

MEDIATION AND CULTURE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Mediation activities have recently been at the centre of language education, as evidenced in the foregrounding of this skill in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020: 91-121) that describes needs, the grid of descriptors and a wide range of activities. In order to identify mediation activities and the mediation practice offered to learners, we will analyse some representative activities proposed in a French textbook from the point of view of mediation, the methods of operating mediation and the role of the teacher. The activities proposed by a French foreign language textbook and additional activities, could reinforce the presentation of an intercultural perspective and the interconnection of language teaching with real-life situations, in the modern societies. Through the analysis of the activities, we will consider not only the process towards the acquisition of new skills, through the activities presented in the textbook, but also the role of the learners and teachers and the way everyday life is presented.

Keywords: language teaching, mediation, textbook, interculturality, activities.

1. Introduction

Translation, summary or reporting play a significant role in the functioning of our society in the framework of communication and effective social and economic activities. Implicitly or explicitly in the 21st century communication concerns mainly mediation activities in intercultural and multicultural aspect. Are learners able to act as

mediators on the level of texts, ideas and communication? Are learners able to act as mediators at the personal, public and academic levels? How do textbooks promote mediation activities? In order to identify mediation activities and the mediation practice offered to learners, the proposed activities in a French language textbook will be examined from the point of view of mediation activities, the modes of operation of mediation activities and the teacher’s role.

Mediation activities are closely linked to intercultural and multicultural aspects. In several cases, textbooks present activities mainly through grammatical and syntactic aspect, while when textbooks are used all over the globe, the learners are not familiar with the fine shades of cultural notions and the way everyday life activities and communication are carried out in other countries, for instance in France. The activities proposed by a French-language foreign language textbook and additional activities, based on the concept of global simulation, could reinforce the intercultural perspective and the interconnection of language teaching with real-life communication situations.

The focus on mediation promotes horizontal communication, specifically in everyday exchanges between persons of equal status in real-life situations. The comparison between the mediation activities proposed in the textbooks and real-life communication situations, especially communication which might occur in the context of the migration crisis, can help us enrich classroom practice by bridging the gap between teaching and communication at the public level, and finally to provide learners with the opportunity to communicate effectively within the framework of intercultural society.

We will examine the way mediation activities are introduced in a French language textbook that was conceived following the introduction of the CEFR. The main research question concerns the way learners are getting in touch with mediation activities in textbooks and the way that through teaching practice, they will be able to use mediation effectively. Are simulation tasks presented in an exhaustive manner and in a step-by-step approach in order to assist learners in real-life situations where the cultural context is also important?

The notions of curricular planning and the multiple forms of mediation are analysed before considering the way mediation

activities are introduced in the textbook. Since mediation is extremely important in real life, we will examine the teacher's role in carrying out the activities in the classrooms and whether the complexity of the task calls for an integrated step by step analysis of the way learners should approach mediation by breaking it down into smaller tasks.

This presentation studies the indicative activities proposed in the textbook through the prism of mediation in order to see the way the relaying specific information in speech/in writing, the shift from graphs, diagrams, charts in speech or writing in the general framework of processing text in speech or writing through shifts in genre and introduction of a wide range of activities are carried out. We will analyse the notions of curricular planning and the multiple forms of mediations, the indicative activities proposed by a French language textbook that was introduced for several years in compulsory education in Greece.

Through the analysis of the mediation activities, we will investigate the space that the learner and mediator is called to bridge and the way the teacher-facilitator is called to approach mediation activities through specific guidelines. All types of activities involve linking to previous information, breaking down complicated information and adapting language. The specific textbook was selected since it was conceived following the introduction of the Common Framework of Reference for Languages (2016) and it focuses on teenagers and adults who are often called to use mediation in everyday life in multicultural environment. We will examine the way mediation activities are introduced and whether there is sufficient guidance through the textbook to the learners in order to carry out effectively the activity. The activities presented are indicative and throughout the textbook, in each unit, there are activities of similar form, so by analysing the introduction of the activities, we will see the way mediation is taught and the role assigned to the learners and teacher. The textbook activities are drawn from *Nouveau Taxi* that has been used widely, especially for adult learners and it was also introduced for several years in compulsory education in Greece.

