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Mediating communication – ELF and flexible multilingualism perspectives on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages



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Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a major international benchmarking resource used for curriculum development and assessment. The elaboration of the concept of multilingual mediation in the 2018 Companion Volume of the CEFR is a timely addition to the original publication in 2001. Amongst other things, it acknowledges an important aspect of contemporary language communication. In this article we examine the ways in which multilingual mediation is characterized and operationalized in the rating scales and the associated descriptors. We argue that some significant dimensions of mediation, such as emotional intelligence, can only be understood in context and they cannot be easily rated on any exnormative scale. Drawing on data from English as a Lingua Franca research, we show that the tendency to portray mediation as largely concerned with cross-lingual information transfer is a partial capture; it misses the agentive richness in multilingual communication that can dynamically open up semantic spaces and generate fluid discourse interactions. We suggest that there is room for more flexible reckoning of mediation to allow for situated language sensibilities and practices in discourse interaction.

Keywords: multilingual mediation, CEFR, English as a Lingua Franca, flexible multilingualism

Introduction

Historically linguistic diversity has been a feature of many societies. However, the progressive increase in worldwide population mobility for economic and political reasons in last few decades has been accompanied by intensification of linguistic diversity in many places. For instance, 22.1% of London's

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population speak a language other than English (as their main language) (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/language/articles/languageinenglandandwales/2013-03-04>). In the publicly funded schools in England 21.2% of primary pupils from a language other than English background (over 1 million pupils approximately), the corresponding percentage for secondary schools is 16.6% (Department for Education, 2018). The current census data in Australia reports that 21% of population speak a language other than English at home (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>; also see FECCA, 2016). Australia and the UK are not by any means unique. Indeed many countries are more linguistically diverse for a variety of reasons, for example, Canada, India, and Papua New Guinea, to name but a few places (for a world map of linguistic diversity, see <https://matadornetwork.com/read/linguistic-diversity-world-one-map/>).

Social interaction in linguistically diverse settings can bring speakers' languages into play in different ways (e.g., Blommaert, 2010; Jørgensen *et al.*, 2011; Rampton, 1995). In such settings interlocutors may call on more than one language to accomplish communication. Multilingual communication is being increasingly recognized as a routine practice in social interactions involving individuals from different language backgrounds and as part of communicative competence. For this reason, we welcome the enhanced prominence of the notion of mediation in the recent iteration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

In this discussion we orient our discussion from the perspectives of English as a Lingua Franca and flexible uses of multilingualism in communication. The phenomenon of English as a Lingua Franca (henceforth ELF) is, by definition, a prime example of multilingual communication. ELF refers to communication between people from different first languages with English most often not being the first language of anyone present in an interaction. The majority of ELF users (including some native English speakers) are thus multilingual. During the three decades of ELF research, empirical data have demonstrated clearly that it has a highly contingent nature, depending heavily on who is speaking with whom (rather than where an interaction is taking place geographically). Thus, ELF use is highly variable, with speakers' accommodation to each other playing a key part (see Jenkins, forthcoming) and cannot be pinned down to the kinds of descriptions to which conventional languages are treated. As well as this, the multilingualism of most ELF users means that English is not necessarily the only language used in an ELF interaction, as is made clear in the most recent definition of ELF: "multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 73). In other words, while all speakers present in an interaction in English, they may choose to use another language known to all of them, or to translanguage, that is, move in and out of another language or languages and English.

Mediation in language communication: CEFR

The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) has been widely adopted by educational jurisdictions in many countries across the world. The Framework was initially designed to support teaching, curriculum development and assessment of foreign languages. Since its publication in 2001, the proficiency scales in the CEFR have been adopted as an authoritative benchmarking reference for a diverse range of second/foreign/additional language teaching and learning settings, professional qualificatory frameworks and public policy regimes. For instance, the Australian and UK immigration systems requires evidence of applicants' English language proficiency which can be demonstrated through Cambridge English and IELTS test scores, and these test scores are benchmarked against CEFR levels. There is little doubt that the CEFR is a very influential point of reference in non-mother tongue language education. Schools in Northern Ireland use the CEFR proficiency scales to identify "newcomer" pupils' English as an Additional Language levels and to inform their curriculum provision

(<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/mandatory-newcomer-designation-pro-forma.pdf>).

