017; Ceccoli 2018, 2019; Cirillo 2017; Gavioli 2012; Davitti 2015; Baraldi and Gavioli 2017; Switzerland: Hild 2017; the UK: Angelelli 2015; Bauer 2017; Cline, Crafter, and Prokopiou 2014), the Americas (e.g. Valdés, Chávez, and Angelelli 2000, 2003; Angelelli 2010, 2016, 2017; Martínez Gómez 2014; Ticca 2017; Rogl 2017) and Australia (e.g. Hlavac 2017; Napier 2017) to name just a few studies in various areas of the world. While CLB is discussed at times as a form of ad hoc interpreting, in this chapter we will focus mostly on CLB with the caveat that, at times, it is impossible to completely separate them, as evidenced by the case of bilingual youngsters who start interpreting for their parents early on and continue doing so at adult age. Thus, before we explore the main topic, a word is necessary about the terms ad hoc and child language broker and how they are used in this chapter.

The term child language brokers (CLBs), also known as child translator/interpreter, generally refers to bilingual children/youth brokering communication for members of their family (Antonini 2017; Cirillo 2017; Orellana 2009; Valdés et al. 2000). There are, however, exceptions to this, as when bilingual children/youth are asked to broker/help with communication by a figure of authority (e.g. a nurse, a school principal) rather than by adults of their family. Research conducted on child language brokering (see section later) reports that children have started brokering as early as at the age of 6 (Harris and Sherwood 1978; Valdés et al. 2003; Orellana 2009; Antonini 2010; Angelelli 2016) and have brokered for family members as well as for others (e.g. for friends or adults who requested their help). Some continue brokering for their families at the age of 40 and older (Angelelli 2016) and, at times, the term ad hoc is
used to refer to them too. Two entries in Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019) apply perfectly to what an ad hoc interpreter does:

1. “concerned with a particular end or purpose; formed or used for specific or immediate problems or needs” (as there is no qualified T/I provider where communication needs to occur, so a bilingual person is brought in); and
2. “fashioned from whatever is immediately available” (as language service provided by a bilingual who may step up on the basis of his/her language proficiency but not necessarily translation or interpreting skills).

From these definitions we can see how both may apply to a situation in which bilingual children/youth broker communication for their family members. However, while the term ad hoc does refer to a particular, specific or immediate problem or need, researchers studying CLBs report that child language brokering is not necessarily an ad hoc occurrence (Antonini 2010; Orellana and Reynolds 2008; Valdés et al. 2003). Indeed, it is frequent. It is more the norm than the exception. Additionally, at times it appears to be quite common for families (as reported in studies mentioned previously in this paper as well as in Cline et al. 2014, and Napier 2017) to have to use CLBs in lieu of professional language service (or ad hoc adult interpreters), when this is not available. Families state that with CLBs they can cope and try to communicate.

CLB is a field of study in its own right. We can trace its origins to at least 40 years, although the phenomenon is much older (Angelelli 2010) and has not always been referred to as CLB. For example, the term “natural translator” was used by Harris and Sherwood (1978) during observations conducted on French–English speaking children in school playgrounds in Canada; the term “native,” as applied to translators (Toury 1984), alludes to individuals who, based on their communicative abilities with two languages and having had no formal education in translation, manage to translate in an acceptable fashion. Additionally, the qualifier “natural translator/interpreter,” first used by Harris and Sherwood (1978), refers to the perceived natural ability a bilingual person might have to translate or interpret (we return to this perception about bilinguals in section 2). In addition, the terms “naïve” and “untrained” also are used. And finally, one term that is used to refer to both adults and children/youngsters brokering communication is bilingual (see section 3).

Geographic displacement of people as a consequence of natural disasters, need for political refuge or wars or movement of people due to migration, travels for medical/healthcare services, pleasure, work or any other reason has linguistic consequences (Angelelli 2011) as well as ethical ones. Societies have struggled to meet the communicative needs of linguistically diverse people all over the world (Federici et al. 2019). This is among the various reasons why, in a family of immigrants, bilingual children/youngsters engage in CLB for their family members.