1.1. Mediation and language textbooks

The integration of real-life situations in an educational framework where learners are encouraged to become social actors, is not always easy. As Coste and Cavalli note, learners handle otherness as an obstacle rather as an opportunity leading to education and new discoveries. (2015: 20) This approach may function as an obstacle to mediation. In this framework, J.-P. Cuq and I. Gruca insist that teaching is a form of mediation. In their approach there is mediation between the object of the learning and the learner through guidance in classroom. The teacher is the guiding part and the learner the guided part. (Cuq and Gruca 2009:123).

Thus, all form of teaching is considered to be mediation, including minor manifestations of mediation through specific activities during the language course. In the context of multilingual education, they present interlinguistic mediation (report or summarize an article in a German journal in English or Spanish), with a strong component of intercultural mediation: comparing realities German (mobbing) and English (bullying) cultural identify possible differences in perception of the same historical fact. The terms describing social phenomena in various countries are not synonyms since the social conditions are different and antisocial behaviour takes different forms in each country. By calling learners to distance themselves from their own cultural benchmarks, the inclusion of mediation in the curriculum of the teaching of modern languages takes on a special meaning.

The preparation of each learner for the effective exercise of democratic citizenship, education in intercultural dialogue, the development of critical thinking are, as well as employability, major objectives of the systems education in Europe. From this perspective, learning about the social activity of communication and intercultural mediation is called to play an increasingly central role. (Beacco, 2016: 77-80) The narration of a text in several languages, the summary in L1 concerning the linguistic aspect, the (re)construction of the message, the alternation between different languages in a professional setting and the help of two or more individuals to communicate when they are unable to understand each other, can provide activities that once integrated into the textbooks contribute to the strengthening of communicative skills.

The question is whether the parameters necessary for the acquisition of mediation are sufficiently developed through the activities proposed in the textbooks. Are learners encouraged to proceed to reflexivity and verbalization phases? Is there presentation of a guided approach in the procedure of carrying out mediation or does it depend mainly on the role of the language teacher along with the traditional grammar and lexis? The investigation of mediation strategies is described as an overall process that involves a series of strategies. Coste and Cavalli insist on the individual, collective or institutional strategies in mediation. These strategies involve amongst other, argumentation, exposition, narration by learners and students.

Whatever its methods, agents and goals, the mediation process is based on strategies, which may be individual, collective or institutional: strategies by professional mediators, strategies by each of the parties involved, strategies by teachers and learners, strategies of argumentation, exposition and narration etc. They indicate the central role of verbalisation while noting the language mixes and adjustments inherent in mediation. (Coste: Cavalli: 2015: 29). The efficient application of these strategies defines the effectiveness of mediation and communication. Similar approaches are codified by J.P. Cuq and I. Gruca for rewriting and reformulation activities. One may only agree that rewriting and reformulation activities are almost infinite covering all forms of objectives, codes and types of speech (Cuq and Gruca: 2005: 454). J.P. Cuq and I. Gruca's approach is defined primarily by the written mediation activities that were incorporated into the textbooks, even before the introduction of the concept of mediation in the Common Framework of Reference for Languages.

The procedure concerns either simplification by syntactic decomposition or paraphrase in shorter sequences or by or paraphrase in shorter sequences or by complexity, such as nominalization. Starting with grammatical decomposition or reworking, one realizes the complexity of the sentence, the elements of denotation and connotation, the norm, the register, the sociolinguistic. The use of textual rules through the guidelines leads to highlight the link between pragmatic, sociolinguistic and syntax (Beacco et al.2016). In such an approach the learner explores the grammatical forms along with the implications in register, lexis and norm and is capable of using the

linguistic repertoire in specific context and communication framework. For instance, nominalization is linked to specific register and changes in lexis is linked to specific register.

2. Curricular planning and mediation

The concept of mediation includes the cognitive, communicational and intercultural dimension concerning people, the situation of communication and the understanding of ideas. Through the search for mediation, in *Developing Illustrative Descriptors* of aspects of mediation for the CEFR (2016:21) two forms of mediation are linked to languages. Cognitive and relational mediation are not mutually excluded but combined, introducing language as a form of mediation in social interactions. The multiple facets of mediation depict its complexity and usefulness in life and education. (stating the work of D. Coste and M. Cavalli 2015:13). Mediation is placed in the same framework as curricular planning and multilingual and multicultural competence.

