

## CHILD LANGUAGE BROKERING IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: NARRATIVE AND VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILD INTERPRETING IN OLIVIA ABTAHI'S *THE INTERPRETER*

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**Abstract:** *Children who interpret for their family members, mostly after migrating to a new country, are referred to as child language brokers. The prevalence of child language brokering has risen alongside the increasing rates of migration worldwide in recent years. Despite its common occurrence with children of migrant communities, child language brokering has received limited attention in children's literature. The scarcity of representation of child language brokers in literature can be attributed to the oversight of their unprofessional and informal interpreting. The Interpreter, a children's picture book, is one of the rare literary works that is specifically plotted on a child language broker. The story follows a young girl who must interpret for her family on various occasions. The author, Olivia Abtahi, shares similar brokering experiences as a child of a migrant family. This case study aims to examine how non-professional interpreting tasks undertaken by children are portrayed in this book. To this end, the key concepts and research areas of child language brokering are elaborated. The key issues of CLB, ranging from adultification and role reversal to caregiving and advocacy, are discussed, drawing upon the child character's experiences and illustrations. This qualitative research is grounded in a content analysis, guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, which yields findings on the presentation of child language brokering as an unpaid, unrecognized, and underappreciated form of non-professional interpreting. Furthermore, the book contributes to the visibility of child language brokers while addressing the potential contributions and challenges of child language brokering for both children and migrant families.*

**Keywords:** *child language brokering; child interpreting; the interpreter; non-professional interpreting; children's literature; visual grammar*

### 1. Introduction

Child language brokering (CLB) refers to non-professional translation and interpreting tasks undertaken by mostly refugee/migrant children to help their families communicate in a host country. Tse (486) defines child language brokers as bilingual children who translate and interpret without formal training. Learning the language of the host country earlier than their parents and other adults in the family, children are usually the main interpreters in refugee/migrant families, particularly in the early years of migration. The task of interpreting, which is accompanied by translation tasks at times, brings along many other responsibilities to child language brokers such as ensuring negotiation between their parents and other parties in communication, resolving conflicts, learning the culture and customs of the host country and informing the family members about these, and ultimately helping the

refugee/migrant community to adapt the host country and contributing to the acculturation. Such a broad scope of tasks, accompanied by being the informal interpreter of the family, usually seems to be embraced voluntarily and happily by children. On the other side of the coin, CLB is not a choice but a compulsion for millions of children and their families. It comes out of necessity, a lack of labor, policy, and budget deficiencies in the host country. As a form of non-professional interpreting that occurs daily in millions of refugees' and migrants' families, CLB has long been neglected as a research area in the field of translation studies (Antonini). This negligence can be attributed to the informal and non-professional form of the task, which is perceived as secondary and minor to the professional interpreting, although in fact, non-professional interpreting is much broader in scope and common than professional. Likewise, the perception of children as (so-called) trivial and insignificant to adults might have accentuated the overlooked nature of this practice. However, CLB holds its potential to inform many key aspects of non-professional interpreting as well as community interpreting.

The negligence of CLB in practical, social, and academic contexts is also reflected in the literature. One of the limited literary works specifically touching upon this common but overlooked phenomenon is a children's picture book, *The Interpreter*. The book was written by Olivia Abtahi and illustrated by Monica Arnaldo. The author is the daughter of two immigrants, an Iranian father and an Argentine mother living in the USA (Abtahi, *About Olivia*). In an interview with Tong, Abtahi narrates that although her parents learned both Spanish and English at school, they still needed help to bridge cultural gaps among all three languages in the household, and she, as a kid, acted as a cultural broker. Thus, the author reflects her own brokering experiences in the book.

The book depicting the child character's experiences of interpreting on multiple occasions touches upon many key issues of CLB, such as affiliated emotions of a child language broker, including joy, happiness, frustration and stress, as well as interpersonal relations affected by adultification and role reversal. The fictional character and her experiences, which are rooted in the author's personal life story, shed light on how a child language broker, her parents, and society perceive CLB as informal, *ad hoc*, and non-professional interpreting. The literary value of this book also turns the invisible experiences of a former child language broker into visible and vital ones through a literary narration by giving the child language broker a voice to reflect her reactions and emotions. The book also shows how interpreting and multilingualism are portrayed and presented to young readers, including refugee and migrant children who may be involved in language brokering for their families.

