

DEVELOPING ILLUSTRATIVE DESCRIPTORS OF ASPECTS OF MEDIATION

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French edition:
Elaborer des descripteurs illustrant des aspects
de la médiation pour le CECR

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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on a project of the Council of Europe's Language Policy Programme (henceforth LPP) carried out between January 2014 and April 2016. The main aim of this project was to develop a descriptive scheme and illustrative descriptors for mediation, the fourth mode of language activity presented in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe 2001 – henceforth CEFR). In turn, the project was carried out within the context of a wider project aiming to provide a 2016 extended version of the CEFR illustrative descriptors. That wider project took place in two, overlapping, phases: firstly, the updating of the 2001 scales on the basis of the pool of validated CEFR-related descriptors that had been calibrated in a number of recent projects, and secondly, the development from scratch of descriptor scales for mediation and related categories (2014-16). In addition, a Eurocentres¹ team also undertook a collation of CEFR-related descriptors for younger learners, mainly from European Language Portfolios (henceforth ELPs). Finally, this three-pronged descriptor project was accompanied by another, parallel, initiative launched in the summer 2013 by the LPP. This was the commissioning of a text (Coste & Cavalli, 2015) aiming to reposition the conceptual scheme of the CEFR in relation to recent developments in language-related needs in school education.²

As Coste & Cavalli aptly underline,

[...] building on the achievements of the CEFR clearly does not mean re-assessing the conceptual basis for its proposals, but rather, on the one hand, elaborating on and updating the descriptors it contains and, on the other, repositioning the basic model within a more all-embracing view of social agents' learning trajectory and personal development. The first aspect is the focus of work being done by a team co-ordinated by Brian North, and the second is the subject of this study. (2015: 6)

[...]

It will be noted that although the CEFR was designed, and has been used, above all in relation to the learning of foreign languages, it presents a model that is just as valid for all other forms of language communication. This is why it can be incorporated as it stands into the model with its broad social and educational scope that is being analysed here. (ibid: 12)

The authors stress that, indeed, the CEFR's notion of the user/learner as social agents makes it very suited to such a broader re-interpretation.

In addition to the notion of mediation, it is this conception of the social agent as an autonomous and responsible player with a plurality of communication skills and plurilingual and pluricultural experience which provides the inclusive link between the current conceptual scheme and the CEFR. (ibid: 13)

One should, however, add that the coordination and coherence between the Coste & Cavalli text and the mediation descriptor project is limited for three kinds of reasons. Firstly, the authors are only concerned with the context of school education, whereas the mediation project, in line with the CEFR itself, has a wider focus, providing descriptors suitable for all four domains of the CEFR: the *public*, the *personal*, the *educational* and the *occupational domains*. Secondly, the focus in the mediation project is on the provision of descriptors for mediation activities, strategies and related competences that involve language use – in addition to the activation of general competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes). The aim of the project was to develop descriptors involving language use and to calibrate them to the CEFR's language proficiency levels A1– C2. The

1. Eurocentres: Foundation for Language and Educational Centres: NGO to the Council of Europe since 1968, provider of language stays abroad, organizer on behalf of the Swiss government of both the 1971 and 1991 Rüşchlikon intergovernmental symposia that led up to the CEFR, proposer of the European Language Portfolio, co-producer of CEFR illustrative descriptors.

2. The working title of the text in its consultation phase was *Revisiter et enrichir le dispositif conceptuel du CEFR*.

remit for Coste & Cavalli is far wider, thus they include as examples descriptors from other sources, particularly from the current Council of Europe project co-ordinated by Martyn Barrett, which aims to provide descriptors for Competences for Democratic Culture (henceforth CDC Project). Thirdly, there is a temporal dislocation between the text production and the mediation project itself, which results in the example descriptors cited by Coste & Cavalli being from the provisional version available before the three rounds of validation, which took place between February and November 2015 as reported later in this paper.

All three descriptor projects mentioned above (2001 update; mediation descriptors, descriptors for young learners) have now been completed. The extended version of the CEFR illustrative descriptors, which integrates the results from the first two projects, is available in a preliminary, consultative edition on the Council of Europe website. The document presenting the descriptors provides a brief introduction and (as appendices) rationales for each of the scales for new categories that were produced in the mediation project. The scheme for those rationales is explained briefly in Section 5 below. An overview of the process and methodology related to development and validation of the new descriptor scales is then given in Sections 6 and 7 then discusses the potential relevance of the mediation descriptors for different contexts. The approach taken to mediation is broader than the one presented originally in the CEFR, though, as will be explained, this broader interpretation is in fact foreshadowed, though not developed, in both the CEFR text and some of the 2001 illustrative descriptor scales. As a result of this broader interpretation, the mediation descriptors can be considered to be – at least potentially – relevant to public, professional, academic and migration contexts in addition to the world of school education that is the focus of the study by Coste & Cavalli (2015).

However, perhaps the most significant point about the descriptors for the new mediation categories is precisely that, in the spirit of the Coste & Cavalli text, their relevance is not confined to the teaching of foreign/second languages. Rather, an interpretation of mediation more in line with educational literature within and beyond the language field leads to a definition of mediation competences that are potentially relevant to all types and contexts of language use. This is a significant, and deliberate, departure from the targeting of the original illustrative descriptors, which were specifically designed in relation to the foreign/second language classroom only.

Before we discuss issues of relevance to different fields in Section 7, however, let us first consider the way in which mediation is presented in the CEFR (Section 2) and the way it has been interpreted in language learning and teaching, in the wider educational context and in other fields (Sections 3 and 4).

Section 2

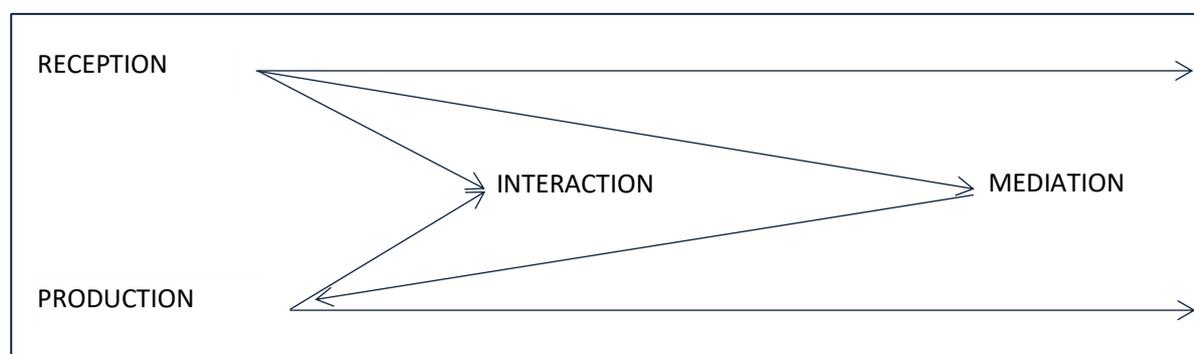
MEDIATION IN THE CEFR

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 from the “four skills” (Lado, 1961) to the four modes of activity: reception, interaction, production and mediation implies; more than just adding a fifth “skill”. It recognizes the unique 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 takes this aspect, i.e. the awareness of the dynamic nature of meaning making to another level. In fact, it integrates and goes further than the co-construction of meaning by underlining the constant link between the social and individual dimensions in language use and language learning. Although the CEFR does not develop the concept of mediation to its full potential, 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 in the socio-constructivist / socio-cultural view of learning (Lantolf, 2000, Schnewly, 2008) in which mediation is a key concept, as will be outlined in Section 5. In addition, an emphasis on the mediator as an intermediary between interlocutors underlines the social vision of the CEFR. In this way, although it is not stated explicitly in the 2001 text, the CEFR descriptive scheme *de facto* gives mediation a key position in the action-oriented approach, similar to the role that other scholars give it when they discuss the language learning process.

To stress the importance that mediation had in the conceptualization of the CEFR, we would like to remind readers of the diagram (reproduced as Figure 1) that appeared in the first public version of the CEFR (Council of Europe 1998: English version, p. 15; French version, p. 16). In this schema, mediation appears to be interwoven with the other three modes of communication in a prolongation of interaction, which in turn has aspects of reception and production. In other words, mediation integrates the other language activities.

The explanation of the diagram, which is retained in the 2001 version even though the diagram itself disappeared, confirms that mediation is an everyday activity, not something restricted to specialists.

Figure 1 – Mediation in the CEFR, 1998 edition



In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of **mediation** make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason to communicate with each other directly. 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. Mediation language activities, (re)processing an existing text, occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies.

(CEFR Section 2.1.3: English version, p. 14; French version, p. 18)

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the concepts of interaction and mediation were not greatly developed in the CEFR. There was little focus on written interaction, which has since become one of the most frequent activities of our everyday lives due to the mass introduction of information and communication technologies, and in interpretation of the CEFR, mediation has tended to be reduced to interpretation and translation. It is for this reason that the mediation project focused on a wider view of mediation, as well as on written interaction in its online form.

In order to further clarify both the potential and the limits of the initial interpretation of mediation as it appears in the CEFR, it is worth regrouping for consideration the other instances when it talks of mediation.

CEFR Section 4.4 presents types of mediation activities:

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 e.g.:

4.4.4.1 oral mediation:

- ▶ simultaneous interpretation (conferences, meetings, formal speeches, etc.);
- ▶ consecutive interpretation (speeches of welcome, guided tours, etc.);
- ▶ informal interpretation:
 - of foreign visitors in own country
 - of native speakers when abroad
 - in social and transactional situations for friends, family, clients, foreign guests, etc.;
 - of signs, menus, notices, etc.

4.4.4.2 written mediation:

- ▶ 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;
- ▶ paraphrasing (specialised texts for lay persons, etc.).

(CEFR Section 4.4.4: English version, p. 87; French version, p. 71)

CEFR Section 4.6.3 adds:

In addition to interaction and mediation activities as defined above (= *interpretation and translation*), there are many activities in which the user/learner is required to produce a textual response to a textual stimulus. The textual stimulus may be an oral question, a set of written instructions (e.g. an examination rubric), a discursive text, authentic or composed, etc. or some combination of these. The required textual response may be anything from a single word to a three-hour essay. Both input and output texts may be spoken or written and in L1 or L2.

(CEFR Section 4.6.3: English version p. 99; French version p. 80)

In discussing the profiling of abilities in ELPs, CEFR Section 8.4.2 concludes:

(*But*) it would be helpful if the ability to cope with several languages or cultures could also be taken into account and registered. Translating (or summarising) a second foreign language into a first foreign language, participating in an oral discussion involving several languages, interpreting a cultural phenomenon in relation to another culture, are examples of mediation (as defined in this document) which have their place to play in assessing and rewarding the ability to manage a plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire.

(CEFR Section 8.4.2: English version, p. 175; French version, p. 133)

The above citations from the CEFR mention at least four different mediation situations, which are in practice often combined. In these activities, the user/learner:

- ▶ receives a text and produces a related text to be received by another person who has no access to the first text;
- ▶ acts as an intermediary in a face-to-face interaction between two interlocutors who do not understand one another, possibly because they do not share the same language or code;
- ▶ interprets a cultural phenomenon in relation to another culture;
- ▶ participates in a conversation or discussion that involves several languages, exploiting his/her plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires.

It is worth pointing out that the CEFR does not confine the concept of mediation to cross-linguistic mediation. It is only in the final example, Section 8.4.2, when discussing the need to value plurilingual profiles in ELPs, that the reference is exclusively to the use of more than one language.

To take each of the other instances outlined above, we can outline their main message as follows:

- ▶ Section 2.1.3: make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly
- ▶ Section 4.4: act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly, normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages.
- ▶ Section 4.6.6: Both input and output texts may be spoken or written and in L1 or L2. (Note: This does not say that one is in L1 and one is in L2; it even states they could both be in L1).

Yet, many people appear to associate mediation in the CEFR solely as cross-linguistic mediation – usually conveying the information given in a text, and to reduce it to some form of (more or less professional) translation and interpretation. Where mediation has been included in curricula and examinations, it tends to involve informal interpretation/translation or summary of a text - written or spoken - in one language into another language. Why has this interpretation prevailed? One can only speculate. Perhaps the bullet-pointed examples cited above encourage it. Perhaps because this interpretation gives a concrete task with which to implement a concept of plurilingualism, even though it is one reduced to an information-gap view of communication. Perhaps because this interpretation provides an ‘up-to-date,’ communicative version of traditional translation test tasks.

Looking at what has happened from a historical perspective can also help to cast light onto this development. Two main considerations in particular seem to be helpful. The first is the fact that North’s (1992) category ‘processing’ in the presentation of the schema *reception, interaction, production, processing* at the 1991 Rüsclikon Symposium that recommended the development of the CEFR and ELP was replaced by the category ‘mediation’ during the work of the CEFR’s Authoring Group. It is possible that the authors continued to be over-influenced by this association with processing text. Descriptors for processing were in fact developed during the Swiss National Research Project referred to above – but then included in Section 4.6.3 ‘Text,’ rather than under mediation. The second, and probably more relevant, consideration is that time was not yet ready for a broader and more dynamic vision of mediation, as language teaching was still confined in the early 90s to a strict monolingual paradigm where separation of languages was seen as a core value. This is also one of the reasons why the rather shy introduction of mediation in the CEFR developed at that same time was actually quite forward-looking. As Baker (1988) aptly states while explaining the move from a negative to a positive vision of bilingualism, results of research had not yet been translated into pedagogical reflection, let alone into classroom practice.

It is a fact that the place of mediation in the CEFR is limited, with little development and no illustrative descriptors provided. However, it is also true that the CEFR underlines a constant movement between the social and individual levels during the process of language learning. The CEFR stresses how the external context must always be interpreted and filtered by the user/learner in relation to several characteristics (Piccardo, Berchoud, Cignatta, Mentz & Pamula, 2011: 20–21).

The mental context is [...] not limited to reducing the information content of the immediately observable external context. Line of thought may be more powerfully influenced by memory, stored knowledge, imagination and other internal cognitive (and emotive) processes. In that case the language produced is only marginally related to the observable external context. Consider, for example, an examinee in a featureless hall, or a mathematician or poet in his or her study.

External conditions and constraints are also relevant mainly in so far as the user/learner recognises, accepts and adjusts to them (or fails to do so). This is very much a matter of the individual's interpretation of the situation in the light of his or her general competences (see Chapter 5.1) such as prior knowledge, values and beliefs.

(CEFR Section 4.1.4: English version, p. 50; French version, p. 44)

In other words, the CEFR reminds us that there is a form of interior mediation that takes place at the level of the individual, to which it adds the social dimension by speaking of the user as a social agent. 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. These are issues we turn to in the following two sections.