It is in the light of the CEFR's powerful influence that we would like to explore the expanded notion of Mediation in the 2018 CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018) in relation to English as a Lingua Franca, multilingualism and translanguaging. In the 2001 edition mediation is glossed as "... written and/or oral activities ... [that] make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 14). It is further elaborated as comprising translation:

"Writer (Lx) → text (in Lx) → USER → text (in Ly) → Reader (Ly)"

and interpretation:

"Interlocutor (Lx) ↔ discourse (Lx) ↔ USER ↔ discourse (Ly) ↔ Interlocutor (Ly)"
(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 99)

It is quite clear that in the 2001 formulation more than one language is involved in mediation. The 2018 Companion Volume extends the notion considerably. First of all, a certain kind of speaker/writer disposition is needed:

"A person who engages in mediation activity needs to have a well-developed emotional intelligence, or an openness to develop it, in order to have sufficient empathy for the viewpoints and emotional states of other participants in the communicative situation." (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 106)

This disposition is needed because mediation is

"... a social and cultural process of creating conditions for communication and cooperation, facing and hopefully defusing any delicate situations and tensions that may arise. Particularly with regard to cross-lingual mediation, users should remember that this inevitably also involves social and cultural competence as well as plurilingual competence." (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 106)

This expanded view of mediation has moved some way beyond the somewhat narrower technical conceptualization in the 2001 rendition. It now embraces a particular set of socio-cultural values that encourages felicitous communication and harmonious exchanges. It has also explicitly included socio-cultural and plurilingual competences in its formulation, which involves situated speaker decision-making and participant uptake. We note that the CEFR draws a distinction between multilingualism and plurilingualism:

"... multilingualism ... is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in society ... the plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other people ... he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. For instance, partners may switch from one language or dialect to

another, exploiting the ability of each to express themselves in one language and to understand the other; or a person may call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, written or even spoken, in a previously 'unknown' language, recognising words from a common international store in a new guise." (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4)

The CEFR conceptualizes that there are three categories of activities in which mediation can occur: **mediating a text**, **mediating concepts** and **mediating communication** (all CEFR terms will be bolded from now on to signal their textual origin). Each of three groups of activities are accompanied by set rating scales:

- **Mediating a text** encompasses a wide range of activities in speech and/or writing such as passing on information, explaining data presented in a graphic form, translating a text, note-taking in a lecture or meeting, and expressing a personal response to creative texts.
- **Mediating concepts** includes facilitating and managing collaborative interaction to construct meaning and "encouraging conceptual talk" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 106).
- **Mediating communication** involves "[f]acilitating plurilingual space," "[a]cting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)," and "[f]acilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 106).

Given the focus of this discussion, we will first attend to **mediating concepts** and **mediating communication** in this section. It should be noted that mediation can involve different varieties of the same language and/or different languages.

Mediating concepts refers to the use of language as a tool "... to think about a subject and to talk about that thinking in a dynamic co-constructive process" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 117). It is regarded as a speech function enacted by speakers in two interactional settings: **Collaborating in a group** and **leading group work**. The former comprises activities such as the speaker consciously managing their own role and contributing to group communication to construct meaning and to take discussion forward. The latter includes monitoring, giving instructions, supporting and (re-)orienting communication without impeding group interaction.

Mediating communication refers to speakers playing the role of an intermediary between different participants to facilitate understanding and to navigate different perspectives, tensions and disagreements. There are three types of mediation under this heading: **Facilitating pluricultural space** is about "... creating a shared space between and among linguistically and culturally different interlocutors, i.e. the capacity of dealing with 'otherness' ... to build on known and unknown cultural features ... to enable communication and collaboration" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 122); **acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)** covers situations where the plurilingual language user "... mediates across languages and cultures in an informal situation in the public, private, occupational or educational domain" to make expressed meaning accessible for fellow participants (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 124); the term "informal" could give rise to ambiguity regarding occupational and education settings. It is, however, clear that this term is used here to explicitly disassociate this type of interactional mediation from official and professional interpretation (e.g. in legal proceedings): "This scale is intended for situations in which the user/learner as a plurilingual individual mediates across language and cultures to the best of their ability in an informal situation in the public, private, occupational or educational domain." (CEFR, 2018, p. 124). **Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements** is concerned with situations where the language user has "... a formal role to mediate in a disagreement between third parties or may informally try to resolve a misunderstanding ... or disagreement between speakers" (CEFR, p. 125).

The range of language use in the activities discussed under **Mediation** is very wide. The depiction of the contexts and functions under **mediating concepts and mediating communication** strongly suggests that they are directly relevant to a good deal of what goes on in the classroom and activities in educational settings more generally. To get closer to the ways in which the CEFR operationalises mediation, we will need to look at the proficiency rating scales attached to these **Mediation** activities. There are seven rating scales related to the two categories of mediation under discussion. Given our interest in ELF and multilingual language use and for reasons of scope of this discussion, we will pay particular attention to “**acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)**” because the descriptors in this rating scale explicitly mention the use of more than one language. We would suggest that the analysis and comments made in the following sections are relevant to a general examination of the ways in which multilingual communication is conceptualised and operationalised in **Mediation** (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018; for a wider discussion on mediation regarding participant roles/identities and institutional influences, see Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, Section 2).