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Acknowledging the issue of communicative needs of non-societal language users (for example, the language of some immigrant, indigenous, refugee or minority groups who cannot access the language used in the place where they live, as is the case, for example, of Hmong speakers in California or Polish in Scotland) as well as the shortage of qualified interpreters/translators is necessary to understand the complexity of this issue. However, it does not do much to solve it, and the pressing need for language provision continues to exist.

Mapping the issue of intercultural/linguistic communicative needs and language provision (or lack thereof) in our current diverse societies might be helpful to contextualize the call on children/youngsters to perform such tasks. It may be summarized as follows:

1. Technology facilitates exchanges of information by enabling (technologically literate) individuals to communicate with each other as well as to access services remotely;
2 an increasing number of exchanges of information occur between users of different lan-
guages belonging to different cultures, as a consequence of human displacement, movement
and increased contact between diverse people;
3 interlinguistic and intercultural exchanges, by definition, bring together users of different
languages (spoken or sign) who cannot communicate directly and, thus, need language
provision;
4 linguistic diversity and human displacement/movement are not stable; they vary across
space and time, making the planning of language-provision services challenging;
5 the number of qualified translators and interpreters to facilitate these exchanges does not
match either the change of linguistic needs or the increase of communicative needs in a
timely fashion;
6 existing opportunities for education or professional development of translators/interpreters
facilitating access to services for linguistic minorities (generally categorized as community/
public service translators/interpreters) are neither sufficient or timely nor appropriate to
cope with changing needs in language provision;
7 current recognition/status of community/public service translators/interpreters as well as
their monetary reward may not attract professional interpreters/translators who hold uni-
versity degrees or certifications to the field.

As the issue of access to communication and/or information for users of non-societal languages
prevails, when a communicative need arises in a family of immigrants and there is no societal
response in the form of a qualified translator or interpreter, families often resort to their own
members for help. Given immigrant children’s and youngsters’ own bilingual abilities and their
willingness to help, it is not unusual for them to step up and interpret/translate for their families
and members of their immediate communities with various degrees of success (Angelelli 2010).
CLB occurs, however, not only because of children or youth volunteering to do it. Service pro-
viders (medical doctors and nurses) participating in a study on Access to Cross-border Health-
care in the EU¹ (Angelelli 2015), for example, discuss that when family members accompany
patients and are present at their appointments, they bring in additional information and know
the patient better. Therefore, they are not prevented from brokering communication during
a medical interview, in fact for these providers, they are preferred even if they interpret only
because they are bilingual.

On the other hand, studying interviews between healthcare providers taking history from
patients mediated by interpreters, Bolden (2000) discusses interpreters’ involvement in the
interview and argues that patients’ voices do not get heard. Discussions about family members
(including CLBs), as well as other ad hoc interpreters taking part in interviews as interpreters,
and their positive and negative influence have been also studied by Zendedel, Schouten, van
Weert, and van den Putte (2018) and Hlavac (2017). Given all of this, we may want to refer to
ad hoc and CLB as not the same. In addition, ad hoc is mostly used to refer to adults broker-
ing communication across languages (see Chapter 28 “Linguistic first aid” in this volume). In
the next section we explore the development of research in CLB by looking at CLBs and their
interaction with other fields of knowledge throughout time.

2 Historical and contextual background

Although not without controversy, interpreting by children/youth (as well as ad hoc interpret-
ing) has gained more attention from researchers in TIS in recent years, although ethics has not
been central in these discussions. One could say that within TIS, in the 21st century, CLB has
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become a field of inquiry in its own right. This is evident by the existing number of publications (e.g. Antonini et al. 2017; Evrin and Meyer 2016), conferences (e.g. International Conferences in Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation 2012 in Bologna, Italy; 2014 in Germersheim, Germany; 2016 in Winterthur, Switzerland; and 2018 in Stellenbosch, South Africa), doctoral dissertations (Ceccoli 2019) as well as research funding (e.g. Arts and Humanities Research Council “Translating Cultures” call from 2014 to 2017) allocated to related topics (e.g. Translation and Translanguaging). The work on the ethics surrounding these topics is not abundant. Prior to TIS other fields of inquiry such as bilingualism, cultural studies, education and psychology (to name a few) have paid attention to these phenomena but with different foci. In this section we review some of them.

