TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE MEDIATION. PROCESSES AND ACTIONS TO SOLVE VARIOUS LANGUAGE PROBLEMS IN ALL FIELDS.

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As I start writing this article and outlining the first paragraphs, I immediately realise that my word processor underlines the Catalan verb *mediar* [to mediate] in red, despite having the latest language update installed on my computer. This warning normally appears when you write a word that doesn't exist in the dictionary, whether because we've made a typo, borrowed a word from another language or because it's a newly coined word that the dictionary's editorial team still hasn't had time to include in the tool. But, how come the verb *mediar* doesn't exist in the Catalan dictionary, but the noun *mediació* [mediation] appears without that exasperating red underlining? The answer perhaps lies in the fact that, as a society, we're perfectly aware of the importance of mediation as a conflict management tool between two or more parties, that is, the noun, but we find it harder to know how we do this, the verb. So much so that we still haven't included it in the dictionary.

Since ancient times, mediation has often been left to specialists. Merchants from the ancient world already mediated between producers and consumers, matchmakers mediated between men and women who wanted to get married, go-betweens mediated between illicit lovers, public notaries mediate between owners and buyers, scientists mediate between the natural world and the uninitiated, lawyers and judges mediate between accusers and the accused, the clergy mediate between the divinity and the faithful... and all these forms of mediation have always taken place, and still do, through language.

In today's information society, there's a greater need for mediation than ever, because our intellectual activity is mainly based on producing knowledge and communicating it to the general public. Knowledge is always 'mediated', through language and in all kinds of ordinary situations. We all mediate constantly, given that mediation itself is a social action to solve conflicts or misunderstandings, as well as to reach agreements. We mediate when doing business, when attending a conference and taking notes, when traveling, when visiting a museum, when teaching a subject... we mediate all the time and everywhere.

The latest evidence of this came to me during a recent trip to the city of Málaga for a conference for foreign language teachers and education professionals, where the concept of language mediation was discussed in depth. After the conference was over, and to fill in the time before flying back to Barcelona, I decided to pay the Centre Pompidou Málaga a visit to see its contemporary art exhibits. As if by chance, when I walked into the room, I spotted some museum staff wearing a T-shirt with the word 'mediator' printed on the back. On my phone, I checked the institution's website to see what this service consisted of, and it says:

> *"Mediation is a way to access creation based on interaction to turn art into a meeting point for diverse perspectives and experiences. Mediation at Centre Pompidou Málaga has been specifically designed for each exhibit and takes into account the kind of public it is aimed*

*at (residents of Málaga, tourists, groups...) of-
fering an adapted service that encourages the
public to discover the works.*
*It adapts both to people who are unfamiliar
with modern and contemporary art and to an
experienced audience through a sensitive ap-
proach that encourages the public to have a
unique experience with the work of art."*
Text translated from Spanish.

I'll come back to the museum's website fur-
ther on. For now, and given that mediation
is part of many ordinary situations, I'll merely
focus on the need to give it the importance
that it's due and the role it plays in teaching/
learning foreign languages, including it in the
corresponding curriculums in order to edu-
cate competent users that know how to me-
diate in these languages.

What is language mediation?

Language mediation, like any kind of media-
tion, is the action of those who intervene be-
tween two or more people to solve a conflict
or reach an agreement. In this case, our con-
flict isn't a neighbourly argument or failure to
fulfil a commercial agreement, but a linguistic
conflict between two or more people who are
unable to communicate directly for whichev-
er reason.

The concept of mediation already appeared
in Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1896-
1934). This Russian psychologist centred
his studies on observing cognitive develop-
ment in children and concluded that culture
and communication play a decisive role in
learning, understood as a personal develop-
ment process. Vygotsky observed that what
he calls *higher mental functions* always oc-
cur through social interactions with relevant
people in the child's life, mainly their family
environment, but also other people such as
teachers, classmates, etc. Through these

interactions, a child acquires what Vygotsky
calls the *mental habits* of their culture, which
among several elements include speech pat-
terns, written language and other symbolic
knowledge through which the child builds
meaning and, subsequently, also expands
their knowledge. Vygotsky calls this process
'cultural mediation' and summarises it in the
concept of Zone of Proximal Development
(ZPD), which is defined as:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/

"the distance between
the actual develop-
ment level as deter-
mined by independent
problem-solving and
the level of poten-
tial development as
determined through
problem-solving un-
der adult guidance or
in collaboration with
more capable peers."

