Brian North, Enrica Piccardo

Mediation and the social and linguistic integration of migrants: updating the CEFR descriptors

Abstract: The notion of mediation has been studied in psychology, pedagogy and the social sciences. The emerging vision of language acquisition as socialization into communities of practice through the mediation of material signs and its implications in the field of language education informed a Council of Europe project that has produced CEFR illustrative descriptors for mediation. The team conducted a three-phase developmental, mixed methods research. The paper concludes by pointing out the relevance of mediation to the integration of migrants.

Résumé : La psychologie, la pédagogie et les sciences sociales ont étudié la notion de médiation. Le nouveau concept d'acquisition de la langue comme compétence de « socialisation au sein des communautés de pratique par la médiation de signes matériels » et ses implications dans le domaine de l'apprentissage des langues a contribué à un projet du Conseil de l'Europe visant à élaborer des descripteurs de la médiation pour le CECR. L'équipe a réalisé une étude développementale en trois phases combinant plusieurs méthodes. En conclusion, l'article insiste sur l'importance de la médiation pour l'intégration des migrants.

1 Introduction

The notion of mediation, crucial for casting light on phenomena implying contact between the social and the individual and bridging between different elements and spaces, has been widely studied in psychology, pedagogy and the social sciences. In professional circles, mediation describes arbitration in disputes and counselling activities. In child development the notion is core both in child/adult interaction and in the way children employ tools and symbols creatively to

Brian North (corresponding author), Eurocentres Foundation and Eaquals,
E-mail: bjnorth@eurocentres.com
Enrica Piccardo, OISE, University of Toronto, Canada/Université Grenoble-Alpes, France,
E-mail: enrica.piccardo@utoronto.ca

make sense of their environment. In the Vygotskian view, semiotic mediation is central to all aspects of knowledge (co-)construction.

This paper reports on a Council of Europe project to develop mediation descriptors for the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). The emerging vision of language acquisition as "[s]ocialization into communities of practice through the mediation of material signs" (Kramsch 2002: 6) and its implications in the field of language education informed the approach adopted in the project. The interpretation of mediation taken led to descriptors potentially relevant to all contexts of language use, not just to the foreign/second language classroom.

2 Mediation in the CEFR

The CEFR pioneered the introduction of mediation, alongside interaction, to indicate communicative language activities which are not covered by reception and production. The change in terminology recognizes the role of the social dimension in language. Interaction is not just the sum of reception and production, but introduces a new factor: the co-construction of meaning. Mediation integrates and takes this further by underlining the constant link between the social and individual dimensions in language use and learning. Although the CEFR does not develop the concept of mediation fully, it emphasises the two key notions of co-construction of meaning in interaction and constant movement between the individual and social level in language learning, mainly through its vision of the user/learner as a social agent (Piccardo 2012). Both these concepts are central to the socio-constructivist/socio-cultural view of learning in which mediation is a key concept.

CEFR Section 4.4 states that "[i]n ***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" (CEFR 4.4.4; English p.87, French p.71). The CEFR does not confine the concept to cross-linguistic mediation. The social agent and his/her interlocutor share the same situational context but may well maintain different perceptions and interpretations. The gap between these may be so great as to require some form of mediation, perhaps even by a third person (CEFR Section 4.1.4; English version p.50; French version p.44).

3 Mediation: a developmental notion

We can identify four types of mediation: linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogic.

Linguistic mediation comprises both the interlinguistic and the intralinguistic dimension, which could be in the target language (e. g. summarise an L2 text in L2) or in the source language, including mother tongue. Another form of linguistic mediation is the flexible use of different languages, for example in multilingual classrooms or in everyday professional life.

Cultural mediation is involved in any linguistic mediation that tries to facilitate understanding (Zarate et al. 2003). Mediation is the linchpin to the notion of cultural awareness, which applies within a language as well as across languages and cultures, with consideration of styles, genres and the different sub-cultures, social and professional, within a society.

Social mediation involves playing the role of intermediary and in the CEFR seems to be limited to helping persons to communicate who are unable to understand each other. But language is not the only reason why people cannot understand one another. The "mediator" helps to bridge gaps and overcome misunderstandings. The multifaceted nature of social mediation is shown by Kramsch (1993: 238) with the concept of "third space" in which a user/learner might take some distance from his/her cultural norms by "reading against the grain" and becoming more aware of loaded connotations. This last aspect is very close to Byram's (1997) *critical cultural awareness/political education.*

Pedagogic mediation is the process by which teachers and parents try to mediate knowledge and above all the ability to think critically for oneself – which together constitute **cognitive mediation.** However, a lot of time in a classroom context is spent establishing rapport, organizing work, keeping people on task, preventing and resolving problems – which together constitute **relational mediation.**

4 Towards a richer "model" of mediation

As we have seen, mediation can mean many things. The use of mediation in relation to diplomacy, conflict resolution and commercial transaction has more recently expanded to include a range of arbitration, counselling and guidance activities. Our deeper reflection on the nature of mediation, though, is rooted in German idealism and dialectical materialism. The work of Vygotsky then enabled the transition of this notion to psychology and education by explaining how social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Being

at the core of knowledge (co-)construction, mediation occurs where there is bridging and exchange between different elements and spaces, where the individual and the social interact. According to Vygotsky, it is the process of mediation which allows one to break out of the dichotomy between the individual and the social dimension and to see individual processes as completely embedded in and structured by social processes. Mediation however is not exclusive to the sociocultural theory rooted in Vygotsky's work; it comes into play in ecological and complex views of language education as well. No matter where and how mediation is theorized though, the whole language acquisition process can be defined as "socialization into communities of practice through the mediation of material signs" (Kramsch 2002: 6).