2.1 Language contact: individual and societal bi-/multilingualism

CLB and ad hoc T&I occur when there is language contact. Research from bilingualism, language contact, and language and society (Valdés and Angelelli 2003; Zentella 1997) has shown that the phenomenon of language contact can occur within a person, between persons or within larger groups (ARAL 2003). An example of language contact and bilingualism within a person can be a language learner, a language teacher, a bilingual engineer, a child language broker as well as a translator or an interpreter.

Bilinguals are not all identical, and they cannot be subsumed under a single standard (Valdés and Figueroa 1994, 7). Bilingualism is not a monolithic construct. Research from bilingualism (e.g. Valdés and Figueroa 1994) has shown a continuum with incipient bilinguals (those who are beginning to acquire or learn another language) at one extreme and ambilinguals (those who have the exact same abilities in both languages) at the other. A balanced level of bilingualism is desirable in T&I. Language proficiency levels, however, are always changing. It requires work to keep up two languages at the same level of proficiency, in all topics and social situations during one’s life (Angelelli 2010). A person may acquire a second language later or earlier in life or become a balanced or unbalanced bilingual (meaning one language is stronger than the other). Perfect bilinguals may not exist (Chrystal 1987, 32).

An example of language contact between two or more persons are exchanges between users of different languages at times doing code-switching or translanguaging, as well as users of different languages communicating with the assistance of an interpreter/translator. Code-switching occurs when bilinguals switch from one language to the other (e.g. Spanish and English), and this may occur between sentences or within a sentence (García and Otheguy 2014). Translanguaging refers to when individuals who know several languages communicate by using all the languages they have at their disposal (García and Wei 2014).

The site of language contact in a bilingual child/youngster and the ability to communicate in two languages as well at times to translate or interpret have been observed (Harris and Sherwood 1978), described in studies on translation (Toury 1984) and empirically researched and measured in studies on psychology and bilingualism (Malakoff and Hakuta 1991), cultural studies (Orellana 2009) and interdisciplinary ones (Guo 2014), as well as the ethnographic study in education and giftedness exploring bilingual children/youth talent in translation and interpreting (e.g. Valdés et al. 2000, 2003).

When populations using different languages come into contact (e.g. whether it is in a country with a historical presence of groups using different languages or a border area, or in cases of mass migration), in addition to individual bilingualism, we have societal bilingualism (Fishman 1980). This creates the perfect ecosystem for CLBs (and ad hoc translators or interpreters), for the reasons explained in the Introduction. This is because in areas where societal bilingualism is
present, two languages are used for everyday needs, beyond the individual level. Sometimes these two languages have a specific function (e.g. one is the language of government and administration and the other is the language used at home), resulting in bilingualism with diglossia.

Diglossia means the use of two varieties of the same language (e.g. standard and dialect as in standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic; diglossia with bilingualism means English with one function and Spanish with the other (Fishman 1991). When bilingualism with diglossia occurs, the non-societal or minority language is used mostly at home or in private encounters (as with friends, family or community members with whom the non-societal language is shared) and the societal language is used at school, government, etc. (as in public encounters).

CLB has been observed more in cases of bilingualism with diglossia when parents or family members can only speak their home language and the children/youngsters (who are schooled in the societal language and therefore have some degree of proficiency in it) help the family with their communicative needs. Additionally, the issue of adult bilinguals acting as ad hoc translators or interpreters has been problematized, especially in diglossic societies (Meylaerts 2010a, 2010b). Both CLBs and ad hoc translators and interpreters, although not referred to by these names, have been studied by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists (Katz 2014a, 2014b; Valdés et al. 2003; Zentella 1997).

In areas of language contact with societal bi-/multilingualism, language mediation, interpreting and translating become more relevant activities because they enable communication between users of non-societal languages and users of the societal language(s). Without language provision, monolingual users of non-societal languages may be excluded from public discourse and denied access to services (Angelelli 2010, 2015, 2018; Davidson 2002; van Dijk 2000) or unable to interact with members of other cultures and heritages. When societies do not or cannot accommodate linguistic diversity, CLBs (as well as ad hoc interpreters/translators) fill the communicative void.

