Studying a Text in Our Own Words: Migrant Parents and Children Navigating Teacher Recommendations

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Abstract

"Homework" is a key site where school cultures are negotiated within the family, shaping the dynamics of school-family engagement (Caronia et al., 2023). For migrant families, navigating the expectations and practices of the Italian school system can be challenging, not only because of linguistic barriers but also because of different experiences and understandings of schooling (Bolognesi & DalleDonne Vandini, 2020). This study, conducted within an action-research project in a primary school, examines homework sessions in three migrant-background households. It focuses on mothers who were explicitly invited by teachers to take on a supporting role in their children's study practices, working alongside school-appointed facilitators. The analysis explores how these mothers interpret and enact that role, negotiating teachers' and facilitators' expectations through their own sense of plausibility (Maley, 2018) concerning their educational role.

Keywords: *parental agency; heritage household; homework; facilitator; language brokering.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Western countries pedagogical studies and educational policies have strongly advocated for closer cooperation between schools and families as a means to enhance students' academic achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Milani, 2012). Within this framework, family–school partnerships are often reinforced through initiatives promoting parental involvement, such as parent–teacher conferences and parent-assisted homework.

This mode of involvement is not without challenges. Parents are frequently expected to turn their homes into "school-like" environments that reproduce the cultural and pedagogical patterns of the school. Popkewitz (2003) describes this process as the emergence of the "pedagogicalized parent," who takes on the role of a surrogate teacher. Such an expectation may

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exacerbate socio-cultural inequalities, when parents are unable to assume this role effectively, putting children at a disadvantage and reinforcing disparities in school outcomes.

In Italy, attention to the school–family alliance has a long tradition and has been institutionalized through policies such as the *Patto di Corresponsabilità* (2007; see Capperucci *et al.*, 2018) and practices such as parent–teacher conferences. Beyond these formal arrangements, this alliance is also normatively expected to take place in the domestic setting, particularly through homework (Caronia *et al.*, 2023), which functions as a key site where school cultures intersect with family life (Caronia *et al.*, 2023; Lisimberti & Montalbetti, 2020; Marsico *et al.*, 2013). Homework routines offer opportunities for both the socialization of academic content and the development of moral orientations, allowing parents' educational roles to be articulated, interpreted, and negotiated within broader institutional expectations (Caronia & Colla, 2023; Colla, 2022).

Despite extensive debate on homework practices (Contini, 2017), the interactional dynamics that unfold in these settings have long remained a "black box" for educational research (Bolognesi & DalleDonne Vandini, 2020; Milani, 2018). Earlier studies have explored parent–child interactions in natural pedagogy events (Fasulo & Pontecorvo, 1999; Orletti, 2000), but only recently has attention turned to homework as a specific site of interaction. Doing homework involves a range of procedures – structuring space and time (Colla, 2020), monitoring execution (Colla, 2022), and explaining or testing content (Caronia *et al.*, 2023) – through which parents and children implicitly enact the school's moral and epistemic order. Parents may act as surrogate teachers, evaluating and testing their children, or mobilize school artifacts such as textbooks, dictionaries, and atlases, which themselves acquire specific forms of agency (Bolognesi & DalleDonne Vandini, 2020; Caronia & Colla, 2021). Alternatively, parents may connect school content to personal or family experiences, recontextualizing abstract knowledge within familiar frames of meaning (Andorno & Sordella, 2021).

Importantly, epistemic authority is not fixed: children, with direct access to classroom instruction, may contest or resist their parents' guidance, prompting ongoing negotiation of knowledge and task procedures (Colla, 2023). In this sense, homework becomes a site of enacted education (Bruner, 1996), where parents and children jointly reconstruct and negotiate cultural meanings and moral orientations inherited from institutional schooling, producing locally situated and plausible educational practices.

These dynamics become even more complex in immigrant families, where linguistic and cultural boundaries may hinder school–family communication (Bove, 2020). Foreign parents often encounter unfamiliar institutional norms, communicative codes, and pedagogical expectations that may evoke uncertainty and vulnerability (Bove & Mantovani, 2015; DalleDonne Vandini & Cino, 2019; Dalledonne Vandini & Cino, 2023). At the same time, parents-teachers encounters reveal the interpretive work through which parents construct meaning and agency in new educational settings.

To investigate these complex dynamics, this study examines homework practices in three immigrant families with primary school-aged children, focusing on how deontic and epistemic authority are enacted and negotiated among parents, children and school representatives, such as teachers and facilitators acting with a mediating role. More specifically, we investigate how parents interpret and respond to teachers' and facilitators' expectations and suggestions about their role in supporting homework. To frame these orientations, the study adopts and extends Prabhu's (1990) notion of *sense of plausibility* – later developed by Maley (2018) – used in teacher training research. The notion originally refers to the implicit, experience-based framework through which individuals assess what counts as reasonable, meaningful, and legitimate in an educational encounter. It does not denote a consciously formulated set of values, but rather a tacit orientation that becomes visible through practice. In this sense, immigrant parents' sense of plausibility emerges in how they take up and translate school expectations, shaping their own understanding of what it means to be supportive and responsible parents within this educational activity.