## 2. Methodology

Picture books can offer a rich social context to analyze sociolinguistic phenomena like CLB. *The Interpreter*, a children's picture book, that specifically narrates the story of a child language broker, is selected as the case study. For Kiefer (262), “picture books even more than paintings are created to express some specific meaning or narrative, sometimes in the company of verbal text, sometimes not”. In expressing meaning and narrative, *The Interpreter* features both rich illustrations and short texts on the illustrated pages. Thus, the analysis of the present study consists of both text and illustrations of the book.

Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar is used as the methodological framework to analyze how illustrations construct and convey meaning alongside the text content. Visual grammar conceptualizes images as meaningful units of communication that are vital for meaning-making in three aspects, namely, representational, interactive, and compositional meaning. The representational meaning is grounded upon how images visualize the main traits and conceptual meanings, thus “represent objects and their relation in a world outside the representational system” (Kress & van Leeuwen 42). Representational meaning can be constructed through two processes, namely, narrative and conceptual. While narrative process is about the actions, reactions, and speeches of the represented participants, conceptual process is more about the non-narrative representation of participants “in terms of class, structure or meaning” (Kress & van Leeuwen 79). In a children's picture book, for instance, the illustration of a child's actions, utterances, ideas, and relationships can be analyzed through the lens of representational meaning of visual grammar. The interactive meaning is constructed through direct conversation between participants in terms of gaze, angle, and social distance that represents the interpersonal and social relations between the viewer and illustrator. For instance, direct contact of an illustrated character with the viewer can create a bond and empathy. Similarly, the closer shot on the illustrated hero can ensure a closer social distance, which builds a closer relationship between the hero and the viewer (Zhang). Compositional meaning is “the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole” (Kress & van Leeuwen 172). The three main components of compositional meaning are information value, salient, and framing, which are all about the structure and layout of the image. In this sense, these components of compositional meaning help viewers see the prioritized information by revealing hierarchies of meaning such as “which visual elements get emphasized or made salient, and how the visual elements are framed” (Hermawan, B., & Sukyadi 406). Against this background, Kress & van

Leeuwen's visual grammar offers a rich analysis framework to read illustrations of a children's picture book as a text that communicates meaning. The selected children's picture book *The Interpreter* allows us to explore the key concepts of CLB through the depiction of these concepts in literary narrative and illustrations. To this end, this study employs content analysis with a deductive approach. The key themes of CLB that are used as the coding framework are as follows: a) adultification; b) mediation, advocacy & impartiality; c) non-institutional settings & socialization; d) caregiving & emotional burden; normativity; e) role reversal; f) main language broker & role distribution. These themes were deductively identified based on the key findings of the CLB literature (Crafter & Iqbal; García-Sánchez; McQuillan & Tse; Weisskirch, among others).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

CLB has been a research focus for various disciplines ranging from developmental psychology to linguistics. The multidimensional and context-dependent structure of CLB makes it possible to research this field from various disciplines with a variety of research methodologies. Although research methodologies and fields vary, the key concepts of CLB have been studied repeatedly and have generated many different and even conflicting findings, which emphasizes the complexity and contextuality of CLB. In this section, the key concepts of CLB, which are most commonly addressed in the CLB literature, are discussed to lay the ground for further analysis of the selected case.

#### **3.1. Adultification**

Adultification, also referred to as parentification, is one of the most commonly addressed issues of CLB. Under normal circumstances, parents as adults are expected to take care of their children and fulfill their needs. CLB reverses this expectation and the roles of parents when children start to meet their parents' communication needs. In case of a brokering task undertaken by a child, parents turn into passive parties of communication who are dependent on their children, while children are involved in interactions mostly between adults, making decisions for them and speaking on their behalf. Child language brokers expressed the feeling associated with such a change in their status in the family as 'I feel grown', 'I feel like an adult/parent' (McQuillan & Tse). Studies show that such a shift between familial roles disrupts hierarchical dynamics and damages the parent-child relationship within a family (Oznobishin & Kurman). Adultification, which causes children to perceive language brokering as a burden, is also reported to result in

psychological problems for child language brokers (Arellano et al.; Titzmann & Michel).