In addition, because the intersection of bi-/multilingualism and T&I goes beyond monolithic constructs of language proficiency, professionalism or access to services (Angelelli 2015), new ways of thinking about languages in contact have shed light on the role played by ad hoc, non-professional interpreters and translators (Ervin and Meyer 2016; Meyer 2012; Angelelli 2010), as well as on the “linguistic biographies” of immigrants, migrants and heritage speakers (Hammer 2017). Additionally, existing research, policies and practices in translation and interpreting have encountered a mix of bilinguals and have highlighted the bearing that bilingualism has on translation and interpreting, especially insofar as it influences the construction of professionalism and role.

2.2 The education of gifted bilinguals

Prior conceptualizations of education and bilingualism portrayed bilingual students (children or youth) as at risk or a problem (cf. White and Kaufman 1997) on the basis that they may not have the expected command of the societal language. More current conceptualizations on education and bi-/multilingualism portray linguistic diversity as a plus, as a gift/talent which needs to be recognized and nurtured (Angelelli 2000, 2010; Valdés 2003; Malakoff and Hakuta 1991). Moreover, in countries like Canada, the United States or the United Kingdom, to name just a few, research on bilingualism and education has demonstrated the importance of nurturing the giftedness of bilingual children/youth.

Research findings from educational psychology and educational linguistics (Malakoff and Hakuta 1991; Bialystok and Hakuta 1994; Valdés et al. 2000, 2003; Borrero 2011) have demonstrated unequivocally that translation and interpreting are not by-products of bilingualism, and
that not all bilinguals can successfully translate or interpret at an appropriate level (i.e. to enable communication). As a result of the ethnography (1996–2001) carried out by a Stanford University team (led by Valdés and Heath entitled “Identifying, Teaching and Assessing the Gifted through Linguistic and Cultural Lenses”) a curriculum was designed (Angelelli, Enright, and Valdés 2000) for bilingual learners to expand the offerings of arts courses, at the time mostly focusing on literature or grammar. The curriculum was piloted in one of the research sites and later adopted in other schools in the Bay Area in California. Findings from the pilot study and beyond showed that CLB enhanced students’ cognitive, linguistic, interpersonal and social skills and fostered the development of decision-making and problem-solving strategies, empathy and self-esteem (Borrero 2011).

Research from education and bilingualism has also demonstrated the importance of being mindful about the different types and categories of bilinguals (Valdés and Figueroa 1994; Angelelli 2010) representing the different upbringings of individuals, some of whom may perform as translators or interpreters during childhood or adolescence. Their upbringings greatly impact how they understand different communicative situations and shape their expectations as they provide (or receive) a service. In addition, this different conceptualization of what service is, what an interpreter or a translator does or where boundaries between the professional and the personal roles lie should be brought to mind to understand the socialization of student interpreters who have experience as child/youth language brokers when deciding on appropriate pedagogies (Angelelli 2010). The ethics surrounding these educational and pedagogical issues have not been sufficiently explored by research focusing on translation and/or interpreting.

When discussing pedagogical issues and the student population in T&I classes (second-language learners and heritage learners), it is worth emphasizing that, although all translators and interpreters are bilinguals, not all bilinguals can translate or interpret. In fact, among bilinguals, professional translators and interpreters have always been a special case at the higher end of the scale of bilingualism, as they use their languages to work rather than only to communicate. Therefore, for them a mastery of standardized varieties of their language combination used to work as well as their professional performance in both languages in different settings with various degrees of formality and across speech communities is required.

Bilinguals have choices between their language repertoires, and they generally make decisions based on the physical or social context in which they find themselves, as well as on the social value ascribed to each language (Hamers and Blanc 2000). This unique ability is a valuable asset and allows bilinguals to adapt to distinct situations and identify with diverse linguistic and ethnic groups (Fishman 1991; Niño-Murcia and Rothman 2009). It should be noted, however, that translators and interpreters, as bilingual professionals, do not have a choice among their working languages once they are interpreting professionally. The language to be used is given to them by the interlocutors for whom they interpret and they can neither code-switch nor engage in translanguaging. This is an important difference between bilinguals who broker based on their language proficiency and bilinguals who are professional translators or interpreters.