In 2001, The Council of Europe published
the Common European Framework of Ref-
erence for Languages (CEFR) in order to
"*provide a common basis for the elaboration
of language syllabuses, curriculum guide-
lines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across
Europe*" and to "*describe in a comprehen-
sive way what language learners have to
learn to do in order to use a language for
communication and what knowledge and
skills they have to develop so as to be able
to act effectively*". Thus, this objective to de-
scribe what a language user has to learn to
do helps define the language activities that
activate language competence. These lan-
guage are reception, production, interaction
and mediation. Specifically, regarding medi-
ation, it states that:

"...the written and/or oral activities of media-
tion make communication possible between
persons who are unable, for whatever rea-

son, to communicate with each other direct-
ly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase,
summary or record, provides for a third party
a (re)formulation of a source text to which this
third party does not have direct access. Me-
diating language activities – (re)processing an
existing text – occupy an important place in
the normal linguistic functioning of our socie-
ties."
CEFR (2001), page 14.

Therefore, for the first time, the concept of
competent user goes beyond an individual
that must know how to write, read, listen to
or speak a certain language, but this same
individual must also know how to interact
and mediate in this same language.

A noteworthy aspect is also the relationship
between interaction and mediation. The
CEFR (2001) states:

"In interaction at least two individuals partic-
ipate in an oral and/or written exchange in
which production and reception alternate and
may in fact overlap in oral communication. Not
only may two interlocutors be speaking and
yet listening to each other simultaneously.
Even where turn-taking is strictly respected,
the listener is generally already forecasting the
remainder of the speaker's message and pre-
paring a response. Learning to interact thus
involves more than learning to receive and to
produce utterances. High importance is gen-
erally attributed to interaction in language use
and learning in view of its central role in com-
munication."
CEFR (2001), page 14.

Reading the previous paragraph, we may be-
lieve that mediation is also interaction, and to
a certain extent this perception is right but
incomplete. Interaction is a single two-way
process between the producer and receiv-
er(s), based on action-reaction. Whereas
mediation includes a third element, the me-

diator, who interacts both with the producer
and the receiver, but also selects the input
information, adapts it and/or reformulates it,
creating a new text.
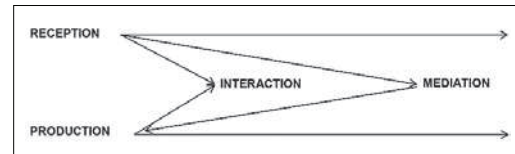
CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors, page 32.

Considering that the document was pub-
lished by the Council of Europe, we could
say that the term *mediation* thus takes on a
political dimension. Europeans want a soci-
ety where language speakers can mediate
between these languages, and this is why
we promote language policies that enable
communication and interaction between Eu-
ropeans with different source languages that
favour mobility, mutual understanding, coop-
eration within Europe and help to overcome
prejudices and discrimination. Everyone can
confirm that our more immediate environ-
ment is becoming more and more pluricultur-
al and plurilingual and for this reason there is
a 'political' need for European citizens of the
21st century to mediate between cultures
and languages.

CEFR's concept of mediation, although in-
spired by Vygotsky's concept of *cultural
mediation* as a process of personal devel-
opment, is limited to the language activity
of 'bridging the gap' between two or more
people who are unable to communicate for
whichever reason. This same document, in
sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2, includes a list of
both oral and written mediation activities,
which prominently features translation and
interpretation and, to a lesser extent, sum-
marising or reformulating texts. Therefore,
we could say that CEFR's concept of medi-
ation, published in 2001, is closely related to
translation and interpretation.