Section 3

MEDIATION: A DEVELOPMENTAL NOTION

The outline of forms of mediation present in the CEFR, though it remains incomplete, underlines the richness of the notion. Not only would it be reductionist to see mediation as solely interpretation and translation, but it would also be simplistic to limit it to one single dimension: that concerning the transfer of information from one language to another.

Considering the different angles from which mediation is touched on in the CEFR, we can say that there seem to be fundamentally four types of mediation: linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogic³. Let us begin by considering linguistic mediation again, since, as discussed above, this is treated most explicitly in the CEFR.

3.1. LINGUISTIC MEDIATION

Linguistic mediation comprises (but is not restricted to) the interlinguistic dimension, particularly in the sense of knowing how to translate and interpret, more formally or less formally, or transforming one kind of text into another. However, it also includes 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. Summarising an L1 text in the L1 is also an act of mediation, probably with a focus on linguistic expression as much as on the transfer of information. Another form of linguistic mediation is the flexible use of different languages, for example in multilingual classrooms. King & Chetty (2014) speak of explaining, summarising, clarifying and expanding a text from one language in another language more familiar to the learners, whilst Creese & Blackledge (2010) and Lewis, Jones & Baker (2012) describe managing collaborative interaction or narrating a text flexibly in different languages in a multilingual classroom, to ensure that everyone is involved. Exploiting a plurilingual repertoire is not confined to classroom contexts. Lüdi (2014) describes flexible alternation between languages in professional contexts, including mediating the purchase of a train ticket through snippets in different languages, gestures and drawings when a client's knowledge of a common international language is insufficient to carry out the transaction in a single language.

But as soon as one goes further than the simple transfer of the simple, propositional sense of the message, as in this example, as soon as one takes account of the cultural implications of words (Byram, 2008) and their sometimes quasi-untranslatability, one enters into the second type of mediation: cultural mediation.

3.2. CULTURAL MEDIATION

A process of linguistic mediation that tries to facilitate understanding is also unavoidably a process of cultural mediation. It is a question of working at a level sophisticated enough to preserve the integrity of the source and to get across the essence of the meaning intended. Passing from one language to another necessarily involves passing from one culture to another or from some cultures to other cultures. In the teaching of modern languages, this aspect is rarely dealt with sufficiently in practice, despite numerous theoretical studies on the subject (e.g. Levy & Zarate, 2003; Zarate, Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier & Penz, 2003; Brown, 2007; Byram, 2008). In-depth consideration of the role and nature of mediation makes it the linchpin to the notion of cultural awareness, which is also there in the background in the CEFR without being developed explicitly (e.g. beginning of CEFR Chapter 4: English version, p. 43; French version, p. 40: Section 5.1.1.3: English version, p. 103; French version, p. 83). Cultural awareness, of course, applies within a language as well as across languages and cultures, with consideration of idiolects, sociolects and of the links between styles and textual genres. It also concerns relating different sub-cultures: social and professional, within the

3. This distinction extends the one between linguistic, cultural and social mediation made by Piccardo (2012).

umbrella culture of a society. This broadening of the concept of mediation leads us naturally to the third type: social mediation.

3.3. SOCIAL MEDIATION

Despite the brevity of the presentation of mediation in the CEFR, the social aspect is always underlined. It concerns a language user who plays the role of intermediary between different interlocutors, engaged in an activity that ‘occupies an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies’ (CEFR Section 2.1.3: English version, p. 14; French version, p. 18). When one thinks of it, there is nothing surprising about this statement, especially considering the nature of communication made explicit in the CEFR in its treatment of interaction. But mediation integrates and goes beyond the exchange and even co-construction of discourse that one sees in interaction. Mediation concerns the facilitation of the communication itself and/or the (re)formulation of a text, the (re)construction of the meaning of a message. And it is precisely this process of (re)construction of meaning that makes mediation a developmental notion. Learning a foreign language always involves, to some extent, being faced with the unknown, having to make sense of something that is only partly, or even not at all, comprehensible. The learner finds him/herself confronted with a text or situation that requires some form of mediation in order to become accessible: linguistic, social or cultural mediation – or a combination of the three.

In the CEFR, social mediation seems to be limited, at least at first sight, to the idea of helping two or more persons to communicate who are unable to communicate alone because they cannot understand each other. But language is not the only reason why people cannot understand one another. The difficulty may be caused by different perspectives or expectations, different interpretation of behaviour, of rights and obligations – the ‘mediator’ may help to bridge these gaps and overcome these misunderstandings. Secondly, if one thinks of mediation in terms of rendering a text comprehensible, one can imagine an even wider application of this mediation process. After all, the comprehension difficulty may not be due to language; it may well be due to lack of knowledge or experience, to a lack of familiarity with the area or field concerned.

However, the concept of social mediation is normally interpreted far more broadly than in the above discussion. It tends to refer to the provision of ombudsman, counselling and conflict prevention or resolution services but is sometimes (e.g. in a review of recent research in the USA by Wall & Dunne 2012) used exclusively to mean arbitration and the resolution of personal, commercial or international disputes. In France, for instance, ‘médiateurs’ are employed by local authorities to perform most of these functions in more sensitive districts. In German the term ‘Mediation’ is also used only in this sense (with the CEFR’s ‘mediation’ translated in both the CEFR itself and in *Profile Deutsch* as ‘Sprachmittlung’ (Glaboniat, Müller, Rusch, Schmitz, & Wertenschlag, 2005).

The multifaceted nature of social mediation requires further thoughts. Zarate helps us navigate this rich notion by proposing three complementary conceptions of mediation:

- ▶ mediation as an area for bringing together new partners. Mediators make intelligible to newcomers the cultural and linguistic contexts which the latter inaugurate;
- ▶ mediation in situations of conflict or tension, where languages and cultural references lead to exclusion and social violence. Different situations of re-mediation will be presented within a process which begins by specifying the object of the conflict, to go on to establishing a procedure for possible conflict settlement;
- ▶ mediation instilling specific dynamics into third areas as alternatives to linguistic and cultural confrontation. In this plural area difference is pinpointed, negotiated and adapted.’ (2003: 95)

The third instance Zarate gives picks up on Kramersch’s (1993) notion of a ‘third space.’ Kramersch herself (2009) later reviews theories of ‘thirdness’ used as a way of breaking out of counter-productive dichotomies in semiotics, literary criticism, foreign language education (e.g. native speaker / non-native speaker) and literacy pedagogy. In discussing the concept of ‘third space’ she says: ‘Understanding someone from another culture requires an effort of translation from one perspective to the other that manages to keep both in the

same field of vision (ibid: 237). The ‘third space’ is a ‘heterogeneous, indeed contradictory and ambivalent space in which third perspectives can grow in the margins of dominant ways of seeing’ (ibid: 237). It is a space in which a user/learner might take some distance from his/her cultural norms by ‘reading against the grain’ (ibid: 238) and becoming more aware of loaded connotations and biases. This last aspect of what Kramsch is describing is very close to Byram’s skill: *Critical cultural awareness / political education: An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries.* (1997: 53 and 63). Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*) in turn is close to the idea of encouraging ‘critical thinking,’ an ability to question and conceptualise that is a traditional aim of mainstream education, which brings us to a further dimension, that of pedagogic mediation.

3.4. PEDAGOGIC MEDIATION

Essentially successful teaching is a form of mediation. Although countries and languages differ considerably in their pedagogic cultures (e.g. see Alexander, 2008), they usually present some combination of collaborative learning with teacher-centred approaches (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008; Zweiers, 2008). Teachers and parents try to mediate knowledge, experiences 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 relationships and rapport, organizing work, integrating certain individuals, keeping people on task, preventing trouble, resolving problems – etc. Thus, pedagogic mediation encompasses the following actions:

- ▶ facilitating access to knowledge, encouraging other people to develop their thinking (**cognitive mediation: scaffolded**)
- ▶ collaboratively co-constructing meaning as a member of a group in a school, seminar, or workshop setting (**cognitive mediation: collaborative**)
- ▶ creating the conditions for the above by creating, organizing and controlling space for creativity (**relational mediation**)

The CEFR includes some descriptor scales related to collaborative interaction⁴, inspired by the pioneering work on small group interaction by Barnes & Todd (1977) and the Oxford Certificates of Educational Achievement (OCEA 1984) that can be seen as a first tentative to cover the second type of mediation in this list. However, it does not touch upon either of the other, teacher-centred, activities. Since, as will be seen in the next section, facilitating access to knowledge is a core aspect of the way mediation is conceived in psychology, this lack seems regrettable.

4. Goal-oriented cooperation, and the three scales for interaction strategies: Taking the floor (Turntaking), Cooperating and Asking for clarification.

Section 4

TOWARDS A RICHER “MODEL” OF MEDIATION

As we have seen in the previous section, mediation can mean many things to many people. It has been defined as a “nomadic notion” (Lenoir, 1996) because it embraces a broad spectrum of dimensions and connotations and it is interpreted in so many various ways in different disciplines. The use of mediation in relation to diplomacy, conflict resolution and commercial transaction spans the ages from the classical to the contemporary world and has more recently expanded to include a wide range of professional arbitration, counselling and guidance activities. Our deeper reflection on the nature of mediation, though, is rooted in philosophy, namely in German idealism and dialectical materialism. For Hegel, thought was a mediation process, an abstract operation through which knowledge was acquired, a view to which Marx and Engels added a social dimension in which mediation was a form of relation between opposing domains and forces in the society. This consideration of the twofold nature of mediation would inform future reflection in a broad range of humanities and social sciences. In particular, the work of Vygotsky (1978) enabled the crucial transition to psychology and education by explaining how social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. According to Vygotsky, every concept appears twice, first at the social, then at the individual level, so higher mental functions have a social origin and nature (Wertsch, 1985), being mediated by psychological and cultural tools, especially language; human abilities are social constructions.

The vision of mediation as a process that connects two spaces is in fact a fundamental point in the work of Vygotsky and to the sociocultural theory that has developed in applied linguistics in North America with reference to his work (Lantolf, 2000). However, the non-linearity of the learning process also informs other theories and models that provide the foundation for our understanding of the process of learning. We are referring in particular to the ecological model (van Lier 2000, 2002, Kramsch, 2002) and to complexity theories (Davis & Sumara, 2005; De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2007; Larsen Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Piccardo, 2015). All these theories and models in fact explain the teaching and learning process in a way, which allows to make sense of the different elements that come into play as well as of their relationships. We refer more extensively to Vygotsky’s work below due to the central place that mediation has in his theories. However, the other theories and models mentioned complement our discussion as the possibility of considering this rich notion of mediation from different theoretical angles allows for a deeper understanding of its implications.

No matter where and how mediation is used and theorized though, it occurs where there is bridging and exchange between different elements and spaces, where the individual and the social interact “Mediation is the process which connects the social and the individual”. (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman 2015: 151). This multifaceted bridging and exchange may involve enhancing communication and reciprocal comprehension, or establishing relationships across barriers and avoiding/solving critical situations or conflicts. In the context of education and training, this will involve helping learners to appropriate knowledge, but also creating the relationships and conditions to enable them to do so. In professional contexts, on the other hand, mediation will tend to involve establishing relationships and making information available across barriers, counselling and guidance activities, and arbitration in personal or institutional disputes.

The means of mediation are culturally connotated human constructions. The action of mankind with the environment is always mediated by tools that are socially constructed and evolve over time as a result of the experience of successive generations. All human behaviour is organized and controlled by material (i.e. concrete) and symbolic (i.e. semiotic) artefacts (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman 2015: 151).

For Vygotsky (1931/74) signs are artificial stimuli that mankind created in order to control own behaviour and that of others. ‘Mental activity [...] is mediated; at a human level it is only possible thanks to the artificial means used to structure and modify it’ (Schneuwly 2008: 16 authors’ translation). “Factors that shape mental activity are social in origin” (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014: 52). And in mental activity the sign as a

symbolic tool replaces the material tool. This concept is crucial in the theory of Vygotsky for whom the core issue in our psychology is the act of mediation. It is with symbolic tools that we construct ourselves and others: whereas the material tool acts on nature, the sign acts on oneself and on other individuals. Language is the sign system reserved for the control of oneself and others. Vygotsky rejects cognitive theories according to which the development of concepts occurs first at the individual level to be then transferred to the social level. On the contrary, social activity – and with it the different forms of social and cultural mediation – precedes the emergence of concepts (Lantolf, 2000). The individual reconstructs for him/herself the mediated social interactions that he or she has experienced. This mediation takes place through different kinds of acoustic, visual and linguistic signs. Language thus stems from social interaction and it is not until later that it becomes the object of a reflection, in which the learner can reconstruct and internalise processes like thought or learning. The most fundamental theoretical postulate of the sociocultural theory is indeed mediation of human thinking, which develops as “internalization of socially constructed activity” where “instruction, development, and assessment are inseparable processes dialectically unified in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)” (Lantolf, 2007: 693). We can say that mediation is at the core of knowledge (co)construction. Indeed, the whole language acquisition process can be defined as “socialization into communities of practice through the mediation of material signs” (Kramersch, 2002: 6).

This view completely contradicts traditional theories, which explain language learning as a cognitive process that happens at the level of the individual, later put into practice in a social context. Such a vision relies upon a separation of language itself and language use: language is seen as a thing apart, separate from both the individual and the social context. ‘Language can be studied *in* its social context, but language itself [in this traditional vision] is seen as a system of arbitrary signs or symbols that are given social existence through their reference to a context which is itself outside of language’. (Kramersch 2000: 133). Internalizing another “mediational system” (ibid, 695) in turn has a powerful impact on the way people communicate with others, the way they think and eventually on the identity construction process (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

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 determined and structured by) social processes. The notion of mediation enables one to break down the walls of Cartesian thinking that separate the individual from culture and society (Engeström 1999: 22). 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 (complex) task (Piccardo, 2012). However, in language education, it is clear that a vision of this type will collide with the traditional idea that a language is learnt through the memorisation of linguistic elements that may later be used to perform an activity. The classic orientation of language teaching, focused on the learning of grammatical and lexical knowledge, is not compatible with theories of learning based on the formation of concepts. In fact, grammar rules, the way they are usually explained in textbooks, are often not an effective vehicle for developing concepts. In addition, finding words that semantically match completely in two different languages is sometimes challenging. This can be a source of frustration among learners. The alternative view is that “language emerges from social and cultural activity and only later becomes an object of reflection” (Kramersch 2000: 134). This corresponds to what suggested in the CEFR, where the user/learner is seen first and foremost as a social agent taking part in school life, buying things, participating in conversations, using all kinds of signs to mediate these activities, and later interiorising the signs in order to structure cognitive processes. Mediation is therefore crucial in the individual’s psycho-cognitive development precisely because semiotic mediation is central to all aspects of knowledge (co)construction: the child employs tools and symbols to make sense of its environment. However, mediation is also seen as a core feature of the social process when adults, siblings and peers interact with the child, providing scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

It is only by appealing to wider, more systemic theories that one can really move beyond an atomistic, reductive view of language learning. On top of the different theories based upon the work of Vygotsky (e.g. sociocultural theory, socio-constructivist theory), other theories too offer a key to studying the complexity of language learning. Van Lier (2002) proposes a non-linear, semiotic view of language. The ecological-semiotic perspective helps to overcome the idea of language as a simple collection of disconnected elements transmitted by school education. Starting from various psychological theories and the philosophy of

language and semiotics, he underlies the fact that it is not a question of providing ‘inputs’ to learners but rather to expose them to ‘affordances,’ a term he borrows from Gibson (1977), which he defines as ‘meaningful ways of relating to the environment through perception-in-action’ (Van Lier 2002: 147). It is, for example, with these ‘affordances’ that learners – through a process of semiotic mediation – seize the meaning of a word in context, the real ‘speaker meaning’ as opposed to the, by comparison dry, literal, ‘sentence meaning’ (Levinson 1983: 17).