Curricular planning is about learning goals, skills, goals, content, procedures, materials and resources, the role of teachers, evaluation (Beacco, 2016: 19). According to the *Guide to the Development and Implementation of Curriculums for Multilingual and Intercultural Education*, “multilingual and multicultural competence” is defined as the ability to mobilize the plural repertoire of language resources to deal with communication needs or interact with otherness and to evolve this repertoire (Beacco, 2016:10). Intercultural competence is about the ability to analyze the experience of otherness and cultural diversity and to take advantage of it by allowing mediation between different social groups.

According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume* with new descriptors the user/learner is a social agent constructing bridges in order to convey meaning within the same language or from one language to another in the framework of cross- linguistic mediation. Mediation is placed in social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional framework in the process of constructing new meaning focusing mainly on passing new information in the appropriate

form (2018: 103). Especially the presentation of information in the appropriate form could be considered as skill that might be analysed in minor components in order to communicate effectively. It is of crucial importance that mediation activities include different languages, or varieties of the same language, two registers of the same variety or a combination of the above. Thus, the descriptors indicate in the most eloquent way the complexity of the mediation and the multiple facets that have to be taken into consideration when integrating in the language teaching process mediation activities.

Relational mediation involves the creation of a multicultural space, the facilitation of interaction, the resolution of difficult situations and disputes. Cognitive mediation involves cooperation in the construction of the message, the production of speech, the content of specific information, the explanation of the data (graphs, diagrams, etc.), the elaboration (processing), interpretation, translation to oral and written language. Mediation strategies involve connecting with background knowledge, amplifying text, analyzing complicated elements, and making necessary adjustments. The concepts of translanguaging and mediation have recently emerged, as language learning was focused on teaching the language isolated from other languages or mediation and translation activities in the 1990s.

Especially in the 1980's the focus on target language use, as best practice, placed the emphasis on maximal target language use with not even implicit reference to mediation and translation-based activities, as a whole. In addition, the concept of cognitive mediation allows access to new knowledge. According to Beacco, mediation is in most cases the main form of interaction, in teaching and learning of all subjects, in the interaction between teacher and learner, among learners themselves or between the teaching material and learners. One may identify forms of mediation when explaining orally or in writing the content of a written text, recording or visual document, giving an account, in the target language of content in another language, explaining and commenting on the actions of characters in the cultural context associated with the language being taught; group discussions, in the foreign language, group projects with partners speaking other languages and from other cultures, and the like.

The learner experiences and practises a form of mediation that is all at once cognitive, communicative and intercultural.” (Beacco, 2016: 57). Mediation is present, implicitly or explicitly in most forms of communication through the cognitive and intercultural aspect, calling for an effective analysis of the task to be carried out. The three dimensions, i.e., cognitive, communicational and intercultural mediation indicate the complexity of competence that is necessary in our societies of several languages and cultures. The parameters of mediation concern the people involved, the situation of communication, the understanding of ideas. The social use of language and especially the reception and understanding of the message influence the end result of mediation through specific strategies involving linguistic know-how and attitudes.

3. Proposed mediation activities

The designers of the Common Framework of Reference for Languages insist that mediation is a daily activity and certainly not an activity limited to specialists. In mediation activities, the user of the language does not have to express his/her thoughts but simply must act as an intermediary between interlocutors unable to understand each other’s lives. They are usually (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. Mediation activities include interpretation (oral) and translation (written), as well as summary and reformulation of texts in the same language when the original text is incomprehensible to its recipient.

The necessary skills concern the preservation of the entire message but also the presentation of the meaning, the communicative nucleus. The transition from one code to another, from one culture to another, concerning sensitivity to notions of sociolinguistics, from intercultural to conscious and unconscious. Mediation involves facilitating communication and/or (re)formulating the text, (re)building the message. It is exactly the process of (re)building the message that mediates a notion of development. Learning a language includes to a level confrontation with unknown elements, understanding something that is partially or sometimes not at all understandable. The learner is faced with a text or situation that requires a form of mediation in order

to become accessible: linguistic, social or social or cultural mediation - or a combination of all three. (Developing Illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the CEFR: 9). Learners, through mediation activities explore the effects of cultural norms, expectation and context on the way language is used and gradually take into consideration these effects when constructing their messages.