Despite the relevance of including mediation in CEFR's list of language activities, the text only mentions it in passing. For the other language activities (reception, production and interaction), the CEFR provides what are known as scales. These scales establish the categories required to describe the different aspects of each language activity in detail. Through descriptors, each scale distinguishes between the different language learning achievement levels: A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) or C2 (Mastery). Surprisingly, the CEFR (2001) doesn't offer scales for mediation. This means that the people in charge of setting curriculums, developing assessment tests or writing textbooks don't take enough care when it comes to mediation. It isn't until the Council of Europe's publication of the *Companion Volume with new descriptors (CV)* in 2018 that a new definition of language mediation is established, the list of mediating activities and strategies required from a competent language user is extended and a set of scales is provided that helps include mediation in curriculums and language learning assessments.

What types of language mediation are there?

In 2015, The Council of Europe published the document *Education, mobility, otherness. The mediation functions of schools* (Coste and Cavalli, 2015) which delves into the concept of mediation.

The new approach is based on the fact that in mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who bridges the gap and helps to build or communicate meanings, sometimes within the same language (intralinguistic mediation), sometimes from one language to another (interlinguistic mediation). It focuses on

language's role in processes such as creating space and conditions to communicate and/or learn, collaborating in creating new meanings, encouraging others to build or understand a new meaning and to communicate new information adequately. The context may be social, educational, cultural, linguistic or professional.

The document provides a richer perspective of mediation, interpreted as:

> "any procedure, arrangement or action designed [...] to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness".
> *Education, mobility, otherness. The mediation functions of schools, page 27.*

Mediation, according to Coste and Cavalli, enables access to knowledge, the reduction of tensions and affective blockades and the construction of bridges towards what is new, towards the other.

This new approach provides us with the first large difference between translating and mediating. Mediation always involves transferring information from an oral, written or multimodal (combining more than two modes of communication; text, audio, image...) input to a recipient who doesn't have direct access to it. In the case of interlinguistic mediation, this obstacle may only be the recipient's ignorance of the input language, which necessarily involves translation from one language to another. However, intralinguistic mediation is based on creating a new text in the same language as the input, given that the obstacle doesn't lie in the recipient's inability to understand the language, but in a linguistic 'conflict' generated by other causes.

The obstacle can take many forms, such as:

- Sociocultural aspects. A person can be proficient in a language but still require a mediator

to understand an input about a certain tradition, historic event, folklore element or local event. For example, when someone tries to understand the public transport fare system of a city when visiting it for the first time.

- Language register. A competent adult may require a mediator to understand slang spoken by youngsters, for example.
- Level of knowledge on a subject. Occasionally, a proficient speaker may need a mediator to understand an input from a field of knowledge very different to their own.
- Channel. For example, a proficient user who can't access a medium (a webinar on the Internet, an interview on the radio...) and asks a mediator to summarise it for them.
- Textual. It involves a change in the text's format. A proficient user who doesn't have time to read a long report and asks a mediator to make a list of the most relevant aspects, for example.
- ...

This difference between intralinguistic and interlinguistic mediation is brought to light in the formulation of the mediation scale descriptors in *Companion Volume with new descriptors (2018)*.

C1	Can explain (in language B) the relevance of specific information found in a particular section of a long, complex text (written in Language A).

RELAYING SPECIFIC INFORMATION IN SPEECH scale (CV, 2018, page 107)

The CV itself clarifies that language A and language B can be two different languages, two different variants of the same language, two registers of the same variety or any combination of the above. They can also be identical.

What's the difference between mediating and translating?

As we've already mentioned, the concept of mediation that the CEFR presented in 2001

was closely connected to the concept of translation and interpretation. In fact, in section 4.4.4., when it lists the mediating activities and strategies that any competent language user must be able to perform or carry out, the following introductory paragraph precedes it:

"In mediating activities, **the language user is not concerned to express his/her own meanings**, but simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. Examples of mediating activities include spoken interpretation and written translation as well as summarising and paraphrasing texts in the same language, when the language of the original text is not understandable to the intended recipient."
CEFR (2001), page 87.

