

# Dialogue Interpreting in an Italian Immigrant Support Centre: mediating constructions of social conditions

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## Abstract

*This paper is about interpreter-mediated interactions in an Italian Support Centre assisting immigrants who need to comply with complicated bureaucratic procedures to obtain permits and apply for jobs. The paper analyses sequences including the social worker's questions about the reason for the visit or the immigrant's problem, the mediator's translations and the immigrant's answers. Although the mediator pursues immediate translations of the immigrants' answers, in a number of cases immigrants show serious difficulties in explaining their problems. The mediator deals with these difficulties promoting expanded dyadic sequences with them, followed by translations for social workers. The analysed interpreter-mediated interactions highlight the significance of the mediating function of interpreting in promoting narratives of immigrants' personal and social conditions.*

## Introduction: interpreting in an Immigrant Support Centre

In the past two decades, studies on interpreting as interaction (Wadensjö 1998) have involved different types of public services, mainly healthcare services (e.g. Angelelli 2004; Baraldi 2012; Baraldi/Gavioli 2007, 2014; Bolden 2000; Davidson 2000; Gavioli 2015; Hsieh 2007), courts (e.g. Angermeyer 2009; Hale 2004), and services for asylum seekers (e.g. Mason 2006; Merlini 2009). This paper analyses interpreter-mediated interactions in an Immigrant Support Centre (ISC) that

delivers information and assistance to immigrants who need to renew their residence permit, prepare documents for family reunion, and find a job. The ISC is located in a highly industrialised area in Northern Italy, which has attracted a great number of immigrants in the past fifteen years. The ISC gives information and assistance to immigrants who need to comply with the Italian migration law and bureaucratic procedures.

This paper is based on 18 audio-recorded interpreter-mediated interactions collected in the ISC between June 14 and November 25, 2006. The length of these interactions ranges from 4 minutes and 36 seconds to 34 minutes and 19 seconds, accounting for a total duration of 3 hours and 40 minutes. In these interactions, two Italian social workers provide information and assistance to immigrants from English-speaking African countries (i.e. Nigeria and Ghana). The immigrants speak no or very little Italian; their proficiency in English is not strong, but English is an official language in their countries. A young Ghanaian woman provides interpreting in these encounters. As is the case in many Italian institutions, she is employed as an “intercultural mediator”, with the requirement of developing positive intercultural relationships between institutional providers and immigrants (e.g. Ceccatelli Gurrieri 2003; Luatti 2006, 2011). She is employed by an association providing services to public institutions and has a long experience in mediating interactions between immigrants and institutional providers in different settings. She is a proficient non-native speaker of Italian and a speaker of Ghanaian English.

The analysis of interpreter-mediated interactions highlights that immigrants find it difficult to comply with the complicated procedures that are required by the Italian migration law for obtaining a job, a residence permit, or a permit for family reunion, and that they need to be guided in the accomplishment of a long and articulated series of steps. This paper explores the ways in which the immigrants’ problems are negotiated with the social workers through language interpreting provided by the mediator. In these interactions, the social workers and the mediator deal with the complicated legal and bureaucratic mechanisms that create (rather than solve) immigrants’ problems. The immigrants’ limited proficiency in Italian increases their problems in dealing with the procedures. Moreover, the immigrants’ limited proficiency in English causes some difficulties in their participation in the interactions. The immigrants’ difficulties in understanding and reporting the complicated procedures increase the complexity of interactions. Complexity means that each action is a choice between different possibilities (Luhmann 1995). This paper focuses on the mediator’s actions as choices of possible ways of interpreting made in cooperation with the social workers.

Many studies consider interpreters’ choice of action relevant for coordinating interpreter-mediated interactions (e.g. Baraldi/Gavioli 2012, 2014; Davitti 2013; Gavioli 2015; Mason 2006; Merlini 2009; Wadensjö 1998). This choice of action may promote interpreters’ coordination as mediation. This can be defined as coordinating the production of linguistic and cultural meanings that facilitate interlocutors’ active participation. Mediation presupposes interpreters’ choice of action in coordinating the interaction and facilitating participation. Against this background, public service interpreting has been described as a form of cul-

tural or intercultural mediation. Wadensjö (1998) observes that interpreting can make cultural differences (concerning “world views”) understandable and manageable. Angelelli (2004) maintains that interpreting can bridge different speech and cultural communities. In both visions, dealing with cultural differences is a central aspect of interpreting with immigrants and cultural minorities.