2. The research context, goals and methodology

The study draws on data collected within the project *Con parole mie* (*In my own words*; Andorno & Sordella, 2021), an action research initiative conducted in multilingual primary school classrooms in Turin, Italy.

At the research level, the project aimed to investigate study practices both in the classroom and at home, with a particular focus on how students' language competence develops beyond basic interpersonal communication skills (Cummins, 2008) toward more advanced cognitive-academic language proficiency. Specifically, it examined how school-related socialization practices and exposure to academic discourse – through textbooks, educational videos, and teachers discourse – contribute to students' acquisition of the so-called *language of schooling*. The research placed special emphasis on students from immigrant backgrounds, for whom these linguistic demands pose an additional challenge due to unbalanced proficiency in the language of instruction.

At the intervention level, the project sought to mitigate linguistic and cultural barriers that hinder parental involvement in school-related activities at home. Drawing on the Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1991, 2000), the intervention promoted multilingual home socialization around school contents, encouraging parents to draw on their greater proficiency in their heritage language to support their children's overall linguistic repertoire. Two main actions were implemented to foster and sustain parental engagement:

– teachers were encouraged to create home assignments that required parental participation. These activities were integrated into ordinary homework tasks, aligning with standard teachers' practices;

– during homework sessions, families were supported by *facilitators*: university students who shared the family's linguistic and cultural background and had themselves completed their education in the Italian school system. They were meant to play a bridging role between students, parents and the teacher, drawing on their dual familiarity with both the family's language and culture and Italian school practices. Rather than functioning as professional mediators, they played a role similar to that of informal language and culture brokers, a function often performed by children in immigrant families (Antonini, 2016).

Facilitators received a small scholarship for their participation and were selected based on their linguistic repertoire, which needed to match that of the involved families; their own schooling experience within the Italian system; and prior experience supporting younger students with homework. In two preparatory meetings with the researchers they were informed about the project's goals and their specific role during the homework sessions: they were not meant to replace parents, but rather to support parental involvement, for instance encouraging the use of the family's entire repertoire during the interaction.

The intervention was carried out over two academic years (2016/17 and 2017/18) in two primary school classes, where over 50% of students had a migrant background. The initiative began with two introductory meetings held during regular parents-teacher conferences, also involving researchers and facilitators. Teachers presented the aims of the intervention with the parents, framing it as a shared educational project. The importance of parental involvement in supporting children's active engagement with academic content was emphasized. The project title was introduced as a guiding principle and quickly became a catchphrase for the initiative. The expression *dillo con parole tue* ("say it in your own words") – widely used in Italian schools to encourage students to move beyond rote memorization and rephrase academic content – was here extended to parents, in order to convey both the invitation to foster children's re-elaboration of textbook material and the encouragement to use whichever language they felt most comfortable with during homework activities.

Participation in the project was voluntary, with only two requirements: hosting a facilitator at home and involving at least one family member during the homework sessions. Ultimately, 12 families, each with a child in third or fourth grade, agreed to take part. Each family participated in an audio-recorded preliminary interview focusing on the child's study habits and the educational roles assumed by family members. During these interviews, facilitators occasionally assisted as linguistic mediators.

Data collection spanned eight cycles, each consisting of:

– a video recording of the classroom lesson,

– an audio recording of the corresponding homework session in each participating family,

– a video recording of the students' in-class presentation of their completed homework.

Additional materials included field notes and photographs taken by facilitators, who also managed the home audio recordings.

For the current analysis, three cases were selected from the corpus, each involving homework sessions of third-grade bilingual students (DAR, RIA, and IME). According to their teachers, while the three students had excelled in the early years of schooling, by third grade they began to experience difficulties with subject-specific content and the increasing linguistic complexity of textbooks. Consequently, the analysis focuses on excerpts from homework sessions in which the study of a textbook page was either the main or a secondary task. In all three cases, the homework sessions involved the facilitator and the children's mother.

The three families share several sociolinguistic traits. Within the household, communication is marked by strong multilingualism (Romanian-Italian for DAR, Moroccan Arabic-Italian for RIA and IME), but the children tend to favor Italian when interacting with each other and when engaging in school-related activities; a result consistent with findings from previous studies (Chini & Andorno, 2018). All three mothers had completed compulsory education in their countries of origin and spoke fluent, though sometimes non target Italian; Riad's mother held a higher degree and also spoke French.

The preliminary interviews revealed common patterns in how the mothers perceived and interpreted their parental role in education. Overall, they presented themselves as deeply engaged in their children's education and invested in their academic success. They emphasized their responsibility in supporting school activities and encouraging participation in cultural practices outside school, particularly in developing reading habits. They reported providing access to cultural resources at home, mainly – but not exclusively – books. One responsibility that all mothers attribute to the family was the maintenance of the heritage language: in addition to providing cultural products in that language, such as books or cartoons, they reported engaging in storytelling in the heritage language.

Despite this active educational engagement, mothers' involvement did not extend to assisting with homework; they reported that they usually ensure that homework is completed but do not intervene in ways typically associated with parental participation (Caronia *et al.*, 2023): the children decided when and how to do their homework, and the mothers neither monitored the process nor checked or corrected the results. The children's autonomy was positively framed as a trait of the "good pupil," one who completes assignments independently and without resistance. The project thus introduced a shift in these established family practices, encouraging a degree of parental participation in homework that was previously uncommon. The analysis offers the opportunity to explore how the mothers oriented to the role assigned to them, as described by teachers and researchers in preliminary encounters and shaped by the facilitators' behaviour during homework sessions.

