



Between Words and Wounds: gender, migration, and the emotional burden of language mediators

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Abstract

Language mediators face cognitive, emotional, and identity-related challenges in the course of their work because of the increasing prevalence of migration and gender-based violence (GBV). These mediators find themselves at the intersection of cultural, social, and gendered power structures and face unique ethical burdens related to their potential gender identification with the survivors of GBV whom they assist (Degani & De Stefani, 2020). These complicating factors can cause intense stress for mediators working with traumatised survivors and can lead to vicarious trauma and role conflict. Inspired by Beverly Costa's works *In Other Words* (2017) and *In More Words* (2020), this project collects narratives from international language mediators working in vulnerable settings. The present article aims to examine the emotional perceptions of survivor-mediated dialogue through a gendered lens and to explore how language mediators navigate their own identities while supporting individuals affected by GBV. By utilising a mixed-method approach that integrates sentiment analysis and corpus-based discourse analysis, we examine a collection of personal narratives by migrant mediators who have worked in GBV contexts in an attempt to detect, extract, and explore their emotional polarisation. Key issues include (1) marginalisation and power imbalances due to gender issues and the migration journey; (2) the impact of emotional stress on the well-being of language mediators. Ultimately, the findings highlight the need for gender-specific training, emotional support, and supervision to effectively manage the complexity of their role and maintain their overall well-being.

Keywords: language mediation, gender-based violence (GBV), migration, mixed-method approach, trauma-informed care

1. Introduction

Mixed migration movements bring together people from many regions, languages, cultures, and needs, including refugees and international migrants. The first step in helping such people is to provide the tools for them to communicate their thoughts, wishes, worries, concerns, and feelings in a way that the host society can understand. When considering this point, little attention has been paid to interpreting and mediating for asylum seekers and refugees (Marjanovic & Harbutli, 2021). It is worth noting that this needs to be explored further

in the specific case of survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). In pragmatic terms, migrants who survive GBV are confronted with considerable language barriers, which exacerbate their precariousness and isolation, leading to a *continuum of violence* in the host country (Sullivan et al., 2021). To prevent this, language mediation becomes an act of “negotiation, resistance, activism and hospitality” (Taronna, 2015), in which translation takes on a profoundly human dimension, enriched by direct contact with *the other*. As it stands, mediation is considered not merely as a process that “reports what is said or written” (Katan, 2015) but as a practice that enables communication between migrants and public services, since it stands at the intersection of two different perspectives. By implementing a linguistic subversion (Demaria, 2003), which produces an alternative system of meanings, mediation breaks down the barriers between migrant survivors of GBV and care providers. In this sense, Bahadır’s (2004) concept of interpreters as “mini-ethnographers” is noteworthy: in their capacity as such, mediators carefully observe social behaviour, manage stress, and build transcultural relationships while engaging with global issues, documenting learning processes, and analysing data using relevant concepts. Mediators operate in the *third space* (Bhabha, 2013), a region of unpredictable borders, where cultures and migrants coexist between languages and peoples that are *different* and *alien*. *In-between* mediation is a social practice – a material approach built from the ground up in the context of the struggles along borders, capable of transporting, leading beyond and becoming an “act of welcome” (Mentasti, 2003).

The concept of translation with which mediators are confronted is “new”: it runs counter to the traditional notion of a cultural dialogue that harmoniously links cultures. Specifically, it reveals its controversial nature through the tension between what translators want to do/say/convey and what they can do/say/translate (Taronna, 2015). As Rudvin and Tomassini (2008) point out, mediators often begin by sharing with their fellow citizens or even their fellow migrants the lessons they have learnt from their migration experience and/or their initial practical difficulties in the new country. Through back-translation, migrant interpreters are transformed from passive objects into active subjects, from “translated” into “translating” beings. As translators, they can raise their voices, define boundaries of integration and exclusion, participate in new communities, and adapt.