### **3.2. Mediation, Advocacy, & Impartiality**

The scope of CLB goes beyond mere interpreting and requires brokers to be engaged in mediation, which involves resolving conflicts, giving advice, taking initiatives, and gatekeeping where necessary. Although the concepts of interpreting and mediation are not mutually exclusive, the institutional expectations from an interpreter and a mediator differ in different countries in the field of community interpreting. The clearest distinction between the two roles can be found in the active role of mediators in ensuring the participation of the parties in communication and the impartiality principle expected from professional interpreters (Baraldi & Gavioli). Unlike professional interpreters, child language brokers undertaking the role of a mediator do not strictly abide by the principles of faithful, complete, and impartial interpreting. Children may deliberately opt not to interpret a message for several reasons, such as not to upset their parents (Bayraktar Özer, *Türkiye*) or finding the content of the message irrelevant to the conversation (Schouten et al.). In this sense, it can be asserted that the focus of child language brokers is often advocacy rather than impartiality.

### **3.3. Non-Institutional Settings & Socialization**

CLB is common in any setting where human interaction and communication between different languages take place. The most common institutional settings of CLB are hospitals, schools, banks, and government agencies such as tax offices, registration offices, among others (Angelelli 2016; Bucaria & Rossato, 2010). In institutional settings, child language brokers assume responsibility for representing their families and migrant/refugee communities in front of an authority and interpret under the impact of power dynamics. Non-institutional settings, on the other hand, include more daily interactions in shopping stores, neighbor gatherings, and so on. As these settings require interpreting in shorter durations on daily topics that do not necessitate terminology and subject knowledge, children generally find interpreting in non-institutional settings easier (Çelem). In CLB research, the greater weight is given to institutional settings due to the formality and sensitivity of interpreting in such settings. Nevertheless, CLB in non-institutional settings, albeit looking trivial and easy, plays a crucial role in ensuring the integration of migrant/refugee families with the host country and culture. In a study conducted on communities speaking minority languages in Turkey, Bayraktar-Özer (*Child Language Brokering*) particularly sheds light on the significance of non-institutional settings, since they can offer limited opportunities for women who do not participate in the labor force and education. Thus, CLB in

non-institutional settings can be a vital part of the lives of migrant/refugee women, as a disadvantaged group, for socializing with society outside the home.

### **3.4. Caregiving & Emotional Burden**

Contrary to the perception of CLB as a pathological and unusual activity which is addressed within the scope of adultification, Bauer (2016) perceives CLB as a daily caregiving practice that is routine and normal in a family. This caregiving lens defines CLB as unpaid care given to family members by children based on love, commitment, and reciprocity. Based on this perception, García-Sánchez, who also shares this view, opposes the idea that CLB causes irreversible role shifts in a family, and instead suggests that children naturally play a role in the caregiving practices in a family.

On the other hand, such a usual aspect of daily life is known to have many negative impacts on children's psychological development (Love & Burie; Oznobishin & Kurman) and academic achievement (Niehaus & Kumpiene). Similarly, although relevant research shows that child language brokers see interpreting for their family as a natural part of life (Crafter et al., Dorner et al.), one of the most frequently reported findings of CLB literature is the perception of language brokering as a 'burden' by children (Orellana & Guan; Tse). These conflicting findings indicate the complex nature of CLB, which heavily depends on the contextual factors. Weisskirch puts forth a variety of contextual factors, such as individual, family, and relational aspects of CLB that determine the impact of brokering tasks on children. The frequency of brokering tasks can be considered one of these factors affecting the impacts and perception of CLB. The high frequency of brokering tasks is known to be associated with more adverse impacts of CLB and causes children to perceive their roles as an extra burden.

### **3.5. Role Reversal**

Role reversal refers to shifts in the power and hierarchical dynamics between parents and children. As a consequence of parentification/adultification, children take an active role not only in interpreting for their parents, but also in making decisions on their behalf and assume an adult-like responsibility. Such a shift in a child's position from passive/weak/dependent to active/strong/independent in a family gives the child language broker a certain level of authority. This shift may damage the parent-child relationship (Oznobishin & Kurman) and cause a threat to the family and migrant community (Haffner) as well as in-house conflicts (Giordano).