2.3 Child language brokering within translation and interpreting studies

One could argue that the beginning of CLB research followed the steps of Harris and Sherwood (1978) when they observed “natural” translators between French and English in school playgrounds in Canada. These bilingual children were perceived as ambassadors for newly arrived children who could not speak the societal language. This perception of translation and interpreting as innate or acquired skills for bilinguals is at the core of the long-standing debate raising questions such as “Are translators/interpreters born or made?” or “Is it necessary to teach translation/
interpreting to bilinguals?” These questions are closely related to the topic of CLB. At the time, however, the focus was not on the ethics of having children take roles of adults (after all, the school staff could have been better placed to help newcomers navigate the unfamiliar environment) as much as it was on observing the phenomenon of CLB (Harris and Sherwood 1978) and understanding how CLBs acquire the ability of translating or interpreting at such an early age.

CLB (as well as ad hoc T&I) as a field of inquiry has met some resistance within the TIS community. In spite of this, both areas have continued to generate interest. As stated by Evrin and Meyer (2016) in their opening editorial to the special issue on Non-professional Interpreting and Translation of the European Journal of Applied Linguistics, “Over the last ten years, non–professional interpreting and translation – perceived as the study of unpaid translation practices – has become a field of research in its own right” (1). We therefore can discuss ad hoc translation and interpreting in a more informed way today than we were able to do 10 or 15 years ago. “The area of inquiry of non–professional interpreters and translators [NPITs, see Chapter 15 “Ethics in public service interpreting” in this volume], which includes CLB and ad-hoc practices, is no longer perceived as the poor relative of Translation and Interpreting Studies” (Antonini 2017, 2).

3 Core issues and topics

3.1 Ethics and CLB: access to information and accountability of service providers

Access to information is key to making informed decisions, especially when it comes to accessing public services such as education, justice, health or social services. Not providing equal access to all eligible members of society is a form of discrimination. When there is a need for a translator or an interpreter and a professional is not facilitating the interaction, various questions arise from different perspectives involving ethics, accountability and responsibility. Linguistic minorities – lawfully living in a country/region (e.g. deaf using sign language or immigrant, refugees, indigenous members speaking a different language than that of the region/country in which they reside), paying taxes and contributing to society – many times and for different reasons cannot communicate using the societal language. The fact that language provision exists and is less costly than social exclusion (Angelelli 2015) raises ethical questions. It also demands accountability from government (Pellinen et al. 2018).

These questions and demands are closely related to CLB. Some of them are: why would these members of society not enjoy the same rights to communication or access to services as users of societal languages? Why are governments turning a blind eye when CLBs have to step up and help their families access services when governments have already paid for language services to be rendered to them? From the perspective of industry, when bidding, winning and charging for services, why assume quality between professionals and non-professionals is the same? Since quality does vary between CLB, ad hoc and professionals as well as between novices and experts (Dillinger 1994; Degueldre 2002), industry has incurred responsibilities and risks by jeopardizing quality for cost-cutting and/or profit margin increasing as illustrated by the case of serious translation errors with fatal consequences in a hospital near Epinal (Angelelli 2015).

Turning a blind eye to allowing access to services through CLBs, or assuming that they may equate access to professional language services, raises ethical and accountability issues at all levels (see for example Bill AB-292 from the California Legislature 2004 and Quan and Lynch 2010). Among these are equal access under the law, right to quality services, stress caused to families, unnecessary confusion, stress/tension caused to CLBs for the ad hoc arrangements and adjustments they need to make within their family dynamics and structure.
3.1 Children/youth and adults sharing topics and interactions: who determines appropriateness? And, role reversal?