1.1 The emotional burden and ethical challenges of mediators in vulnerable contexts

Building on the reconceptualisation of translation as an active and transformative practice, it is worth noting that mediators with migratory backgrounds often connect deeply with their clients, which can be both a strength and a challenge. However, this sense of belonging may also be counterproductive, as it gives rise to migrants’ expectations that the mediator will stand up for them and defend their interests against those of the institutions for which they work. This unquestionable sense of involvement and affiliation with the migrants as subjects, protagonists, and carriers of stories also highlights the significance of identification in interpretation in vulnerable settings. This is particularly relevant, as mediators in asylum, legal, and medical contexts often extend themselves beyond their linguistic roles, providing emotional and psychological support, as well. This broadening and deepening of interactions can blur both professional and personal boundaries, especially when clients share cultural or ethnic identities with their mediators. Costa’s theory (2021) suggests that this identification affects mediators emotionally, creating tension between their desire to support their clients and their moral duty to remain neutral. Additionally, the mediators’ limited decision-making power only adds to their stress, as they often witness trauma without the ability to intervene, echoing the helplessness experienced by their clients. This phenomenon is particularly evident in female mediators who are confronted with narratives of GBV or human trafficking that may remind them of their own experiences or those of their communities (Degani & De Stefani, 2020).

Therefore, mediators are often exposed to narratives of all kinds of violence, abuse, suffering, and social marginalisation, which significantly increase the risk of developing symptoms typical of vicarious trauma. According to Figley (1995), vicarious trauma results from empathic involvement in helping professionals with traumatic experiences, and it can be defined as “*the natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatising event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatised or suffering person.*” It is marked by negative alterations in individual and interpersonal patterns and beliefs, producing symptoms comparable to those of direct trauma (Pearlman, 1995; Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2015). According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), vicarious trauma is defined by intrusive symptoms (unpleasant memories, dreams, and marked physiological responses), avoidance experiences, cognitive changes (negative expectancies about self, others, and the world), dissociation (emotional or physical detachment during or after user interaction), and alterations in arousal and reactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Naimi (2022) states that mediators working with asylum seekers or survivors of GBV often need to reconstruct fragmented and contradictory stories. This process requires a high degree of cognitive focus, as linguistic precision and continuous processing/rewording are needed. Nevertheless, it also increases the risk that mediators internalise the same effects of the survivors’ trauma, thus impairing their ability to process emotions and meanings effectively (Harvey, 2001).

An additional risk factor for the development of trauma symptoms in language mediators is the considerable ambiguity of their role. Their translation implies a high degree of linguistic and cultural construction of meaning, in relation to both the individual’s narrative and the requirements of their services. Adherence to the role of “communication facilitator” (Farini, 2012) exposes mediators to a higher risk of emotional overload, especially in contexts where the clients’ expectations are not aligned with institutional needs (Angelelli, 2004). This ambiguity can lead to long-term stress and burnout when mediators feel that their clients are being mistreated or unfairly judged by the authorities, as is often the case in asylum and refugee decisions (Hubscher-Davidson, 2021). In the most extreme cases, this tension can lead to a conflict defined as “emotional dissonance” between the required commitment to professional neutrality and the desire to support clients actively.

1.2 Addressing gaps in trauma-informed training and mental health support

The emotional and ethical landscape described above highlights the urgent need for targeted support systems. This brings into focus a critical gap: the lack of trauma-informed approaches tailored to the specific needs of language mediators working in high-demand and stressful environments. Overall, language mediators need to have access to structured, trauma-informed interventions that are linked to specialised training. Trauma-informed care (TIC) is based on key principles such as respecting the individual’s dignity, enhancing personal empowerment, and developing self-care techniques. Such strategies reduce the risk of retraumatisation for both the survivors and the professionals involved (SAMHSA, 2014). For language mediators, this means not only adopting a transparent and precise communication style, but also being culturally sensitive and aware of the dynamics of trauma. Evidence from the literature (Costa et al., 2020; Delizee et al., 2024) shows effective training programs. These practices include emotion regulation strategies and cognitive behavioural therapy techniques, such as mindfulness and grounding, integrating trauma theories and specific mediation processes from a multidisciplinary perspective (Bancroft et al., 2013, 2016, 2017). According to Farini (2012), other support strategies could be regular supervision and peer support groups, in order to provide mediators with a listening and sharing space where they can process their experiences and exchange coping strategies. In this context, initiatives such as the Colleagues Across Borders project (Costa, 2020) have already demonstrated that structured psychological support from qualified professionals can reduce the symptoms of vicarious trauma and improve

the overall quality of mediators' work. Despite the growing awareness of the impact of vicarious trauma and the proven effectiveness of support measures, specific training programs and institutional support to address these challenges remain extremely rare because of a lack of institutional resources. The existing literature highlights the reality that mediators working in mental health settings rarely receive specific training to cope with the emotional strain arising from the complexity of the context and their work (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2018; Rubini et al., 2024). Furthermore, researchers stress that only a small percentage of linguists have participated in training programs with specific modules on trauma or emotion regulation (Doherty et al., 2010). Similarly, Naimi (2022) argues that many mediators enter the profession without any formal training in this regard and learn primarily through direct experience. These unmet needs can increase the risk of burnout and affect the quality of mediators' performance. In addition to the lack of specific programs, qualitative studies reveal that many mediators work in isolation without the opportunity to interact with colleagues or professionals in order to process their often challenging experiences (Määttä, 2022).