The combination of interpreters’ choice of action and mediation may lead to three problems. First, interpreters’ choice of action may prevent accurate interpreting, thus determining problems in interpreted-mediated interactions (e.g. Angermeyer 2009; Bolden 2000; Davidson 2000; Hsieh 2007). Second, the function of intercultural mediation, i.e. establishing positive intercultural relations between the participants, can prevail over the function of mediating between languages (Pöchhacker 2008), thus creating problems in interpreting. Third, intercultural mediation can promote cultural “essentialism”, i.e. primary attention for cultural differences (e.g. different world views, different cultural communities), thus hiding the complexity and nuances of immigrants’ personal stories and negotiation of identity (Holliday 2011; Luatti 2011).

This paper shows that, although the mediator frequently provides immediate translation of the participants’ turns at talk, her activity may require different choices of action, which are accepted and supported by the social workers. The mediator’s choices facilitate (1) the immigrants’ explanations of their personal and social problems and (2) the social workers’ understanding of the immigrants’ problems.

In the next section, some transcribed extracts from interpreter-mediated interactions in the ISC will be analysed. In these extracts, the social worker is indicated with SW, the mediator with M, and the immigrant with I. Transcription conventions are provided in the appendix.

### 1. Interpreting as facilitating constructions of immigrants’ problems

In the ISC, the social worker’s question about the reason for the immigrant’s visit usually initiates the sequence in which the immigrants can explain their problems. The design of this type of question is very similar to that of “general inquiry questions” in medical settings, which “allow patients to present their concerns in their own terms” (Heritage/Robinson 2006: 92). General inquiries are non-focused and open questions (Robinson 2001) projecting expectations of immigrants’ explanations of their problems. General inquiry questions can be followed by the social worker’s further questions to collect more details about immigrants’ problems. These questions parallel “history taking questions” in medical interactions, which “propose the relevance of information gathering and set agendas for patients’ responses that are sharply constrained” (Heritage/Robinson 2006: 97). In all cases, the mediator’s interpreting choices promote the social construction of the immigrants’ problems in the interaction.

Extract 1 shows a smooth construction of the immigrant’s problem in the interaction, as the mediator systematically provides immediate translation of the participants’ turns of talk. SW asks a general inquiry question (turn 12) and

two “history taking” questions (turns 16, 20). SW’s questions and I’s answers are systematically and immediately followed by M’s translations (turns 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23).

Extract 1

- 12) SW. Okay. Eh: di che cosa aveva bisogno.  
*Okay. Eh: what was he looking for?*
- 13) M: The reason why you come here.
- 14) I: I come here to know if my soggiorno ((*stay permit*)) is ready.
- 15) M: You want ha: detto che vuole sapere se il permesso di soggiorno è pronto.  
*He said that he wishes so know if his stay permit is ready*
- 16) SW: Okay. Allora, prima di: eh controllare sul computer, sul database della Questura se è pronto il permesso di soggiorno, avrei bisogno di sapere se lei è venuto altre volte qui o se è la prima volta.  
*Okay. So, before eh: checking the computer, the Police database, to see if the stay permit is ready, I would need to know if you came here before or if this is the first time.*
- 17) M: Before looking on the computer that the soggiorno is ready or not, he-he wants to know is this your first time here?
- 18) I: No. It’s not first I’m coming here, is the second time.
- 19) M: Ha detto che non è la prima volta ma è la seconda volta.  
*He said that this is not the first time, but the second time.*
- 20) SW: Okay eh: e la prima volta si ricorda più o meno quanto tempo fa è ve[nuto]?  
*Okay eh: and does he remember how long ago he came for the first time?*
- 21) M:  
[the first time you came he[re
- 22) I: [In  
August, in August.
- 23) M: In Agosto.  
*In August*

The analysis reveals an increased complexity of interpreter-mediated interactions when immigrants’ explanations of their problems are confused, incomplete or complicated, showing their difficulties in understanding and explaining the complication of bureaucracy and legislation, given also their limited proficiency in both Italian and English.

Extract 2 shows a situation in which I1 has the problem of renewing his residence permit, and I2 helps him to explain this problem, as I1 does not speak English sufficiently well. After M’s translation of SW’s general inquiry question (turn 15), and a short negotiation between M and I2 (not shown), in turns 30-36, I2 explains the problem, encouraged by M’s minimal responses (“mhm”) and partial repetition of turn 35 (“is expired”). In turn 37, M translates I’s explanation.