### **3.6. Main Language Broker & Role Distribution**

A child who is chosen by the family to interpret most of the time for communication is defined as the main language broker. Personality traits, eagerness, speaking skills, and language competency of a child can be effective factors to be preferred as the main language broker. The CLB literature shows the majority of girls selected as main language brokers of families (Chao; Valdés), which is closely associated with the gender roles, domestic and care-related duties attributed to girls. Although a single child usually acts as the main language broker of the family, brokering tasks can be divided between siblings and other family members as well. The division of brokering tasks eases the responsibility of the main language broker and contributes to a more positive perception of brokering by the child.

## **4. Analysis**

The main character of the book is a little girl named Cecilia who occasionally interprets for her parents between Spanish and English. It can be deduced that Cecilia's parents migrated from a Spanish-speaking country to an English-speaking country. This parallel between Cecilia and the author is noteworthy, as Olivia Abtahi is the daughter of an Argentinian mother and a Persian father who migrated to the U.S.A. As Cecilia's parents are not competent in English, they reach out to their daughter to build communication with others in the host country.

The story follows the busy schedule of Cecilia, who is depicted interpreting for her parents on various occasions. During the interpreting tasks, she remains between her childhood, particularly his favorite activity, playing soccer with her friends, and the constant call-ups from her parents. The lively and joyful depiction of Cecilia evolves into a more tired and depressed figure, reflecting her struggle between her two identities: that of an interpreter and a child. The climax of the story is based on a teacher's question to Cecilia: 'How are you doing?' This question makes Cecilia aware of her in-between identity and the tiring nature of her work. Upon a mental breakdown, Cecilia tells her parents about her tiredness and willingness to help at the same time and asks for more help and support from other sources. Her family realizes the burden on Cecilia and makes a new plan to get help from other members of the family, namely, Cecilia's elder brother and aunt.

The following examples include the selected text contents and depictions of the illustrations from the book that touch upon the key CLB concepts, along with their analyses based on the methodological framework of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and theoretical framework of CLB.

### Example 1

**Text:** Some kids had one job: to be a kid. Cecilia worked two. (pp.1-2)

**Illustration:** Cecilia wears an oversized green suit and tie, sitting at a desk with a name plate, INTERPRETER. She reads the newspaper while eating a slice of bread and sipping coffee from a mocha pot. The post-it notes in multiple languages attached to her desk read: For my family.

### Example 2

**Text:** Cecilia went to all kinds of grown-up places. Places her classmates had never been. (p.7)

**Illustration:** The next pages show Cecilia actively interpreting between English and Spanish in various settings, including a doctor appointment, a tax office, a car maintenance site, a hairdresser, a grocery shop, a cargo shop accompanying her father, mother, and little sibling. She also interprets through the phone and helps her dad read a paper on a laptop. During her interpreting tasks, she is positioned next to her parents.

### Example 3

**Text:** Sometimes, Cecilia got her jobs mixed up. (9-10)

**Illustration:** Cecilia plays soccer with her friends outside the house, wearing a soccer uniform. Her play is interrupted with another call, “CECILIA YOU ARE UP!” She runs home, passing through a door with a big title INTERPRETER, and she is in her green suit and tie again.

In these illustrations, the representational meaning is constructed through one key image: a child dressed in an oversized suit. Professional attire represents the seriousness and formality of brokering, which requires a significant amount of time and effort, like a professional job. The big size of the suit worn by Cecilia during her interpreting tasks is another symbol of adult-like responsibility that comes along with brokering, which weighs heavily on a little kid. The position of Cecilia next to her parents as an interpreter during interactions with others is critical for the interactive meaning of the illustrations. The proximity of Cecilia to her parents, rather than being located in the middle between two parties of communication, is a clear indicator of her emotional and familial proximity of her parents. In interpreter-mediated dialogues, "the interpreter -placed centrally between the parties- forms part of a communicative radius shared by all those present" (Wadensjö 81). The central physical positioning of the interpreter signifies equal proximity to both parties and their impartiality. On the other hand, the proximity of Cecilia to family members is a clear symbol of her advocacy for her parents, and that the impartiality principle is not prioritized. In terms of the compositional meaning, the capital letters and bigger fonts of INTERPRETER and CECILIA YOU



ARE UP! create a visual salience in these examples. Throughout the flow of the story, these salient illustrative units bring the viewer's focus to the significance and urgency of brokering tasks that usually interrupt Cecilia's childhood activities. The framing of Cecilia in two activities on the same page: one playing soccer and one running to her job at the same time, also shows the division of her identities that are both connected within Cecilia but emerge as disconnected identities when her adult-like job interrupts her childhood.