Some examples of mediating activities are provided, such as simultaneous interpretation at conferences or meetings, consecutive interpretation for welcome speeches or guided tours, informal interpretation in everyday situations, specialised translation of contracts or legal and scientific texts, literary translation, summarising the gist of newspaper and magazine articles, paraphrasing specialised texts for lay persons, etc.

In 2006, Professor Bessie Dendrinos of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens published an article titled '*Mediation in communication, language teaching and testing*' in the *Journal of Applied Linguistics*. This article has largely influenced the development of the concept of language mediation. Dendrinos was the person responsible for the National Foreign Language Exam System (KPG), a centre that depends on the University of Athens in charge of writing and administering large-scale certification tests in different foreign languages (English,

French, German, Italian, Spanish and Turkish). The KPG tests were the first European certification tests that included mediation tasks in their specifications, the result of prior research work that the institution carried out within this language activity.

In her article, Dendrinos reflects on the role of the mediator and attempts to respond to the question "Who is a mediator?" or better yet, "What does a mediator do?". First, Dendrinos rejects the definition given by the CEFR (2001) specifying that during mediating activities "the language user is not concerned to express his/her own meanings". Dendrinos declares:

> "The aforementioned definition sounds somewhat strange considering that any person involved in communication is a-priori concerned with his/her own meanings because, otherwise, it is impossible for him/her to make sense of things and to participate in an exchange (of meanings). Perhaps it would be better to say not concerned with his/her own ideas, opinions, point of view…"

Taking into account that the communication goal of a mediating activity is facilitating communication between two parties to help them resolve a communication conflict or problem, the mediator requires a more thorough understanding of what is said or written. Based on this, Dendrinos makes a list of the qualities that a competent mediator must have.

For Dendrinos, a competent mediator is:

- A social actor whose task is supervising the interaction process between two parties and intervene when necessary to contribute to good communication between them or even influence the result of the interaction. That is, a mediator 'actively develops a task' in the communication process.

- A facilitator in social events whose task is providing the information necessary to overcome the communication barriers that may exist between both parties. That is, a mediator 'contributes prior knowledge' to the communication process.

- A negotiator or creator of meaning whose task is developing new meanings, especially in situations that require a reconciliation, agreement or commitment. That is, a mediator 'contributes new ideas' to the communication process.

- An arbitrator of meaning whose task is deciding the meaning of what has been said or written in cases where, for example, the parties have different cultural or linguistic contexts, in order to solve the conflict. That is, a mediator 'explains what the parties mean' in the communication process.

From everything that has been said above, we can clearly see that there is a substantial difference between the concept of mediating and translating (or interpreting). Translating is a specialised activity that requires accuracy when transferring the contents of the text from one language to another, where the translator isn't one of the actors participating in the interaction, but remains in the background.

Neither translators or interpreters appear in any way within the speech produced, don't express their personal view on a topic, or their opinion, and aren't participants in a communication exchange. They remain true to the original text. They don't have 'the right' to change the discourse, genre or register of the text produced or resort to indirect speech.

Whereas mediators actively participate in the communication, becoming participants and therefore transforming a two-dimensional ex-

change of information into a three-way inter-action. Mediators must interpret the meanings and use options that they believe will be useful to the other participants, given their communication needs. They choose which messages they want to transfer and which information details they want to communicate, using their own discretion to decide what might be relevant or of interest to the other participants. The information communicated is often in the form of a summary or report that only includes the details considered relevant to overcome a specific communication conflict. What's included in the summary exclusively depends on the context of the communication and the conflict to be resolved.

Mediation has a social dimension, in fact, it's a social practice through which participants create 'shared' meanings in communication processes where negotiating meaning and transferring specific information are required.

What do we need to mediate?