2. Methodology

2.1 Project

Drawing on the existing literature and inspired by Beverly Costa's *In Other Words* (2017) and *In More Words* (2020), both of which are anthologies of interpreters' stories highlighting the complexities of multilingual communication, this project collects storytelling interviews with international language mediators working in contexts affected by GBV. This study seeks to identify the nuanced emotional and psychological dimensions of survivor-mediated dialogue, through a gendered lens. Furthermore, this contribution explores how mediators navigate the dual challenge of facilitating communication for survivors while simultaneously managing their own multilayered identities. Moreover, the project aims to publish an anthology as the final output for both the professional and the wider public audience.

2.2 Procedure

To select participants for the project, a call was issued aimed at language mediators. Clear guidelines, including submission requirements, deadlines, and thematic suggestions, were disseminated, encouraging participants to submit free, authentic, and reflective narratives in any language. They were required either to focus on specific case studies – high-risk or high-challenge situations – or to reflect on the general experience of working in the field.

2.3 Data analysis

In this preliminary study, 10 interviews (9 women and 1 man) were collected and combined into a single corpus. Subsequently, they were analysed after the lemmatisation process and the deletion of stop words. Two tools were used to analyse the data: Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) for sentiment analysis (Boyd, 2017) and T-LAB for corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Gillings et al., 2023). These tools provided a broad overview of the corpus, with quantitative data and deeper contextual information. Because the narratives served as the core data, after an initial test with LIWC, further hypotheses analysed in more detail with T-LAB were made. The mixed-method approach adopted, using these two software programs, combines the depth of personal storytelling with the generalisability and analytical rigour of computer-based tools. In particular, the application of the mixed-method approach requires careful planning and integration in several phases. In this specific case, the analysis was iterative, with separate initial data processing leading to a unified interpretation that prioritised the research question over methodological constraints, consistent with the pragmatist perspective (Tashakkori, 1998). Mixed-methods research, as emphasised by Rossman and

Wilson (1985) and Dörnyei (2007), evolves from concerns about indiscriminate combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods without any clear justification. The researchers recognise that combining these approaches can achieve more than triangulation, traditionally used to check the consistency of results. Instead, mixed methods allow for complementarity, where one method elaborates, refines, or challenges the findings of the other, creating a dynamic interplay between qualitative and quantitative dimensions (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Furthermore, there is a crucial advantage inherent in computerised quantitative analysis. According to Colucci and Montali (2008), the automation of the analysis increases its objectivity, as the subjective involvement of the researcher is limited to the interpretation of the results and does not influence either the selection or the coding of the core data.

2.3.1 Sentiment analysis

The sentiment analysis carried out with LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) identifies emotional valences in the text. For this purpose, the categories of emotional and social language were selected. The sentiment analysis through LIWC enables an exploration of topics such as intercultural communication, gendered experiences, and interpersonal relationships by anchoring the analysis in linguistic performance. LIWC (Pennebaker & Francis, 1999), now available in its latest version, LIWC2015, consists of two main components: a dictionary and the computer program itself. Over time, the LIWC lexicon has been translated into several languages, enabling cross-cultural research. To ensure reliability, the dictionary has been extensively validated using psychometric approaches (Pennebaker et al., 2015). Although the LIWC technique of counting words in specific categories oversimplifies the context, it often provides accurate psychological insights as language patterns naturally cluster (Boyd et al., 2016; Boyd, 2017). In the present study, this combination of results gained – sentiment scoring and thematic highlighting – provides a robust method for uncovering key patterns and relationships in the data.