3. Analysis

3.1. *Dario's homework session: "Ti ho detto di leggere!" (I told you to read!)*

In the session analyzed, Dario is asked to complete a diagram (Fig. 1) on the basis of the previous lesson and of the reading of an assigned passage from the textbook. FAC is present but remains silent for most of the session, while MOT assumes a directing role from the very beginning (ex.1)[1].

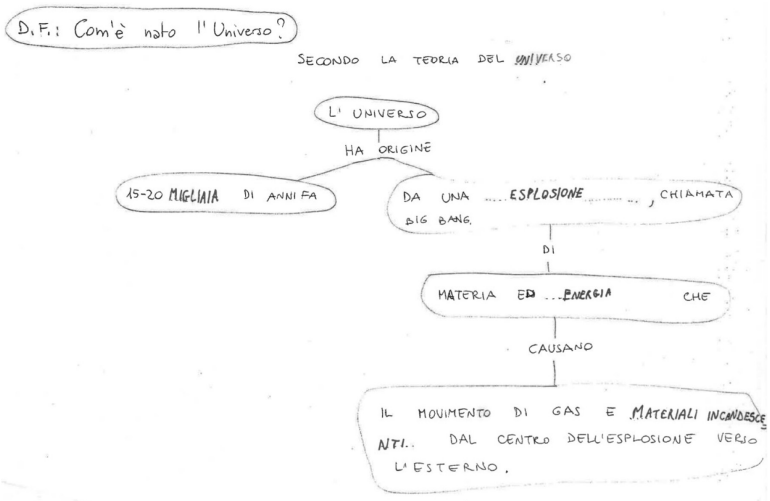


Figure 1 The final version of the diagram completed by Dario.

(1)
01 MOT allora. (.) adesso che devi fare?
so. (.) now what do you have to do?
02 DAR devo fare questo schema.
I have to complete this diagram.
03 MOT e che scrive lì?
and what does it say there?
04 DAR "l'universo ha origine quindici sbarra (.) quindici venti" (.) migliaia.
"the universe originated fifteen slash (.) fifteen twenty"(.) thousand.
05 MOT migliaia di anni?
thousand years?
06 DAR fa. (.) secondo me sì. (.) vabbè. (.) °grande esplosione°.
ago. (.) I think so. (.) okay. (.) °big explosion°.
07 [Dario continues reading and filling in the diagram silently]
08 MOT cioè? (.) grande esplosione cioè? (.) questo si chiama big bang?
meaning? (.) big explosion, meaning? (.) this is called the big bang?
09 DAR "chiamata big bang".
"called big bang."
10 MOT big bang.
big bang.

1 The transcriptions follow Jefferson (2004). IME, RIA, and DAR are the three students; their respective mothers are identified as MOT; FAC denotes the facilitator. Double quotation marks indicate portions of the school materials being read aloud. Utterances in the participants' heritage languages are presented in *italics*; English translation is provided in interlinear format, lines in the transcript are referred to through "l." followed by the corresponding number, as in l.01.

MOT opens the session by checking the activity to be carried out (l.01) and DAR introduces the diagram-filling task (l.02). In the subsequent lines, a conflict emerges over how to approach the task. With a follow-up question (l.03), MOT suggests consulting the textbook ("there" in l.03 refers to textbook), while DAR begins filling in the diagram based on his memory of the previous lesson (l.04). As MOT checks his first completion (l.05), DAR self-assesses his answer without referring to the book (l.06 "I think so"), and then continues filling in the diagram silently (l.07). MOT attempts to reopen the participatory framework with a request for clarification (l.08), and DAR once again confirms his answer based on the words available in the diagram (l.09). MOT aligns with him (l.10) and subsequently does not propose further reference to the textbook.

While completing the last part of the diagram, DAR asks for some help (ex.2).

(2)
01 DAR "che causano... (.) di gas e"?
"that cause... (.) of gas and"?
02 MOT il?
the?
03 DAR "che causano il movimento (.) di gas e"?
"that cause the movement (.) of gas and"?
04 MOT e?
and?
05 FAC e? io non lo so, non guardare me ((ride))
and? I don't know, don't look at me ((laughs))
06 DAR materia?
matter?|
07 MOT eh certo, penso di sì.
of course, I think so.
08 FAC io non l'ho seguita la lezione
I didn't attend that lesson
09 MOT e: no, ti ho detto di leggere questa qua, per questo ti ho detto di leggere
hey, no, I told you to read this one here, that's why I told you to read

DAR's repeated prompt (l.01, 03) are directed not at MOT, who merely reformulates them as interrogative prompts (l.02, 04), but at FAC. FAC intervenes for the first time in two closely spaced turns, deflecting the role of knowledge holder (l.05 "I don't know, don't look at me"), and justifying himself because he did not participated in the lesson (l.08). In other words, FAC does not align to MOT's suggestion to use the book. She once again suggests this practice (l.09-10), but her assertion goes unacknowledged.