Mediation: From Language A to Language B

ACTING AS INTERMEDIARY IN INFORMAL SITUATIONS (WITH FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES)	
C2	Can communicate in clear, fluent, well-structured (Language B) the sense of what is said in (Language A) on a wide range of general and specialised topics, maintaining appropriate style and register, conveying finer shades of meaning and elaborating on sociocultural implications.
C1	Can communicate fluently in (Language B) the sense of what is said in (Language A) on a wide range of subjects of personal, academic and professional interest, conveying significant information clearly and concisely as well as explaining cultural references.
B2	Can mediate (between Language A and Language B), conveying detailed information, drawing the attention of both sides to background information and sociocultural cues, and posing clarification and follow-up questions or statements as necessary.
	Can communicate in (Language B) the sense of what is said in a welcome address, anecdote or presentation in his/her field given in (Language A), interpreting cultural cues appropriately and giving additional explanations when necessary, provided that the speaker stops frequently in order to allow time for him/her to do so. Can communicate in (Language B) the sense of what is said in (Language A) on subjects within his/her fields of interest, conveying and when necessary explaining the significance of important statements and viewpoints, provided speakers give clarifications if needed.
B1	Can communicate in (Language B) the main sense of what is said in (Language A) on subjects within his/her fields of interest, conveying straightforward factual information and explicit cultural references, provided that he/she can prepare beforehand and that the speakers articulate clearly in everyday language.
	Can communicate in (Language B) the main sense of what is said in (Language A) on subjects of personal interest, whilst following important politeness conventions, provided that the speakers articulate clearly in standard language and that he/she can ask for clarification and pause to plan how to express things.
A2	Can communicate in (Language B) the overall sense of what is said in (Language A) in everyday situations, following basic cultural conventions and conveying the essential information, provided that the speakers articulate clearly in standard language and that he/she can ask for repetition and clarification.
	Can communicate in (Language B) the main point of what is said in (Language A) in predictable, everyday situations, conveying back and forth information about personal wants and needs, provided that the speakers help with formulation.
A1	Can communicate (in Language B) other people's personal details and very simple, predictable information available (in Language A), provided other people help with formulation.
Pre-A1	No descriptors available

Figure 1 Council of Europe, 2018, p. 124

The official characterisation of this scale is that at A levels the mediator can “assist in a very simple manner,” at A2+ (upper division of A2) and B1 s/he can mediate in “predictable everyday situations,” at B2 s/he can mediate “competently in their fields of interest,” at C1 s/he can mediate “fluently on a

wide range of subjects,” and at C2 s/he can “convey the meaning of the speaker faithfully, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 124). Progression from A1 to the higher levels seems to be based on the mediator’s ability to handle more topic areas in linguistically more sophisticated ways. This raises some interesting questions as to the construct of mediation: Is mediation an individual speaker attribute that can be arrayed in terms of levels? Or do the levels index the underlying language (and communication) proficiencies, and repertoires of cultural and topic knowledge? If mediation requires an emotional intelligence-based volition to participate in “a social and cultural process of creating conditions for communication and cooperation” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 106), then arguably the same speaker disposition would undergird all mediation efforts. It would be very difficult to demonstrate that someone who is going “back and forth” in conveying information concerning personal wants and needs in two languages (A2 level) is less “mediating” in terms of volition than someone communicating “in (Language B) the sense of what is said in (Language A) on subjects within his/her field of interest ...” (B2, Council of Europe, 2018, p. 106). And if language proficiency and topic knowledge are proxy considerations for benchmarking mediation levels, what would be the basis of gradation? If we compare B1+ and C1 levels:

B1+ Can communicate in (Language B) the main sense of what is said in (Language A) on subjects within his/her fields of interest, conveying straightforward factual information and explicit cultural references, provided that he/she can prepare beforehand and that the speakers articulate clearly in everyday language.

C1 Can communicate fluently in (Language B) the sense of what is said in (Language A) on a wide range of subjects of personal, academic and professional interest, conveying significant information clearly and concisely as well as explaining cultural references. (loc.cit)

These two descriptors cover broadly the same kind of activities. The adjectival terms such as “straightforward” (B1+) and “significant” (C1) can be read as signalling the difference in level. But these can be interpreted contingently with reference to content and participant needs in different contexts and situations of mediation. The key substantive difference between these two descriptors seems to be the condition that “he/she can prepare beforehand” (B1+). It is difficult to interpret this condition because mediating as an intermediary in group interaction, in all likelihood, is about dealing with contingencies. How far such contingencies can be prepared in advance is a moot question. In many ways this kind of difficulty in scaling mediation reflects a deeper conceptual issue: How is multilingual mediation, indeed multilingual communication more generally, achieved in the real life interactions where participant co-construction is a significant ingredient?

Multilingualism and lingua franca in communicative use

This brings us straight to the issue of language use in lingua franca communication on the grounds that Mediation, as construed by CEFR 2018, is by definition lingua franca communication. We start by considering the issue in respect of English as a lingua franca, since this is the area that to date has been researched most extensively.

English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) has been conceptualised three times in line with increasing empirical information (see Jenkins, 2015, 2018). The most recent of these conceptualisations (“ELF 3”) is most pertinent to the current discussion. Previous definitions of ELF focused on English, for example, “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). More recently, the primary role of the other languages of ELF users, that is, ELF’s essential multilingualism, has been recognised and foregrounded. This in turn led to the suggestion that ELF should be renamed EMF

(English as a multilingua franca) and defined as “multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 73).