However, in turn 38 SW signals that he needs further details with a minimal response (see Gavioli 2012) that invites M to continue her exploration. M explicitly invites I2 to get to the point (turn 39, “and so?”). The next sequence includes I2’s further explanation and M’s minimal responses (turns 40-44) and ends with M’s translation (turn 45). In turn 46, SW shows understanding (“esatto”, exactly).

Extract 2

- 15) SW: Ehm. Perché sei qui oggi?  
*Ehm. Why are you here today?*
- 16) M: The reason why you are here today.  
(..)
- 30) I2: Ok, the reason is that, ehm, he has permesso di soggiorno,  
31) M: mhm
- 32) I2: But since the paper is at the hand, up to date there is no work for him!
- 33) M: Mhm
- 34) I2: So if you know it he find it difficult to go and renew and now the paper is expired
- 35) M: Is expired
- 36) I2: Yea
- 37) M: Ok. Ha detto che ha un permesso di soggiorno (.) solo che faceva fatica a trovare un lavoro e adesso il permesso di soggiorno è scaduto.  
*She said that she has a stay permit (.) but she had problems to find a job and now the stay permit has expired.*
- 38) SW: Mhm (.)
- 39) M: And so?
- 40) I2: So eh, we went to eh this place what do they call it, ehh Collocamento ((*job centre*)) [to register so that they can give him disoccupato ((*unemployed*)), So that he can renew it
- 41) M: [mhm
- 42) M: mhm
- 43) I2: But what it do is that, because the paper is expired, (?) to[do it for him,
- 44) M: [Mhm
- 45) M: E così sono andato al centro impiego a vedere che potevano dare una lettera di disoccupazione per andare a rinnovare il permesso di soggiorno ma loro hanno detto che finché il soggiorno è scaduto loro non possono fare niente  
*And so I went to the job centre to see if they could give me a letter of unemployment to go to have the stay permit renewed but they said that until the permit has expired there is nothing they can do.*
- 46) SW: Esatto, mhm  
*Exactly, mhm:*

In extract 2, the immigrant's expanded explanation triggers the mediator's minimal signals of understanding and clarification request. The mediator's translation is delayed by a dyadic sequence with the immigrant, which is encouraged by the social worker.

Extract 3 shows M's more complex conversational work. Initially, SW recalls the difficulties of a previous interaction with I (turn 12). M translates, stressing the problem of I's limited proficiency in English. I starts to explain her problem in turn 17, announcing her asylum seeker status. M invites I to continue through a minimal response (turn 18). In turn 19, I adds further details regarding her problems in finding a job. In this sequence, I utters the word "asylum" in a low voice (turn 17) and provides a confused explanation of her problem (turn 19). Therefore, M checks her understanding of I's condition (turn 20), then she explains that she is checking because she did not understand well (turn 22). After receiving I's confirmation of her correct understanding, M continues to explore the meaning of the problem (turn 24). In the next turns (26, 28, 30, and 32), M displays understanding of I's expanded explanation ("mhm", "ah okay"). In turn 34, M provides a translation; however, as in extract 2, SW signals his need for more details to start assistance. In turns 36-56, I continues to explain her problem, while M provides minimal signals of understanding. In turn 43, M tries to translate the explanation, but she is interrupted by I, who continues to explain her problem. Finally, M asks for permission to translate (turn 57), and then provides the translation (turns 59, 61), with I's contribution, showing some knowledge of Italian (turn 61). Finally, in turn 62, SW can start to deliver information.

### Extract 3

- 12) SW: Ci siamo: dati appuntamento qua per spiegare bene in: anche in inglese, il: l-il discorso che aveva portato il problema che aveva portato al nostro ufficio  
*We fixed an appointment here to explain well in: also in English the: th-the issue she brought the problem she brought to our office*
- 13) M: he is saying that he gave you an appointment today, to come here to explain the reason why the last time, because you can't speak very well or a little bit English so that you can't explain the reason why you came here the last time.
- 14) SW: okay
- 15) I: Okay
- 16) SW: Adesso [eh  
*Now*
- 17) I: [Ehm: she: I'm a political, political °asylum° seeking
- 18) M: mhm
- 19) I: She gave me a paper for two years, for first year two years, she said take the paper and go around to find a job (.) you can't get it.
- 20) M: Please: (.) you you're a political asylum
- 21) I: Yes: ye[s:

- 22) M: [Because I don't understand very well. You are a political asylum
- 23) I: Yes, yes
- 24) M: Who gave you the paper? Because you are saying she gave me the paper. Who give you- the government?
- 25) I: The government, the government gave me the paper
- 26) M: mhm, ah okay
- 27) I: She go interview,
- 28) M: Mh[m:
- 29) I: [And it's for Rome,
- 30) M: Mhm
- 31) I: And from- the commissioner give me the paper.
- 32) M: Ah Okay
- 33) I: Yes, everything and passport and everything.
- 34) M: Ah: okay, Ha detto, sta dicendo che ha venuto, è venuto qua per chiedere eh: in Italia come un asilo politico. E' già andata a Roma per fare la commissione, avevano già dato, assegnato un: come un rifugiato politico. Hanno già dato i documenti, hanno già fatto mhm: lei dice un passaporto, è qua, e tutti i documenti sono qua.  
*Ah: okay, she said, she is saying that she has come, has come here to ask eh: in Italy as a political asylum. She has already been to Rome to do the committee, they had already given, assigned a: as a political refugee. They have already given her the documents, have already done mhm; she says a passport, it's here, and all documents are here.*
- (1)
- 35) SW: Mhm
- 36) I: And, she did, you take the paper to find a job an[d go to the companies and agenzia ((agency)) and so forth
- 37) M: [eh:
- 38) I: She gave me that for two years
- 39) M: Mhm
- 40) I: I go around to find a job to do
- 41) M: Mhm
- 42) I: She can't get (.) it
- 43) M: Okay Sta dicendo [che  
*Okay she is saying [that*
- 44) I: [The:n, she gave me another two years again, she go round and find a job, the agenzia people they told me, this paper is for political
- 45) M: Mhm
- 46) I: So if you find a job and you can't get a job, government pay you, she give me money
- 47) M: Okay.
- 48) I: If there is no problem at all about me
- 49) M: Ah okay
- 50) I: =so the government give, give me anything
- 51) M: Ah, okay
- 52) I: Now the person that I stay with him, now they are fed up, because they will rent and give me food and so forth, you know eh:: ehm::: people [she fed up now

- 53) M: [Okay
- 54) M: Okay
- 55) I: She told me now to find a place to stay, and: you see?  
[Very: very difficult for me,
- 56) M: [okay
- 57) M: Okay. Please can I explain it to him?
- 58) I: Yes, yes
- 59) M: Okay. Sta dicendo avevano già dato questo ehm documento du- quattro anni fa per cercare un lavoro che era valido per due anni (.) ha girato con quel permesso di soggiorno con- come rifugiato politico per cercare lavoro nelle agenzie ne:[come si chiamano, nelle aziende  
*Okay. She is saying that they had already given ehm document tw-four years ago to look for a job that was valid for two years (.) she has gone around with that stay permit with-as political refugee to look for a job in the agencies in: [how do you call them in companies*
- 60) I: [company
- 61) M: ma non ha trovato nessun lavoro si è scaduto i due anni di permesso di soggiorno che hanno dato i primi due anni, hanno rinnovato e hanno dato un altro due anni che poteva lavorare. Comincia ancora girare, a fare tutti le domande e un'agenzia di lavoro ha detto che anzi con questo tipo di permesso di soggiorno non può lavorare. Che lo stato deve dare un contributo, ma fino adesso lo Stato non ha dato nes- sun contributo e non ho trovato il lavoro. Ha un problema con m: le persone che vive con loro perché fino a che non ha lavoro non può pagare l'affitto, fa fatica a mangiare e ques- ti persone che vive con loro, dicono di andare via perché non può contribuire a pagare le spese.  
*Bus she didn't find any job. It has expired the two years of stay permit that they gave the first two years, they have renewed it and they gave two more years so that she could work. She starts to go around again, to apply to all and an agency said that on the contrary with this type of permit she can't work. That the State must give her a grant, but until now the State didn't give any grant and she didn't find any job. She has a problem with m: the people she lives with them because until she doesn't work she cannot pay the rent, she has problems to eat and these people who lives with them tell her to go away because she cannot contribute to pay for the bills.*
- 62) SW: Okay, allora ehm le dici che io ho sentito per il dis- corso del eh: motivo del soggiorno, asilo politico quindi già riconosciuta rifugiata [...]  
*Okay, so ehm tell her that I have asked for the question of eh: reasons of the stay, political asylum, therefore she has been already recognized as a refugee [...]*

In extract 3, the mediator's work on the immigrant's expanded explanation is more complex than in extract 2, in that it includes two relevant clarification questions, which are triggered by the immigrant's difficulties in explaining her problem and by the negotiation of translation with the immigrant, who continues to explain her problem. As in extract 2, the mediator's work is encouraged by the social worker.

