The development of mediation strategies when relaying information, both in speech and writing: Task samples for undergraduate students of Spanish as a foreign language

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Mediation was marginally included in the CEFR (2001), but it is in most recent editions (2018, 2020) that this area has gained pivotal recognition. New descriptors have been incorporated to foster the development of mediation activities and strategies, as well as the emphasis on plurilingual and pluricultural competences for language learning, among other aspects. This paper will discuss two sequences of tasks based on the illustrative descriptor "Relaying specific information" included within the "Mediating a text" scale, which "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" (CEFR/CV 2020: 91). Furthermore, there are two subscales that have been covered throughout our activities. The first is "Relaying specific information" and the second is "Processing text." Both subscales can take place in speech, writing or sign, but in the case of our tasks, they were done in speech followed by the writing format. In the first one (CEFR/CV, B2), textual mediation was carried out whilst discussing the controversial decision of adding Castilian Spanish subtitles -- the variety of Peninsular Spanish spoken in northern and central Spain-- to the film Roma (2018), shot in Mexican Spanish, and Mixtec. The second task aimed to offer an in-depth revision of cohesive devices. Thus, it provided students (CEFR/CV, C1) with the opportunity to review various Spanish linking words and strengthen their use in argumentative texts.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, descriptors, mediating a text, relaying specific information, CEFR

1 Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) initially gave limited recognition to mediation in 2001 but has significantly embraced it in recent editions. New descriptors have been added to promote mediation activities, emphasizing plurilingual and pluricultural competences in language learning. The paper discusses two sets of tasks centred around the descriptor 'Relaying specific information' within the 'Mediating a text' scale, which involves passing on content due to language, cultural, semantic, or technical barriers. Two subscales, 'Relaying specific information' and 'Processing text,' are explored through speech and writing formats. One task involves discussing the addition of Castilian Spanish subtitles to the film *Roma*, while the second task focuses on reinforcing the use of Spanish linking words in argumentative texts for students at different CEFR levels.

Both activities were used with undergraduate students of Spanish as a Foreign Language with a B2 and C1 level of competence (CEFR), respectively. The respective modules, SPAN0016 Grammar and Communicative Skills and SPAN0034 Grammar and Communicative Skills are mandatory components of the BA Spanish and Latin American Studies at University College London. Although each year a cohort typically comprises 80-100 students, they are divided into small groups of 10-12 students who receive a weekly session. As per UCL Student Registry Services, in the academic year 2022-2023, the university boasted 53% of international students. Thus, it can be safely assumed that English is not the mother tongue of a considerable number of the students in our classrooms. Whilst in the United Kingdom the integration of mediation practice is still to be explored and investigated in further depth as a communication skill in the modern foreign languages' curricula, we avow that our lessons can be deemed plurilingual environments where mediation can be utilised as a valuable tool to grasp and validate students' different perspectives and to bridge potential cultural, epistemological and linguistic gaps (De Arriba García and Cantero Serena 2004: 10-11). Indeed, Trovato (2016) and Sánchez Cuadrado and Pedregosa (2022) understand mediation as a type of interaction that occurs among people unable to communicate with each other due to various reasons.

1.1 Descriptive illustrators for 'Relaying specific information'

'Relaying specific information' involves extracting and transmitting particular information of immediate significance from the source text to another individual or group. The focus here is on the specific content that holds relevance, rather than the primary ideas or lines of argument presented in the text. Examples of this practice include: Transmitting information about timings, locations, prices, etc. from announcements or written/signed documents; conveying sets of directions or instructions or relaying specific and pertinent information from informational texts such as guides and brochures, correspondence; or longer, intricate texts such as articles and reports (CEFR/CV 2020: 93).