When children/youth take part in adult conversations, whether as members of the family or as performing CLB, they may be exposed to topics which may or may not be appropriate for their age (e.g. a serious illness in the family, a missed mortgage payment, a crime committed in the neighborhood or the passing of a friend). The matter of how appropriate it is to expose children/youth to certain topics is one for each family to determine and, as such, it is personal and private. However, when families (including children and youth) find themselves in public organizations such as a hospital or a government agency where they need to access services, and professional interpreting is not provided, CLB becomes the last resort for families in need of communication. This is no longer a private matter of the CLB’s family (2004). This is a public matter as government agencies or organizations are responsible for asking help from youth/children to broker communicative events which may or may not be appropriate for them.

Some government agencies and NGOs offer guidelines as to when and where it would not be good practice to bring CLBs to mediate adult communication. In the homepage of The Children’s Society in the UK (Children’s Society), for example, there is a list of roles that refugee and asylum-seeking children take to help parents communicate with service providers as well as information on good and not-so-good practices. While guidelines might be helpful, they do not absolve or exclude the organization/stakeholders from accountability and call into question the ethics of the provider requesting the help of the CLBs. Conversely, and to show the complexity of these matters, if the CLBs is not allowed to help their parents to communicate on the basis that the topic is an adult matter, if this matter has a negative outcome or cannot be resolved due to miscommunication, it would also raise a question on the ethics of the decision vis-à-vis its impact on the child who may have trouble understanding why he/she was not allowed to help the parent.

Within immigrant families, the role that younger members play in mediating communication adds to the range of patterns of family interactions (Guo 2014) on a daily basis. Studies on family dynamics and bilingualism and on family language policy (King and Fogle 2017; Spolsky 2004, 2012) shed light on the trust and respect towards family decision-making. Findings show immigrant families play as teams. Members help each other by playing to their strengths (e.g. the youngsters are schooled in the language of the host society and thus see helping family members with communication as part of what a member of a team does). In the roles played in the family by younger members, there seems to be an explicit or implicit understanding of who does what (e.g. who helps with babysitting for a younger sibling, who sets the table, who calls grandma, who takes the garbage out or who interprets [Valdés et al. 2003; Angelelli 2010; Guo 2014]). These findings illustrate the risks of transferring family behaviors and ethical judgements from one ethnic group to another.

Making ethical decisions for one specific case becomes less difficult if guidance can be found in the law – provided, of course, that the law is enforced. However, in many countries, legislation covering access to language either does not exist (Angelelli 2015) or, if it exists, is enforced only partially. For example, in the US there is legislation banning the use of children as family “translators” in healthcare institutions receiving national funding (California Legislative Information 2004). Professional and academic publications continue to report the use of bilingual children/youth as well as ad hoc translators and interpreters (Valdés et al. 2003; Orellana 2009; Hsieh 2016; Angelelli 2004a, 2016) in healthcare. In spite of the law, resorting to CLB for adult interactions, however, is observed not only in healthcare and not only in the US (c.f. Napier 2017). This raises ethical questions on the part of adults requesting the help of CLBs and of governments’ accountability vis-à-vis these occurrences.
The issue of role reversal and its implications for the child, the parents and the family has been discussed extensively in CLB research (Angelelli 2010) and in developmental psychology (see discussion in Guo 2014). What has emerged from studies conducted in organizations focusing on education or healthcare, such as hospitals, clinics, schools and social service offices, is that when children and youngsters interpret for their families, it is not just the adult members of the bilingual child’s/youth’s family who request help from them. It is also the adults in the community who cannot communicate with non-societal language users, even when there are interpreters available and they are not costly. This is an ethical issue. And it is also the child/youth who volunteers with adults’ consent. In this sense, and as it has been reported (Valdés et al. 2003; Orellana and Reynolds 2008; Antonini 2010; Angelelli 2016, 2017; Napier 2017), the children/youth stepping up and trying to help family members is not an arbitrary choice of either the adult members of the family or the younger ones. It is the consequence of a (sometimes urgent) communicative need which is not met with language services, i.e. interpreters are not provided, even when available and affordable (see, for example, Angelelli 2015.)