In the first part of extract 4 (turns 5-11), M provides immediate translation of the participants' turns of talk (SW's general inquiry question, I's answer explaining his problem, SW's delivery of preliminary information and I's confirmation of understanding). In turn 13, M translates SW's history taking question about I's request of family reunion. In turn 14, I answers that he wants to join his wife. Although this answer seems clear, M asks for clarification (turn 15, "only your wife?"), probably because, in answering the first question, I has added the word "family" to the initial word "spouse" (turn 7). In turn 16, I reveals his intention to invite one daughter. M repeats the gist of I's answer ("one daughter") to be sure that this is all, and then she translates. In turn 20, SW signals his understanding with a repetition.

#### Extract 4

- 5) SW: Okay Jefferson (.) Tu sei venuto qua per che motivo?  
*For what reason did you come here?*
- 6) M: The reason why you are here.
- 7) I: I'm here to find out the requirement the country deserve one to bring your spouse or your family [(?)
- 8) M: [Your family Sei venuto a chiedere informazioni, le cose che ha bisogno quando vuol fare ricongiungimento familiare.  
*You came here to ask for information, the things one needs when he wants a family reunion*
- 9) SW: Okay. Mhm ti: do: un foglio: con scritto che cose servono per fare il ricongiungimento. Poi ti spiego quali sono i documenti più importanti e che abbiamo bisogno in fretta.  
*I'll give you a sheet with the things needed for the family reunion. Then, I will explain what the most important documents are and those we need as soon as possible.*
- 10) M: okay. He's going to give you a fo:rm and show you all the things you need so that you can know how to do the things as early as possible.
- 11) I: Okay.
- (2)
- 12) SW: Con chi vuoi fare il ricongiungimento [familiare  
*With whom do you want to have the family reunion?*
- 13) M: [who want, who  
do you want to bring in?
- 14) I: My wife.
- 15) M: Only your wife?
- 16) I: No, and one daughter.
- 17) M: One daughter.
- (.)

- 18) SW: Okay.  
 19) M: La moglie e una figlia.  
*The wife and one daughter*  
 20) SW: Una moglie e una figlia.  
*A wife and one daughter*

In extract 4, the mediator's work includes a clarification question and a repetition to check the immigrant's answer. These choices of action are triggered by the immigrant's confused description of his wish for family reunion.

In the first part of extract 5 (turns 1-8), as in extract 4, M provides immediate translation of the participants' turns of talk (SW's general inquiry question, I's answer, SW's "history taking" question). In turn 9, I hesitantly explains that the police have postponed permits of family reunion. M asks for clarification (turn 10, "only yours or all?"), then she checks I's answer (turn 12, "the people. Is not only you"). In turn 13, I provides more, confused details concerning his personal story, rather than simply confirming M's understanding. Therefore, M checks again through a direct question (turn 14). After receiving I's confirmation, M investigates the meaning of turn 13 through an expansion as development (turn 16, "and then you came here"), a question (turn 18), a reformulation (turn 20), and a repetition of part of I's turn (turn 22). After signalling understanding (turn 24), M provides a translation (turn 26), prefaced by a declaration of difficulties in understanding what I was saying, thus justifying the length of the dyadic interaction with I.