Once Dario has filled in the diagram, MOT proposes the reading of the book as a final activity (ex. 3).

(3)
01 MOT ok. adesso mi leggi che io ti faccio le domande. leggi tutto lì e dopo- io ti
fine. now read it to me so I can ask you questions. read it all there and then— I'll
02 faccio, ti domando lessico, le parole nuove, tutto. leggila con voce alta così
ask you, I'll ask about vocabulary, new words, everything. read it out loud so
03 capiamo tutti.
we can all understand.
04 [Dario reads the whole page aloud]
05 MOT ok adesso ti faccio le domande. tutto qua, hai letto qua? ok. secondo te
ok now I'll ask you the questions. all right, have you read this? ok. what do you think
06 primordiale che significa?
primordial means?
07 DAR originario, iniziale.
original, initial.
08 MOT ok. il big bang?
ok. the big bang?
09 DAR grande esplosione.
great explosion.
10 MOT secondo la teoria di chi?
according to whose theory?
10 DAR scienza. scienziati.
science. scientists.
11 MOT ok. è una esplosione di che cosa?
ok. it's an explosion of what?
12 DAR energia e materia.
energy and matter.

MOT now establishes her role as tester of the child's knowledge. To this end, she repeatedly bases the epistemic authority on the textbook, that needs to be read (l.01-02), and read aloud to share the relevant knowledge (l.02-03). DAR complies (l.04). After reading, MOT initiates a focused comprehension-checking sequence (l.05), verifying the meaning of key terms listed in the page glossary (l.05-6, 08) and posing display questions modeled on the textbook (l.10, 12). DAR's answers closely reproduce the text's wording (l.07, 09, 11, 13). The exchange proceeds in this way until the end of the page.

In this excerpt, MOT demonstrates a dominant stance, leading the task and enacting directive and evaluative moves. She asserts deontic authority over the procedures (how to complete the diagram, when to consult the textbook) and – while repeatedly deferring epistemic primacy to the textbook – advocates a role as tester of DAR knowledge on the basis of the textbook authority.

DAR selectively follows MOT's guidance: during reading aloud, he complies with MOT's prompts, but during diagram completion he engages in acts of resistance, relying on his memory and self-assessing his answers, rather than following MOT suggestion to refer to the textbook. Alternatively, he recognizes FAC rather than MOT as an ancillary epistemic authority.

FAC intervenes minimally, disclaiming both epistemic and deontic authority over the task. However, by punctually attributing the primacy of epistemic rights to classroom lessons rather than the textbook, he does not legitimize MOT's position, and his deflective stance reinforces DAR's orientation.

3.2. *Riad's homework session: "ʕleš?" (why?)*

In the observed excerpt, RIA is tasked with studying a page from the textbook. The page has already been read collectively in class, accompanied by the teacher's explanation.

At the start of the session, a discussion rises out about RIA study habits (ex. 4 and 5).

(4)
01 FAC non lo so, tu come studi di solito?
I don't know, how do you usually study?
02 RIA [studio]
[*I study*]
03 FAC [con la mam]ma come studiate?
[*with your* m]om *how do you study together?*
04 RIA io studio alcune volte da solo
I study alone sometimes
05 FAC ah ma (.) cioè nel senso prima leggi, poi:
ah, but (.) *I mean, first you read, then:*
06 RIA [sì]
[*yes*]
07 FAC [eh] la mamma ti fa le domande?
[*eh*] *does your mom ask you questions?*
08 RIA leggo chiudo gli occhi e ripeto le cose che ho letto
I read, close my eyes, and repeat the things I've read
09 FAC ah ok (.) allora non so vuoi leggere? fate come siete abituati a fare
ah ok (.) *well, I don't know do you want to read? do as you're used to doing*
10 MOT ah sì
ah yes
11 FAC e poi la mamma ti interroga
and then your mom tests you

FAC initiates the discussion by asking about RIA' study habits (l.01) and self-repairs her question (l.03) to explicitely evoke MOT' participation. While RIA describes a routine based on independent reading and repetition (l.04), FAC assigns MOT the role of "asking questions" (l.07). Even after RIA further exclude MOT from his routine (l.08), FAC reasserts her framing by instructing him to proceed "as usual" (l.09) and designating MOT as a surrogate teacher responsible for assessing RIA's knowledge of the textbook content (l.11).

(5)
01 FAC quindi tu di solito leggi (.) ripeti (.) leggi più volte la frase (.) e cerchi di impararla
so you usually read (.) repeat (.) read the sentence several times (.) and try to learn it
02 a memoria
by heart
03 RIA sì
yes
04 FAC però la [mamma]
but your [mum]
05 RIA [non] a memoria
[not] by heart
06 FAC però la mamma ti sta dicendo di leggere una volta, di capire il concetto
but your mum is telling you to read it once, to understand the concept
07 MOT sì
yes
08 FAC e ripetere solo [le parole chiave]
and repeat only [the key words]
09 MOT [l'importante è capire]
[the important thing is to understand]
10 FAC le parole importanti (.) ok
the important words (.) okay
11 MOT *waxa ila ma, ila ma, ila ma-fhemh-eš wa-law enah-ū yab?a yaḥfaḍ, ya?radha*
if he doesn't understand it, even if he keeps repeating it
12 a memoria non serve a niente!
by heart, it's useless!
13 FAC non serve a niente [hai ragione]
it's useless [you're right]
14 MOT *[xasso huwa] yefhem (.) ken fahem/ha*
[he must] understand (.) if he understands it
15 RIA infatti io faccio così!
in fact. that's what I do!