The understanding of ELF as an essentially multilingual practice has major implications for the way mediation is considered. First and foremost, it means that in lingua franca communication, we cannot assume, let alone require, that speakers will restrict themselves either to one language at a time or to a so-called “standard” version of that language. There is also a good deal of empirical research that points to flexible multilingual communication, or translanguaging, becoming the situated emergent norm, with speakers using one or other of their language(s) according to their and their interlocutors’ needs at any given moment in an exchange, and switching from one to another as a matter of course. In turn, this renders it impossible to think of assessing the quality of a speaker’s use of Language A or Language B separately (for a fuller discussion on translanguaging, see Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Li, 2014; García, Johnson, & Selzer, 2016; Leung & Valdés, 2019; Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015, 2018; amongst others). It is the communicative effectiveness of their total mediation in the combination of whichever language(s) they select that constitutes the only factor which can be evaluated.

As well as this, research into ELF use over the past two decades reveals that ELF users do not adhere to native speaker norms of English but adapt the language to suit their own purposes. Again, this means that where English is concerned in mediation events, criteria such as “well-structured,” “standard,” and “fluent” become problematic. The baseline, such as it is possible even to talk of one, is not the native speaker of Language A or Language B, but the effective multilingual who is able both to adjust the languages in their repertoire and to translanguage as appropriate in the moment. And this, we believe, is as true of other languages used in lingua franca communication as it is of English/ELF. Thus we can talk e.g. of “Polish as a lingua franca, or “multilingualism with Polish,” just as we talk of ELF and “multilingualism with English.” Any attempt to evaluate **Mediation** formally will need to grapple with these issues. We will now turn to two instances of real-life exchanges in an English-speaking environment to illustrate the intricately contingent, dynamic and multifaceted ways in which multilingual mediation facilitated communication and meaning-making in group discussion.

The two data extracts are drawn from a study of ELF communication by Batziakas (2016). In Batziakas’s study, the data was presented to support his discussion on the use of languages other than English in ELF contexts. The data comprised a set of audio recordings of meetings of an international student society at a university in London. Our discussion will focus on the interactionally contingent aspects of mediation that emerged in these exchanges. In the first extract the students were discussing the search for someone to represent for their society within the university; they were talking about the personal qualities required for this “officer” position. There were three participants (pseudonyms): Marat (with a Russian language background), Eshal (with an Urdu language background), and Linlin (with a Mandarin Chinese language background). In this conversation the term “hold zhu” was introduced by one of the participants, Linlin. “Hold zhu” is a translingual neologism—the English lexical word “hold” is conjoined with the Mandarin Chinese “zhu” “住.” “住” is polysemous in that it can be used to mean “to live” (as in the phrase “to live a life”) and “to reside” (as in the phrase “to reside in London”).

Transcription conventions:

- (.) – brief pause
- (number) – longer pause in seconds
- bolding – focal language items
- ↑ – intonation signalling enthusiasm
- = – latching

[] – overlapping speech
 ((words)) – contextual information
 ? – question intonation

Extract 1

- 1 Linlin well (.) for me the officer of a college is (.) like
 2 (1.2) is like the representative there (.) is like the
 3 best person someone can get to have there=
 4 Eshal =yeap
 5 Linlin so I would like someone who can (.) who can (.) ideally
 6 who can hold zhu
 7 (1.4)
 8 Marat hold hold what? What did you say?
 9 Linlin oh (.) hold zhu (.) means you know someone who is
 10 good (.) who manages to do things (.) and and to have
 11 people under control (.) and people like him and
 12 appreciate him (.) or something like that
 13 (1.2)
 14 Marat someone who is (.) cool then? or amazing?=
 15 Linlin =haha not the second one but not the first one either(.)
 16 yeah something like cool you know (2.0) yeah someone
 17 cooler than cool (.) but not as amazing as amazing
 18 (4.3)
 19 Eshal hm (.) I like this in between (3.1) I like it a lot
 20 actually
 21 Linlin great↑

In this part of the discussion Linlin was trying to introduce a precise term to represent her meaning. She appeared to struggle to find the words that would best reflect her meaning in Lines 5 and 6 – she uttered “who can” three times with brief pauses. In Line 6 she finally introduced “hold zhu”. This term was an instance of translingual neologism that originated in Taiwan and became popular in China; it connotes the ability to stay calm and to be seen to be strong and stable. The conjoining of “hold” and “zhu” has clearly transcended the dictionary meanings of the two component lexical items in their original languages. From the point of view of mediation, Linlin’s introduction of this term into the discussion allowed her to say what she wanted to mean. The translingualism (T-L) involved therefore facilitated the content development of their conversation. Seen in this light the multilingual mediation here did not just involve the use of Language B to provide access to the meanings expressed in Language A. This moment of T-L was an integral part of “... a social and cultural process of creating conditions for communication and cooperation” (CEFR, 2018, p. 106). It is quite clear that Linlin used language as a tool “... to think about a subject and to talk about that thinking in a dynamic co-constructive process” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 117). In Line 8 Marat asked for help to understand this unfamiliar term. Linlin’s reply in Lines 9-12 provided a gloss which triggered further exchanges with Marat and Eshal that led to the consensus that “hold zhu” could be used to refer to someone who was “cooler than cool but not as amazing as amazing” (Lines 16-17). We also note that the translingual nature of the phrase “hold zhu” suggests that Languages A and B do not need to be considered in terms of bounded systems of grammatical and pragmatic rules and conventions that speakers should maintain in actual instances of language use. This was ratified by Eshal’s affirmation of her understanding and approval of this newfound expression in Line 19.