The notion of affordances is crucial as it underlines the relevance and the potential of idiosyncratic phenomena. It is also conceptually very close to one of the key notions of complexity theories, that of emergence. Emergence appears in two forms: both as a property and as a process. Emergence is a collective property that characterizes the whole, while none of its constituting elements possesses that same property and an emergent process is happening precisely when all these constituting elements interact. Emergent phenomena derive from the interactions and combinations of these individual elements and are the result of such process (Piccardo, 2016 in press). All complex adaptive systems (CAS) are characterized by phenomena of emergence (Larsen Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Individuals can be seen as CAS, which are nested in another, larger CAS, for instance, in the case of language education, the class. Language learning can be considered as an emergent process that involves individuals engaged in social interactions that are inevitably, to a greater or lesser extent, complex and unpredictable. Interestingly, this reminds closely the definition of creativity offered by Sawyer for whom “all creativity is an emergent process that involves a social group of individuals engaged in complex, unpredictable interaction’ (2003: 19).

In many respects, the presentation of mediation as an interdependent duality of individual and social, which is key to the CEFR vision, 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 fundamental binary distinction between an idea of language as representation of thought and one of language as communication tool (Piccardo, 2005: 22) with the interpersonal function defined as embodying ‘all use of language to express social and personal relations’ (Halliday 1973: 41).

Thus, language is not used just to transmit knowledge or enable communication, but also to construct meanings. Since the time of Locke at least it has been acknowledged that there is a very complex relationship between language, thought and the construction of meaning. For Locke words (essentially nouns) are ideas, but the connection between each word and idea is just conventional and therefore, since different people have different ideas, and the link between word and idea is only conventional and not intrinsic, the meaning of any particular word in any specific context depends on the precise idea the speaker has, to which the hearer has no access except through the (imperfect) mediation of the word (Locke 1722: Essay III, Chapter 2, paragraphs 1–4). Dictionaries were developed to define these conventional meanings associated with words. More recently, the discipline pragmatics has investigated these distinctions between dictionary meaning (or sentence meaning) and speaker meaning (Levinson 1983: 17). Locke’s ideas are further developed in the (still controversial) Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that posits that available language determines what one can think.

We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language [...] all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated. (Whorf, B.L. 1956: 212–4)

Whatever one thinks of that hypothesis, it is undeniable that language is a major mediating tool that facilitates thought and the construction of ideas. The notion of *linguaging*, which has developed in sociocultural theory, helps one reflect on this aspect of mediation. Linguaging is “a dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning” (Swain, 2006: 96), and takes two forms: *private speech* and *collaborative dialogue* (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2015). Collaborative dialogue is relatively self-defining and already appears in the CEFR in the scales for *Goal-oriented co-operation* (under interaction activities) and *Co-operating* (under interaction strategies). In addition, the emphasis in the CEFR on the mediator as an intermediary between different interlocutors underlines this social, collaborative vision of language, as

discussed above. Private speech is defined as ‘inner speech made conscious through the symbolic mediation of languaging (ibid, 32). In other words, between the interior speech seen by Vygotsky as the sublimation of speech, a purely internalised process of comprehension and conceptualisation, and the exterior speech, there is a more or less conscious use of an intermediary form of *private speech*, constructed through languaging, which of course occurs in the mother tongue as well as in additional languages.

Private speech is a mediation activity in which language fully plays its role as a semiotic tool to facilitate thought. Thinking out loud is a not uncommon habit. Private speech may occur when repairing or assembling something, or when looking for a misplaced object. When cooking for instance, private speech may well be used to mediate a text (the recipe), perhaps aloud. The boundary between private speech and collaborative dialogue may then become blurred, with two people cooking or repairing: one mediating the text and the other confirming actions taken. Taking this a stage further away from private speech, one person may be mediating the text because it assumes ‘specialised’ knowledge unknown to the other person (like how to blanch vegetables or reboot a modem) or because it is written in a language the other person is not familiar with.

Swain and Lapkin (2013) suggest that students should be given an opportunity to use their first language during collaborative dialogues or private speech, so that they could “mediate their understanding and generation of complex ideas (languaging) before they produce an end product (oral or written) in the target language” (Swain & Lapkin 2013: 122–123), and propose that only after their proficiency increases, they could be encouraged to use the L2 as a tool for mediation. They consider that each time user/learners encounter new and complex material they should be allowed to mediate their thinking via their first language. The use of L1 needs to be “purposeful, not random”, in particular, the use of L1 “to illustrate cross-linguistic comparisons or to provide the meaning of abstract vocabulary items can mediate L2 development during ZPD activity in the target language” (Swain & Lapkin, 2013, p. 123). Corcoll López & González-Davies (2016) give a very concrete example of just such a classroom activity.

Section 5

CATEGORIES OF THE SCHEME

As implied by the discussion in the previous sections, mediation is concerned with the role of language in processes like the creation of the space and conditions to facilitate communication, understanding and/or learning, the construction and co-construction of new meaning, and/or the conveyance of information. It is an all-embracing “nomadic” notion.

To summarise the discussion of mediation, all the mediation activities that were mentioned in Sections 1 - 3 are listed below. There are over 50 entries, after eliminating repetition. The list reflects the kind of activities mentioned in the related literature (see project biography).

Section 1: Mediation in the CEFR

- ▶ Co-construction of meaning
- ▶ Acting as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly
- ▶ Written translation
- ▶ Simultaneous interpretation (conferences, meetings, formal speeches, etc.)
- ▶ Consecutive interpretation (speeches of welcome, guided tours, etc.)
- ▶ Informal interpretation
- ▶ Summarising gist (newspaper and magazine articles, etc.)
- ▶ Paraphrasing (specialised texts for lay persons, etc.)
- ▶ Making a record
- ▶ (Re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access
- ▶ (Re)processing an existing text
- ▶ Producing a textual response to a textual stimulus (oral question, set of written instructions, discursive text)
- ▶ Participating in an oral discussion involving several languages
- ▶ Interpreting a cultural phenomenon in relation to another culture
- ▶ Mediation between two people who share the same situational context but may well maintain different perceptions and interpretations

Section 2: Mediation: a developmental notion

- ▶ Summarising an L1 text in the L1, probably with a focus on linguistic expression as much as on the transference of information
- ▶ Explaining, summarising, clarifying and expanding a text from one language in another language
- ▶ Managing collaborative interaction
- ▶ Narrating a text flexibly in different languages
- ▶ Facilitating understanding
- ▶ Alternation between languages in professional contexts

- ▶ Mediating an everyday transaction through snippets in different languages, gestures and drawings when knowledge of a common language is insufficient to carry out the transaction in a single language
- ▶ Working at a (*cultural*) level sophisticated enough to preserve the integrity of the source and to get across the essence of the meaning intended
- ▶ Considering idiolects, sociolects and the links between styles and textual genres
- ▶ Relating different sub-cultures: social and professional, within the umbrella culture of a society
- ▶ Playing the role of intermediary between different interlocutors
- ▶ Facilitating the communication itself
- ▶ (Re)formulating of a text
- ▶ (Re)constructing the meaning of a message
- ▶ Helping two or more persons to communicate who are unable to communicate alone because they cannot understand each other
- ▶ Having to make sense (as a learner) of something that is only partly, or even not at all, comprehensible
- ▶ Making sense of a text with which one is confronted
- ▶ Helping to bridge gaps and overcome misunderstandings (caused by different perspectives or expectations, different interpretation of behaviour, of rights and obligations)
- ▶ Provision of ombudsman, counselling and conflict prevention or resolution services
- ▶ Arbitration and the resolution of personal, commercial or international disputes
- ▶ Bringing together new partners by making cultural and linguistic contexts intelligible to newcomers
- ▶ Mediation in situations of conflict or tension, where languages and cultural references lead to exclusion and social violence: specifying the subject of the conflict and establishing a procedure for a possible settlement
- ▶ Pinpointing problematic difference and negotiating in a neutral, dynamic 'third space' or 'plural area' a way of dealing with the difference, as an alternative to linguistic and cultural confrontation
- ▶ Translation from one perspective to the other, that manages to keep both perspectives in the same field of vision
- ▶ Taking some distance from one's cultural norms, 'reading against the grain' and becoming more aware of loaded connotations and biases
- ▶ Rendering a text comprehensible
- ▶ Mediating for lack of knowledge or experience, lack of familiarity with the area or field concerned
- ▶ Evaluating critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries
- ▶ Encouraging "critical thinking," an ability to question and conceptualise
- ▶ Teaching
- ▶ Directly mediating knowledge, experiences and an ability to think critically for oneself
- ▶ Mediating knowledge, experiences and an ability to think critically for oneself indirectly through collaborative work
- ▶ Establishing relationships and rapport

- ▶ Organizing work, integrating certain individuals, keeping people on task, preventing trouble, resolving problems – etc.
- ▶ Facilitating access to knowledge, encouraging other people to develop their thinking (cognitive mediation: scaffolded)
- ▶ Collaborative co-constructing meaning as a member of a group in a school, seminar, or workshop setting (cognitive mediation: collaborative)
- ▶ Creating the conditions for the above by creating, organizing and controlling space for creativity (relational mediation)

Section 3: Towards a richer “model” of mediation

- ▶ Mediation in relation to diplomacy
- ▶ Mediation in relation conflict resolution
- ▶ Mediation in relation commercial transaction
- ▶ Arbitration, counselling and guidance activities
- ▶ Bridging and exchanging between different elements and spaces, where the individual and the social interact
- ▶ Enhancing communication and reciprocal comprehension
- ▶ Establishing relationships across barriers
- ▶ Avoiding/solving critical situations or conflicts
- ▶ Helping learners to appropriate knowledge
- ▶ Creating the relationships and conditions to enable learners to appropriate knowledge
- ▶ Establishing relationships
- ▶ Making information available across barriers,
- ▶ Counselling and guidance activities
- ▶ Arbitration in personal or institutional disputes
- ▶ Making sense of things through language
- ▶ Structure learning through language
- ▶ Mediation of the mental processes involved in the completion of a (complex) task
- ▶ Using all kinds of signs to mediate activities (like taking part in school life, buying things, participating in conversations) and later interiorising the signs in order to structure psychological processes
- ▶ Providing scaffolding
- ▶ Socialization into communities of practice
- ▶ Mediating one’s relationship to a new culture
- ▶ Collaborative dialogue
- ▶ Goal-oriented cooperation
- ▶ Exploiting language as a semiotic tool to facilitate thought
- ▶ Thinking out loud when repairing or assembling something, or when looking for a misplaced object
- ▶ Mediating a text (for instance the recipe we provided earlier as an example), perhaps aloud
- ▶ Two people carrying out an activity (e.g. cooking or repairing): one mediating the text and the other confirming actions taken

- ▶ Mediating a text because it assumes ‘specialised’ knowledge unknown to the other person
- ▶ Mediating a text because it is written in a language the other person is not familiar with

The above list is very long and rich and yet not comprehensive. It mainly aims at underlining the range of ways in which mediation may be employed. Perhaps because of this issue, Coste and Cavalli (2015:12) offer a very abstract, generic consideration of mediation: “In all cases, the aim of the mediation process, defined in the most general terms, is to reduce the gap between two poles that are distant from or in tension with each other.”

The reader will have noticed that there are certain points in the list that are given in italics, repeated below. These are the points that are not fully reflected in the proposed illustrative descriptors:

Section 2: Mediation: a developmental notion

- ▶ Having to make sense (as a learner) of something that is only partly, or even not at all, comprehensible
- ▶ Making sense of a text with which one is confronted
- ▶ Bringing together new partners by making cultural and linguistic contexts intelligible to newcomers

Section 3: Towards a richer ‘model’ of mediation

- ▶ Mediation in relation to diplomacy,
- ▶ Mediation in relation commercial transaction
- ▶ Counselling and guidance activities
- ▶ Socialization into communities of practice
- ▶ Thinking out loud when repairing or assembling something, or when looking for a misplaced object

These eight points fall into three groups: mediating to oneself; mediation as a professional activity, and integrating newcomers. Regarding mediation to oneself, it was decided early on in the work of the group that there was a danger that everything could be interpreted as mediation. There was no point redefining reception as mediating a text to oneself or indeed in repeating under mediation any activities already found in the CEFR under reception, interaction or production. The line adopted was that mediation would be taken to mean self-effacing activity to ‘reduce the gap’ between a person or persons on the one hand and other persons or new concepts on the other hand. There was some discussion as to whether one should regard expressing reactions to literature as mediation. Clearly one mediates when explaining or giving a view on a work to another person. Because responses to and criticism of literature was at the borders of the concept of mediation developing in the project, however, it was decided to put descriptors for this area under ‘Mediating a text’ together with Listening and Note-taking.

Professional mediation is not the focus of the project. However, since dealing with delicate situations and disputes is a part of everyday life, a scale is included for *Resolving delicate situations and disputes*.