These examples highlight the demanding nature of child language brokering by grounding the story of the book on the main theme of adultification. The name plate INTERPRETER on Cecilia's working desk and oversized suit and tie worn by Cecilia during her brokering tasks are particularly used to define Cecilia's voluntary brokering for her family as a job of adults, albeit unpaid and non-professional. The involvement of a child in non-professional interpreting is emphasized frequently by comparing Cecilia with her peers who do not have to be involved in an adult-like job every day. The most striking comparison between Cecilia the kid and Cecilia the interpreter is made through the illustration of her two identities in the same scene (Example 3): One as a kid playing soccer with her friends, and the other as a dressed-up adult who is called for duty. The interruption of Cecilia's soccer play represents the interruption of her child identity and the compulsory shift to her adult identity. This example particularly depicts how a child is expected to behave like an adult and undertake an adult's responsibility, and how this responsibility disrupts her childhood.

The post-it note on Cecilia's working desk, for my family, shows the language broker's ties with her family and how she sees her broker role as a familial duty. Unlike the Western approach to child and familial roles, collectivist societies may consider a child's language brokering as a part of the division of work in a family (Bauer; Reynold & Orellana). This note shows Cecilia does not initially and automatically associate her adult-like role with an unwanted and undesired act that damages her childhood. Instead, CLB is depicted as a common and natural part of life for a migrant family. On the other hand, multiple occasions of frequent brokering of Cecilia eventually interrupt her daily and usual childhood activities.

#### Example 4

**Text:** Cecilia (*to the hairdresser*): Only two goals- I mean, inches, please. No bangs.

Hairdresser (*looking surprised and angry*): She should have seen me sooner! Look at the frizz!

**Illustration:** Looking anxious, the mother sits on the hairdresser's chair.

**Text:** Cecilia (*to her mother*): Don't worry. She will cut your hair the way you like.

Mother (*smiling and relieved*): Thank you, Cecilia. What would I do without you? (pp.11-12)

In this example, Cecilia interprets her mother's demand from the hairdresser, yet she deliberately omits the hairdresser's negative comment about the poor condition of her mother's hair. The omission of the negative message shows the intention of the child language broker to protect her mother and avoid hurting her. Going further with the gatekeeping of this negative comment, she further comforts her mother that her hair will be cut as she wants. The omission of a message and replacing it with a comforting phrase can set an example of how child language brokers mediate during communication. This can be an apparent invasion of impartiality in terms of professional interpreting. However, it can be seen and discussed as a part of advocacy in CLB, which ultimately contributes to the protection of the disadvantaged person/community of society, a migrant woman in this case. The child language broker acts as the agent of the disadvantaged party of the interaction and aims to ease communication rather than ensuring impartiality of the interpreting process. The agency of child language broker is further accentuated through the interactive meaning constructed by the illustration of Cecilia and her mother in a close shot when the mother thanks Cecilia. The closer social distance between the two characters reveals the close bond between them and may evoke a sense of empathy among viewers.

### Example 5

**Illustration:** Cecilia and her mother encounter a migrant woman and her son. The woman speaks Persian. Her son interprets in English for Cecilia: "How old is your little one?" Cecilia turns to her mother and interprets into Spanish. (p.14)

This page includes multiple child language brokers interpreting among multiple languages. The noteworthy depiction of a non-institutional setting includes two migrant women who do not speak English, presumably the official language of the host country. Both women are dependent on their children and their interpreting to communicate with each other. The common ground of these two women is to have a little child. Small-talk and daily interaction between these two women could only be possible with a child interpreting her mother's Persian question into English and another's daughter interpreting from English to Spanish. It is evident that without their children brokering for them, two women speaking different languages would not communicate in such an encounter. The illustration of a small interaction on this page shows how CLB acts as the only and key factor in enabling most

migrant women to socialize and interact with other migrant communities as well as the host community.