In the next extract the members of the same international student society discussed the need to make

the events that they organised as attractive and enjoyable as possible. One of the participants introduced the Greek term “kefi” into the conversation. There were four participants: Arvin (with a Mauritian Creole language background); José (Spanish language background), Leonidas (Greek language background), and Sener (Turkish language background).

Extract 2

- 1 Leonidas I mean (.) we can persuade them to pay in our
 2 events (.) you know (.) everyone should be entertained
 3 and enjoyed (.) right?=
 4 Sener =[right]
 5 Arvin [yes]
 6 Leonidas and not only everyone else but even ourselves should
 7 be ok too (.) obviously=
 8 Jose =obviously (.) yeah
 9 Leonidas and in my mind the only way to achieve this is
 10 when whatever we say or do or organise is done
 11 in a way that can make everyone have (2.6) eer (2.4)
 12 I'll tell which word we have in Greece used exactly
 13 for this case (3.8) which could be a key word for
 14 everyone in our events (3.4) kefi is the word (.) in
 15 English it is eer (2.2) ((takes out his smartphone
 16 and tries to look that word up))
 17 Arvin ok↑ (.) but seriously it's fine you don't have to do
 18 that=
 19 Leonidas eeh give me one second please because because this
 20 Greek word in English (.) it means (1.6) found it (.)
 21 it says it's like high spirits or good mood or joy
 22 in English (1.3) yeah these English words aren't bad
 23 to describe the events but they they go round and
 24 round in what is needed here but seriously man (.)
 25 that Greek word is exactly what is needed in these
 26 events not round and round but accurate and exact=
 27 Jose =[hahahaha]
 28 Sener [hahaha]
 29 Arvin [I see] (2.0) and is kefi a noun or a verb or
 30 something else like you're saying I'm kefyng (.)
 31 or I'm kepful (.) or I kefi something? (.) like
 32 I'm having a good time (.) or I'm delightful (.)
 33 or I like something?
 34 Leonidas hahahahaha no no no my fault I didn't explain
 35 everything (.) it's like I do something with kefi(.)
 36 or I have kefi (.) or I am in kefi
 37 Jose like I'm in love perhaps?
 38 Leonidas hahaha yeah haha well kefi (.) the most appropriate
 39 for our events
 40 Sener it sounds good to me (.) I mean=
 41 Jose =you mean it sounds good the word or the idea?
 42 Sener both (.) I mean this is exactly what we need for the
 43 events and the word is (.) specific and definite=
 44 Jose =and I can say kefi with kefi (.) and also I want

- 45 our society to organise events with kefi too=
 46 Leonidas =hahaha thank you really very much (.) guys

At the beginning of this extract Leonidas was trying to emphasise the importance of making their society's events entertaining and enjoyable. In Line 14 he introduced the Greek word "kefi" which expressed the exact meaning from his point of view. At this moment it would seem that Leonidas was drawing on his Greek language repertoire to introduce to the others a term that would match his intended meaning closely. The translation into English was necessitated by his need to communicate the meaning of "kefi" to his fellow students (Lines 15 and 16). It may well be that Leonidas had already decided that there was no word in English that would represent his meaning accurately. Having uttered "kefi," he realised that he would need to provide a translation in English in order for the discussion to progress. Hence the reading out aloud of the words he obtained from the translation facility on his phone (Lines 21-22). Leonidas was, however, interested in persuading the others that the term "kefi" carried a more precise meaning for his purposes. This part of the discussion on word meaning led to Arvin asking questions about how "kefi" could be used in terms of the grammatical categories (Lines 29-33). At this point "kefi" became the focal point for collective negotiation of its meaning and use. For the participants to this conversation, "kefi" was added to their language repertoire as a possible vocabulary item. In addition, they discussed its use grammatically with reference to English.

From these two extracts we can observe that multilingual mediation is not just about using Language B to make accessible the meaning expressed in Language A. The use of multilingual repertoires of the interlocutors in "... [the] social and cultural process of creating conditions for communication and cooperation" (CEFR, 2018, p. 106) can bring additional propositional meaning into the discussion at hand to engender a more open semantic and rhetorical space. This additionality is mediationaly generative. For instance, in Extract 1 the injection of "hold zhu" into the discussion not only expanded the vocabulary of description for the participants, it also led to some finessing of meanings ("cooler than cool" and "not as amazing as amazing"). In Extract 2 the adoption of the term "kefi" not only increased the semantic specificity for the participants ("that Greek word is exactly what is needed"), it also led to some language learning of the formal properties associated with its use in English.