2.3.2 Corpus-based discourse analysis

T-LAB, version 10.1.1, is a linguistic, statistical, and graphical tool for text analysis. The tool aims to identify complex topics that are particularly useful in various academic fields, especially in psychology. T-LAB uses automatic and semi-automatic methods that quickly highlight significant patterns of words, topics, and variables. It also applies pre-treatments, such as text segmentation, automatic lemmatisation, and automatic selection of keywords. In addition, the software makes it possible to distinguish between lexical units (LUs), such as words or lemmas, and contextual units (CUs), which are typical of the different parts of a single text (e.g., interviews of people belonging to the same category). For the interview corpus, the T-LAB features Occurrence, Keyword, and Co-Occurrence Detection are used to measure and analyse the relationships between the keywords. By analysing co-occurrence, it is possible to identify associations, thematic similarities, and shared meanings in the text to identify the relationships between signifiers and take on meaningful forms that “suggest a contextual representation of meaning” (Lancia, 2004: 10) through co-occurrence patterns. Specifically, T-LAB in social psychology is useful for analysing phenomena such as immigration and social inequality and proves particularly effective in examining social constructions, collective perceptions, and public discourses on these topics by identifying semantic networks, central themes, and discourse patterns.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Emotion metrics

Table 1: Emotion metrics (LIWC)

WC	Authentic	Tone	Affect	Tone_pos	Tone_neg	Emotion	Emo_pos	Emo_neg	Emo_anxiety	Emo_anger	Emo_sadness
8237	62.82	35.36	4.42	2.62	1.55	1.42	0.44	0.74	0.19	0.08	0.11

The results (Table 1) show how language reflects emotional engagement, particularly in the sensitive areas of trauma and gender-specific conflict mediation. At the top of the list is the high score for authenticity (62.82%), which indicates a deeply personal and authentic tone in discourse. This level of authenticity is not just a stylistic choice: it also indicates that the speakers or mediators are drawing directly from their lived experiences or emotionally charged interactions. Their narratives likely convey not just facts, but also the emotional truths behind the situations they are living through. In this sense, authenticity becomes a means of creating resonance and trust, essential in trauma-related contexts where connection and credibility are crucial.

However, authenticity alone cannot protect speakers from the emotional toll that is evident in the results. Tonality analysis revealed a complex interplay of positive and negative elements, with an overall score of 35.36%. While there is a tendency towards positivity (tone_pos at 2.62%), there is an undertone of negativity (tone_neg at 1.55%). This duality suggests mediators maintain a positive outlook even when confronted with harsh realities. Such a balance of tone may reflect their professional need to promote hope and solutions while dealing with emotionally distressing content. The affective use of language (4.42%) provides further insight into the emotional fabric of this discourse. The low percentage indicates that explicit emotional expression is restrained. This reticence may reflect professional boundaries or the need for emotional regulation in discussions where the stakes are high. Nevertheless, the details reveal a more poignant story. Positive emotions were barely noted at only 0.44%, suggesting that expressions of joy or contentment are rare. Negative emotions (0.74%) are more pronounced and are characterised by specific subgroups such as anxiety (0.19%), sadness (0.11%), and anger (0.08%). Among these, anxiety was the most pronounced, indicating the stress and tension to which mediators are regularly exposed in the course of their work. This could be due to the fact that they are operating in a very tense environment where the outcome is uncertain, the stakes are high, and the emotional weight of the people they are helping can become a shared burden. The presence of sadness emphasises the deep connection mediators are likely to feel with the people and the communities they help. It is an emotional testimony to the gravity of the issues at stake – trauma, loss, and systemic injustice. Meanwhile, anger, while less common, cannot be dismissed altogether.

3.2 Social metrics

Table 2: Social metrics (LIWC)

WC	Drives	Affiliation	Achieve	Power	Social	Social behavior	Prosocial	Conflict	Moral	Community	Culture	Ethnicity
8234	4.87	2.45	1.11	1.37	16.82	6.8	1.53	0.22	0.26	3.17	0.9	0.6

The social metrics (Table 2), however, emphasise the fundamental importance of social behaviour and interaction, as evidenced by the considerable 16.82% of words related to social