As regards the third group, integrating newcomers (bringing together new partners by making cultural and linguistic contexts intelligible to newcomers; socialization into communities of practice) there was initially a scale with this title in a group of draft scales for a category Institutional mediation/Integrating newcomers. This was because Coste & Cavalli define the relevance of mediation predominantly as a means of personal mobility, as follows:

The social agent’s mobility allows him or her to participate in and move between social groups (or communities). It is through this participation and movement that social agents first encounter, in the form of perceived otherness and distance, opportunities and subject-matter for, and experiences of, learning and personal development. Mediation, for which different agencies are responsible and which mainly takes place through language activities, seeks to facilitate the different aspects of this process: supporting mobility and rendering it more free-flowing; approaching and reducing or appropriating otherness; gaining access to, integrating with and participating in communities, possibly having recourse to social networks. The agencies

in question, from social agents themselves to institutions, have responsibilities to bear in this process, the exercise of which involves, among other things, acts of mediation. (2015: 7)

The initial, draft descriptors for B1 on the proposed scale were as follows:

Can welcome newcomers, *entering unprepared into conversations with them on familiar topics*. CEFR (adapted)

Can obtain detailed information on relevant issues, with the help of a prepared questionnaire. CEFR (adapted)

Can act as a guide on a conducted tour, answering straightforward questions. ELTDU (adapted)

Can convey simple, straightforward information of immediate relevance, e.g. describing areas of responsibility, routines, tasks that need completing, sources of assistance available. CEFR (adapted)

Can explain and give simple reasons for procedures. ELTDU (adapted)

Can enquire about needs, make suggestions and give an opinion regarding solutions to problems or practical questions. CEFR (adapted)

The consultants to whom this initial set of descriptors was shown pointed out the risk that descriptors of this type might be perceived as rather unidirectional and patronizing. They also underlined that the activities described were not significantly different from activities already present in the CEFR descriptors for interaction, which could be adapted. The category was therefore dropped, along with some others that also just 'recycled' concepts and elements of existing CEFR descriptors.

Eventually, consideration of Zarate's 'neutral, dynamic "third space" or "plural area" (2003: 95) gave rise to another way of dealing with this issue, which became a scale for *Creating pluricultural space*. The final descriptors for B1 and B1+ on this scale are as follows:

Can support communication across cultures by initiating conversation, showing interest and empathy by asking and answering simple questions, and expressing agreement and understanding.

Can act in a supportive manner in intercultural encounters, recognising the feelings and different world views of other members of the group.

Can support an intercultural exchange using a limited repertoire to introduce people from different cultural backgrounds and to ask and answer questions, showing awareness that some questions may be perceived differently in the cultures concerned.

Can help to develop a shared communication culture, by exchanging information in a simple way about values and attitudes to language and culture.

To return to the list of mediation activities collated from Sections 1–3, what strikes one about the list, as we said above, is its length, richness, variety and lack of structure. Mediation has so many layers, types, aspects. How can one capture this richness in a practical descriptive scheme that is easy to understand? How can one do so in such a scheme that fits within the CEFR's descriptive scheme? In addition, the way that, in discussing linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogic mediation, similar points come up again and again underlines the overlapping and intermeshing between these commonly-used categories. Nowadays we understand that all categorisation in the social sciences, and even many in the natural sciences, are conventional rather than intrinsic (Broch, 2005; Piccardo, 2005). Whorf's (1956: 212) statement that 'we cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way,' appears far less controversial today than it did as recently as the 1980s. All boundaries between categories in our field are fuzzy distinctions not Cartesian absolutes and in any case, with regard to any CEFR categories, we are not talking about components or 'things' anyway, but rather aspects to bear in mind. **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.**

The categorisation adopted by Coste & Cavalli of *cognitive mediation* and *relational mediation*, was used in developing the categories for descriptor scales:

[...] it may be postulated that the fundamental task of knowledge transmission and building and the appropriation of that which at first sight is perceived as otherness involves a series of operations that can be described as **cognitive mediation**. The management of interactions, relationships and even conflicts and, more generally speaking, everything pertaining to a reduction of distances between individuals, facilitating encounters and cooperation and creating a climate conducive to understanding and to work falls within the scope of a form of mediation that can be described as **relational mediation**. Relational mediation may, of course, also have a role to play in the school context as helpful to or a prerequisite for cognitive mediation. (2015: 28)

As the authors point out, the boundary between these two categories is also fuzzy, relational and cognitive mediation are frequently if not normally combined. The key issue is that they involve language use:

These two mediation forms – cognitive and relational – which are not mutually exclusive and are often combined; essentially involve **language as a means of mediation** (as defined by the CEFR, but in a considerably expanded form) within social contexts. (ibid: 13)

For the initial set of descriptors prepared for the consultation process, the distinction between cognitive and relational mediation was used to present the scales. However, since real communication requires a holistic integration of both aspects, the mediation scales are presented in a more practical division into four groups:

- ▶ Mediating a text;
- ▶ Mediating concepts;
- ▶ Mediating communication, and
- ▶ Mediation strategies.

The categories for the descriptor scales are given in Table 1⁵. The two scales on reactions to creative text (including literature) and the two on online interaction each concern aspects that might well not be considered to be mediation, but in which an element of mediation is involved.

5. Titles changed slightly during the process of validation and consultation. It is the final titles that are given.

Table 1 – Categories for descriptor scales

| | |
|---|--|
| MEDIATION SCALES | |
| Mediation activities | |
| Mediating a text | |
| Relaying specific information in speech | |
| Relaying specific information in writing | |
| Explaining data (e.g. in graphs, diagrams, charts etc.) in speech | |
| Explaining data (e.g. in graphs, diagrams, charts etc.) in writing | |
| Processing text in speech | |
| Processing text in writing | |
| Translating a written text in speech | Added after Phase 1 |
| Translating a written text in writing | |
| Note-taking (lectures, seminars, meetings, etc.) | |
| Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature) | |
| Analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature) | |
| Mediating concepts | |
| Collaborative work within a group | |
| Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers | |
| Collaborating to construct meaning | |
| Leading group work | |
| Managing interaction | |
| Encouraging conceptual talk | |
| Mediating communication | |
| (Establishing a positive atmosphere) | Dropped after pre-consultation |
| Facilitating pluricultural space | Added after Phase 2 |
| (Interpreting) | Dropped after consultation |
| Acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues) | Developed from “Interpreting” after consultation |
| Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements | |
| Mediation Strategies | |
| Strategies to explain a new concept | |
| Linking to previous knowledge | |
| Adapting language | |
| Breaking down complicated information | Added after Phase 2 |
| (Visually representing information) | Dropped after pre-consultation |
| Strategies to simplify a text | |
| Amplifying a dense text | |
| Streamlining a text | |
| (Restructuring a text) | Dropped after Phase 1 |
| OTHER SCALES | |
| Online interaction | |
| Online conversation and discussion | |
| Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration | |
| Plurilingual and pluricultural competence | |
| Building on pluricultural repertoire | |
| Plurilingual comprehension | Added after Phase 3 |
| Building on plurilingual repertoire | |

There had been specific requests to the Council of Europe's Language Policy Programme for scales on online interaction and on appreciation of literature, and, in their work on mediation, the group felt that plurilingual and pluricultural competences (CEFR Section 6.1.3) were clearly relevant to mediation in a cross-linguistic context.

During the initial work of the group, various solutions were proposed to the question of how to deal with the question of directionality in mediation across languages. A version offering descriptors for three variants (in one language; L1 to L2; L2 to L1) produced immense repetition, some 1,500 descriptors and created more problems than it solved: (Is it always clear what the L1 is? Is it clear what the source and target languages are?). The solution finally adopted was to recommend that users, in the process of adapting a descriptor to their context, to specify the actual languages concerned. For example the following B1 descriptor: *Can relay in the content of public announcements and messages spoken in standard language at normal speed*, might be elaborated as follows: *Can relay in French the content of public announcements and messages spoken in standard German at normal speed*.

5.1. RATIONALES FOR THE SCALES

Sources for the descriptors and rationales for all the new scales (including for phonology) are provided in the CEFR Companion Volume. The rationales follow a standard pattern.

First there is a description of the broader area concerned. Then, for each of the descriptor scales in that area follows a brief definition of the category; a list of key concepts operationalized in the scale, and a brief description of the way in which progression up the scale from the A levels to the C levels is characterized. On the next six pages, before we turn to the validation of the descriptors, Table 2 - 7 give the definitions for each of the broader areas, and for the descriptor scales within it.

Table 2 – Mediating a text

Table 3 – Mediating concepts

Table 4 – Mediating communication

Table 5 – Mediation strategies

Table 6 – Online interaction

Table 7 – Plurilingual & pluricultural competences

For the full rationales, readers are referred to the CEFR Companion Volume with the descriptors.

Table 2 – Mediating a text

Mediating a text

Mediating a text involves passing on to another person the content of a text to which they do not have access, often because of linguistic, cultural, semantic or technical barriers. This is the main sense in which the 2001 CEFR text uses the term mediation. This presentation reflected the fact that it replaced ‘processing,’ the fourth category in addition to reception, interaction and production, presented at the Rüschnikon Symposium that had recommended the development of the CEFR. Indeed, a scale for *Processing* was included in CEFR Section 4.6.3 Text. This has now been expanded into three different descriptor scales for both spoken and written language (*Relaying specific information, Explaining data, Processing*), making a total of six scales that effectively replace the existing one. In addition, two scales are presented for translating a written text, in speech and writing respectively. These scales are not intended to describe the activities of professional translators or to their training. Indeed, translating competences are not addressed in the scale. Furthermore, professional translators, like professional interpreters, are usually operating at a level well above C2. Rendering a text into another language or acting as a linguistic intermediary are everyday activities for non-specialists in the professional and personal domains. The notion of mediating a text has also been further developed to include mediating a text for oneself (for example in taking notes during a lecture) or in expressing reactions to texts, particularly creative and literary ones.

Relaying specific information

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, rather than the main ideas or lines of argument presented in a text. *Relaying specific information* is related to *Reading for orientation* (although the information concerned may have been given orally in a public announcement or series of instructions). The user/learner scans the source text for the necessary information and then subsequently relays this to a recipient.

Explaining data (e.g. in graphs, diagrams, charts etc.)

Explaining data refers to the transformation into a verbal text of information found in diagrams, charts, figures and other images. The user/learner might do this as part of a PowerPoint presentation, or when explaining to a friend or colleague the key information given in graphics accompanying an article, a weather forecast, or financial information.

Processing text

When user/learners *process* information, they first have to understand the information and/or arguments included in the source text and then transfer these to another text, usually in a more condensed form, in a way that is appropriate to the context of situation. In other words, the outcome represents a condensing and/or reformulating of the original information and arguments, focusing on the main points and ideas in the source text. The key word of the processing information scales in both speaking and writing is ‘summarising’. Whereas in *Relaying specific information* the user/learner will almost certainly not read the whole text (unless the information required is well hidden!), in *Processing text*, he/she has first to fully understand all the main points in the source text. *Processing text* is thus related to *Reading for information and argument* (sometimes called reading for detail, or careful reading), although the information concerned may have been given orally in a presentation or lecture. The user/learner may then choose to present the information to the recipient in a completely different order, depending on the goal of the communicative encounter.

Translating a written text

Translating a written text in speech is a largely informal activity that is by no means uncommon in everyday personal and professional life. It is the process of spontaneously giving a spoken translation of a written text, often a notice, letter, email or other communication. *Translating a written text in writing*, a more formal process, is not intended to relate to the activities of professional translator. Plurilingual user/learners sometimes find themselves in a situation in which they are asked to provide a written translation of a text in a professional or personal context. Here they are being asked to reproduce the substantive message of the source text. With these scales, it will be particularly important to specify the languages involved because the scale deliberately does not address the issue of translating into and from the mother tongue. This is partly because of the fact that, for increasing numbers of plurilingual persons, ‘mother tongue’ and ‘best language’ are not always synonymous. What the scale provides is a functional description of the ability to reproduce a source text in another language.

Note-taking (lectures, seminars, meetings etc.)

This 2001 CEFR scale concerns the ability to listen and write coherent notes, which is valuable in academic and professional life.

Reactions to creative text (including literature)

Creative texts tend to evoke a reaction, and this is often promoted in language education. There are perhaps four main types of classic response: engagement: giving a personal reaction to the work or a character or characteristic of it; interpretation: ascribing meaning or significance to aspects of the work; analysis of certain aspects of the work, and evaluation: giving a critical appraisal. There is a fundamental difference between the first two categories (engagement and interpretation) and the last two (analysis and evaluation). Describing a personal reaction and interpretation is cognitively far simpler than giving a more intellectual analysis and/or evaluation. The former also requires less sophisticated language. Therefore, two different scales are offered: *Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)* reflects the approach taken in school sectors and in adult reading circles. The scale focuses on expression of the effect a work of literature has on the user/learner as an individual. *Analysis and criticism of creative texts, (including literature)* represents the approach more common at an upper secondary and university level. It concerns more formal, intellectual reactions. Aspects analysed include the significance of events in a novel, treatment of the same themes in different works and other links between them; the extent to which a work follows conventions, and more global evaluation of the work as a whole.

Table 3 – Mediating concepts

Mediating concepts

It is recognised in education that language is a tool used to think about a subject and to talk about that thinking in a dynamic co-constructive process. A key component of the development of mediation scales, therefore, is to capture this function. How can the user/learner facilitate access to knowledge and concepts through language? There are two main ways in which this occurs: one is in the context of collaborative work and the other is when someone has the official or unofficial role of facilitator, teacher or trainer. In either context, it is virtually impossible to develop concepts without preparing the ground for it by managing the relational issues concerned. For this reason, two scales are presented for collaborating in a group, and for leading group work. In each case the first scale, concerns establishing the conditions for effective work (= relational mediation). The second scale is concerned with the development and elaboration of ideas (=cognitive mediation). As is the case with different aspects of communicative language competence, or of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, distinctions are made to assist reflection, but real communication requires a holistic integration of different aspects. The four descriptor scales in this section thus form pairs as indicated below:

| | Establishing conditions | Developing ideas |
|---------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Collaborating in a group | Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers | Collaborating to construct meaning |
| Leading group work | Managing interaction | Encouraging conceptual talk |

Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers

The user/learner contributes to successful collaboration in a group that he/she belongs to, usually with a specific shared objective or communicative task in mind. He/she is concerned with making conscious interventions where appropriate to orient the discussion, balance contributions, and help to overcome communication difficulties within the group. He/she does not have a designated lead role in the group, and is not concerned with creating a lead role for himself/herself, being concerned solely with successful collaboration.

Collaborating to construct meaning

Collaborating to construct meaning 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.

Managing interaction

The user/learner has a designated lead role to organise communicative activity between members of a group or several groups, for example as a teacher, workshop 'animateur', trainer or meeting chair. He/she has a

conscious approach to managing phases of communication that may include both plenary communications with the whole group, and/or management of communication within and between sub-groups.