For instance, the construction of a message depends on several parameters as the familiar or formal context, the use of specialised jargon, the local surroundings. The overall communication context defines the forms to be used, for instance politeness is expressed in different ways in different cultures and languages. Our approach concerns the analysis of the facets of the mediation activities proposed in a French language textbook. We will see how the mediation activities are proposed, the cultural context associated with the language to be taught, the attitudes implicitly presented. The textbook was selected, since it is presented as designed in order to develop general competences and more specifically the competence to communicate effectively, according to the authors. In the teacher's book there is reference to the development of sufficient communicative competence in order to facilitate communication, for instance during a trip to a French-speaking country.

The activities are conceived in an action based-learning perspective and the textbook is articulated in A1, A2 and B1 levels, having teenagers and adults as target audience. The textbook was selected since it aims at older adolescents and adults, that is learners who will act in a global framework and will use mediation activities in order to communicate effectively. The language teacher using the textbook is perceived as facilitator who helps learners become more and more autonomous. The textbook aims seem to assimilate the concepts and approach of the CEFR. It is therefore interesting to exam the way, through a textbook, adults and teenagers are encouraged to act as social agents and the way mediation activities, that are essential in communication are presented.

Taking these parameters into account, for example, in the textbook the Nouveau Taxi 3! mediation activities are introduced mainly through the grammatical aspect. The activities presented are typical examples of guided writing having as starting point the grammatical aspect in order to use effectively grammatical structures in an activity imitating real

life situations. In each unit there is consistent introduction of mediation activities assisting learners to put in practice the knowledge and skills acquired. The cultural context implicitly present in the background is the one of a French speaking country:

- I. Observez les dessins et imaginez pourquoi ces personnes ont choisi la colocation. Utilisez chaque fois une expression de cause différente. (en présentant des dessins) [Look at the pictures and try to imagine why these people have chosen apartment sharing. Use each time a different formulation in order to express the reasons. (there is presentation of drawings)]
- II. Anne est une mère célibataire qui cherche une ou plusieurs personnes pour l’aider dans sa vie quotidienne. Aidez- là à rédiger une petite annonce en utilisant le conditionnel présent Elle a besoin quelqu’ un pour:
 - faire son ménage et son repassage
 - aller chercher ses enfants à l’école tous les soirs
 - s’occuper des travaux le week-end
 - faire ses courses
 - réparer son ordinateur

Anne is a single mother who is looking for one or more people to help her in her daily life. Help her write a classified ad using the Conditionnel (conditional mood/tense).

She needs someone to:

- Do the cleaning and ironing
- Pick up the children from school every evening
- Take care of the housework during the week end
- Go shopping
- Fix her computer

- III. Guide de la colocation Vous travaillez au service du logement de votre université et on vous a demandé de rédiger le guide du parfait colocataire. Ecrivez un texte de 120 mots maximum en vous inspirant de la leçon 2 p. 12 du livre élève.

[Roommate's guide

You work in your university's housing department and you have been asked to write the perfect roommate's guide. Write a text of up to 120 words based on the example at Lesson 2 in the student book.]

4. Approaching mediation in its multiple facets

These activities present the space between what the learner and mediator is called to bridge. This important dimension is designed by Coste and Cavalli introducing the notion of the space between that mediation covers, bringing two poles closer together (2015:29). The approach of two poles as they describe it, introduces the process of change, alteration in order to bridge the space between. The image that they introduce depicts the dynamic form of mediation. In this framework, the notion of the ideal flat mate, in the third activity, is not the same in all cultures.

According to the students and their prior knowledge, experience and background similar tasks may be developed in various forms in classroom. Since the textbook is used all over the world, when the task is assigned in teenagers and adults, the language teacher in the framework of transmitting knowledge, information, presenting explanations and clarifications guides the learners to know the parameters of the task in terms of language, linguistics, sociolinguistics. Similar activities are extremely helpful in real life context.