Once we've described *what* a competent mediator does (social actor, facilitator, negotiator of meaning and arbitrator), to provide a good description on the kinds of characteristics they should have, we must delve into *what they need* to do so.

Analysing the actions of foreign language learners on different mediation tasks brings to light the fact that mediation, whether spoken or written, is a complex activity that consists of other language activities and that mediating communication is always immersed in a sociocultural context.

This leads to the conclusion that a good mediator must have certain knowledge of the world, drawn from experience and social participation. This allows them to effectively participate in communication activities within the aforementioned sociocultural context. They also need linguistic conscience regarding how the language or languages that the interaction is occurring in work. They must know how the discourse occurs, which genres or textual register are appropriate for the situation, which is the usage of the language, that is, which relationships and connections there are between a language (grammar and vocabulary) and the sociocultural means in which it works and exists. Finally, they also need multicultural competence that allows them to bridge the gap between the cultures that participate in the communication encounter.

As well as knowledge, they must also have communication competences. Language competence, understood as the ability to speak, allows the mediator to create understandable messages. To do so, the mediator will require an adequate lexical repertoire, grammatical correctness and command of the vocabulary, the phonological system and accurate spelling. They'll also need sociolinguistic competence, understood as the ability to adequately produce and understand linguistic expressions in different usage contexts, where variable factors occur such as the participants' situation and the relationship between them, their communication intentions, the communication event that they're participating in and the interaction rules and conventions that regulate it. Finally, they'll also need pragmatic competence that allows them to use verbal and non-verbal resources to promote effectiveness during communication.

A good mediator must also have the social and cognitive skills that allow them to produce information, receive it and interact with others. A person who works in mediation requires a well-developed degree of emotional intelligence that allows them to show enough

empathy to understand the points of view and emotional states of the other participants in the communication situation. This attitude ensures the communication and cooperation required to solve any delicate situation or tension that may arise.

What are mediating activities?

As we've already mentioned, the publication of the *Companion Volume* in 2018 had a remarkable impact on the world of language teaching and learning. Regarding mediation, the new document not only elaborated on the concept, compared to the CEFR (2001) where it was basically associated to translation and interpretation, but also offered 24 scales on mediating activities and strategies, each with descriptors referring to CEFR's six levels of competence (from A1 to C2).
True to CEFR's taxonomic nature of attempting to describe the sheer complexity of human language, that is, defining what we mean when we talk about communicative language competence, and also in order to achieve a higher degree of concision regarding what we mean when we talk about language mediation activities, the *Companion Volume* (2018) offers a list of mediation activities classified into three main groups.

It also offers a scale that generically describes what a language user can do with the highest level of competence (C2) when it comes to mediation. It describes it as follows:

OVERALL MEDIATION
C2 Can mediate effectively and naturally, taking on different roles according to the needs of the people and situation involved, identifying nuances and undercurrents ang guiding a sensitive or delicate discussion. Can explain in clear, fluent, wellstructured language the way facts and arguments are presented, conveying evaluative aspects and most nuances precisely, and pointing out sociocultural implications (e.g. use of register, understatement, irony and sarcasm).

CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors, page 105.
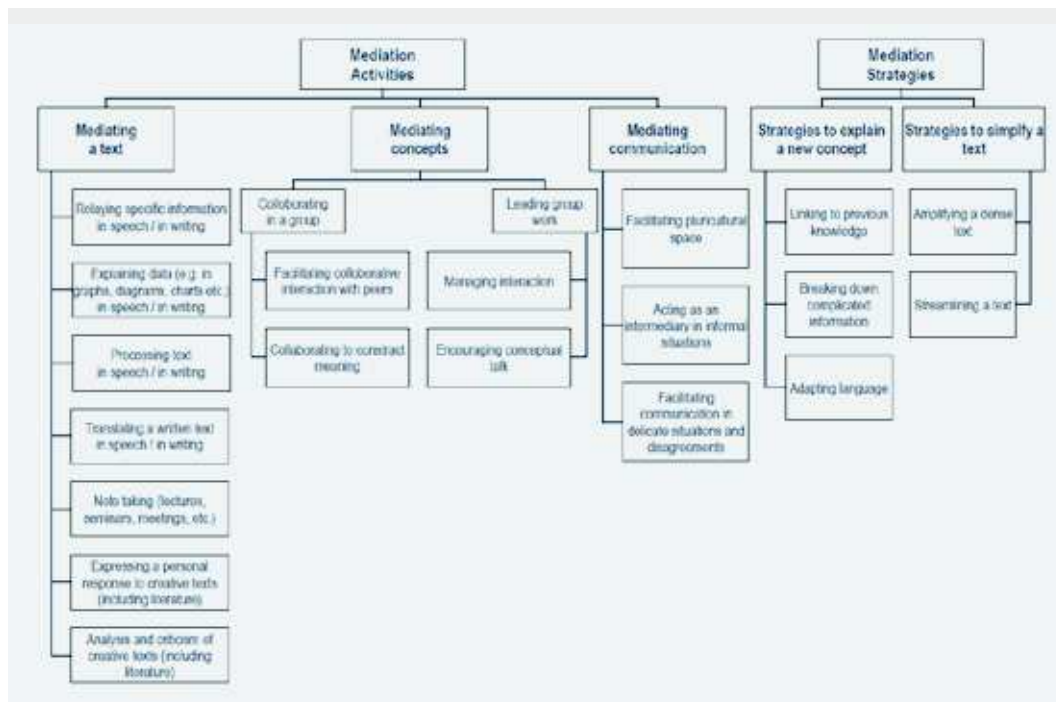
CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors, page 104.

The three groups into which the mediation activity scales are classified are mediating a text, mediating concepts and mediating communication.

Mediating a text involves passing on to another person the content of a text to which they don't have access, often because of linguistic, cultural, semantic or technical barriers.

Mediating concepts refers to the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others. This is a fundamental aspect of education and is what fits in best with Vygotsky's concept of cultural mediation, described at the beginning of the article. Mediating concepts involves two complementary aspects: on the one hand, constructing and elaborating meaning and, on the other hand, facilitating and stimulating conditions that are conducive to conceptual exchange and development.

The aim of **mediating communication** is to facilitate understanding and to shape successful communication between people who may have individual, sociocultural, sociolinguistic or intellectual differences in standpoint. The skills involved are relevant to diplomacy, negotiation, pedagogy and dispute resolution, but also to everyday social and/or workplace interactions.

The activities mediating a text described by the *Companion Volume* are the following:

Relaying specific information refers to the way some particular piece(s) of information of immediate relevance is extracted from the target text and relayed to someone else. Here, the emphasis is on the specific content that is relevant to the recipient, rather than the main ideas or lines of argument presented in a text. To carry out this mediating activity, apart from taking into account the context in which communication takes place, it's imperative to know precisely which are the recipient's characteristics and what kind of information they need. A simple example of this activity would be to explain the contents of a written menu to someone who's both vegetarian and blind. The mediator would select which dishes are suitable for vegetarians and then inform them of the options available on the menu, expanding on the written description if necessary.

Explaining data refers to transforming information found in diagrams, charts, tables, figures and other images into a verbal text. This is a common activity in presentations, during which flow charts, trend graphs or bar charts are often shown, and where the most relevant points of the data presented graphically must be selected and interpreted.

Processing text involves understanding the information and/or arguments included in the source text and then transferring these to another text, usually in a more condensed form, in a way that is appropriate to the context and situation. The recipient of the new text may be another person or oneself and, to perform the task efficiently, such a detailed description of the recipient isn't necessary, as in the case of transmitting specific information, given that the emphasis is on the text's information and argument and not so much on the recipient's needs. The outcome is a condensed and/or reformulated version of the original information and arguments, focusing on the main points and ideas in the source text. An example of this activity often takes place at university: students transform an oral text, provided by the professors, into a written text in order to later review the arguments and ideas presented. In this case, students mediate for themselves but also for other classmates if they share their notes.