Encouraging conceptual talk

In *Encouraging conceptual talk* the user/learner provides scaffolding to enable another person or persons to themselves construct a new concept, rather than passively following a lead. The user/learner may do this as a member of a group, taking temporarily the role of facilitator, or they may have the designated role of an expert (e.g. animator/teacher/trainer/manager) who is leading the group in order to help them understand concepts.

Table 4 – Mediating communication

Mediating communication

Despite the brevity of the presentation of mediation in the 2001 CEFR text, the social aspect is underlined. Mediation concerns a language user who plays the role of intermediary between different interlocutors, engaged in activities that ‘occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies.’ (CEFR Section 2.1.3). Language is of course not the only reason why people sometimes have difficulty understanding one another. Even if one thinks of mediation in terms of rendering a text comprehensible, the comprehension difficulty may well be due to a lack of familiarity with the area or field concerned. Understanding the other requires an effort of translation from one’s own perspective to the other, keeping both perspectives in mind; sometimes people need a third person or a third space in order to achieve this. Sometimes there are delicate situations, tensions or even disagreements that need to be faced in order to create the conditions for any understanding and hence any communication.

The descriptors for mediating communication will therefore have direct relevance to teachers, trainers, students and professionals who wish to develop their awareness and competence in this area, in order to achieve better outcomes in their communicative encounters in a particular language or languages, particularly when there is an intercultural element involved. The skills involved are relevant to diplomacy, negotiation, pedagogy and dispute resolution, but also to everyday social and/or workplace interactions.

Facilitating pluricultural space

This scale 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 user/learner aims to facilitate a positive interactive environment for successful communication between participants of different cultural backgrounds, including in multi-cultural contexts. Rather than simply exploiting his/her pluricultural repertoire to gain acceptance and to enhance his own mission or message (see *Exploiting pluricultural repertoire*), he/she is engaged as a cultural mediator: creating a neutral, trusted, shared ‘space’ in order to enhance the communication between others. He/she aims to expand and deepen intercultural understanding between participants in order to avoid and/or overcome any potential communication difficulties arising from contrasting cultural viewpoints. Naturally, the mediator him/herself needs a continually developing awareness of sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences affecting cross-cultural communication.

Acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)

This scale is intended for situations in which the user/learner as a plurilingual individual mediates across languages and cultures to the best of his/her ability in an informal situation in the public, private, occupational or educational domain. The scale is therefore not concerned with the activities of professional interpreters. The mediation may be in one direction (e.g. during a welcome speech) or in two directions (e.g. during a conversation).

This scale does not describe the degree of spontaneity and precision with which such professionals perform simultaneous translation at bodies like the Council of Europe, European Union or United Nations. Firstly, Level C2 describes ‘the top examination levels in the scheme adopted by ALTE’ (CEFR Section 3.2: English version, p. 23), a level that can be achieved by ‘those who have been highly successful learners’ (CEFR Section 3.6: English version, p. 36). Professional interpreters, like other language professionals, generally have a proficiency level above this.

Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements

The user/learner may have a formal role to mediate in a disagreement between third parties, or may informally try to resolve a misunderstanding, delicate situation or disagreement between speakers. He/she is primarily concerned with clarifying what the problem is and what the parties want, helping them to understand each

other's positions. He/she may well attempt to persuade them to move closer to a resolution of the issue. He/she is not at all concerned with his/her own viewpoint, but seeks balance in the representation of the viewpoints of the other parties involved in the discussion.

Table 5 – Mediation strategies

Mediation strategies

The user/learner's ability to mediate does not only involve being linguistically competent in the relevant language or languages, it also entails using mediation strategies that are appropriate in relation to the conventions, conditions and constraints of the communicative context. Mediation strategies are the techniques employed to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding. Thus, mediation strategies in the sense being used here, apply mainly to cognitive mediation (constructing new meaning in collaborative work or when guiding a group; conveying received meaning from a spoken or written source text). Mediation strategies are communicative language strategies, that is to say performance strategies used during the mediation process. As a mediator, the user/learner may need to shuttle between people, between texts, between types of discourse and between languages, depending on the mediation context. The strategies are the tools used in the process.

This is a broader view of mediation strategies than the one currently presented in CEFR Section 4.4.4.3 (English version, pp. 87–88). There, mediation strategies are said to “reflect ways of coping with the demands of using finite resources to process information and establish equivalent meaning.” Developing background knowledge, locating supports, preparing a glossary, previewing, noting equivalences, bridging gaps in knowledge and checking congruence of two versions or refining by consulting dictionaries are some of the strategies mentioned. However, firstly these strategies apply mainly to interpretation and translation rather than the broader view of mediation presented in the range of mediation activities outlined above. Secondly, those strategies, with the exception of bridging gaps in knowledge, all concern what happens before or after the actual mediation process.

The strategies here presented are performance strategies, i.e. ways of helping people to understand, during the actual process of mediation. They concern the way source content is processed for the recipient. For instance, is it necessary to elaborate it, to condense it, to paraphrase it, to simplify it, to illustrate it with metaphors or visuals? Since these are all quite complicated processes, there are no descriptors for the A levels.

Linking to previous knowledge

Establishing links to previous knowledge is a significant part of the mediation process since it is an essential part of the learning process. 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, etc. Links may be made to **other texts**, relating new information and concepts to previous material, and to background knowledge of the world.

Amplifying text

Density of information is often an obstacle to understanding. This scale is concerned with the expansion of the input source (spoken or written) through the inclusion of helpful information, examples, details, background information, reasoning and explanatory comments.

Streamlining text

This scale is concerned with the opposite to *Amplifying*: condensing a written text to its essential message(s). This may involve expressing the same information in fewer words by eliminating repetition and digressions, and excluding those sections of the source that do not add relevant new information. However, it may also involve regrouping the source ideas in order to highlight important points, to draw conclusions or to compare and contrast them.

Breaking down complicated information

Understanding can often be enhanced by breaking down complicated information into constituent parts, and the showing how these parts fit together to give the whole picture.

Visually representing information

This scale concerns the use of drawings and graphic organisers (tables, flow charts, mind maps etc.) in order to illustrate new information.

Adjusting language

The user/learner may need to adjust his/her language and paraphrase the content of a text in order to include the content appropriately in a new text of a different genre and register. This may be done through the inclusion of synonyms, simplification or other types of paraphrasing.

Table 6 – Online interaction

Online interaction

Online communication is always mediated through a machine, which implies that it is unlikely ever to be exactly the same as interaction in presence. There are emergent properties of group interaction online that are almost impossible to capture in traditional competence scales focusing on written and speech acts of the individual. For instance, there is an availability of resources shared in real time. On the other hand, there may be misunderstandings which are not spotted (and corrected) immediately, as is often easier with face-to-face communication. Some requirements for successful communication are:

- ▶ the need for more redundancy in messages;
- ▶ the need to check that the message has been correctly understood;
- ▶ ability to reformulate in order to help comprehension, deal with misunderstanding;
- ▶ ability to handle emotional reactions.

Online conversation and discussion

This scale focuses on online conversation and discussion online as a multi-modal phenomenon, with an emphasis on how interlocutors communicate online to handle both serious issues and social exchanges in an open-ended way.

Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration

This scale focuses on the collaborative nature of web 2.0 interaction and the transactions that occur online as a regular feature of modern life, all with specific outcomes. A rigid separation between written and oral does not really apply to online transactions, where multimodality is increasingly a key feature and resource.

Table 7 – Plurilingual & pluricultural competences

Plurilingual and pluricultural competences

The notions of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism presented in the CEFR (Sections 1.3; 1.4; and 6.1.3) have been used as the starting point for the development of descriptor scales in this area. In particular, the following points made in the CEFR have been taken into consideration:

- ▶ Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism as the latter focuses on the presence of a number of language and their co-existence in a given society whereas plurilingualism stresses the fact that:
 - languages are interrelated and interconnected especially at the level of the individual;
 - languages and cultures are not kept in separated mental compartments;
 - all knowledge and experience of languages contribute to building up communicative competence.
- ▶ Balanced mastery of different languages is not the goal, but rather the ability (and willingness) to modulate their usage according to the social and communicative situation.
- ▶ Barriers between languages can be overcome in communication and different languages can be used purposefully for conveying messages in the same situation.

Other concepts were also taken into consideration after analysing recent literature:

- ▶ The capacity to deal with 'otherness' to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc., in order to enable communication and collaboration.
- ▶ The willingness to act as an intercultural mediator.
- ▶ The proactive will and capacity of the user/learner to use knowledge of languages he/she is familiar with in order to understand new languages, of relying upon (and looking for) cognates and internationalisms in order to understand texts in unknown languages – whilst being aware of the danger of 'false friends.'

- ▶ The capacity to respond in a sociolinguistically appropriate way by incorporating different languages or elements of other languages and/or variations of languages in his/her own discourse for communication purposes.
- ▶ The manipulation of the above at a higher level for ludic and stylistic purposes;
- ▶ The capacity to exploit one's linguistic repertoire by purposefully blending, embedding and alternating languages at the utterance level and at the discourse level;
- ▶ A readiness and capacity to expand plurilingual and pluricultural awareness through an attitude of openness and curiosity;

Terms associated with these concepts include: translanguaging, code switching/mixing/meshing; transidiomatic practices, and polylingualism.

The scale Creating pluricultural space is included under Relational Mediation, rather than here, because it focuses on the more pro-active role as an intermediary acting as intercultural mediator, in order to establish and maintain relationships.

In addition, the three scales summarized on the right describe aspects of the broader conceptual area concerning plurilingual and intercultural education. This area is the subject of CARAP/FREPA (Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches: <http://carap.ecml.at>). CARAP/FREPA lists different aspects of plurilingual and intercultural competences in a hypertextual structure independent of language level, organised according to the three broad areas: Knowledge (savoir), Attitudes (savoir-être) and Skills (savoir-faire). The three scales presented here are complemented by a cross-reference to the CARAP/FREPA scheme to provide users with an opportunity for further reflection and access to related training materials in this area.

Building on pluricultural repertoire

Many notions that appear in literature and descriptors for intercultural competence are included, for example:

- ▶ A need to deal with ambiguity when faced with cultural diversity:
 - looking for sociolinguistic and pragmatic ambiguity and adjusting his/her reactions, modify his/her language, reflect upon them, etc.
- ▶ A need for understanding that different cultures may have different practices, cultural norms:
 - commenting and comparing cultural elements/differences;
 - discussing how actions may be perceived by people belonging to other cultures.
- ▶ A need to take into consideration differences in behaviours (including gestures, tones and attitudes):
 - discussing overgeneralisations and stereotypes.
- ▶ A need to recognise similarities and use them as a basis to improve communication:
 - explaining features of a culture;
 - analysing and discussing documents.
- ▶ A will to show sensitivity to differences and readiness to offer and ask for clarification:
 - anticipating possible risks of misunderstanding.

However, the aim in this project was to associate descriptors with levels of language proficiency in order to help teachers to integrate appropriate objectives into their courses. Therefore, there is a tendency for the language ability that is merely implied in other sets of descriptors for this area to be made explicit. Conversely, descriptors that concern latent attitudes, or which were so general as to apply to a wide range of level, were either edited or excluded.

Plurilingual comprehension

The main notion represented by this scale is the capacity to use the knowledge of and proficiency (albeit partial) in one or more languages as leverage for approaching texts in other languages and so achieve the communication goal.

Building on plurilingual repertoire

In this scale we find aspects that characterise both the previous scales. As the social agent is exploiting his/her cultural repertoire, he/she is also engaged in exploiting all available linguistic resources in order to communicate effectively in a multilingual context and/or in a classic mediation situation in which the other people do not share a common language.

Section 6

DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF ILLUSTRATIVE DESCRIPTORS

Principled ways of validating and calibrating descriptors for proficiency scales have existed for over 50 years but were ignored in the language and educational fields until the 1993–96 Swiss National Research Project (CEFR Appendix B; North, 1995, 2000; North & Schneider, 1998; Schneider & North, 2000). Unfortunately, it still remains the exception for descriptors in education to be properly developed and validated.

The three basic problems that occur repeatedly in descriptors scales are briefly outlined below. For a fuller discussion of these issues and development methodologies to avoid them readers are referred to the following: 1) North (2000: 28–40) for a discussion of the major criticisms made; 2) Appendix A of the CEFR itself and Vogt (2011) for development methodologies, and 3) North (2014: 69–70) for the detailed validity claims of the published 2001 CEFR descriptors.

Firstly, as Champney (1941: 144) and Alderson (1991: 82) stated, a descriptor scale cannot be valid if the distinction between levels is made by alternating adverbials (e.g. always, usually, more/less than half the time); this concerns the formulation style. Secondly, as North (1992; 1993) pointed out, when descriptor scales are developed intuitively, the authors consult existing materials and the result is that clichés and assumptions tend to get copied from scale to scale without ever being validated. Finally, when a descriptor framework is used as a point of reference, there is a danger of circular argument in a closed system as Lantolf & Frawley (1988: 186; 1992: 35) claimed. A B2 person “can produce stretches of language at a fairly even tempo” so a person who “can produce stretches of language at a fairly even tempo” must be B2. This coherence may be useful in increasing the reliability in criterion-referenced assessment, but it can become a problem in developing descriptors for new areas. The expression “stretches of language at a fairly even tempo” may trigger the reaction ‘This must be a B2 descriptor,’ even though the expression may be used in relation to a very specific action under particular conditions, which would rather suggest a different level.

There are two logical corollaries from this last point: Firstly, the point to start in developing descriptors for a new area is not the formulation of existing CEFR descriptors, but the principle characteristics that define performance in the new area concerned. This does not mean that CEFR phraseology must be rigorously avoided, but it should not be the starting point for a semi-automatic, word processing exercise. Secondly, because of the danger of circular thinking we explained above, respondents assigning levels to descriptors should ideally not be the sole method for the calibration of descriptors to levels. As space does not permit a full criticism of standard-setting methods based on judgements by respondents, readers are referred to North, 2014: 219–22. The judgements of experts who have internalised the CEFR levels has been used successfully in many projects. Nevertheless, confirmation from an independent check is desirable, preferably with data from the use of the descriptors as criterion statements for assessment, to which respondents answer: “Yes” or “No” to the question whether a person could do what is described in the descriptor. As the Manual for relating assessments to the CEFR suggests (Council of Europe, 2009), it is always a good idea to use two independent, complementary standard-setting methods.

In the mediation project particular attention was given in order to avoid the pitfalls we have just explained above. The approach taken to the development and validation replicated the one adopted for the development of the original CEFR illustrative descriptors in the Swiss National Research Project.