### Example 6

**Text:** Cecilia had been working overtime. She was so tired. Her friends wanted her to play outside with them, but there was so much to do left.

**Illustration:** Sitting at her interpreter desk at home, Cecilia unhappily sees her friends calling her "CECILIA?" to play outside while the speaker calls her for work again "CECILIA?" (p.15-16)

### Example 7

**Illustration:** Cecilia and her parents are in a parent-teacher conference, sitting in front of an elderly teacher.

**Text:**

Cecilia (*looking surprised*): Sorry?

Teacher (*to Cecilia*): I asked, how are you doing?

Cecilia (*to her parents*): Cómo están...

Teacher (*to Cecilia*): No Cecilia, I asked you. (pp.17-18)

**Text:**

How am I doing? (p.19)

**Illustration:** Cecilia's two personalities; Cecilia in a green suit and tie and Cecilia in a soccer uniform; face each other under the question "How am I doing?"

**Text:**

Mother (*to Cecilia*): Mija, are you okay?

Cecilia couldn't take it anymore. She was done being a professional. (p.20)

**Illustration:** Cecilia looks at her mother, forcing herself not to cry.

### Example 8

**Text:** Mom, dad, I don't want to run errands every day and wait at the DMV! I want to be outside, I want to play soccer, I want to dance and paint and eat ice cream and speak English and Spanish whenever I want! I want, I want, I want... (pp.21-22)

**Illustration:** Cecilia screams out loud.

### Example 9

**Text:**

Mother & father (*to Cecilia*): Mi amor, why didn't you say something before?

Cecilia gulped.

Cecilia: I think it's time for a team meeting. (p.23)

**Illustration:** Cecilia sprawls over a chair and looks exhausted.

These four examples above show the slowly accumulated burden on a child language broker whose hard work remains invisible and underappreciated. The invisibility of Cecilia as a family interpreter and her busy schedule can be associated with the perception of her task as natural caregiving practice in the family. As an indicator of the naturalness of her task, Cecilia is depicted as excited and joyful in the early interpreting tasks. After multiple brokering tasks at different settings for a long time, Cecilia starts to seem bothered, unhappy, and bored.

Example 7 sets the climax of the story, where her well-being and emotions are asked for the first time after a long time. Her feelings were completely invisible, so that she was not asked about her physical or mental wellness for so long that she thought the question "How are you doing?" was to be interpreted for her parents. This question also makes her compare her two identities and question her well-being; it makes her think about herself, besides caring for her parents. At this point, the visual composition of Cecilia's two identities is framed face-to-face for the first time. Cecilia in soccer uniform with a ball in her hand faces Cecilia in an oversized suit with a suitcase. This compositional meaning is based on the separation and conflict of these two identities. The mental breakdown of Cecilia is narrated in both Spanish and English as a powerful monologue. The division of monologue is two languages in two pages with a smaller figure of Cecilia that shows her mouth wide open screaming shows the in-betweenness of Cecilia in two languages, two worlds and two identities, while simultaneously signals the heavy burden of this on a little child. It can be seen that what causes Cecilia to feel the burden of brokering is not the CLB itself, but the high frequency of her tasks, which mostly go unacknowledged. Although the reason why she did not talk about the burden she felt with her parents is not explained in the text, it can be assumed that she perceives CLB as a natural and daily caregiving practice, which she offers to her family.

### Example 10

**Text:** She pulled up her calendar and showed her parents how many shifts she had that week.

**Illustration:** A close-up shot of Cecilia's busy calendar that shows every day full of duties.

**Text:**

Mother: You have been working so hard.

Father: It's our job to take care of you, not the other way around.

"I want to help," Cecilia said, "Just not all the time". (pp.24-26)

The close-up shot to Cecilia's calendar contributes to the interactive meaning of the close connection between Cecilia and the viewer and lets viewer empathize with Cecilia. This example above depicts a hidden role reversal in the family caused by CLB. The father's late recognition of such a shift in parent-child roles happens only after the mental breakdown of Cecilia, who screams her overloaded tasks aloud. This awareness of the father is a key point in the story where parents remember their adult/parent roles and responsibilities, and Cecilia's overloaded role as a broker that turns her into the main caregiver of the family. Only after this recognition, the burden on Cecilia is distributed to other sources. Cecilia's response, "I want to help. Just not all the time," once again indicates the normativity of the brokering practice, which is voluntarily and happily undertaken by the child, which later turns into a burden through high demands from the family.