#### Extract 5

- 1) SW: Perché sei venuto qua Donald?  
 2) *Why did you come here Donald?*  
 M: Donald, the reason why you are here  
 3) I: Ah okay I'm here to (.) inform (.) him that (.) eh: I've (.) I've make application for bringing my my what do you call it, my family here (.) And the embassy in Ghana, they've stopped (.) eh: they've stopped (.) doing the proposal of the stamping stamping of the (.) of the letter  
 4) M: Mhm  
 5) I: And I don't know the reason why.  
 6) M: Mhm, okay. Ha detto che è venuto qua, è venuto qua per fare la domanda per la per ricongiungimento familiare. In Ghana, l'ambasciata, la procedura che sta facendo, ha smesso per mettere un timbro su un documento. E voleva chiedere perché.  
*He said that he came here he came here to apply for the for family reunion. In Ghana, the embassy, the procedure that it was doing, it stopped to put a stamp on a document. And he wanted to ask why.*  
 7) SW: L'ambasciata ti ha:: rilasciato un foglio, qualcosa con scritto che: non, non ti fanno, non ti danno: i fogli? Come fai a sapere che l'ambasciata si è bloccata?  
*Did the embassy give you a sheet, something saying that they won't make won't give you the sheets? How can you know that the embassy is blocked?*

- 8) M: The embassy, mhm, does he give you a paper or write a letter or show you the reason why they don't want to give, they don't want, they've stopped, or they have don't want to put a stamp on [it
- 9) I: [No. When I went there, they said, they said they have postponed all those eh:: all th- all those eh: papers.
- 10) M: Only yours, or all?
- 11) I: All those, all those [peoples
- 12) M: [those people. is not only y[ou
- 13) I: [yes:  
I went there, eh I came here the other day with the stamped stamped the paper, all the documents I need to do, produce (?) produce eh the the what do you call it, eh the stamp of the embassy they say, they have eh eh they have expired. So, as to return all the papers back, I returned the papers back about about four, three four (2) eh I will say three months ago. But I follow it up to Ghana. I came here just Friday, this last Friday, to check up what is going on but they still they have a suspended all those things.
- 14) M: Eh, excuse me. You said that the embassy has suspend everybody's procedure?
- 15) I: Yes, that was what I was told
- 16) M: You were told. And then you came here.
- 17) I: Mhm
- 18) M: And what did they- who told you the other things?
- 19) I: No, I just came in, eh last Friday
- 20) M: So, last Friday that embassy told you that they've suspend(ed) everything
- 21) I: That was eh:: I would say, three weeks ago
- 22) M: Three weeks ago
- 23) I: Three weeks ago I was in Ghana
- 24) M: Ah
- 25) I: Myself I myself was in Ghana
- 26) M: Okay. No sta, perché non ho capito bene, sta dicendo che è andato in Ghana tre settimane fa è andato all'ambasciata per chiedere come sta andando la: procedura di ricon-ricongiungimento e l'ambasciata hanno detto a lui che hanno sospeso per il momento tutti (.) le procedure che stanno facendo per tutti (.) Allora ritornato qua e vuoi chiedere a voi perché.  
*Okay. No he is because I didn't understand well, he is saying that he has gone to Ghana three weeks ago he has gone to the embassy to ask how the: procedure of fami-family reunion was going on and the embassy have told him that for the moment they have suspended everybody (.) the procedures that they are doing for everybody (.) Therefore he has come back here and want to ask you why*
- 27) SW: Allora, la: noi non sappiamo ogni ambasciata che cosa fa [...].  
*Well, the: we don't know what each embassy does [...]*

In extract 5, the immigrant's difficulties in explaining his problem trigger many of the mediator's choices of action, including clarification questions, repetitions, reformulations to check the immigrant's answers, and expansions as developments.

Extracts 2-5 show that the dyadic sequences between the mediator and the immigrant expand the immigrants' stories of their problems. These dyadic sequences can be provided both after the social worker's first general inquiry question (extracts 2-3) and after his following history taking questions (extracts 4-5). They show complex interpreter-mediated interactions, originating from the immigrants' difficulties and uncertainties in explaining their problems, which trigger the mediator's exploration of the meaning of these problems.

## 2. Interpreting as mediation of immigrants' stories of personal and social conditions

The analysis shows different ways in which immigrants' problems are construed in interpreter-mediated interactions. By answering social workers' general inquiry and history taking questions, immigrants explain their problems regarding residence permits, finding a job, or family reunion. Immigrants' explanations show their search for inclusion in the Italian society and their struggle with the procedures that exclude them.