The group discussions in the two extracts we have seen also point to another aspect of multilingual mediation being more than using Language B to make accessible the meaning expressed in Language A. The introduction of multilingual language use can create topic shifts that are not directly related to the issue at hand. In general, we know that topic maintenance and topic shift can be complex and unpredictable in interactional language use. The stretch of talk in Extract 1 concerned with the meaning of "hold zhu" (Lines 8-17) and the discussion in Extract 2 related to the parts of speech of the term "kefi" (Lines 29-37) suggests that there is a good deal of contingency triggered by the multilingual resources that have been brought into play. This can add to the complexity and unpredictability. In many ways this is to be expected. Multilingual speakers can introduce a wider range of linguistic meanings, pragmatic expectations and sociocultural values from their diverse linguacultural backgrounds into the interaction. A salient question here is: Does the conceptualisation of mediation within the CEFR address issues of contingency in interactional discourse brought into play through interlocutor interests and volitions? A corollary is: Does the enactment of multilingual mediation in the CEFR allow for co-construction in interaction? We now turn our attention back to the relevant CEFR descriptors.

Multilingual mediation in the CEFR – Transmission and omissions

In the original version of the CEFR mediation is introduced as a part of a learner/user's communicative language competence "... activated in the performance of the various *language activities*, involving

reception, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpreting or translating)” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 14, bolding in original). Mediation is called into operation when the learner/user acts “... as a channel of communication (often, but not necessarily, in different languages) between two or more persons who for one reason or another cannot communicate directly. This process, *mediation*, may be interactive or not” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 57, italics in original). **Oral mediation** includes simultaneous interpretation (e.g., conference speeches), consecutive interpretation (e.g. talk by tour guides), and informal interpretation in social and transactional settings for family and friends when dealing with a language that is not understood by all involved. **Written mediation** includes “exact translation (e.g., of contracts, legal and scientific texts, etc.) ... literary translation (novels, drama, poetry, libretti, etc.) ... summarising gist (newspaper and magazine articles, etc.) within L2 or between L1 and L2 ... [and] paraphrasing (specialised texts for lay persons, etc.)” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 87). The 2001 CEFR regards **mediation strategies** as “ways of coping with the demands of using finite resources to process information and establish equivalent meaning” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 87). So, metaphorically speaking, in performing mediation the language user is an enabling transmission conduit in context—the otherwise hard to understand meaning generated by another speaker is made (more) accessible through renditions that are more within the linguistic repertoires of the others involved.

In the 2018 Companion Volume of the CEFR, the idea of the mediator as an enabling transmission conduit seems to continue to underpin the way in which the descriptors are framed. In the focal **Acting as Intermediary in Informal Situation** scale we referred to earlier, the enabling conduit metaphor is maintained throughout the the six levels, for instance:

A1 “Can communicate (in Language B) other people’s personal details and very simple, predictable information available (in Language A), provided other people help with formulation.”

B1 “Can communicate in (Language B) the main sense of what is said in (Language A) on subjects of personal interests, while following important politeness conventions, provided that the speakers articulate clearly in standard language and that he/she can ask for clarification and pause to plan how to express things.”

C1 “Can communicate fluently in (Language B) the sense of what is said in (Language A) on a wide range of subjects of personal, academic and professional interest, conveying significant information clearly and concisely as well as explaining cultural references.” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 124).

There does not appear to be any development or change in the way multilingual mediation is conceptualized at the different levels. The function of the mediator as a transmission enabling conduit is palpable and unchanged in all the six levels. The progression through the levels is mainly linked to the increasingly complex and specialist nature of the information to be mediated and the associated multilingual language knowledge: “personal details and simple predictable information” at A1 level, “a range of subjects of personal, academic and professional interest, conveying significant information clearly and concisely” at C1 level. The mention of “explaining cultural difference” could be interpreted as opening a space for non-transmission mediation. However, the semantic prosody embedded in this descriptor would suggest that this reference to cultural differences should be considered as an aspect of the efficiency of information transmission, a technical quality at this (high) level.

The crucial missing element in the CEFR’s entire approach to mediation is flexible and dynamic use of multilingualism. The assumption underpinning the CEFR appears to be one in which

multilingualism simply means knowing (at various levels of competence) one, two or more discrete languages, or what Cummins (2005), when he was talking of out-of-date approaches to bilingualism, has labelled “the two solitudes,” and Heller (1999) “parallel monolingualism.” But over the past couple of decades, sociolinguistic research has increasingly provided evidence demonstrating that bilingualism/multilingualism does not equate with the monolingual’s knowledge and use of two or more native languages. Rather, it is something far richer and creative, as has been shown in the ways in which multilingual mediation occurred in our discussion on the two extracts above.