- ▶ *Intuitive phase*: collecting and reviewing relevant source material, drafting, editing and discussing descriptors in an iterative process through a series of meetings.
- ▶ *Qualitative phase*: workshops with teachers evaluating and judging descriptors, matching them to the category they were intended to describe, and proposing reformulations.

- ▶ Quantitative phase: calibration of the best descriptors on the basis of a Rasch model scaling analysis.

There were, however, several differences between the work being reported and the original research (North, 2000, North & Schneider, 1998):

Intuitive phase: In the project reported on in this paper, the vast majority of the mediation descriptors were inspired by reading relevant literature, rather than coming from existing scales from CEFR-related projects. This is because the latter took only an information-transfer view of mediation.

Qualitative Phase: In the original CEFR-descriptor research, the 32 workshops with teachers had to be conducted face-to-face. Today, the existence of the internet – plus the networks of organisations like EALTA (European Association for Language Testing and Assessment), Equals (Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services), CERCLES (European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education) and UNlcert (a German organisation focused on University language education and certification) – meant that 137 workshops could be carried out at a distance, with the necessary materials being emailed to coordinators. This Phase 1 of the validation process is described in detail below.

Quantitative Phase: Whereas in the original CEFR-descriptor research, CEFR levels and descriptors did not exist, in the current project the networks mentioned above were all familiar with them. Therefore it was possible to ask informants to match descriptors to levels, as is frequently done in a standard-setting task with test items or in an assessment standardisation session with performance samples. This allowed the use of two complementary ways of calibrating descriptors, in Phases 3 and 2 respectively, as described below. The second method was a replication of that used in the original CEFR-descriptor research (using a 0-4 rating scale to answer the question ‘*Could the person concerned do what is described in the descriptor?*’).

For those readers more interested in the technical aspects of the development and validation, the full technical reports from each of those three main validation phases, plus from two follow-up projects on plurilingual/pluricultural competences and on phonology respectively, are also available.

An initial collection of descriptors, organized in draft scales, was put together by the first author during the first half of 2014. This collection was presented to consultants in a workshop on the final day of a consultation meeting held in Strasbourg in June 2014. As a result of this feedback, the collection was revised between July and September 2014 in preparation for a first meeting of an Authoring Group⁶ and an accompanying Sounding Board⁷. The descriptors were then extensively edited in a series of workshops and email exchanges between the end of September 2014 and early February 2015. The result was a set of descriptor scales for 24 categories with an overall total of 427 descriptors. It was at this point that descriptors were given serial numbers. All descriptors considered and rejected, as well as the original formulation of descriptors adopted from other sources were systematically logged in an archive version.

Between February 2015 and November 2015 these descriptors were then subjected to a validation process organised in three phases:

- ▶ Phase 1: Evaluating descriptors, allocating them to categories and suggesting improvements to formulation;
- ▶ Phase 2: Assigning descriptors to CEFR levels;
- ▶ Phase 3: Rating a person’s ability to perform what is described by a descriptor.

There was in addition a follow-up survey on plurilingual/pluricultural competences⁸. This separate plurilingual/pluricultural survey repeated Phases 2 & 3 in one survey, for reasons explained below when discussing the results of the data analyses.

6. Brian North, Tim Goodier, Enrica Piccardo, Maria Stathalpoulou

7. Coreen Docherty, Hanan Khalifa, Ángeles Ortega, Sauli Takala

8 A follow-up project following all three validation phases was also carried out in order to revise the CEFR scale for Phonological control. A detailed report on the phonology sub-project is separately available on the Council of Europe’s website (Piccardo, 2016).

6.1. THE VALIDATION PHASES

Full reports are separately available on the Council of Europe’s website for each of the three phases.

6.1.1. Phase 1

In this series of (circa 3-hour) distance workshops that took place between 16.02.15 and 26.03.15, the 427 draft descriptors were presented on a series of 30 overlapping sets, with sets being allocated to different institutes. The 137 institutes that took part each arranged their own face-to-face workshop, using materials sent by email. Each institute provided between one and nine pairs, giving a total of 495 pairs (approximately 990 respondents). Certain categories of existing CEFR descriptors on related areas were also included in order to see if the new categories could be distinguished from the existing ones. The task for each pair was to identify the intended category of descriptors, to rate them for *Clarity*, for *Pedagogical usefulness* and for *Relation to real world language use*, and to suggest improvements to the wording. Pairs of participants were asked to discuss and rate one of the sets of about 60 descriptors presented in random order. Examples of the data collection worksheets used by participants can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. In this case, the set focused on the two new online scales. Figure 2 shows the worksheet used for allocating a descriptor to a scale and evaluating its quality and Figure 3 shows the worksheet for suggesting reformulation.

Figure 2 – Data collection worksheet

Step 1: Tick in one column only (i.e. for a category, or for “Can’t Decide” or “Drop this descriptor”), referring to the Descriptor Sheet. Pay attention to the item numbers!! If you tick “Drop this descriptor,” proceed to the next descriptor. Do not do Step 2 in this case. If you tick “Can’t decide” you may still do Step 2 if you wish.
Step 2: Judge the quality of the descriptor. Tick Y/N (=Yes or No) in the column each of the 3 criteria accordingly.
Step 3: (Optional): If you want to suggest changes to a descriptor, write these directly on the Descriptor Sheet, put your name on the sheet and return it to the coordinator.

| Item no. | Step 1: Category (please tick ONE only) | | | | Step 2: Quality (please tick) | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|--------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|---|----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | Online Conversation and Discussion | Goal-oriented Online Transactions and Collaboration | Can't decide | Drop this descriptor | Clearly formulated | | Pedagogically useful | | Relevant to real life | |
| | | | | | Y | N | Y | N | Y | N |
| 114 | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 140 | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |

Figure 3 – Descriptor worksheet

| Item no. | Descriptor |
|----------|--|
| 175 | Can critically evaluate online comments, embedded links and media, and express negative reactions diplomatically. |
| 177 | Can deal confidently effectively with linguistic and cultural problems or cultural issues adjusting his/her register appropriately, that arise in order to complete online collaborative or transactional exchanges, adjusting his/her register appropriately. |

Very many informants did suggest reformulations. Many suggestions for reformulation involved striking through subordinate clauses or otherwise radically shortening descriptors or suggesting that they should be split into two. The Group had found it a challenge to get descriptors for mediation down to the 20–25 word length that North (2000: 345) had discovered teachers had a preference for, and this feedback was as a result invaluable in achieving that aim.

A report was created which collated, for each descriptor, the responses from each set on which the descriptor had appeared. For example, mediation strategies had appeared on Sets 11, 16, 17 and 20 and so in the example in Table 8 for Descriptor 230, the entries for those sets are shown one after another. Column 1 shows the descriptor ID, column 2 the sets in which it appeared and Column 3 the category to which it belonged, in this case LINK the scale for *Linking to previous knowledge*. As can be seen from Table 8, this descriptor was overwhelmingly allocated to the correct category.

Table 8 – Collated data on categories

| ID | Set | Scale | Scale comparisons* | | | | | | | | | Can't decide | Drop it |
|-----|-----|-------|--------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|------|--------------|---------|
| | | | GEN | STIM | PROsp | LINK | RESTR | AMPL | STREA | ADJU | INFO | | |
| 230 | 11 | LINK | | | | 20 | | | | | | | 4 |
| 230 | 16 | LINK | | 1 | | 9 | | | | | | 2 | 1 |
| 230 | 17 | LINK | | | | 13 | | 1 | | | | 2 | 2 |
| 230 | 20 | LINK | | | | 12 | | | | | 1 | 1 | 3 |

*GEN = Generating conceptual talk; STIM = Stimulating interaction in plenary and groups; PROsp = Processing text in speech; RESTR = Restructuring text; AMPL = Amplifying text; STREA = Streamlining text; ADJU = Adjusting language; INFO = Information exchange

In order to evaluate the data systematically, coefficients (as percentages) were calculated, following Eichelmann (2015). Table 9 shows the coefficients concerned:

- ▶ for assignment to the correct category (OKCoeff),
- ▶ for dropping the descriptor (DRCoeff), and
- ▶ for the three quality coefficients (Clarity, Pedagogical usefulness, Relation to real world).

Table 9 – Descriptor coefficients

| Serial | OKCoeff | DRCoeff | CLEAR | Coeff | PED | Coeff | REAL | Coeff | Pairs |
|--------|---------|---------|-------|-------|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 230 | 83 | 17 | 13 | 54 | 11 | 46 | 12 | 50 | 24 |
| 230 | 69 | 8 | 10 | 77 | 12 | 92 | 11 | 85 | 13 |
| 230 | 72 | 11 | 10 | 56 | 13 | 72 | 15 | 83 | 18 |
| 230 | 71 | 18 | 14 | 82 | 14 | 82 | 14 | 82 | 17 |
| | | 14 | | 65 | | 69 | | 72 | 72 |

The drop coefficient and the three qualities were also aggregated into an overall coefficient again expressed as a percentage. This is shown in larger print in the bottom row of Table 9. A subjective criterion was then established for each coefficient. For the OK coefficient 50% was adopted, again following Eichelmann (2015), and for the three quality coefficients a higher criterion of 70%. After some thought, 15% was adopted for the drop coefficient. These criteria worked well for distinguishing possible problems. From the data in Table 9, we can deduce that although Descriptor 230 was well allocated to its category (Table 8) it is not overly popular. It hits the drop criterion in the feedback from respondents who had two of the four sets of descriptors on which it occurred. In the aggregate result (percentage of total pairs) it ends just below the 15% 'drop criterion'. It also just fails the criterion for both pedagogical usefulness and clarity. It is clearly a borderline case. After discussion, it was dropped. Where in doubt, particularly when there were other descriptors saying more or less the same thing, the tendency was to drop the descriptor.

The results enabled the group to weed out less popular, less clear or less useful descriptors, and to improve the formulation of descriptors. 45 descriptors failed enough criteria to be dropped completely and another 23 needed discussion – to see if proposed amendments solve issues raised.

The majority of the descriptors were in fact amended as a result of the suggestions for reformulations and simplifications received from the respondents. In addition, one strategy category that had performed very badly was dropped (*Restructuring text*) and two new scales that had been suggested during more general feedback were created (*Breaking down complicated information* and *Translation of written text in speech*).

6.1.2. Phase 2

In a second workshop that took place between 11.05.15 and 19.06.15, following activities familiarising participants with the CEFR levels, the respondents were asked to judge the CEFR level of approximately 60 presented on one of a series of 23 overlapping questionnaires (total: 426 descriptors). 20 existing CEFR descriptors were included in the 426 to act as ‘anchor items.’ 10 of these appeared in a block at the end of every questionnaire with the other 10 being distributed amongst the 23 questionnaires. The reason that 20 CEFR descriptors were included was to ‘anchor’ the mathematical scale values produced during a Rasch rating scale analysis (Wright & Masters, 1982, Linacre, 2015) back to the values on the mathematical scale produced in the original research underlying the CEFR descriptor scale (published in appendices to North, 2000). In this way, one would be able to confirm the CEFR levels of descriptors in a scientific manner.

There were 189 institutions from 45 countries and 1294 persons taking part in Phase 2. This was fairly remarkable considering that the survey was distributed in May and June, which is an extremely busy time of year for educational and examination institutes. The aim was for each survey to be rated by 40-50 persons so that, given the overlapping sets, each descriptor would be rated by 100 persons. This goal was met for all descriptor scales: the lowest number of respondents for any one scale being 151 and the highest 273.

For each descriptor, participants were asked to answer the question:

At what CEFR level do you think a person can do what is defined in the descriptor?

Each participant entered their decisions on level first on a paper print out of the Survey Monkey⁹ form. That was followed by a phase of reflection, discussion with colleagues and review. Finally, when ready, they entered their considered judgements on their computer.

Participants were given 10 proficiency bands to choose from:

Pre-A1 A1 A2 + B1 + B2 + C1 C2

These were the bands created in the original research that created the scale behind the CEFR levels (North, 2000, North & Schneider, 1998, Schneider & North, 2000): The decision to offer the 10 proficiency bands, including plus levels – rather than just the six CEFR criterion levels (A1, A2 etc.) – was taken after discussion and with some trepidation. Raters are known to be challenged when faced with a rating scale of more than five or six categories; cognitive overload can result in inconsistent ratings. However, the assumption was made that participants were familiar with the CEFR levels. Experience in the video-benchmarking seminars held by the CIEP (Centre international d'études pédagogiques) in Sèvres in 2005 (for French) and in 2008 (cross-linguistic: five languages) suggested that informed participants could cope with the plus levels. Once people are familiar with 10 levels, they appear to have little difficulty distinguishing between them. Eurocentres, for example, have successfully used 10 CEFR-related levels for over 25 years.

Another reason why the 10-band variant was adopted was that B1+ and in particular B2+ had appeared very evident as distinct levels during the process of developing descriptors for mediation. There was a strong tendency for descriptors of mediation behaviour that had been formulated on the basis of papers published on the subject, to appear to represent a B2+ level of proficiency: a high pragmatic, functional ability that did not necessarily show the precision with language associated with the C levels. In addition, one of the (lesser) aims in producing the extended version of the CEFR illustrative descriptors was to more fully flesh out the plus levels, so it seemed best to ask participants to consider them consciously. Descriptors for both criterion and plus levels were accordingly included in each of the two familiarisation tasks and in the block of 10 main ‘anchor items’ shared by all the questionnaires.¹⁰

Two complementary analysis methods were adopted for the Phase 2 data: (a) collation of raw ratings to percentages, and (b) Rasch analysis (Linacre 2015). For the collation of raw ratings, 50% of respondents

9. www.surveymonkey.com

10. As explained at the beginning of this section, the “anchor items” are included in order to be able to link the new scale produced in the analysis back to the original scale underlying the CEFR levels that was produced in the 1993–96 Swiss National Research Project.

choosing the same criterion level, without a wide spread across other levels, was taken as a definitive result¹¹. In other words, the split into criterion level (e.g. B2) and plus level (e.g. B2+) was ignored at this point. For plurilingual and pluricultural competences, this 50% criterion was relaxed slightly.

Figure 4 shows the collation of the ratings of some of the descriptors. On the left are shown the criterion levels and then columns for each of the descriptors.