FAC further frames RIA's study method (ex. 5, l.01-02) against what she presents as the correct approach attributed to MOT (l.04-08), but explicitely echoing teachers' recommendations. MOT aligns (l.07), repeating key evaluative expressions (l.09) and rewording the same recommendations in Arabic and Italian (l.11-12). FAC's uptake of MOT's utterances and explicit ratification (l.13) further legitimizes MOT' authority. Repeated overlaps between FAC and MOT (l.08-09, l.13-14) show their deontic alignment in defining what "good study" should look like. RIA's defensive responses (l.05, 15) shows his attempt to align with the normative stance being constructed by the two adults.

The reading activity then begins (ex. 6).

(6)
01 RIA "ieri come oggi nelle acque del Nilo" (.) °ieri come oggi nelle acque del Nilo° (.)
"yesterday as today, in Nile waters" (.) °yesterday as today, in Nile waters° (.)
02 "nuotavano pesci in abbondanza che gli Egizi pescavano."
"there swam plenty of fish that the Egyptians used to catch."
03 [Riad continues reading and repeating portions of the text]
04 RIA "poiché il Nilo era così importante per la vita degli Egizi, lo adoravano come una
"since the Nile was so important for the Egyptians' life, they worshipped it as a
05 divinità. lo testimonia (.) il ritrovamento di un inno."
deity. This is shown (.) by the discovery of a hymn."
06 MOT *šnu huwa el* inno? (.) un inno per (.) il Nilo. (.) *šnu huwa* inno? (.) *ehm?*
what's a hymn? (.) a hymn for (.) the Nile. (.) what's a hymn? (.) uhm?
07 RIA (.) è una preghiera magica
(.) *it's a magical prayer.*

08 MOT *yek?* (.) *ʕleš ke ydirūha?*
ah yes? (.) *why do they do it?*
09 RIA per pe:r perché perché il faraone per perché il fara (.) perché il faraone lo
be be because because the pharaoh be because the pha (.) *because the pharaoh*
10 recitava (.) per (.) per (.) per far cadere la pioggia
recited it (.) *to* (.) *to* (.) *to make the rain fall.*
11 MOT a:h (.) quindi inno (.) una preghiera
ah (.) *so hymn* (.) *a prayer.*

RIA begins by reading aloud in a soft and hesitant voice, repeating short portions of the text (l.01-05). This pattern reflects the procedures he had previously described – reading and mentally rehearsing the text. MOT's intervention interrupts this flow (l.06): switching to Arabic, she asks for clarification of the word *inno*. RIA's answer, in Italian, draws on the explanation provided by the teacher at school (l.07) – he reads by a gloss he wrote in the margin of the textbook. MOT follows up with a second question, again in Arabic (l.08), that pushes RIA beyond rote repetition: he responds in Italian, by attempting to rephrase the relevant portion of the text (l.09-10). MOT uptakes his answer (l.11).

Once the reading is finished, a new phase is initiated by MOT (ex. 7).

(7)
01 MOT chiudi *baʃda el* libro e poi faccio io le domande (.) allora (.) il Nilo (.) il Nilo (.)
close first the book and then I'll ask the questions (.) *so* (.) *the Nile* (.) *the Nile* (.)
02 *bennesba lel fareʕina loʔdem* (.) *šnu ke* (.) *šnu ke ymeṭel le hom* (.)
for the ancient pharaohs (.) *what* (.) *what did it represent* (.)
03 *bennesba lel fareʕina* (.) *loʔdem*
for the pharaohs (.) *ancient*
04 RIA era co[me]
it was li[ke]
05 MOT [*el* Nilo] *ešnu huwa bennesba le-hom?*
[*the Nile*] *what does it represent for them?*
06 RIA è una divinità per loro
it's a divinity for them.
07 MOT mhmh
mhmh.
08 RIA e nelle acque del Nilo (.) vivevano (.) che nuota (.) nuotavano anche pesci (.)
and in the Nile waters (.) *there lived* (.) *that swim* (.) *there also swam fish* (.)
che (.) che gli Egizi pescavano
that (.) *that the Egyptians caught.*
10 MOT *ʕleš?* (.) *beš…*
why? (.) *to…*
11 RIA per mangiar (.) per mangiare
to eat (.) *to eat.*

In this phase, MOT's shows her alignment with the role of "asking questions" projected by FAC (l.01). Her hesitant phrasing and frequent code-switching in formulating her first question, in Arabic (l.01-05), indicate that she is actively working to shape her contribution within this new role. RIA's answer, in Italian, matches the textbook (l.06). After MOT's minimal acknowledgment token (l.07), he continues paraphrasing additional information from the text, thus returning to its usual recitation pattern (l.08-9). With a new question in Arabic (l.10), requiring to provide an inferential explanation not explicitly stated in the textbook, MOT once again shifts RIA' interactional footing from recitation to dialogue (l.11).