And on top of this, empirical ELF research in particular has demonstrated the fluidity of multilingual communication, regardless of whether English is actually involved (see the discussion of “English as a *multilingua franca*” above, according to which English is known to participants in a conversation, but not necessarily selected for use). The key point is that multilingual communication is by its very nature fluid, flexible and contingent. This means, in turn, that its fluidity, flexibility and contingency need to be carefully taken into account well before prescriptions are made as to what should count as “better” or “worse” multilingual mediation and then turned into proficiency scale descriptors. Multilingual communication goes way beyond transmission of information, and involves on the spot co-construction, accommodation, intercultural openness and a host of similar phenomena. The conduit metaphor embedded in the 2018 CEFR descriptors related to multilingual mediation offer no possible pathway towards enabling the evaluation of the presence or absence of such multilingual mediation skills.

To clarify these points, we take a couple of examples from empirical ELF research, ELF being a typical case of multilingual communication. The research has demonstrated repeatedly in substantial corpora such as ELFA (English as a *lingua franca* in academic settings) and VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) that communication in ELF settings does not conform rigidly to native English grammatical and pragmatic norms. Rather, despite usually being aware of these norms (which they have learned during their English language education), ELF users often prefer other ways of speaking with each other. These involve on the one hand, “flouting” native English grammatical norms, and on the other hand translanguaging by using grammatical and pragmatic norms drawn from languages other than English. Sometimes these come from their own first language, sometimes from the language(s) of one or more other participants in the conversation, sometimes they are hybrid forms drawing on more than one language, sometimes they are idiomatic forms in their first language translated word for word into English, and sometimes modifications of native English idiomatic usage.

In all these cases, it is clear from discussions with ELF users that their prime consideration is not to conform to native English, but to communicate successfully with their specific interlocutors in the specific interaction, and in terms of translanguaging, to introduce their own identities and/or to enrich the conversation with forms that are novel for their interlocutors. Thus, whereas the use of -s in the present simple third person singular is a marker of (educated) nativeness for native English speakers, in ELF communication, non-native English users may choose not to use this membership signal (which, incidentally, contributes nothing to intelligibility, given that the third person singular is signalled by the preceding pronoun). And as Cogo and Dewey (2012) report, this is particularly so when no native English speakers are present, which should be considered in conjunction with the finding that non-native English users frequently describe ELF communication as more successful without the presence of native English speakers, especially monolingual native English speakers (see e.g., Peckham et al., 2012).

Turning to the creative use of languages other than English, we take an example from Cogo’s (2012, pp. 305-206) research into Business ELF, or BELF. In this exchange, H (Helmut) is a first language speaker of German, while M (Maria) and P (Pedro) are both first language speakers of Spanish. As is

evident in the extract below, all three languages that the speakers have at their disposal are used at various points in a Skype meeting. The interlocutors were colleagues in a multinational company trying to develop an invoice form. The “she” in this extract refers to another colleague who was not present.

Extract 3

Transcription conventions:

- (.) brief pause
- <L1de> utterances in a participant’s first language (L1) are put between tags indicating the speaker’s L1, such as “de”= German and “sp”= Spanish.
- <LNde> utterances in languages which are neither English nor the speaker’s first language are marked LN with the language indicated.
- <L1sp>yes<L1sp> the parts in italics are translations. Translation lines in Section 6 are not numbered, to clarify that they are not spoken turns but translations of the lines above.

- 1 P <L1sp>bueno<L1sp> okay so we have to try to do it in the way she says
 2 (.) like you have the first position number bla bla bla and then the
 3 second position (1)
 <L1sp>fine<L1sp>
 4 M [<L1sp>si<L1sp>
 [<L1sp>yes<L1sp>
 5 P [you see? so she want to put the <LNde>versand<LNde> as another
 6 article (.) you know what she’s doing?
 <LNde>shipping<LNde>
 7 M <L1sp>que esta<L1sp> <LNde>sie macht versand als ein artikel
 manchmal <LNde>
 <L1sp>that she’s<L1sp><LNde>she wants the shipping as an article
 sometimes<LNde>
 8 H <L1de>ja ?<L1de>
 <L1de>yes ? <L1de>
 9 P <LNde>das normal <LNde>
 <LNde>that normal <LNde>

As Cogo (2012, p. 306) explains: Pedro has provided a summary of the different items that should appear in the invoice and their positions on the document and tries to double check with Maria and Helmut that this is fine. Maria replies affirmatively in Spanish (Line 4) while overlapping with Pedro’s turn specifying that they need to put “versand” (shipping) as another item (Lines 5-6). Despite Maria’s overlap in Spanish, Pedro continues his point in English (again to make sure that Helmut is included in the discussion and understands the point) and explicitly asks the interlocutors if they are aware that the accountant (line 6, “she”) is putting another item (line 5, “versand”) in the invoice. Maria, who seems to be aware that this question is also (and probably mainly) directed to Helmut for his accountancy role, switches to German to draw Helmut’s attention to the question. After Helmut’s confirmation in German (line 8), Pedro also switches to German to ask if that is a common practice (to include “versand” as an item). In the retrospective interview, Pedro justifies his crossing to German as “medio en chiste (.) como ellos estan hablando alemán quiero decirles que yo también entiendo alemán” [“a bit like a joke (.) because they are speaking in German I want to tell them that I understand German too”]. This language playing and crossing is common at IT Services, where people draw on various resources from their repertoire to create a multilingual playful atmosphere, and while crossing imagined language boundaries (i.e., the boundaries that make Spanish the language of Pedro and Maria, and German the language of Maria and Helmut) they also discuss working practices.