Figure 4 – Percentage rating broader levels

| | COLLAB01reason | COLLAB02questssuggest | COLLAB03expanding | COLLAB04contribute | COLLAB05central | COLLAB06explicitqs | COLLAB07challenge | COLLAB08eliciting | COLLAB09further | COLLAB10highlight | COLLAB11present | COLLAB12summarise | COLLAB13synthesis | COLLAB14mainfocus |
|------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Pre A1 (0) | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| A1 (1) | 2% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| A2 (2&3) | 40% | 19% | 0% | 0% | 4% | 3% | 1% | 2% | 2% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 0% | 7% |
| B1 (4&5) | 45% | 46% | 18% | 5% | 40% | 23% | 10% | 20% | 23% | 3% | 37% | 16% | 7% | 38% |
| B2 (6&7) | 11% | 34% | 67% | 47% | 44% | 48% | 62% | 47% | 66% | 20% | 52% | 66% | 41% | 44% |
| C1 (8) | 0% | 1% | 14% | 30% | 11% | 20% | 23% | 26% | 7% | 44% | 8% | 17% | 34% | 9% |
| C2(9) | 0% | 0% | 1% | 18% | 1% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 1% | 33% | 0% | 1% | 18% | 3% |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Let's look at the third descriptor, COLLAB03expanding, *'Can build on a partner's ideas, expanding and deepening them'* from the category 'Collaborating to construct meaning'. Here 67% of the respondents chose B2, evenly balanced between B2 criterion level and B2+, with the Rasch analysis suggesting B2. However, the original intention had been C1, so it was decided that this item should be recalibrated with the different methodology of Phase 3. The first item, COLLAB1reason, *'Can ask a group member to give the reason(s) for their views'* had only 45% saying B1, but B1 (criterion level) this was the intended level, confirmed by the Rasch analysis, and so after discussion this item was accepted as calibrated, since the vast majority of the 40% at the broader level A2 had chosen A2+. The second item, COLLAB2questssuggest *'Can ask and answer questions about suggestions made in collaborative discussion'* was far less successful. It was intended to be A2, but only 19% had assigned it to that broader level, of whom a mere 7% had selected the intended A2 criterion level – whilst a full 34% had chosen B2 and the Rasch calibration was B1+. Clearly there was something wrong with this item that was causing it to be interpreted as a far higher level than intended. Consequently, it was dropped.

The second form of analysis was a Rasch rating scale analysis using the program Winsteps (Linacre, 2015). A Rasch analysis gives more accurate measurement – which explains why the calibration of the original illustrative descriptors has been found in follow up projects to be stable (e.g. Jones, 2002, Kaftandjieva & Takala, 2002, recent experience with the CEFR-J: Negishi, Takada & Tono, 2013, Pearson experience with their GSE). Four different approaches to anchoring the new descriptors to the mathematical scale underlying

11. For the final decision, this 50% was calculated after excluding respondents who had 'misfitted' in the Rasch analysis. The concept of 'misfit' is explained shortly when discussing the Rasch rating scale analysis. This exclusion made a difference to the results for some 10% of the descriptors.

the CEFR levels were applied, with the results being compared.¹² Where the results coincided on a CEFR level, this was taken as a definitive Rasch calibration. If CEFR level reported by the different anchoring methods differed, or when it was not clear if the item was at the criterion level or the plus level, this was a reason to recalibrate the item in Phase 3.

For almost 100 of the 406 descriptors to be calibrated, over 50% of the respondents had chosen the intended level, and this level was confirmed by definitive result from all the variants on the Rasch analysis. Approximately another 90 descriptors were considered calibrated after a discussion of the results. In most of these 90 cases, the two types of analysis provided the same result, that differed slightly from the original intention, but that was taken as definitive. After Phase 2, therefore, 192 of the 406 descriptors had been calibrated. On the other hand, 36 were dropped either because they were interpreted as being at a range of different levels or because they misfitted in the Rasch analysis. Therefore 178 descriptors, some edited again, were forwarded to Phase 3 for recalibration. Immediately afterwards, some 64 new descriptors were drafted, mainly for lower levels, since on many of the draft scales, the lowest level described was B1 or even B2. In addition, the scale *Facilitating Pluricultural Space* was created.

6.1.3. Phase 3

The third phase of the project was an online survey that took place in English and French between 07.09.15 and 08.11.15. Some 365 descriptors were presented on a series of 23 overlapping questionnaires, with questionnaires again being allocated to different institutes. The 365 descriptors included 74 anchor items: 12 CEFR anchor items and another 62 descriptors from among those that had been calibrated in Phase 2. This meant that each category now had its own anchor items, meaning that it could, if necessary, be the subject of a separate Rasch analysis. All 23 questionnaires were also distributed in an open call through organisations such as FIPLV (International federation of language teachers), the ECML (European Centre for Modern Languages), Equals (Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services), EALTA (European Association for Language Testing and Assessment) and the CASLT/ ACPLS (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers). Cambridge English and NILE also distributed the open call in English to their networks. At least 154 of the 189 institutes who took part in Phase 2 completed the survey, which with the open calls gave a total of 3503 usable responses, with 25% of these responses coming from the French survey. Over 80 countries and 60 languages were represented in the data.

The instruction for the survey task was a direct replication of that used to calibrate the original illustrative descriptors (North, 2000, North & Schneider, 1998). Respondents were asked to think about a person that they knew very well (this could be someone else or themselves), and to answer the following question:

Could you, or the person concerned, do what is described in the descriptor?

To answer, respondents used the same 0–4 rating scale that had been used to calibrate the original CEFR illustrative descriptors, also summarised on each page as:

- 0 Beyond my/his/her capabilities
- 1 Yes, under favourable circumstances
- 2 Yes, in normal circumstances
- 3 Yes, even in difficult circumstances
- 4 Clearly better than this

12. The issue of anchoring to a mathematical scale created 20 years earlier on the basis of a different assessment task (used in this project in Phase 2) are complex. Readers are referred to the Phase 2 Validation Report for details. A model for one of the techniques was provided by Michael Corrigan of Cambridge English Language Assessment, for which the authors wish to express their gratitude. A standard technique exists to check the stability of the mathematical values of the anchor items in the two analyses: original and current (Wright & Stone, 1979). At least in relation to expanding the CEFR descriptors in various projects, it seems to be normal to need to exclude about 10% of the anchor items chosen, because of a statistically significant difference in their scale values in two different data sets. Readers are referred to the validation reports for details.

The data was then subjected to a Rasch rating scale analysis with the 62 anchor items anchored to their previously established scale values.

The result of the global analysis appeared to be surprisingly consistent. In addition, however, separate analyses were also run for certain categories. This is because including data in a single Rasch analysis presupposes technical unidimensionality. This is not at all the same thing as psychological unidimensionality; the Rasch model is very robust and accepts a considerable degree of psychological multidimensionality whilst giving a sensible result. However, where there is a possibility of a dimensionality problem, categories should be analysed separately to see if this yields different difficulty values (Bejar, 1980). Separate analyses were therefore undertaken for all the areas that might be thought to be less central to the main construct:

- ▶ for plurilingual and pluricultural competences (Facilitating pluricultural space; Building on pluricultural repertoire; Building on plurilingual repertoire);
- ▶ for interpretation and translation (Interpreting; Translating a written text in speech; Translating a written text in writing);
- ▶ for online interaction (Online conversation and discussion; Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration);
- ▶ for reactions to creative text and literature (Expressing a personal response to creative text – including literature; Analysis and criticism of creative text – including literature).

The separate analyses resulted in some slight changes to calibrations that appeared intuitively sensible, and were closer to the results intended and to those achieved in Phase 2. After the analysis had been completed, there were a total 395 validated descriptors that had been calibrated in Phases 2 and 3 to the scale underlying the CEFR descriptors.

6.2. FOLLOW-UP SURVEY ON PLURILINGUAL/PLURICULTURAL COMPETENCES¹³

However, there were some indications of problems with the bottom half of the scale for '*Exploiting plurilingual repertoire*'. It appeared as if the majority of the respondents had given similar or even identical responses to *all* the descriptors for this category. This effect of answering each item identically, technically known as "halo effect," had not occurred for any other category. 'Halo effect' is typically associated with rater confusion. It is possible that the very newness and unfamiliarity of the concept of plurilingualism was what had caused the problem. The response was to set up a follow up survey that took place, in English and French, between 10.02.16 and 11.03.16 using the Phase 2 methodology again (assigning a CEFR level). Having a follow up, however, also gave an opportunity to broaden the range of descriptors for both the pluricultural and the plurilingual area. In common with Coste & Cavalli (2015: 31), a clear distinction between plurilingual and pluricultural competences was maintained, seeing the two as separate, balanced categories. A plural approach was also taken to the relevant 'culture(s)' – which will include subcultures – and 'language(s)' – which will include varieties and codes. A considerable number of further descriptors on '*Building on pluricultural repertoire*' were included and descriptors adapted from REFIC (Référentiel de compétences de communication plurilingue en intercompréhension), produced in the MIRIADI project were used to expand the coverage of *Plurilingual comprehension*, and also the existing CEFR scale *Receptive strategies: Identifying cues and inferring*.

The survey was sent to two groups of language professionals:

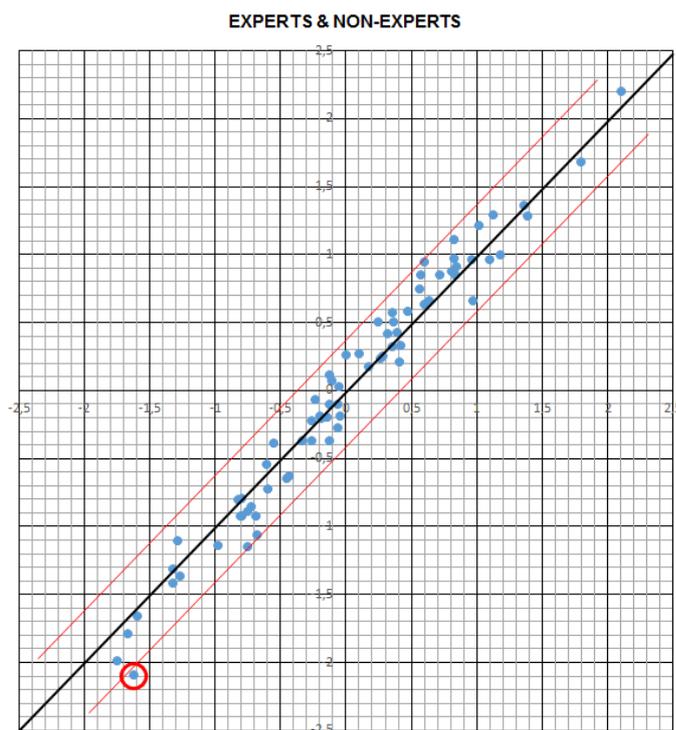
- ▶ a list of some 100 experts in plurilingual education, including many who had taken part in European projects in this area ('experts');

13. There was also a follow up mini-project on phonology involving two surveys, one that combined Phases 1 & 2 and the second, which took place in English and French at the same time as the follow up on plurilingual/pluricultural, combining Phases 2 & 3. For the Phase 3 methodology, respondents assessed performances on video clips. See separate report by Piccardo on the phonology project.

- ▶ an “open call” to most of the practitioners who had taken part in Phase 3 and had indicated an interest in further surveys (“non-experts”)¹⁴.

In total of 62 ‘experts’ and 267 ‘non-experts’ completed the survey (215 in English and 114 in French). Perhaps surprisingly, there was virtually no difference of interpretation between the two groups. Figure 5 shows a chart that is the standard technique to check this (Wright & Stone 1979) by identifying those items for which the two values (from the ‘experts’ and from the ‘non-experts’ respectively) differ by three standard deviations from a perfect alignment (i.e. identical values from both groups for the item in question). Differing by three standard deviations indicates that there is 95% probability that this difference did not occur by chance. This is the conventional test of statistical significance. In Figure 5, the dots represent the position of the two sets of difficulty values. The diagonal black line is called the trend line (=perfect alignment). The red lines plot the 95% statistical significance. For items outside those red lines, the difference between the two values is significant: it cannot be explained away as measurement error.

Figure 5 – Interpretation of difficulty by “experts” and “practitioners”



As can be seen, one sole item is outside the criterion line. This was the item at the very top of the scale of difficulty, and both groups in any case put it at C2. This means that the ‘experts’ and ‘non-experts’ interpreted the descriptors in the same way.

The same two types of data analysis that were described in relation to Phase 2 were repeated: (a) collation of raw ratings into percentages per level, and (b) Rasch analysis – a free analysis, later equated to the mathematical scale underlying the CEFR levels with the first anchoring method described in the section on Phase 2 above. The data itself turned out to be of astoundingly good quality. From a psychometric point of view, the data from this survey was far superior to those from Phases 2 or 3. Unlike in those surveys, or in any other Rasch analysis the current writer has undertaken, there was virtually no ‘misfit.’ Only seven respondents (about 2%) were excluded from the data.

14. In order to minimize complications after the problem encountered in Phase 3, volunteers from countries in which the CEFR has not been implemented were excluded.

That means that respondents:

- ▶ were familiar with the concepts involved;
- ▶ took care doing the survey, despite its length;
- ▶ were able to understand the descriptors;
- ▶ answered in a consistent fashion – did not get confused and contradict themselves;
- ▶ were able to associate descriptors with levels.

That means that, in relation to the descriptors:

- ▶ reservations about ‘non-language competences’ did not cause a problem;
- ▶ the lack of specifying languages in relation to descriptors for plurilingualism did not cause a problem;
- ▶ it is possible to scale descriptors of this type to CEFR levels.

Nevertheless, 11 of the 73 descriptors were dropped after the analysis or discussion. These were items for which there had been a wider spread in the range of level assigned by the respondents. Not surprisingly, all 11 descriptors dropped for this reason were on pluricultural competence. Discussion and feedback from respondents in their comments led to substantial reformulations of another 13 descriptors, six of which were for pluricultural and four for plurilingual comprehension. 14 respondents (4%) also commented on unease with assigning a level to plurilingual descriptors without languages being specified. It is clear that, for example, for practical use of descriptors concerning plurilingualism, one would have to specify the languages involved. However, the aim of the project was to see if the functional difficulty represented by a descriptor could be strongly associated with a CEFR level, irrespective of language. This approach had been taken successfully in the main mediation project. Advice is therefore given in a note like the one below to specify the actual languages concerned as part of the adaptation of descriptors on the two scales on plurilingual competence before use.

Note:

What is calibrated in this scale is the practical functional ability to exploit plurilingualism. In any particular context, when specific languages are concerned, users may wish to complete the descriptor by specifying those languages, replacing the expressions underlined and in italic in the descriptor.

For example the B2 descriptor

Can make use of different languages in his/her plurilingual repertoire during collaborative interaction, in order to clarify the nature of a task, the main steps, the decisions to be taken, the outcomes expected.

might be presented as:

Can make use of English, Spanish and French during collaborative interaction, in order to clarify the nature of a task, the main steps, the decisions to be taken, the outcomes expected.