In this excerpt, interactional dynamics differ markedly from DAR's case. FAC actively opens the participatory framework to MOT and constructs

MOT as the legitimate bearer of the teacher's recommendations, projecting onto her the deontic authority to guide and evaluate RIA's study through "asking questions".

While MOT aligns to the framing offered by FAC, her enactment departs from it in subtle but meaningful ways: instead of posing display questions, she uses them to scaffold RIA's autonomous elaboration; the repeated shift to Arabic shifts the school task into a more familiar, dialogic format. All participants orient to the textbook as their sole epistemic source, but MOT's interventions create a local configuration in which learning unfolds through re-elaboration and negotiation of meaning rather than simple recall.

3.3. *Imen's homework session: "Ti ricordi la nostra campagna?" (do you remember our fields?)*

In the following excerpt, IME is about to study the same text used with RIA. The activity begins with a negotiation about the procedures for completing the task (ex.8)

(8)
01 FAC cosa devi fare? *nšof*
what do you have to do? let me see
02 IME ce n'è uno di storia poi di- e di italiano
there's one in history, then a- and an Italian one
03 MOT storia è già finita?
is history already finished?
04 IME finita
finished
05 MOT però bisogna dare ancora una: una passata perchè non sei proprio
but we still need to do one more: a quick run-through because you're not exactly
06 FAC poi te la ripassi:
then you'll review it again
07 [MOT and IME discuss the time scheduling for the re-reading]
08 MOT IME *maxassekš tbqay thaẓẓay*
IME you shouldn't read it letter by letter
09 FAC *daba nʕawdo nqrawh w nʕawdu nšarḥo ndakši llli fhemti*
now we'll read it again and explain once more what you understood.
10 FAC *maxassekš tkuni ḥafdah kalma bkalma. hadak ši lli fhemti ntiya menu qra mezian*
you don't have to have learned it word for word. focus on what you understood.

FAC opens the sessions by asking about the assigned tasks (l.01-02). A negotiation follows, giving MOT the opportunity to point out the appropriate study procedures: revision is needed (l.05) and repeating "letter by letter" should be avoided (l.08). In both cases, FAC echoes MOT's recommendations (l.06, l.10). While MOT and FAC are largely aligned on these procedural norms, it is FAC who specifies the concrete steps to achieve the expected outcome (l.09-10).

The remainder of the activity unfolds according to FAC's guidelines: after IME has read the text once more, a comprehension-check phase unfolds, led by FAC (ex. 9).

(9)

01 FAC mhmh. *aš ḥemna daba?*
mhmh. what did we understand now?

02 IME ieri come oggi nuotavano pesci nel Nilo, (.) che… (.) pescati dagli Egizi, (.)
yesterday as today fish swam in the Nile (.) caught by the Egyptians (.)

03 lungo le: rive # c'erano molti uccelli cacciati, (.) e crescevano anche canne e papiri
along the banks there were many birds hunted (.) and reeds and papyrus also grew

04 FAC allora. *xassna ntfakro. qrina dik lmarra qrina "Wad smitu* Nilo*"*
so, we have to remember. last time we read "A river called the Nile"

05 *fih lḥut bezzaf, ʕaqli fih lḥut bezza:f, ʕali bezaf, žḥal had, f*'i tempi degli
where there are many fish, remember many fish, remember well, in the time of the

06 Egizi, *u daba, kaystaduh* lo pescavano. ok, *hadi,* chiaro? poi. *kanu fīnab*
Egyptians, and now, they used to fish them. ok, this is clear? then. around it

07 *kanu bezaf dial tyor kanu kay staduhum ḥttahumaya kanu kaystaʕmluhum* (.)
there were many birds they also used to hunt (.)

08 IME crescevano canne [e papiri],
grew reeds [*and papyrus*],

09 FAC [canne e] papiri, *kanu kay staʕmluhum* gli artigiani. *yaʕni*
[*reeds and*] *papyrus, they were used by artisans. meaning*

10 *maʕert kanu kaysanʕo bihum ši haža- (.) wla wqrib men had, ʕaqli ʕla ḥetta sura,*
they made something with them or- (.) *and near that, remember also the picture,*

11 *qqrib men had l* fiume. *ʕaqli ʕla sura lḥayawanat kayrʕaw. yaʕni hanaya*
close to this river. remember the image of the animals grazing. meaning here—

11 IME (cioè i) pascoli
(*that is the*) *pastures*

12 FAC mhmh. pascoli, *fin kay rʕaw lḥayawanat.*
mhmh. pastures, where the animals graze.

13 [FAC continues recalling the previous lesson content]

14 FAC *daba ʕawdi liya nti daba ašnu ḥemti*
now tell me again what you understood

15 IME ieri come oggi nel Nilo c'erano tanti pesci pescati (.) pescati dagli Egizi,
yesterday as today in the Nile there were many fish caught (.) caught by the Egyptians

16 (.) sulle- nelle rive del fiume (.) c'erano gli uccelli, e cresce- eh caccia:
(.) *on- on the riverbanks (.) there were birds, and grew- uh hunt:*

17 FAC mh
mh

18 IME cacciati, come i pe- come i pe:sci, come i pesci, cacciati
hunted, like the fi- like the fi:sh, like the fish, hunted

FAC initiates the comprehension check in Arabic (l.01), to which IME responds in Italian by reciting portions of the textbook (l.02-03). FAC then, again in Arabic, establishes a new procedure (l.04, "we have to remember") and launches a long recalling of the previous lesson (l.04-13), temporarily shifting epistemic primacy from the textbook to herself, while the text and its visual apparatus are reframed as a mnemonic resource (l.10-11). IME participates with minimal interventions, consisting of textbook excerpts (l.08, 11). The solution provided by FAC seems ineffective in changing IME's procedure: in response to FAC's subsequent prompt (l.14), she once again provides a near-verbatim recitation of the text (l.15-18).