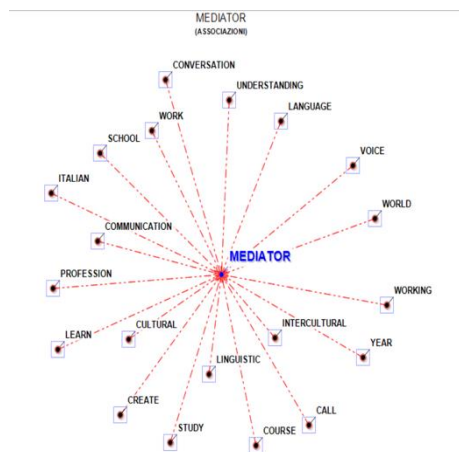
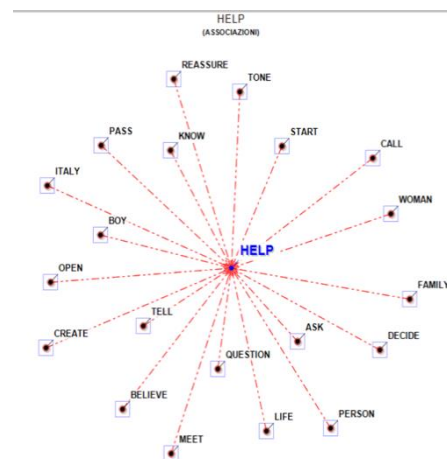
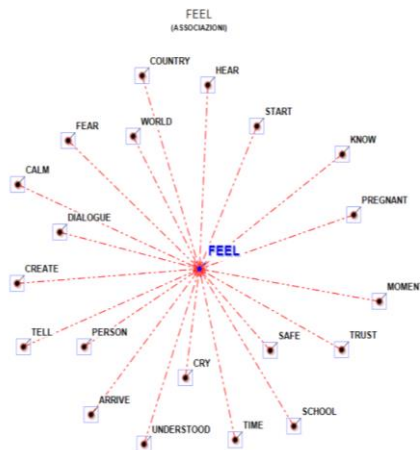
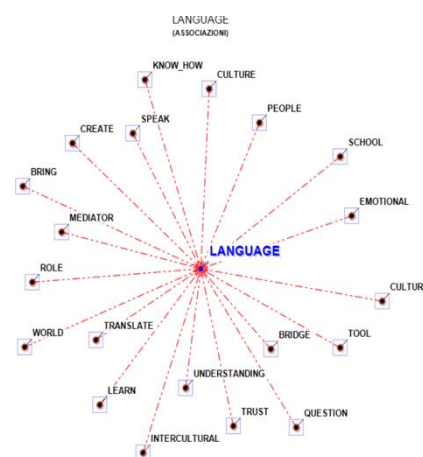
language. This significant proportion suggests that the discourse between mediators and migrants is deeply rooted in relational themes and reflects how individuals connect and collaborate in their social environment, particularly in addressing sensitive personal and community challenges such as migration and GBV. Within this broad social focus, the score of 2.45% for affiliation underlines a moderate but significant focus on belonging and group dynamics. This theme of belonging reflects the importance of community and solidarity and suggests that speakers often situate themselves within a framework of collective identity and mutual support systems. Furthermore, the prosocial metric, at 1.53%, introduces an additional layer of positivity into the discourse, reflecting deliberate expressions of cooperation and constructive social interactions, where solutions are worked out through collective effort and mutual understanding. Interestingly, despite the difficult topics discussed, the sentiment analysis uncovers little conflictual or moralising language, as shown in the table, suggesting that divisive or confrontational rhetoric is deliberately avoided. This lack of polarising language likely reflects a strategic and disciplined approach by all parties in order to maintain a focus on understanding and resolution and to avoid escalation in contexts where tensions can easily arise.

3.3 Frequencies, collocations, and co-occurrences

Table 3: Table of occurrences (T-LAB)

ITEM (N = 189)	N_CE
MEDIATOR	29
ASK	25
PEOPLE	24
TELL	22
STORY	21
HELP	21
KNOW	20
WORD	19
TIME	18
LANGUAGE	18
PERSON	18
WORK	17
FEEL	16
LISTEN	15

The table of occurrences (Table 3) highlights several keywords selected within a threshold of 15 occurrences, including *mediator* (29 occurrences), *help* (21), *language* (18), and *feeling* (16). These keywords were selected for their statistical relevance and for their ability to represent the complex interchange between mediators' professional tasks and their emotional engagement. After opting for the four most important keywords, chi-square tests were conducted for each selected term to check for associated co-occurrences. The results of the tests performed by T-LAB and some extracts from the collected interviews are presented in order to demonstrate the co-occurrence between these terms and the most impactful aspects of the mediators' narratives.

Figure 1: Co-occurrences of *MEDIATOR* (T-LAB)Figure 2: Co-occurrences of *HELP* (T-LAB)Figure 3: Co-occurrences of *FEEL* (T-LAB)Figure 4: Co-occurrences of *LANGUAGE* (T-LAB)

The graphic representation associated with the term “mediator” (Figure 1) emphasises its role not only in linguistic translation but also in cultural and emotional processes. As the results show, this term frequently co-occurs with terms such as “communication,” “profession,” “linguistic,” and “creation,” reflecting the role of mediators as crucial actors in promoting intercultural dialogue. In particular, for the co-occurrence of “mediator” and “intercultural,” the chi-square test shows a significant correlation ($\chi^2(1) = 29.72, p < 0.001$), indicating a strong relationship between these two words. The frequent “mediator”–“intercultural” pairing illustrates the mediator’s ability to promote understanding across linguistic and cultural divides and to manage intercultural communication. One mediator states:

The role of an intercultural language mediator is not only to translate words from one language to another but above all to carefully select the words to be used so that they do not become obstacles, but instead promote understanding and trust.