In this way, the responsibility for reverting roles or placing children/youth in adult conversations exceeds the realm of the family and becomes a responsibility shared with the organization and the society. In a way, the parents/family members are placed between a rock and a hard place: either they have their children broker information for them or they are left with no information. And what is even more serious is that the children are also placed in this difficult position: either they broker the information discussed or they feel they are not helping their parents.

In addition to role reversal and appropriateness or lack thereof, when communication is brokered by CLBs or ad hoc T&Is, the issue of access to quality language provision for speakers of non-societal languages in a multilingual society raises even more ethical issues and has driven many debates current and past.

4 New debates and emerging issues

Several issues, although not new, appear to be attracting new attention and deserve serious consideration. To contextualize this section and avoid discussions in abstract or overgeneralizations, I will give an example of an ethical dilemma collected during fieldwork in two settings (a public school and a public hospital). The dilemma refers to accountability and ethics of organizations offering services to linguistic minorities and having or not having CLB as part of their language provision. These empirical examples come from data collected during the course of two ethnographies involving communication between non-societal language users and users of societal language (English). CLBs (as well as ad hoc T&Is) were used while providing services. In the tradition of reporting data in ethnography (Fetterman 2009; Le Compte and Schensul 1999), the reader should note that these examples are typical of the observations performed during these studies, otherwise they should not be reported. In other words, these examples do not constitute unique occurrences.

4.1 Examples of ethical dilemmas surrounding CLB

As more initiatives become available to foster the talents of bilingual children/youth in language brokering, we continue to ponder the question of private and public spheres when it comes to family decisions, dynamics and CLB. While it would be presumptuous to attempt to answer if/when it is appropriate or not to call on and allow children/youth to broker communication between adults as well as to determine how and why it would be appropriate to do so, it falls
within the scope of this chapter to discuss the ethics of the situation and the ethical consequences of having or not having children/youth engage in brokering.

The first of the examples comes from an ethnographic study conducted in an educational setting (Valdés et al. 2000, 2003; Angelelli 2000). In this study we found that CLB was used in teacher-parent conferences, meetings, science fairs, translation of posters and notes to parents, among others. The second one comes from one ethnographic study in three US hospitals (Angelelli 2004a) and one exploratory study conducted in five Member States of the EU involving over 112 healthcare settings (Angelelli 2015, 2016). In these studies, we found that CLB was used to help direct patients to various areas of the hospital, to assist them reading brochures, test descriptions, medication-intake instructions, as well as to communicate during educational sessions (e.g. cooking for diabetics, nutrition during pregnancy) as they broker interactions with other family members who share the language of the CLBs.

Several issues can be identified in these situated practices. These issues are part of current debates on CLB:

1. Children/youth come into an appointment to school/the hospital with their adult family members to help them in their communication. In both settings, these children/youth are not requested to leave the room unless the matter is delicate. They are allowed to help their own family members in communicating with adults.

2. When bilingual children/youth are present at school/the hospital, in both studies, they are asked to do CLB for adults/children in the organization who are not their own family members (i.e. either for other parents in a teacher-parent conference or for another patient at the reception desk in a hospital, for example). They are asked to do so by the adult in the organization.

3. CLB was used not only when no adult interpreter/translator was available for both scheduled and impromptu interactions. In various occasions the child/youth stepped up when the assigned “interpreter” could not understand the speaker of non-societal language due to the interpreter’s limited proficiency in it. On these occasions neither the adult family member nor the provider objected to CLB and the communicative event went on with various degrees of success.

The examples show how CLB occurs in private encounters (a doctor-patient consultation or a teacher/parent conference). Unlike public ones, occurring in a court of law or a conference lecture hall, in private encounters there is no audience. The presence of an audience limits the possibility of interactions between the parties (i.e. there is a protocol). It also reminds interlocutors that they are performing in the presence of others. The others (i.e. the audience) witness the interaction and communicative rules are observed, leaving little flexibility to break protocol and negotiate roles (Angelelli 2004b, 88). In a private encounter, on the other hand, there is more flexibility, a protocol can be broken and roles are more fluid as they are less clearly defined. Therefore in a private encounter, family members many times can decide who plays which role when needed in an interaction.