Throughout this phase, MOT remains silently, but intervenes once, as illustrated in ex. 10.

(10)

01 MOT ti ricordi la nostra campagna quando andiamo al Marocco (.) come facciamo
do you remember our fields when we go to Morocco (.) how do we do
02 per fare dare l'acqua agli uli- piante dell'oliva di melograno (.) come facciamo?
to water the oli- olive and pomegranate trees (.) how do we do it?
03 IME non so andiamo:: da–
I don't know we go:: to–
04 MOT *ašnu lli kan nawdu?*
what do we turn on?
05 FAC *wallaw (xx) kolši* ah ok
they started (xx) everything ah ok
06 IME ah *lbir* giusto!
ah the well, right!
07 MOT motor
the motor

In this instance, MOT independently takes a different initiative, by prompting IME, first in Italian (l.01-02) and then in Arabic (l.04), to recall a past experience in Morocco. In responding, IME approaches the textbook theme from a new perspective; her emphatic tone in l.06 ("the well, right!") signals she has grasped the connection between the textbook content and her own lived experience. MOT ratifies IME's contribution with a recast (l.07).

A similar dynamics occurs lately (ex.11).

(11)

01 FAC *ʕawdi lmamak šwiya ašnu kan ḥad*
tell your mom a bit what there was in this
02 MOT allora (.) dimmi che cosa hai fatto
so (.) tell me what you did
03 IME ok
ok
04 MOT cosa hai studiato cosa hai (.) imparato, *ašnu ḥemti*
what did you study what did you (.) learn, what did you understand
05 IME tutto
everything
06 FAC *ʕawdi liha dak šši lli ḥemti*
tell her what you understood
07 MOT *goli liya dak ši lli ḥemti*
tell me what you understood
08 [IME starts her retelling]
09 IME Menes (.) il faraone (.) faceva quest- una preghiera (.) che sarebbe l'inno eh: (.)
Menes (.) the pharaoh (.) made this– a prayer (.) which was the hymn eh: (.)
10 quindi recitava questa preghiera (.) mh per far: per far piovere (.) quindi ad arricchire
so he recited this prayer (.) mh to make: to make it rain (.) so as to enrich
11 le: le acque (.) e quindi eh:: (.) eh: le- il c- le coltivazioni erano sempre più ricche (.)
the waters (.) and so eh:: (.) eh: the c– the crops were ever richer (.)
12 [IME continues her retelling]
13 MOT *ḥit hadik* la preghiera *dial šta kolši kay dirha menni ma kat subš šta*
because that rain prayer everyone does it when it doesn't rain
14 [IME and FAC laugh]
15 MOT *ta ḥna kan diruha taġunža*
we do it too, taġunža
16 [IME and FAC chat]
17 IME ma- (.) poi piove?
but- (.) then does it rain?
18 MOT quest'anno no, però l'anno scorso sì l'hanno fatta, al Marocco. (.)
this year no, but last year yes, they did it, in Morocco. (.)
19 non fa solo il re (.) tutti li persone può fare
not only the king does it (.) anyone can do it

In this case, FAC explicitly positions MOT as the recipient of IME's exposition (l.02, 06); MOT aligns with and expands on this positioning (l.02, 04, 07). Both FAC and MOT are now speaking in Arabic, but IME once again begins recounting content in Italian, closely following the textbook wording (l.08-13), MOT intervenes in Arabic, referring to a familiar practice (l.13, 15). The playful alignment among MOT, IME and FAC, marked by laughter and chatting (l.14, 16), signals a moment of shared surprise, as MOT temporarily expands the participatory framework beyond strict task boundaries. Prompted by IME's curiosity (l.17), MOT further elaborates on the parallel, comparing the textbook's description with the Moroccan context (l.18-19); in doing so, asserts epistemic authority over these interpretative connections (l.20-21). This sequence concludes the homework session.

In this session, the participatory framework takes a still distinct form when compared with DAR and RIA. As in RIA's case, FAC and MOT repeatedly align on the "correct" ways of studying, adhering to the teacher's recommendations. However, differing from RIA's case, FAC's role in involving MOT is limited. She assigns MOT a largely passive, listening role, while retaining for herself the main responsibility as mediator of the textbook content, which – consistent with the other cases – is treated as the sole epistemic authority.