**Example 11**

**Text:** She used to have a coworker, but he got promoted. (p.8)

**Example 12**

**Illustration:** Cecilia enters the room to find her brother and aunt.

**Text:**

Cecilia: Tia! What are you doing here? Sebastian, you're back from college!

Sebastian: Only for the weekend. I'm going to the accountant with Mom and Dad.

Aunt: And I'll help them at the doctor's office tomorrow.

Cecilia: Thank you hermano. Gracias, tía. (p.27-29)

In Example 13, Cecilia's elder brother is referred to as a coworker, which suggests that brother used to help her and there was a job division between the two siblings for certain tasks. The other example shows that he no longer helps Cecilia as he goes to college, living outside the house. This makes Cecilia the main language broker of the family. After the burden of Cecilia, being the main language broker, was acknowledged by her parents, a decision was made to get more help from other family members. Here, Cecilia's brother and aunt talk about certain brokering tasks that they will get from Cecilia to help their

family. The illustration of her brother and aunt in suits and behind their desks also contributes to the representational meaning of language brokering as a job that usually requires adult skills. The happiness of Cecilia shows how role distribution for brokering tasks within a family can ease the burden on a child language broker and prevent the adultification process. The help provided to the main language broker through role distribution also prevents role reversal in family dynamics, which ultimately contributes to the perception of CLB as a natural caregiving practice of daily life, and evokes positive feelings of the child toward CLB.

## **5. Conclusion**

A children's picture book, *The Interpreter*, touches upon a highly frequent practice among millions of refugees and migrants all around the world: child language brokering. The term refers to the non-professional interpreting practiced by children, primarily for their families. The story follows a young girl named Cecilia, who serves as a language broker. The book, through its narrative and illustrations, brings attention to the often overlooked and underappreciated role of child language brokers and explores the key concepts of CLB, which is the focus of research across various disciplines. This study aims to analyze how these concepts are conveyed through the perspective of an author who has personal experience as a child language broker.

According to the content analysis of the book, the story portrays CLB as a form of non-professional interpreting that typically requires adult skills and abilities. This portrayal is further cemented using job-related terminology from the adult world, such as 'job', 'coworker' promoted', and 'shifts' to define the brokering practice. Illustrations also depict the child character in an oversized suit, seated at a desk with an 'interpreter' name plate, carrying a suitcase and a calendar. These illustrations are discussed as representational units to position the child language broker undertaking an adult responsibility that resembles a full-time job. Similarly, the salient illustrative units underline the job-like nature of the child language broker's tasks. The demanding nature of these interpreting tasks reinforces the adultification impact of CLB, leading to role reversal in caregiving roles within the family between adults and children.

While the caregiving aspect of CLB is underlined throughout the story, the high frequency of brokering tasks ultimately leads to emotional burnout for the main language broker of the family. The heavy emotional burden associated with brokering arises from the unrecognized, unpaid, and often taken-for-granted nature of this form of interpreting. The book showcases the language broker's willingness to help and care for family members while also bringing attention to the possible negative effects of CLB, as children shoulder

more responsibilities than they should. The solution offered is to acknowledge the invisible burden on the child language broker and get help from sources other than the child.

The narrative also illustrates the peculiarity of CLB performed as a form of mediation and advocacy for the family members of the child interpreter who prioritizes familial needs over impartiality, unlike a professional interpreter. The illustrations of the child language broker next to her parents during interpreter-mediated interactions, unlike the interpreter's usual physical positioning in the middle in dialogue interpreting, along with the close-ups to her interactions with her parents, construct the interactive meaning of the close relationship between the child and family members. The positive contribution of CLB in the socialization of minority communities, particularly among women, is also highlighted in the book.

Bringing together the potential contribution of CLB with its potential adverse impacts on children, migrant families, and society as a whole, the author draws attention to the presence and prevalence of child interpreting in migrant families. Without demonizing or labelling CLB as an ultimate evil, the book touches upon many significant concepts of CLB to present the experiences of child language brokers by making their interpreting experiences valid and visible.

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