The example illustrates how the mediator is aware of the words they use and their impact on the client’s representation. The right choice of words enables the most vulnerable to feel welcomed and heard, reducing their feelings of anxiety and fear. The extract also emphasises that mediators use language strategically to build bridges rather than to erect barriers, reflecting their dual responsibility as linguistic and emotional facilitators.

The term “help” (Figure 2) is associated with words like “ask,” “tell,” “believe,” and “reassure,” underscoring the dynamic interplay of trust, reliance, and guidance between mediators and migrants. This analysis points out the purpose of the mediator in addressing complex emotional and practical challenges for those seeking their help. The co-occurrence of the words “help” and “ask” is also significant, as shown by the results of the chi-square test ($\chi^2(1) = 11.75, p < 0.001$). For example, as one mediator recounts:

Days passed and I lost count until one day a Senegalese boy who spoke English came. Finally, I could ask for help, but I did not know whether to trust him or not. I was afraid he would tell the madame.

This narrative describes the precarious psychophysical state of the people who ask for protection and help. Due to the violence that they have experienced both before and during their migration journey, there is usually a high level of fear and uncertainty as to whether they can rely on the help of those in charge. In these contexts, the role of the mediator is crucial so that clients recognise this figure as a reliable ally who can manage the complex emotional dynamics at play.

The graphic representation related to “feel” (Figure 3) highlights the mediators’ efforts to promote emotional safety and shows common associations with terms such as “safe,” “cry,” “dialogue,” and “fear.” The visual elements draw attention to the mediators’ empathy-driven actions and their dual role in mitigating clients’ anxiety while managing their emotional well-being. Subsequent analysis of the co-occurrences of the keyword “feel” revealed a significant association with both terms “safe” ($\chi^2(1) = 16.35, p < 0.001$) and “cry” ($\chi^2(1) = 17.56, p = 0.00$). The pairing of “feel” and “safe” underscores the focus on emotional reassurance, which mediators strive to provide, drawing attention to the essential role of creating safe environments in mediation contexts. One mediator explains:

I need to find the right words to make that person feel heard and protected while guiding them through a system that, as complex as it may be, should not be perceived as a threat.

This example illustrates the mediator’s careful approach to communication and underscores the key role of sensitivity to linguistic accuracy and emotional resonance. By making sure that the survivor feels “heard and protected,” the mediator can mitigate the intrinsic power imbalance in institutional settings and transform bureaucratic procedures into empowering experiences for the survivor. In addition, the “feel”–“cry” pairing illustrates the emotional strain that mediators constantly experience in the practice of their profession, as can be observed in the following two excerpts:

Right at that moment, R. starts to cry uncontrollably. My heart breaks with pain because I can feel how hurt she is, but I must remain professional. How do you deal with feelings in times like this? I know she is also pregnant. No prejudice, no anger, no emotions – professional. It’s a mantra I say to myself all the time.

She tells me that as soon as she saves enough money, she reaches Tunisia. She immediately looks for work, but it is very difficult because the colour of her skin is not accepted. She is kicked out of every place and finds herself on the street again. I take her hands again, which is the only thing I can do. She cries continuously. I feel tired.

These examples illustrate the emotional dissonance mediators experience when listening to particularly traumatic stories that evoke feelings of deep-seated fear, powerlessness, and frustration. However, as shown in the first example from the mantra “No prejudice, no anger, no emotions – professional,” mediators feel compelled to maintain a consistent neutrality in order to fulfil their professional duties without having effective coping strategies to deal with the emotional distress. Moreover, as described in the second example, emotional overload is

often linked to ethical challenges; thus, the mediator's ability to intervene in the face of narratives of severe injustice and marginalisation is limited to largely symbolic gestures.

Lastly, the visual association associated with the word "language" (Figure 4) underscores the transformative potential of language when used strategically to build mutual understanding and foster authentic dialogue. In addition, the chi-square test for the co-occurrence of the terms "language" and "bridge" yielded a significant result ($\chi^2(1) = 15.19, p < 0.001$), indicating a strong association between the two words. One mediator explains:

My role is not only to build a bridge between two languages but also between two world views and two perceptions of justice, bureaucracy, and institutions. Our job is to simplify, humanise, and build trust by finding ways to transform language from a barrier into a tool for dialogue.