All activities proposed involve reception, production and interaction. In the Activity I, through the visual prompt the learner is called to construct and convey meaning passing new information in the appropriate form. The context is social and the focus is on the linguistic means. The usage of a visual prompt may act as an incentive for deverbalsation and linguistic expression, by breaking the link to the mother tongue. This is one of the typical cases of explaining data in graphs, diagrams, charts and visual in speech or in writing.

The learner is encouraged to adapt at the same time language since s/he is called to use various forms through different expressions of cause. At this point it is worth noting that the expression of cause is presented in a wide range of linguistic means according to the register and the learner is called to use effectively structures. In this way the

grammatical accuracy is the main trigger for the activity but at the same time paraphrasing, adapting speech, flexibility and grammatical precision are developed.

Therefore, the use of graphs and visual prompts renders the activity useful in teaching learners from different social and national backgrounds. The activity invites learners to use different formulation to express the cause, focusing on grammatical aspect. In this framework, the teacher – facilitator invites learners to use the appropriate structures and socio-linguistically appropriate forms in order to carry out the activity effectively. The textbook formulation guides the learner to focus on grammar but the effective carrying out of the speech act depends also of sociolinguistics.

Thus, the teacher role has to be active, in order to avoid simple reproduction of grammatical structures but to indicate that there are expressions of cause that are formal and others that are used in informal context. In this way, oral expression options are analysed and in real life context, learners as social agents express themselves fluently using the socio-linguistically appropriate forms. In the Activity II, the focus is on the guided writing of an advertisement in a cultural framework placing the written production in the actual communication needs of a modern family, introducing also speech acts in modern real-life conditions.

The written mediation is based on the effective usage of Conditionnel (conditional mood/tense) in French. The usage of Conditionnel in French allows to talk about hypothetical or imagined reality that can occur under certain circumstances. The pragmatic aspect is of primary importance since the living conditions of the family may to apply in other countries. The grammar axis acts as the basis for the activity surrounded by significant aspects of everyday life conditions and communication needs in the French language speaking context, allowing at the same time the intercultural perspective. The textbook focuses on the use of conditional mood, while the social aspect of the activity evolves around the social conditions, the life of single parents and the everyday activities of a household in French.

This context is taken from the modern life and learners, are not only called to formulate the appropriate speech acts but also think about family life in France implicitly comparing it to the family life

in the social context they come from. In the Activity III the learner is actually called to imitate a text relaying in a specific way sets of directions or instructions. It is actually an informational text. The learner may need to employ difficult concepts and technical topic and proceed to a conscious adaptation of speech.

Apart from the register and speech acts, the focus on the traits of the ideal roommate will be discussed in classroom. In general, since the textbook is designed for adolescents and adults, the mediation approach is mainly around familiar leisure activities. These examples indicate a specimen of the mediation activities offered to learners. The teacher is called upon to guide learners to develop strategies to effectively perform linguistic, social or cultural mediation or a combination of all three. The learners are gradually introduced to the activity but there is need for guidance, in order to perform the tasks. The activities proposed present the focus on the vocabulary range, the grammatical accuracy and the verbalization of graphic elements. There is also focus on the pragmatic aspect concerning flexibility, the thematic development, the coherence, the propositional precision and adapting language to the situation.

The speech acts the learners are called to perform concern, for instance, the guidelines of the perfect roommate. Given that social practice and acceptable behaviour vary from country to country or even from region to region, the multiple facets of the activity concern not only the appropriate grammatical and syntactical forms but a prior investigation around the generally accepted traits of the ideal roommate, in social context in various countries. The learner is called to convey information in a clear and well- structured manner on familiar subjects of current interest.

The guided writing presents a chance to simulate real life situations through the grammatical activities and class practice is a useful tool for real-life situations. The notion of relaying specific information, acts as a guide for carrying out activities, is described recently by North as extracting the relevant information from the target text while relaying specific information involves reading for orientation (North 2016:25). This process includes scanning for the necessary information and relaying, the two necessary steps to be carried out for efficient communication. The learner is called to take into account the

overall reorganization of the text, the paraphrase, the application of grammatical learning and realize that the text is not an accumulation of juxtaposed sentences. The instructions by the teacher-facilitator may guide to the appropriate sociolinguistic choices, taking into account the type or type of text. The teacher may propose a wide range of activities that focus on changing the point of view, the register.