MOT, although intervening only occasionally, does so through strong, self-initiated moves. Without overtly challenging FAC, she departs from the procedural paths suggested by her, by introducing personal experience – what Pomerantz (1980) describes as *Type 1 knowledge* – as a relevant epistemic resource together with more institutional *type 2 knowledge* provided by the textbook. In doing so, she simultaneously asserts deontic authority over the task's direction and epistemic authority grounded in lived knowledge.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the excerpts highlights how mothers navigate a complex landscape of expectations and practices, balancing teachers' recommendations, facilitators' framing, and their children's study routines. In doing so, they configure and negotiate their own role within a form of parental involvement that, up to this moment, does not typically belong to their interactional repertoire. The data also shed light on children's strategies for managing the relatively novel task of studying from a textbook – strategies that, in turn, contribute to shaping how their mothers interpret when and how to intervene.

Children's behavior confirms what emerged from both educational authorities. On the one hand, as asserted by the mothers, they show proactivity in organizing homework and autonomy in implementing study practices developed through a long-standing routine of independent work.

At this level, parental intervention occasionally leads to silent conflicts, as shown by the unsuccessful attempt to impose on DAR a different way of managing the diagram completion task (ex.1). On the other hand, as teachers noted, children's engagement with the textbook reveals a complex negotiation of epistemic authority: while DAR resists using it as a relevant source of knowledge (ex.1), RIA and IME treat it as a fixed repository of knowledge to be memorized (ex. 6, 7, 9, 11). Across all cases, the textbook was treated as the primary epistemic authority; accordingly, phenomena typical of parent-led homework sessions – such as the provision of additional pedagogical materials (Caronia & Colla, 2021) or requests for clarification of unfamiliar terms direclty provided by parents (Bolognesi & DalleDonne Vandini, 2020) – were entirely absent. This likely also reflects limited trust, on the part of either children or mothers, in the mothers' epistemic authority: for example, in the only instance where a request for help was made (DAR), it was addressed to the facilitator – despite his own minimal participation – rather than the mother.

The intervention proposed by the teachers – aimed at fostering more dialogic study practices and encouraging students to re-elaborate school knowledge "in their own words" – can be understood as a form of delegated deontic authority. Both facilitators and mothers oriented to this institutional mandate, aligning with teachers' recommendations and locally re-enacting them within the homework setting. Their alliance, however, took different forms across cases.

Facilitators enacted their mediating role with varying degrees of agency: while in DAR's case the facilitator remained a largely silent witness, in RIA's and IME's cases facilitators actively consolidated the mothers' deontic authority and supported their agency, legitimizing their role through repeated acts of inclusion in the participatory framework, by projecting teachers' recommendations onto them, and aligning with their initiatives. In these cases, the role assigned to mothers by facilitators resembled that of an "ancillary teacher" (Baker & Keogh, 1995), responsible for assessing learning through evaluative questioning (RIA) or listening to a retelling of textbook content (IME). The legitimization work accomplished by the facilitators was mirrored by the mothers' alignment with them: with their consolidated experience in the Italian school system, facilitators were perceived by mothers as legitimate sources of institutional competence (Bolognesi & Dalladonne Vandini, 2020), comparable to teachers, regarding the implicit "curriculum for the home" (Baker & Keogh, 1995).

However, mothers' enactments of the role they were assigned varied across cases, showing that pedagogical recommendations are not simply absorbed but reinterpreted through each parent's own understanding of her educational role. Among the three cases, RIA's mother most closely enacted the supportive role envisioned by teachers, even partially departing from the role interactionally framed by the facilitator: rather than asking evaluative questions, as suggested by the fa-

cilitator, she used them to scaffold RIA's autonomous elaboration of the text. IME's mother, while intervening only occasionally, departed more markedly from the facilitator's procedural framing, by connecting academic content to first-hand experiences drawn from her cultural background – thereby expanding what counts as legitimate knowledge within the homework activity. In doing so, she assumed an additional educational function – preserving and valuing the family's cultural heritage, which she had described as a core parental responsibility. Among the practices of reorienting their children's homework routines, RIA's and IME's mothers also exploit shifts to the heritage language, using it as a resource to distance themselves from the textbook's wording while still recognizing it as the primary epistemic authority. DAR's mother, in turn, enacted her deontic authority by redirecting study practices toward a stricter adherence to the textbook as the legitimate epistemic source; in doing so, she partially reinterpreted the teacher's recommendation – at times promoting the use of the textbook as a resource, at others turning it into an object of verification.

Taken together, the excerpts show that the parental agency of mothers manifests itself in their appropriation and reinterpretation of teachers' recommendations and facilitator's local framing through their own sense of plausibility. Just as teachers, when confronted with new pedagogical paradigms, do not merely reproduce prescribed models but re-enact them through the filter of their own beliefs, habits, and experiences (Prabhu, 1990; Maley, 2018), the mothers observed here, when confronted with the new educational role assigned to them by the teachers, similarly recontextualize it within the moral framework of family life: their educational goals, their children's routines, and their own educational resources – including, notably, the use of the heritage language. Through the micro-interactions in which parents, children, and facilitators make sense of what counts as "good" learning practices around the textbook, pedagogical principles emerge not as abstract prescriptions but as situated accomplishments – negotiated, adapted, and rendered plausible within each actor's lived experience. In Bruner's terms, these practices exemplify education as an enacted process: a dynamic and dialogic reconstruction of pedagogical meanings as they move between institutional and family settings.

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