1.2 Descriptive illustrators for 'Planning strategies'

Furthermore, when learners go through the procedure of undertaking the a forementioned activities, a series of strategies are developed, which are also comprised in the CEFR/CV (2020). The framework presents communication strategies in relation to the traditional approach to strategies in interlanguage communication, which include 'planning', 'execution', 'monitoring, and repair.' The execution strategy for production, precisely 'compensating', is explained with an illustrative scale. See Table 1 for the illustrative descriptors for CEFR levels B2 and C1. This strategy involves mental preparation before speaking, signing, or writing. Thus, it can include conscious thinking about what to say and how to say it, as well as rehearsal or drafting. The scale defines key concepts such as determining how to express the intended message and anticipating recipients' reactions (CEFR/CV 2020: 68-69).

Table 1. *CEFR/CV scales for planning strategies (CEFR/CV 2020: 69)*

	CEFR Companion Volume Planning scales
C1	Can, when preparing a more formal text, consciously adopt the conventions linked to the particular type of text concerned (e.g. structure, level of formality).
B2	Can, in preparing for a potentially complicated or awkward situation, plan what to say in the event of different reactions, reflecting on what expression would be appropriate.
	Can plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipient(s).

'Compensating' is a strategy used to maintain communication when one cannot find the appropriate expression. As seen in Table 2, the scale further operationalises this strategy, including concepts like using accompanying gestures to support language, deliberately using a 'wrong' word or sign and explaining it, defining a missing concept, and employing paraphrasing (circumlocution) and the extent to which it is utilised (CEFR/CV 2020: 69).

Table 2. *CEFR/CV scales for compensating strategies (CEFR/CV 2020: 69)*

	CEFR Companion Volume compensating scales
C1	Can exploit their range of vocabulary options creatively so as to readily and effectively use circumlocution in almost all situations.
B2	Can use circumlocution and paraphrase to cover gaps in vocabulary and structure.
	Can address most communication problems by using circumlocution, or by avoiding difficult expressions.

The 'monitoring and repair' scale encompasses two aspects: the spontaneous realisation of a mistake or problem during communication and the conscious and possibly planned process of reviewing what has been said for accuracy and appropriateness. Table 3 shows some critical concepts within this scale, which involve changing tactics, either prominently at lower levels or smoothly at higher levels, self-correcting slips, errors, and recurring mistakes, and the level of apparent communication problem that prompts the need for repair (CEFR/CV 2020: 70).

Table 3. *CEFR CV scales for monitoring and repair strategies (CEFR/CV 2020: 69)*

	CEFR Companion Volume monitoring and repair
C1	Can backtrack when they encounter a difficulty and reformulate what they want to say without fully interrupting the flow of language.
	Can self-correct with a high degree of effectiveness.
B2	Can often retrospectively self-correct their occasional "slips" or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure.
	Can correct slips and errors that they become conscious of, or that have led to misunderstandings.
	Can make a note of their recurring mistakes and consciously monitor for them.

The two sequences of tasks were composed of four main stages: introduction/warm up, reading task, mediation task and writing/oral task as per the pattern shown in Table 4 where the descriptions and aims of each stage are also detailed.

Table 4. *Stages of the sessions*

Number	Stage	Time (min)	Description	Objectives
1	Warm-up (speaking)	5	Introducing the task: goals and instructions	Getting the gist of the topic area
			Introducing lexical, grammar and discursive items, and contextualising knowledge	Eliciting from students' lexical and grammar items to assess previous knowledge
			Establishing working groups and defining a sequence	
2	Reading task (reading & speaking)	20	Focusing on reception strategies to acquire understanding of the topic area to be covered	Learning something new about the topic area and comprehending the new topic
3	Mediation task (listening & speaking)		Extracting and transmitting data (in speech)	Showing understanding of the topic area and new concepts. Practising new items how?
			Condensing and rephrasing original information from the source text (in speech)	Practising mediation strategies (compensating and monitoring and repair)
			Information exchange	
4	Writing task (writing & speaking)		Collaborating in writing a summary of the topic, including elements from each source text	Revising and consolidating new items provided
			Focus on grammar, lexical and discursive elements	Providing prompts for discussion