The role of the facilitator is to break down the mediation process in

- selection of the specific information
- explaining data in speech form
- selection of the discourse genre
- variation of forms

Textbooks and teacher guides provide overall guidelines and the ways to facilitate interaction in the classrooms, to provide the necessary clarification concerning the tasks, the time allocated to each activity and to place the learning at the centre of the learning process.

However, the complexity of mediation activities calls for a multi-dimensional role of the teacher, guiding the students to take into consideration not only the linguistic aspect but also sociolinguistics and mainly the specific traits of each culture.

The grammar structure and the acquisition of grammatical forms serve as an incentive from the development of the activity, that is not limited to the successful usage of the grammatical form. The multiple facets of mediation call for a step-by-step analysis of the process like guided writing in interconnection to real-life situations.

Mediation activities integrated all prior knowledge and skills starting even from visual prompts, with no verbal elements. In the teacher's book there is presentation of indicative answers concerning written and oral production, that is mainly implicit mediation activities, but there is no step-by-step analysis of a standard process that may lead the student to construct his/her oral or written mediation task.

Given that the aim is to help students become effective social agents in a globalised world, special emphasis seems necessary in teacher training, in the construction of textbooks and in actual classroom practice having students at the centre of the mediation process. The gradual integration of mediation activities in the teaching process

helps the learner, in a procedural way, to scan the source text for the necessary information, select the appropriate elements and relay to the recipient in the appropriate form. The creativity of the language teacher is manifested through the selection of the appropriate informational texts ranging from simple brochures to complex articles and reports according to the needs analysis.

Conclusion

Mediation activities cover a wide range of activities needed for effective communication. In the framework of language teaching, textbooks included activities ranging from reformulation or change of register, concerning written or oral expression, in a form of implicit mediation.

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment: Developing Illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the CEFR presented in detail the dimensions and parameters of mediation by analyzing the building blocks. By exploiting the concept, the development of mediation skills, the evaluation, the context of mediation, we can develop in detail activities in real life simulation, and finally prepare the learner effectively for communication needs, since there is no doubt that learners focus mainly on acquiring communication skills as members of a global society.

Until now, the sample of mediation activities in the textbooks, seems mainly focused on the grammatical and textual aspect. Mediation activities, through their presentation in textbooks, seem at an initial stage to be focused mainly on the grammatical and sociolinguistic aspect. The complexity of the competency calls for a comprehensive use so that learners can apply strategies and skills to their real lives.

By investigating the form of mediation activities in a textbook designed for adults and teenagers following the introduction of CEFR, the initial finding and indications seem to call for an integrated approach to mediation. Modern communication needs call for an overall approach and role of facilitator of the teaching staff along with learning material. The focus on grammar structures serves as an

incentive and a form of guided oral and written production, integrating reception and production.

Due to the importance of mediation in real life, it seems necessary to place further emphasis to the mediation activities, train teachers to handle in a cohesive approach the teaching process in mediation and to sensitize learners in the existential competence linked to mediation. Further research is needed, even by observation in classroom to identify the approach to mediation activities in the teaching context, in order to present an overall approach, step by step guidelines for teachers and students.

For instance:

- Purposeful selection of information in the source document or discourse
 - Use of background information
 - Identifying and bridging the communication gap
 - Selecting the appropriate forms in terms of linguistics and sociolinguistics
 - Fine tuning and restoring the communication gap between interlocutors by rendering information appropriately in the context of the given situation
 - Focusing on the social actor aspect while shaping the new meaning
 - Respecting the rules and the possibilities of the communicative framework by reorganizing and combining information through paraphrasing and summarising
- It seems that the role of the teacher-facilitator in mediation activities is important in order to guide the learners. An integrated approach, by breaking down mediation activities in detailed steps, might be useful in order to assist learners to carry out mediation effectively in real-life instead of simply choosing the appropriate grammar form.

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