Translating is a well-known activity that doesn't need describing. In fact, this is one of the mediation activities, together with summarising and reformulating texts (now, processing texts), that the CEFR already included in 2001.

Note-taking (lectures, seminars, meetings etc.) concerns the ability to listen to and write coherent notes. This is a frequent activity in academic and professional life.

Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature) focuses on expressing the effect a work of literature has on the user as an individual. This includes explaining what they like, what interested them about the work, describing characters, saying which they identified with, relating aspects of the work to their own experience, relating feelings and emotions, personal interpretation of the work as a whole or of aspects of it... This is a mediating activity with others, but also with oneself, since an internal dialogue is necessary to carry it out.

Analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature) concerns more formal, intellectual reactions. This mediating activity is less common because it requires an extremely high degree of specialisation.

When it comes to activities mediating concepts, the *Companion Volume (2018)* distinguishes between collaborating in a group and leading group work. In either case, it is virtually impossible to develop concepts without preparing the ground to manage the relational issues between participants. For this reason, activities concerned with establishing the conditions for effective work (relational mediation) and activities concerned with developing and elaborating ideas (cognitive mediation) are described separately. Specifically, the activities described are:

Collaborating in a group

Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers (relational mediation) refers to the language user's ability to successfully contribute to collaboration in a group that they belong to, usually with a specific shared objective in mind. This involves, for example, making conscious interventions where appropriate to orient the discussion, balance contributions, and help to overcome communication difficulties within the group, consciously managing their own role, helping to review key points of a debate and defining next steps, asking questions and making contributions to move the discussion forward in a productive way, etc.

Collaborating to construct meaning (cognitive mediation) is concerned with stimulating and developing ideas as a member of a group. It is particularly relevant to collaborative work in problem-solving, brainstorming, concept development and project work. The user can, for example, ask others to explain their thinking and identify inconsistencies in their thought processes or summarise the discussion and decide on next steps.

Leading group work

When **managing the interaction** (relational mediation), the user has a designated leading role to organise communicative activity between members of a group, by managing the phases of communication. Some actions that are typical of this activity are, for example, leading plenary activity, giving instructions and checking understanding of communicative task objectives, monitoring and facilitating communication within the group or sub-groups without impeding the flow of communication between group participants, re-orienting communication... This task is developed by teachers, moderators, board meeting chairs, project managers...

Encouraging conceptual talk (cognitive mediation) involves providing scaffolding to enable another person or persons to themselves construct a new concept, for example, by asking questions to stimulate logical reasoning and or building contributions into logical, coherent discourse.

Regarding the activities related to mediating communication, the *Companion Volume* identifies three:

Facilitating pluricultural space reflects the notion of creating a shared space between and among linguistically and culturally different interlocutors, i.e. the capacity of dealing with 'otherness' to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration. The mediator's goal is to create a neutral space that promotes intercultural understanding between participants in order to avoid and/or overcome any potential communication difficulties arising from contrasting cultural viewpoints. For this activity, the moderator can, for example, use questions and show interest to promote understanding of cultural norms and perspectives between speakers, demonstrate sensitivity to and respect for different sociocultural and sociolinguistic norms, or anticipate, deal with and/or repair misunderstandings arising from sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences.

Acting as an intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues) refers to situations in which the user as a plurilingual individual mediates across languages and cultures in an informal situation in the public, private, occupational or educational domain. The mediation may be in one direction, e.g. during a welcome speech, or in two directions, e.g. during a conversation at a party. To perform this activity, the mediator must know how to informally communicate the sense of what speakers are saying in a conversation or repeat the sense of what is expressed in speeches and presentations.

Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements involves being capable of taking on a formal role to mediate in a disagreement between third parties, or to informally try to resolve a misunderstanding, delicate situation or disagreement between speakers. The mediator is concerned with clarifying what the problem is and what the parties want, helping them to understand each other's positions. They may attempt to persuade the parties to move closer to a resolution of the issue. To do so, the mediator must know how to explore in a sensitive and balanced way the different viewpoints represented by participants in the dialogue, elaborate on viewpoints expressed to enhance and deepen participants' understanding of the issues discussed, establish common ground, establish possible areas of concession between participants, mediate a shift in viewpoint of one or more participants, to move closer to an agreement or resolution.