2 Sequence of tasks for level B2 (Council of Europe, CEFR/CV 2020)

Our first sequence of tasks focused on the controversy surrounding the film *Roma* (2018). Mediation as a tool for language learning is regularly incorporated into our B2 Spanish language sessions, and in the academic year 2022-23, we successfully used textual mediation to analyse Spanish diversity and intralinguistic subtitling. *Roma* was primarily filmed in Mexican Spanish but had Castilian Spanish subtitles provided by Netflix. This decision ignited a heated debate on Twitter about Spanish as a common language, and even the director, Alfonso Cuarón, expressed his disagreement with the decision. Although Castilian Spanish subtitles were removed and Latin American subtitles were instead offered, some cinemas in Madrid and Barcelona continued to provide the former subtitle option. The debate persisted on social media, fuelling discussions and arguments (Koch et al. 2019).

The activity was conducted as part of our B2 weekly one-hour 'Additional Contents and Skills' class, which emphasizes oral expression and group work and aims to decolonise Spanish Language teaching (Hernández-Martín 2022). The activity's primary objective was to foster students' active debate

involvement and to equip them with valuable skills in assuming diverse roles. This was accomplished by creating multiple tasks that entailed writing, speaking, and mediating. Please refer to Table 4 for a comprehensive breakdown of the sequence. Throughout the entire activity, students collaborated in pairs or small groups.

For the reading task, we deliberately selected two articles with contrasting viewpoints and writing styles to achieve the goal of learning more about the main topic, as indicated by Table 4. We also considered the location of the sources to ensure that the voices of underrepresented communities were heard in the classroom, as per our goal of promoting diversity in the curriculum. The two chosen articles were: a) "Polémica por subtítulos de Roma en España", from the newspaper Última *Hora*, a progressive digital newspaper from Asunción, Paraguay; and b) "Netflix zanja la polémica con Cuarón y elimina los subtítulos en español de Roma", published by *Libertad Digital,* a conservative digital newspaper based in Madrid, Spain. Both articles were published on January 10th, 2019.

These articles, labelled a) and b), discussed the current controversy but differed in the specific details they provided (such as examples of intralinguistic translations, involved social agents, discussion locations, and relevant terms related to the controversy). Additionally, the articles presented contrasting viewpoints on the use of Castilian Spanish subtitles.

During the reading task, each pair of students was given a different text to read: one received text a) and the other received text b). Both students were responsible for reading their own text and preparing for the mediation activity. This involved taking notes and planning their response, focusing on the "planning strategies" mentioned in the CFER (see above). Students were encouraged to think about what they wanted to say, how to express themselves, and to rehearse or draft their ideas. The teacher also provided guidance on anticipating the other person's reaction and choosing the best way to communicate in each situation.

For the upcoming mediation task, as shown in Table 4, students have been assigned roles based on the two proposed subscales in the CEFR for textual mediation:

Communicating specific information: Students had to verbally relay examples of translating Mexican Spanish into Castilian Spanish, such as *ustedes* to *vosotros*, *mamá* to *madre* or *enojarse* to *enfadarse*. They were also asked to select three keywords that best depicted the information presented. Effective keywords may comprise privilege, lack of confidence, context, or heritage.

Summarising arguments: Students were asked to abridge and restate in speech the arguments presented in the source text in a clear and concise manner.

Throughout this stage, students practised important skills such as paraphrasing, adapting their communication style and body language, and self-correction. When summarising the newspaper articles, it was crucial to maintain the flow of language, and so the monitoring and repair strategies outlined in the CFER were often employed by the students. The compensatory strategy helped achieving successful communication when combining different varieties of Spanish and encountering unfamiliar concepts.

During the writing task, students confidently collaborated to create a summary of the two articles in 10-15 lines. Each summary was required to include a quote from each article and a proposed solution or compromise to the controversy. The students utilised mediation to exchange and enhance each other's ideas. They also employed compensating strategies and monitoring and repair strategies to ensure good understanding. The teacher assisted the students in identifying common ground between opposing viewpoints and provided strategies for brainstorming creative solutions. The resulting statements from each pair were showcased on an interactive blackboard and used as topics for the final class debate.