5 Conclusions

In this chapter we have discussed ethical issues surrounding children and youth’s participation in language brokering for their friends and families, and even when requested by help from strangers to communicate. We have considered how the topic of CLB relates to bilingual and multilingual societies, how it fills a void when access to communication is not provided. It is evident that the phenomenon of CLB (as well as ad hoc interpreting) is complex and multifaceted. While its
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exploration sheds light on important points, it also raises several questions. Some questions related to the education of bilinguals, their giftedness and cultural/linguistic talent have been researched abundantly (Guo 2014; Malakoff and Hakuta 1991; Angelelli 2010, 2016; Antonini 2010; Borroto 2011; Valdés et al. 2003) and, while we have made some progress and learned much in those specific areas, in terms of ethics and accountability of stakeholders much remains to be done.

As long as there are people, there is diversity, movement and displacement. Communication occurs through movement and displacement. When people do not share a language, they cannot communicate directly. Their communication is facilitated by translators and interpreters. As we have discussed in this chapter, in bi-/multilingual societies which, at least in principle, support participative democratic practices, the need to provide access to services for linguistic groups that do not use the societal language is basic. Individuals cannot participate without access. When access is disregarded, individuals and communities get organized helping each other in the same ways families do.

In these situations, organizations as well as families may resort to bilinguals (children, youngsters) to act as translators/interpreters. Organizations make choices based on availability and cost. Families make choices based on trust or need. Users of non-societal languages, when not provided with language services, are denied a choice. In these cases, they resort to whatever means is available for them to communicate. This may mean relying on their own children. Sometimes, even when offered an interpreter they still prefer to have a family member, as they can trust their family member more than they can trust a stranger or the stranger’s abilities.

Because CLB is a situated practice, we have highlighted the need for exploring phenomena in context rather than reducing them to right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. Additionally, we have raised the issue of accountability on the part of requesters for their actions when involving CLBs in interactions. Every interaction of CLBs in communication is a situated practice, whether the CLB is child-to-child, child-to-adult or adult-to-adult. We, as ethical and responsible adult members of society, and as researchers, should look at the phenomenon of CLB, understand its context, ask whose responsibility it is to provide, allow, ban or even require CLB, which means to consider if/when it can be either appropriate or inappropriate to engage children/youngsters in brokering communication in general and adult communication specifically, as well as to consider the consequences of each and all of these decisions. This chapter and this volume have afforded us the opportunity to delve into this discussion in context.

Related topics in this volume

Ethics in public service interpreting; ethics of volunteering in translation and interpreting; ethics of activist translation and interpreting; ethics codes for interpreters and translators; research ethics in translation and interpreting studies; translating and interpreting in conflict and crisis; accessibility and linguistic rights.

Note

1 The participating Member States were Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. The study was conducted in a pre-Brexit era.

References


Apostolou, Fotini, Effie Yannopoulou, and Angeliki Papahadjopoulos. 2018. Round Table Discussion at Narratives of Immigration–Community Interpreting as a Right of Passage. The voice of community interpreters: Community interpreters working in different settings in Greece.


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Further reading


This edited work presents a collection of essays displaying multiple methods and theoretical frameworks to study non-professional translating and interpreting. It includes studies on adults as well as children/youth from spoken as well as sign languages. The empirical studies report results using qualitative, quantitative as well as mixed methods.


Based on longitudinal data on linguistic and cultural brokering of Latino children and youth acting as “para-phrasers” for their immigrant families on a day-to-day basis, this book presents insights of child/youth development. Orellana critiques simplistic notions of child–parent role reversal and highlights the role biculturalism plays in these translation practices. She also shows that exchanges are not unidirectional; instead, they are co-constructed between children/youth translators and their parents.


Two different bodies of research and literature ground this work: giftedness and translation/interpreting in a book discussing a five-year ethnographic study looking at bilingual youth translating and interpreting to broker communication between societal language users and linguistic minorities. Based on empirical data, this book challenges the position on translation and interpreting as a by-product of bilingualism. By identifying, assessing and teaching gifted bilinguals, results unequivocally show that T&I performed by youngsters/children is a case of giftedness.