Further copious examples and analyses of multilinguals’ pragmatic uses of ELF are provided in the

book length accounts of Cogo and Dewey (2012), Mauranen (2012), and Pitzl (2018), where the focus is more on multilinguals' creative use of native English than on the use of other languages per se. The critical point in all this, however, is that the updated CEFR has not taken account of the ways in which multilingual speakers make use of their entire multilingual repertoires in order to promote successful lingua franca communication rather than trying to adhere inflexibly to the norms of any one specific language. Arguably, this renders its distinction between multilingualism and plurilingualism meaningless.

Concluding remarks

The enhanced prominence given to Mediation in the recently extended and revised iteration of the CEFR is a positive step in recognizing multilingualism. It is, however, quite clear that the underlying assumptions of use of languages do not take sufficient account of the dynamic and flexible nature of multilingual communication. There is certainly little recognition of co-construction in interactional discourse, made more complex and unpredictable by the rich background languages (and their associated socio-cultural knowledges and practices). The emphasis on information transmission from one language to another is but just one aspect of multilingual mediation. In this discussion we have pointed to the need to recognize contingency and dynamism in multilingual mediation that can bring additional resources into communication and task accomplishment.

In passing it is interesting to note that the other Mediation scales do not appear to put so much emphasis on transmission of information. For instance, in "Facilitating Pluricultural Space," the B2+ descriptors state that:

- "Can *exploit knowledge of socio-cultural conventions* in order to establish a consensus on how to proceed in a particular situation unfamiliar to everyone involved.
- Can, in intercultural encounters, *demonstrate appreciation of perspectives other than his/her own normal worldview*, and express him/herself in a way appropriate to the context.
- Can *clarify misunderstandings and misinterpretations during intercultural encounters*, suggesting how things were actually meant in order to clear the air and move the discussion forward." (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 123, italics added)

The italicized texts signal unambiguously that the language user/learner can "exploit," "demonstrate," and "clarify" differences, and "move" things forward.

In the "Facilitating Communication in Delicate Situations and Disagreements" scale the B2+ descriptors state that:

- Can elicit possible solutions from parties in disagreement in order *to help* them to *reach consensus*, formulating open-ended, neutral questions to minimise embarrassment or offense.
- Can help the parties in a disagreement better understand each other by *restating and reframing* their *positions* more clearly and by prioritising needs and goals.
- Can *formulate a clear and accurate summary* of what has been agreed and *what is expected* from each of the parties. (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 125, italics added)

Here the phrases such as "to help ... reach consensus," "restating and reframing ... position," and "formulate a clear and accurate summary of ... what is expected ..." suggest that there is a space for agentive language use and contingent decision making. It may well be argued that "Facilitating Pluricultural Space" and "Facilitating Communication in Delicate Situations and Disagreements" are different facets of Mediation from "Acting as Intermediary in Informal Situations," so it follows that

different principles and criteria would apply. The difficulty with this “differentiated mediation” view is that all three types of Mediation can in fact be conducted in myriad ways involving monolingual and/or multilingual communication. It is not inconceivable that “Facilitating Pluricultural Space” would involve multilingual communication. Indeed, it would make good sense to call on shared multilingual resources when “Facilitating Pluricultural Space” where appropriate (although the scale descriptors do not formally provide for this). If Mediation is about “finding a way to get through to others somehow,” then the same principles and criteria should apply to the different facets. In a curious way the monolingually constituted descriptors for “Facilitating Pluricultural Space” and “Facilitating Communication in Delicate Situations” seem to allow more room for agentive thinking and contingent decision making than “Acting as [Multilingual] Intermediary in Informal Situations.”

Finally, it is far from clear that acts of multilingual mediation can be mapped onto levels of a rating scale. Unlike aspects of language such as grammar, there is no established template or standards for judgement. It is virtually impossible to pre-specify good or not so good mediation, let alone multilingual mediation. A good deal of what counts as success or lack of success in mediation depends on interlocutor uptake and joint negotiation. It may well be possible to conduct empirical studies to provide data for enumerating examples of actions that can promote mediation. Whether such enumeration would lead to the basis of scale building is a moot point. For as Peter Lenz (2020) observed at a recent event focusing on the CEFR, “we need to fight hypnosis through scales and levels and stick with the actual training and assessment needs of actual people.” There is plenty of scope for local enrichment of the concept of mediation to take account of participant perceptions, values and practices in respect of discourse sensibilities, multilingualism and communication effectiveness.

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