Language is thus a powerful means of communication that establishes connections between different schemes, representations, and paradigms that are, in extreme cases, completely contradictory.

Overall, a gender-sensitive approach is crucial since it recognises the unique, gender-specific dimensions of violence, especially GBV, and the different abovementioned linguistic and cultural challenges. The current results emphasise that in this way, survivors feel understood and empowered and are not isolated or prevented from seeking help. Gender-sensitive mediation can better protect survivors from being trapped in cycles of abuse and create a more attentive and inclusive support system (UN Women, 2023). However, the stress associated with witnessing and processing traumatic experiences puts mediators at significant risk of becoming victims of trauma themselves. In this sense, the results highlight the need for a systematic support framework, which this project addresses by proposing supervision sessions led by experienced professionals, such as psychotherapists, alongside community-oriented peer support groups (Anderson, 2011). This integrated support model enhances individual well-being, strengthens professional efficiency, and reduces the risk of burnout (Bontempo & Malcolm, 2012). The results suggest that structured, consistent support sessions promote mediators' overall well-being and improve both their self-care skills and their professional effectiveness (Holmgren et al., 2003). These support mechanisms are consistent with the trauma-informed care approach, which aims to understand the impact of trauma and ensure that systems support those who are exposed to trauma (Kimberg & Wheeler, 2019). These elements underline the need to adopt such intervention programmes as best practices that serve as ethical imperatives and not as optional measures.

4. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, as the discussion suggested, although mediators play a professional role not sufficiently recognised in Italy, they bridge cultural boundaries and provide crucial support in traumatic contexts such as migration and GBV, as highlighted in the results shown above. Overall, the findings underline that policymakers need to officially address language mediation as an essential profession within the legal, asylum, and healthcare systems (Vaccarelli, 2024). This includes the establishment of professional standards, the introduction of certification procedures, and the integration of mediation services into national policies on migration and GBV. As with other social professions, a national register for language mediators should be considered. This would ensure professional recognition, regulate access to the profession, and provide a structured framework for training, accreditation, and career progression. Secondly, governments and international organisations should ensure fair working conditions and adequate remuneration for language mediators. This requires the introduction of minimum wage regulations, employment contracts with clear conditions, and structured career paths that provide professional stability. Ensuring adequate working conditions will reduce the turnover

rate and improve the quality of mediation services. Thirdly, legal protection for mediators needs to be strengthened (Filmer & Federici, 2018). This includes creating a legal framework that not only defines their role, rights, and obligations but also ensures protection against workplace exploitation. Finally, institutions need to establish clear ethical guidelines and standardised practices to regulate mediation work in sensitive contexts. These guidelines should define the scope of professional impartiality, confidentiality, and the ethical boundaries of mediation. The introduction of a code of conduct would provide mediators with clear professional expectations and improve the overall accountability and effectiveness of their role. In defining ethical and training guidelines, applying a TIC approach means implementing practical measures to recognise the impact of trauma and integrate this awareness into all professional practices in order to reduce the risk of retraumatisation (Im et al., 2021).

The practical applications of this approach should ideally follow a few basic principles:

- Training and awareness for professionals are fundamental to providing mediators, social workers, and healthcare professionals with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of trauma-informed mediation (Toledano Buendía, 2019; Giraffa Onlus, 2019). A thorough understanding of the psychological and physiological effects of trauma, as well as its different manifestations in different cultures, is crucial for designing sensitive and effective interventions. By integrating a gender-sensitive training framework, professionals can develop an awareness of power dynamics, institutional biases, and cultural sensitivities and ensure that their practice is grounded in survivor-centred approaches. In pragmatic terms, training programmes should include real-life case studies and scenario-based learning to enhance their practical application. To bridge geographical and institutional differences, digital training modules, e-learning platforms, and webinars need to be utilised to ensure that professional development is both accessible and up-to-date. The dissemination of updated guidelines, research findings, and best practices through professional networks and social media further supports a dynamic and informed mediation workforce.