To conclude, the follow-up survey worked extremely well and allowed

- ▶ provision of descriptors at lower levels for the existing CEFR scale for *Receptive strategies, Identifying cue and inferring*
- ▶ provision of a scale for *Plurilingual comprehension*, focused at lower levels
- ▶ confirmation of calibrations for the scale *Building on plurilingual repertoire* (where there had been problems in Phase 3, as mentioned above)
- ▶ inclusion of descriptors from a range of sources in the scale *Building on pluricultural repertoire*.

The aim had been to calibrate descriptors for use of plurilingual and pluricultural competences to CEFR levels in order to include these categories in the main body of CEFR illustrative descriptors. A last step in the project was to put side by side and compare the scales for *Facilitating pluricultural space, Building on pluricultural repertoire* and *Sociolinguistic appropriateness* (existing CEFR scale). This exercise showed that

there appeared to be (a) a clear coherence across the three scales, and (b) a clear distinction between the levels, even between criterion and plus levels. The descriptors for B1 on these three scales are given in Table 10 as an example.

Although each scale has a different focus, one can see that there is coherence. At this level, B1, the user/learner can:

- ▶ act according to the salient politeness conventions;
- ▶ act according to conventions regarding posture, eye contact, and distance from others;
- ▶ respond appropriately to the most commonly used cultural cues;
- ▶ show awareness of the most significant differences between the customs, usages, attitudes, values and beliefs;
- ▶ explain/exchange information in simple terms about values, beliefs and behaviours;
- ▶ show awareness that some questions may be perceived differently in the cultures concerned, and
- ▶ show awareness of the way in which things that may look 'strange' to him/her in another sociocultural context may well be 'normal' for the other people concerned.

In addition to:

- ▶ performing and responding to a wide range of language functions, using their most common exponents in a neutral register, and
- ▶ introducing people from different cultures and asking and answering questions, whilst showing sensitivity.

And so:

- ▶ help to develop a shared communication culture, and
- ▶ support an intercultural exchange, despite their limited repertoire.

Table 10 – Comparing “socio-cultural” content across scales

| Creating pluricultural space B1 | Sociolinguistic appropriateness B1 | Exploiting pluricultural repertoire B1 |
|---|--|--|
| Can support an intercultural exchange using a limited repertoire to introduce people from different cultural backgrounds and to ask and answer questions, showing awareness that some questions may be perceived differently in the cultures concerned. | Can perform and respond to a wide range of language functions, using their most common exponents in a neutral register. | Can generally act according to conventions regarding posture, eye contact, and distance from others. |
| Can help to develop a shared communication culture, by exchanging information in a simple way about values and attitudes to language and culture. | Is aware of the salient politeness conventions and acts appropriately. | Can generally respond appropriately to the most commonly used cultural cues. |
| | Is aware of, and looks out for signs of, the most significant differences between the customs, usages, attitudes, values and beliefs prevalent in the community concerned and those of his or her own community. | Can explain in simple terms how his/her own values and behaviours influence his/her views of other people’s values and behaviours. |
| | | Can discuss in simple terms the way in which things that may look ‘strange’ to him/her in another sociocultural context may well be ‘normal’ for the other people concerned. |

This project strongly suggests that these are realistic aims for user/learners with approximately a B1 level of proficiency.

The descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competences provide food for thought: they define objectives that are appropriate at different levels. They could therefore potentially offer curriculum developers a starting point for integrating concrete aims for this area at different levels of their language curriculum. In the same way that European Language Portfolios frequently ended with a short section entitled “Quality”, with descriptors selected from CEFR Chapter 5 (the competences of the user/learner) for the level concerned, one could imagine that curriculum aims, or ELPs, could in future include a similar section on “Plurilingual/pluricultural repertoire” for the level concerned. It is interesting to note that a section containing descriptors in this area has already been included in some recent curriculum documents.¹⁵ Other curriculum and ELP developers may well be encouraged also to integrate the plurilingual/pluricultural dimension if they are provided with all the materials for adaptation in the same source: the CEFR illustrative descriptors.

15. For example the new language curriculum documents for German-speaking cantons in Switzerland (Lehrplan 21: examples available from <http://www.lehrplan21.ch>).

6.3. CONCLUSIONS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

In total, approximately 35% of the complete body of descriptors subjected to the rigorous three-phase validation process described above were, for one reason or another, rejected. In addition, some 105 calibrated descriptors were later removed in the final review, 56 before the formal consultation and 49 afterwards. This was mainly in order to reduce repetition, rather than because of concerns on quality. These supplementary descriptors are presented in an appendix to the descriptor document, together two scales for which it had only been possible to develop descriptors for the B levels (*Establishing a positive atmosphere; Visually representing information*).

There was great consistency in the way that concepts had been calibrated to CEFR levels, as Table 10 suggested. To give another example, in the following four descriptors on the scale *Managing interaction*, which all concern giving instructions and were calibrated at B2:

Can explain ground rules for collaborative discussion in small groups that involves problem-solving or the evaluation of alternative proposals.

Can explain the different roles of participants in the collaborative process.

Can give clear instructions to organise pair and small group work and conclude them with summary reports in plenary¹⁶.

Can intervene when necessary to set a group back on task with new instructions or to encourage more even participation.

The fact that it proved possible to calibrate the new descriptors to the scale from the original research (North, 2000) was also a considerable achievement. After all, the areas being described were very different (mediation rather than interaction/production), the type of informants was substantially different (mainly university teachers rather than secondary school teachers), they came from 45 countries rather than just from Switzerland, and finally the not inconsiderable fact that the survey took place 20 years later.

The response to the project also shows that there is a considerable enthusiasm for further development and research related to the CEFR. The Council of Europe's name obviously helped, but it is remarkable that approaching 1,000 people took part in all three validation phases. The very diverse groups of respondents clearly valued the opportunity to participate. A total of some 1,000 comments were made by participants in Phase 2 (631) and Phase 3 (364), many of which were comprehensive and insightful, indicating a high level of engagement with the task. After Phase 2, 93% of the informants had stated they would be interested to continue and even after Phase 3, 76% indicated that they would like to participate in similar future projects.

One issue that is clear – when talking about descriptors for mediation activities, mediation strategies, reacting to literature, interacting online and/or using plurilingual and pluricultural competences – is that a user/learner needs more than just communicative language competence to do what is described. Language competence at the level concerned is necessary but not sufficient. Mediating, reacting to literature, interacting online and using plurilingual and pluricultural competences all involve using a range of general competences (*CEFR Section 5.1*), usually in close conjunction with pragmatic and socio-linguistic competences (*CEFR Section 5.2.2 & 3*). Thus with these descriptor scales, competences other than linguistic competences come into play. In fact, however, this is not a new issue. Many existing CEFR scales already require cognitive skills and experience as well as language competence, such as *Listening and note taking*, *Reading for information and argument*, *Formal discussion (Meetings)*, *Sustained monologue: Addressing audiences*, and producing *Reports and essays*.

The need for general competences in addition to language competences is particularly the case with *Building on plurilingual/pluricultural repertoire*. The boundaries between knowledge of the world (*CEFR Section 5.1.1.1*), sociocultural knowledge (*CEFR Section 5.1.1.2*) and intercultural awareness (*CEFR Section 5.1.1.3*) are not really clear cut, as the CEFR aptly explains. Nor are those between practical skills and know-how (*CEFR Section 5.1.2.1*) – the latter including social skills – and socio-cultural knowledge or intercultural skills

16. In the final review, this descriptor was merged with the previous one.

and know-how (5.1.2.2). What is more important than possible overlap between categories is the fact that the user/learner calls on all these various aspects, merged with the appropriate communicative language competence, in the creation of meaning in a communicative situation. Earlier in the paper, we drew attention to the fact that firstly the boundaries between categories are artificial, and secondly that categories cannot be considered to exist in isolation. In reality, all communicative activity involves integrating language competences with general competences and relevant strategies. As we stated in Section 5 on categories, 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.

It was clear in the theoretical discussion that we presented in Sections 2 and 3 that mediation is very broad in scope. The over-arching nature of mediation meant that it was very challenging to 'reduce' it in the categories and descriptors that we have provided. Nevertheless, we consider that such an exercise is timely and relevant, since making mediation, and the related areas, more visible and accessible through concrete descriptors may help language educators to consider their place in the curriculum.

Section 7

RELEVANCE TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

The aim of the project we have been discussing in this paper, decided in a meeting in Strasbourg in May 2013 organised by the Council of Europe's Education Committee, was to bring the CEFR up-to-date as part of an effort to ensure continuity of the CEFR endeavour. As already stated in the introduction, the project was a complex one, which included a series of related sub-projects. These involved the following: a) developing a descriptive scheme and descriptors for mediation, b) providing a 2016 extended version of the CEFR illustrative descriptors including the mediation descriptors, and c) repositioning the conceptual scheme of the CEFR through an accompanying text (Coste & Cavalli 2015) intended to underline developments in language-related needs in school education, particularly relevant in the present social context characterized by a high increase of migration. In the mediation project itself, the focus has been on the language proficiency necessary, but not sufficient, to perform various kinds of mediation activities and strategies. The intention was that the provision of such a set of mediation descriptors might provide a 'hinge' towards developing CEFR descriptors for the language of schooling.

In this respect, the generic definition of mediation that Coste & Cavalli give towards the end of their paper emphasises the essential nature of mediation as a communicative *language* activity that could apply to a very wide range of language contexts:

To mediate is, *inter alia*, to reformulate, to transcode, to alter linguistically and/or semiotically by rephrasing in the same language, by alternating languages, by switching from oral to written expression or vice versa, by changing genres, by combining text and other modes of representation, or by relying on the resources – both human and technical – present in the immediate environment. Mediation uses all available means and this is its attraction for language learning and the development of a range of discourse competences. (2015: 62–3)

Whereas the original CEFR illustrative descriptors were clearly targeted at secondary school and adult learners of foreign languages, the mediation descriptors have, at least potentially, a broader application, particularly in relation to the teaching and learning of languages across the curriculum, including the language of schooling. This is breaking new ground, a fact that two thirds of the respondents in the formal consultation found a definitely positive development, with another 25% agreeing 'to some extent'. Unlike with the original CEFR illustrative descriptors and the other two related descriptor projects (updating the 2001 scales; collating descriptors for young learners) the focus was not on foreign languages. Notions like native speaker/non-native speaker were already questionable at the time the CEFR descriptors were developed (Kramersch, 1993) but were preserved in half a dozen descriptors inherited from older scales. Nowadays, given the level of mobility and migration¹⁷ and the variety of ethnicities in city classrooms, the notion of native speaker and even the dichotomy language of schooling /foreign language, let alone mother tongue / foreign language, loses its validity. This is one of the main reasons that expressions like mother tongue, second language, source language, target language, etc. are not used in the mediation descriptors. It is simply suggested that the user should name the precise languages involved.

This is not to say that the mediation descriptors do not have relevance to foreign/second language learning. Mediation is an everyday occurrence in public, academic, and professional life and in today's globalised world this mediation is frequently cross-linguistic. In knowledge-based societies, an ability to sift 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,

17. e.g. the population of London is now only 45% indigenous, white British (2011 census: BBC News 11.12.12.) Around half a million French people live and work in London, putting it among the cities with the largest French populations in the world (Euronews 19.04.15). More than 2 million foreigners live in Switzerland: 24.4% (Tages Anzeiger, 23.06.15). Over a million migrants came to Europe in 2015 (BBC News 04.03.16).

as immigrants, despite their possibly partial competences, operating as more formal or less formal mediators between representatives of a host community and newer arrivals.

In order to help to bring out the relevance of the mediation descriptors to different areas, examples related to the four domains outlined in the CEFR (public, private, occupational, educational) have been provided for each of the descriptors for mediation activities and online interaction. These examples were developed during the project, sometimes in removing unnecessary detail from descriptors, sometimes developed from scratch. They have been revised following feedback from participants in a workshop offered on this subject parallel to Phase 3.

Personal mobility and migration were not at all invisible as concerns at the time the CEFR was developed in the early to mid-1990s. Indeed, ensuring the valorisation of languages of origin as well as portability of qualifications in job-relevant languages were the major motivations behind the proposal for a plurilingual ELP made at the Rüslikon Symposium (Schärer & North, 1992). The same three years that saw the Swiss National Research Project and the development of the CEFR (1993–6) also saw the development of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Jezak & Piccardo, 2016), intended to structure learning environments for adult migrants.¹⁸ However, issues connected with migration are clearly more central today than they were twenty years ago.

One can recognise relatively quickly a number of contexts in which the mediation descriptors may prove to be relevant, as a starting point and stimulus for providing context-specific definitions of learning objectives, desirable competences, job or study requirements, etc. The following list is a very tentative, first attempt to identify which particular scales might be relevant to which groups:

- ▶ school learners in general (particularly mediating concepts)
- ▶ teachers giving subjects through an additional language (particularly mediating communication, mediating concepts and building on plurilingual repertoire)
- ▶ international students following university preparation courses (particularly mediating concepts and mediating a text)
- ▶ migrant children in schools (particularly mediating concepts and mediating a text, plurilingual comprehension and building on plurilingual repertoire)
- ▶ adult migrants (particularly mediating communication, mediating a text, plurilingual comprehension and building on plurilingual repertoire)
- ▶ people working with adult migrants (particularly mediating communication and building on pluricultural repertoire)
- ▶ businessmen (particularly mediating communication, mediating a text, and building on pluricultural repertoire)
- ▶ foreign language learners (particularly mediating concepts and mediating a text)
- ▶ seminar leaders/trainers (particularly mediating communication, mediating concepts and mediating a text)

Clearly then, the mediation descriptors would appear to have direct relevance for the following Council of Europe areas of concern:

- ▶ Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants Project (LIAM)
- ▶ Language of Schooling Project
- ▶ Plurilingual and intercultural education
- ▶ Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC)

18. This is contrary to the view of Coste & Cavalli (2015: 14) who consider that 'the notions of mobility, otherness and groups ... were less in the forefront of the languages and education field in the 1990s when the CEFR was drafted' despite Byram's ground-breaking work (Byram & Zarate 1996; Byram 1997), the ELP, the CLBs and Coste's own work at the time with Genviève Zarate (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997).

The core perspective of the CEFR is that of encouraging and valuing the dynamic and collaborative nature of user/learners' trajectories. We hope that the results of this project will enable CEFR users to better understand the nature and relevance of mediation in (language) education at all levels. We believe that the provision of the new illustrative descriptors will be a stimulus to users of the CEFR to consider the forms in which mediation through language takes place in their context, the categories of mediation that appear relevant, and the place of plurilingual and pluricultural competences in their curricula.

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