Which strategies do we need to mediate effectively?

After describing the activities we identify as mediating activities or activities that involve mediation, we must reflect on how the user carries them out, that is, which is their 'action plan' to achieve the goal of communication. In other words, the strategies they employ.

Mediation strategies must always be appropriate for the conventions, conditions and restrictions of the communication context. They could be defined as 'techniques' used to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding, the way source content is processed for the recipient, for example, elaborating it, condensing it, paraphrasing it, simplifying it or illustrating it with metaphors.

As a mediator, the user may need to 'bridge the gap' between people, texts, types of discourse and languages, depending on the mediation context.

The *Companion Volume* (2018) names five mediation strategies that a competent language user must employ to perform any of the training activities described in the previous section. These strategies are:

Linking to previous knowledge. This strategy is an essential part of the learning process, and therefore also of mediation. The mediator may explain new information by making comparisons, by describing how it relates to something the recipient already knows or by helping recipients activate previous knowledge.

Adapting language. To mediate effectively, the user may need to employ shifts in use of language, style and/or register in order to incorporate the content of a text into a new text of a different genre and register. This may be done through the inclusion of synonyms, similes, simplification or paraphrasing.

Breaking down complicated information. The mediator can often enhance understanding by breaking down complicated information into constituent parts, and showing how these parts fit together to give the whole picture.

Amplifying a dense text. Density of information is often an obstacle to understanding. This strategy consists of expanding the source text information by including helpful information, examples, details, reasoning or explanatory comments.

Streamlining a text. This strategy is the opposite of the previous one described. In this case, the strategy consists of pruning a source text to its essential message. This

may involve expressing the same information in fewer words by eliminating repetition and digressions, and excluding those sections of the source that don't add relevant new information and highlighting important points.

Conclusion

Considering all the concepts described in previous sections, we can conclude that language mediation is basically an ordinary and all-pervading social practice that allows us to solve communication conflicts through language. It's also an essential tool to develop new ideas and concepts and therefore build new knowledge.

The mediator is a social agent who resolves misunderstandings, who encourages conceptual debate, who takes notes in a meeting to write the minutes, who translates, who intervenes in delicate situations to contribute to the wellbeing of others, who selects information, adapts it and transfers it to the recipient who doesn't have direct access to the source for whichever reason, who interprets and explains data, who explains their reactions to a work of art, who manages the interaction between speakers and participates to build new meaning.

This practice has a political dimension. A plurilingual and pluricultural Europe obliges us, as language users, to not only know how to read, listen, write and speak in this language, but our language competence also depends on our ability to interact and mediate between users of the same or other languages.

Finally, returning to my visit to Centre Pompidou Málaga that I described in the introduction, I'd like to highlight that, to my surprise, in the description provided on the institution's website I found the essence

of many of the aspects that had been discussed during the conference that I'd just attended.

The website talked about "*a way to access creation based on interaction*" and highlighted the importance of creating "*a meeting point for diverse perspectives and experiences*". Both concepts fit perfectly with the relationship between interaction and mediation and the idea of language mediation as a social practice. Further on, the museum explained to visitors that it "*has been specifically designed for each exhibit and takes into account the kind of public it is aimed at*", which in my language meant 'taking into account who the recipient is and their characteristics' and this was reaffirmed with the following sentence: "*it adapts both to people who are unfamiliar with modern and contemporary art and to an experienced audience*". Finally, they ended their description of their mediation activity by "*offering an adapted service that encourages the public to discover the works*", that is, we select and adapt the information that the recipient needs to understand the message, in other words, we lead the visitor to their Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. What else can you ask for? It was the most precise summary of what we'd been discussing for two days put into real context.

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