- Customised interventions tailored to gender, culture, and life experiences must be prioritised in all mediation settings and take into account the deep intersection of gender, culture, and life experiences in shaping a survivor's perspective (Jolof et al., 2024). Language mediation should not be a rigid process, but one that adapts to the survivor's preferences and comfort level. The ability to select a mediator who has linguistic and cultural commonalities fosters trust and creates an environment in which survivors can communicate without fear of misinterpretation or bias. In addition to linguistic accuracy, cultural competence plays an essential role in mediation. It ensures that the service provider is aware of the nuances of the survivor's background, particularly in relation to gender roles, religious considerations, and socio-political contexts. Trauma-informed practices (Campanella, 2022, 2023) must also tailor mediation techniques to individual experiences. For example, survivors of protracted violence or displacement may need a slower, more patient approach, while those with specific trauma triggers may need an environment that minimises stressors. Giving survivors a sense of ownership over the mediation process by allowing them to decide on their mediator, language preferences, and customisation of the process will increase their autonomy and restore their control over their story.

- Creating physically and psychologically safe mediation spaces is a prerequisite for ethical and effective mediation (Costa et al., 2020). Safety goes beyond physical protection and includes survivors' emotional and psychological well-being. The environment in which mediation takes place should be private, neutral, and carefully structured to avoid intimidation and fear. Safe spaces for women and girls in women's shelters, community centres, and specialist crisis intervention centres provide optimal conditions for mediation as they are designed to be free from external threats or influences that could retraumatise survivors. These spaces should be designed to reduce power imbalances, whether through the spatial

arrangement of the seating, the presence of supportive professionals, or the provision of mechanisms that allow survivors to interrupt or terminate the process when necessary. Trauma-informed principles should be embedded in all mediation settings to ensure that professionals remain patient, avoid abrupt questioning, and pay attention to non-verbal signs of distress. Psychological comfort is equally important and requires a calm and reassuring environment where survivors feel heard and validated. In contexts such as healthcare and justice, these principles need to be adapted accordingly, with additional safeguards in place to ensure the dignity and respect of survivors throughout the mediation process.

- The use of inclusive and sensitive communication techniques underpins the entire mediation process, recognising that language itself can either empower or alienate a survivor (Toledano Buendía, 2019). Mediators must use neutral, non-judgemental language and avoid phrases that implicitly blame or reinforce any social stigma. The terminology used should place survivors at the centre and acknowledge their experiences while respecting their agency in defining their narrative. Complex questions should be avoided in favour of open-ended prompts that encourage survivors to tell their story at their own pace. The use of leading or coercive questions must be avoided in order to ensure that survivors do not feel pressured into giving a particular answer. Active listening, validation, and sensitivity to linguistic nuances contribute to a communication environment in which survivors feel respected and in control. Mediation should aim to minimise the need for survivors to repeat distressing details multiple times in order to reduce the risk of emotional exhaustion and retraumatisation.

- Support from professionals through supervision and peer networks is important to ensure the well-being of language mediators, who are often faced with vicarious trauma and emotional exhaustion (Costa et al., 2020). Establishing regular supervision sessions, debriefing mechanisms, and peer support groups can provide mediators with important coping strategies and ensure that they are not left alone with their emotional burdens. Digital platforms are playing an increasingly important role in this area. Online forums, professional networks, and structured mentoring initiatives provide spaces where mediators can exchange experiences, share best practices, and receive psychological support. The bilingual forum of the Pásalo project¹ serves as an exemplary model that demonstrates how structured digital communities can promote resilience and professional development. Such spaces allow facilitators to network across geographical boundaries, strengthening collective knowledge and emotional well-being. In addition to peer networking, an institutional commitment to providing mental health resources, crisis debriefing, and access to professional counselling also contributes to the sustainability of trauma-informed mediation processes.

- Drawing on the findings of the SOS-VICS project,² this study argues in particular for the systematic integration of accessible multilingual materials in the areas of law, healthcare, and asylum. Clear, rights-based information in multiple languages, provided via printed guides, digital platforms, and audiovisual aids, will enable those affected to navigate services and make informed decisions. In addition, cultural mediation techniques must be used to help survivors contextualise their experiences within institutional settings, bridge gaps in understanding, and improve engagement with support systems.

However, despite the valuable nature of this work and the insights that it provides, the sample size remains restricted, which could limit the generalizability of the results. To strengthen the validity and depth of the results, an expansion of the sample would allow for a broader representation of voices and experiences. In addition, comparative analysis – examining variations between demographic groups, contexts, or periods – could lead to more comprehensive results and highlight patterns or variations that might be overlooked in a single

¹ For more on this topic, visit <https://www.pasaloproject.org/bilingual-forum.html>.

² For more on this topic, visit <https://sosvics.eintegra.es/>.

analysis, especially one of this small sample size. This approach would improve the overall rigour and applicability of the current study's tentative conclusions.

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