The mediator's translations of these explanations are provided either after each turn, in smooth triadic interactions, or after dyadic sequences with the immigrant, in which the mediator's actions are intensified and differentiated. In these dyadic sequences, the mediator's clarification requests, reformulations, minimal responses, and repetitions reproduce a well-known pattern of interpreting as "explicit coordination" (Wadensjö 1998). However, the importance of coordination *as mediation* is particularly evident here, as the mediator extends two well-known activities of mediation: active listening, through minimal responses and repetitions (Bush/Folger 1994) and promotion of narratives, through questions, reformulations and expansions as developments (Winslade/Monk 2008). Through these actions, the mediator supports and encourages immigrants' explanations of their problems.

The complexity of dyadic sequences is based on this activity of mediation, and escalates from the mediator's simple use of active listening (extract 2) to her intense promotion of narratives (extracts 3-5). Mediation is prompted by the immigrants' difficulties and hesitations in explaining their problems in the context of a complicated legal and organisational system, difficulties and hesitations that are increased by their limited language proficiency. Therefore, the complexity of interpreter-mediated interaction results from the combination of the immigrant's difficulty in explaining and the mediator's intensified coordination.

After a dyadic sequence, the mediator invariably provides a translation of the immigrant's explanation, which can thus become a resource for the social worker's assistance. The mediator is not perfectly proficient in the use of the Italian grammar; nevertheless, she systematically provides accurate after-sequence translations of immigrants' explanations. In addition, the mediator makes her difficulties in understanding explicit, explaining to the social worker why she

promotes dyadic sequences. The combination of support in dyadic sequences and translation thereafter promotes the mediation between immigrants' difficulty in expressing problems of social exclusion and social workers' information and assistance.

Mediation is favoured by social workers' actions. Although the design of their questions parallel those of healthcare providers, social workers do not act as "experts" who take responsibility for solving immigrants' problems. Healthcare providers never lose authority and responsibility in solving patients' problems, providing diagnoses and prescriptions, even when they promote patients' active participation (e.g. Beach/Dixson 2001; Heritage/Lindström 2012). Social workers only provide assistance for problems which must be solved by immigrants themselves. This limited authority may explain why social workers rarely interfere with the mediator's exploration of immigrants' problems of social exclusion. In the extracts shown above, only in two cases do the social worker's minimal responses indirectly invite the mediator to continue her investigation (extracts 2 and 3). This minimal interference makes evident that expansions in dyadic sequences do not threaten the social workers' authority; it indicates that the mediator is authorised to extend her coordination of the interaction.

The analysis conducted in this paper shows that the mediator's expanded coordination can accomplish an important function in the interactional construction of the immigrants' problems of social exclusion, while supporting the social workers' provision of information and assistance. The mediator's coordination, while being based on her choices of action, avoids the risk of "mediator-centred" interpreting, in which interpreters substitute institutional providers, creating problems of communication. The mediator's coordination promotes and highlights immigrants' personal stories and their struggle to achieve social inclusion. Therefore, interpreting as mediation means empowering participants' expressions (Bush/Folger 1994) and personal narratives (Winslade/Monk 2008).

Finally, it should be underlined that in the analysed interpreter-mediated interactions, immigrants do not display their cultural identities, i.e. they do not present themselves as members of specific groups or communities. They display their personal attempts to achieve inclusion in the Italian society, looking for a residence permit, a job, and family reunion. They display "ontological narratives", i.e. personal stories that "constitute and make sense" of immigrants' lives and are influenced by social conditions (Baker 2006: 28). The mediator aligns with these narratives, and therefore her activity of coordination does not promote the interactional production of "cultural differences" or "cultural identities". The social identity of "immigrant", which is construed in the ISC, is not associated with cultural identity, e.g. as "Africans", "Nigerians" or "Ghanaians". Rather, it is associated with personal stories of marginalisation and exclusion, and mediation consists in expanding and clarifying these stories. In conclusion, interpreter-mediated interactions do not show cultural essentialism, but a cultural work that narrows the gap between immigrants' personal narratives and the institutional narrative (Baker 2006: 31).

## Transcription conventions

(.)	barely noticeable pause
(2)	noticeable, timed pause (n = length in seconds)
A text [text B [text	square brackets aligned across adjacent lines denote the start of overlapping talk.
tex-	syllable cut short
te:xt	lengthening of previous sound or syllable
(?)	untranscribable audio
=text	latched to the preceding turn in transcript
<u>Text</u>	stressed syllable or word
°text°	low volume
.,?!)	punctuation provides a guide to intonation
((sneezes))	transcriber's comments
<i>translation</i>	translation in italics

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