Seeing mediation as an interdependent duality of individual and social echoes Halliday's "basic distinction between an ideational (representational, referential, cognitive) and an interpersonal (expressive-conative, social, evocative) function of language" (1975: 52). Halliday underlines in his model the difference between an idea of language as representation of thought and use of language as a communication tool for expressing social and personal relations. Action that allows one to make sense of things and structure learning through language is accomplished through the mediation of the mental processes involved in the completion of a task (Piccardo 2012).

5 Development and validation of illustrative descriptors

Mediation, then, is an all-embracing notion, striking in its richness, variety, layers and lack of structure. How can one capture this in a practical descriptive scheme? In addition, in discussing linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogic mediation, one sees an overlapping and intermeshing between these categories. Nowadays we understand that all categorisation in the social sciences is conventional rather than intrinsic. The fact that we bring one aspect into focus in order to describe it does not imply that we believe it enjoys a separate existence in an atomistic model. Using the current scholarly discussion on mediation as its conceptual framework, the team conducted a Type 1 developmental research (Richey and Klein 2005). The validation methodology adopted replicated the three-phase, "mixed methods" approach (Cresswell 2003) used to develop the original CEFR descriptors (North and Schneider 1998).

Firstly, in the *intuitive phase* a team reviewed source material, drafting, editing and discussing descriptors in an iterative process. Secondly, in the *qualitative*

phase, with some 990 respondents, the categories were validated, individual descriptors evaluated and proposals for reformulation made. Finally, in the *quantitative phase* (c. 1250 respondents), the best descriptors were calibrated with two independent Rasch Rating Scale model analyses. A detailed paper, together with technical reports, is available on the Council of Europe's website. The categories for the resulting descriptor scales are given below. The "other new scales" concern aspects that might well not be considered to be mediation, but in which an element of mediation is involved.

Mediation activities

Relational mediation (spoken): Establishing a positive atmosphere; Creating pluricultural space; Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers; Managing interaction in plenary and in groups; Dealing with delicate situations and disputes

Cognitive mediation

Constructing meaning (spoken): Collaborating to construct meaning; Stimulating the development of ideas

Conveying received meaning (spoken): Relaying specific information; Explaining data; Processing text; Interpreting; Spoken translation of written text

Conveying received meaning (written): Relaying specific information; Explaining data; Processing text; Translating

Mediation strategies

Linking to previous knowledge; Amplifying text; Streamlining text; Breaking down complicated information; Visually representing information; Adjusting language

Other new scales

Multimodal online conversation and discussion; Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration

Expressing a personal response to literature (including film); Analysis and criticism of literature (including film)

Exploiting pluricultural repertoire in intercultural encounters; Plurilingual comprehension; Exploiting plurilingual repertoire

6 Relevance to the LIAM context

Mediation is an everyday occurrence in public, academic, and professional life and in today's globalised world it is frequently cross-linguistic. In knowledge-based societies, an ability to sift through and process information – perhaps in more than one language – to identify and pass on what is relevant, is also of constantly increasing importance. Then of course there are second language learners who find themselves, as immigrants, despite their possibly partial competences, operating as more formal or less formal mediators between representatives of a host community and newer arrivals. Indeed, both migrants and professionals who work with migrants often find themselves in situations in which they need to help to create pluricultural space, facilitate discussion, deal with misunderstandings and delicate situations, relay or summarise information, interpret and elaborate on what is said, and above all increase their pluricultural awareness. The core vision of the CEFR is to value the dynamic and collaborative nature of user/learners' trajectories. We hope that the provision of CEFR descriptors will help raise awareness of the need for mediation skills in a migration context, and contribute to the efforts of those involved to improve mutual understanding.

References

Byram, Michael. 1997. *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Cleveland: Multilingual Matters.

Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 9 August 2016).

Cresswell, John W. 2003. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Halliday, Michael A. K. 1975. *Learning how to mean: Explorations in the development of language.* London: Arnold.

Kramsch, Claire. 1993. *Context and culture in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch Claire. (ed.). 2002. *Language acquisition and language socialization: Ecological perspectives.* New York: Continuum.

North, Brian & Günther Schneider. 1998. Scaling descriptors for language proficiency scales. *Language Testing* 15(2). 217–262.

Piccardo, Enrica. 2012. Médiation et apprentissage des langues: Pourquoi est-il temps de réflechir à cette notion? *ELA: Études de Linguistique Appliquée* 167. 285–97.

Richey, Rita C. & James D. Klein. 2005. Developmental research methods: Creating knowledge from instructional design and development practice. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education 16*(2). 23–38.

Zarate, Genviève, Aline Gohard-Radenkovic, Denise Lussier & Hermine Penz. 2004. *Cultural mediation in language learning and teaching.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.