At the end of the session, students had the opportunity to express their opinions in a class debate. They were also invited to continue the conversation outside of class using specialised hybrid software available at https://www.kialo-edu.com/.

3 Sequence of tasks for level C1 (Council of Europe, CEFR/CV 2020)

The main objective of the second sequence of tasks was to offer students the opportunity to revise different types of linking words in Spanish and to consolidate their use in argumentative texts.

As a warming up activity, students were shown a Spanish version of the wheel of power and privilege, which was taken from *Una guía para prevención de la discriminación LGBTIfóbica y machista: conceptos y actividades de diversidad afectivo-sexual y de género para el equipo educativo* (Agüero García and Calvo Pérez 2019). They were asked to offer their own interpretations of the intersections of oppression and privilege described in the wheel and were subsequently posed the question of in which ways their privilege could be best utilised. As the main material used in the lesson was a newspaper article focusing on the portrayal of several millennials who, after living lives of abundance, started to question their own fortunes and were now committed to reducing wealth inequality and distributing their inherited wealth in order to support different social and environmental causes, the wheel of power and privilege was a visual tool to introduce the topic area and contextualise intercultural knowledge.

Next, students were divided into two heterogeneous groups formed by students with different mother tongues, nationalities and cultures with the purpose of carrying out an information gap activity. Each group was required to read one half of an article from the Spanish newspaper *El País* titled "Podría ser rico, pero no quiero: jóvenes que renuncian a sus fortunas para luchar contra la desigualdad" (in the English version of *El País* the article appears under the following title: "The millennials giving up fortunes for social justice"). Each group was also asked to prepare and offer an oral summary of their half to the other group. In terms of the "Planning strategies" that were put into practice by students, it was essential to consider the different textual conventions needed to deliver their brief oral presentations. Since the material they had been given was a written, journalistic text, the use of different conventions typical of oral presentations, such as fluency, intonation, clarity, and a simple, persuasive structure, had to be carefully planned.

The following part of the session was devoted to the mediation activity necessary to undertake this task. Not only was the chosen text's level of complexity suitable for the consolidation of the C1 level sought in our module, but the myriad of collocations, linking words, idioms and technical terms allowed students to expand their vocabulary and to utilise mediation in order to bridge any linguistic, cultural or epistemological gaps. In order to fulfil this task, each group was given a) a list of keywords for which they needed to offer a definition/explanation and b) a list of linking words with which to structure their discourse. As mediation is used, complex language skills such as reformulating ideas, providing definitions, shifting registers, explaining cultural elements, etc., are put into practice. This stage of the session also involved a focus on the lexical items for which each group had to provide definitions, and on discursive elements, notably the linking words they were prompted to use. Their "compensating strategies" were maximised here as their lexical range was exploited and used creatively in order to fulfil the double task of correctly and effectively offer definitions and practice with the linking words given.

Subsequently, the emphasis was put on oral production, as each group had to offer an oral summary to the other group by following the instructions in their brief. The "monitoring and repair strategy" was particularly relevant here, for the flow of language must be maintained. Hence, self-correction and circumventing were frequently used by students. Finally, the activity was wrapped up with a debate about the article and how it might be related to the wheel of privilege and oppression.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of mediation strategies in relaying information, both in speech and writing, is a crucial aspect of language learning, particularly for undergraduate students of Spanish as a foreign language. The inclusion of mediation in the CEFR has provided recognition and guidelines for fostering mediation activities and strategies. This paper discussed two sequences of tasks based on the illustrative descriptor 'Relaying specific information' within the 'Mediating a text' scale, focusing on

passing on content from texts with linguistic, cultural, semantic, or technical barriers. Both sequences aimed to enhance students' skills in relaying specific information and processing text.

By completing the tasks explained above, students engaged in various strategies outlined in the CEFR, such as planning, executing, monitoring, and repairing their communication. They learned to compensate for communication difficulties, utilise circumlocution and paraphrasing, and self-correct their language. These strategies contribute to effective mediation and enhance their overall language proficiency. The activities were designed for undergraduate Spanish as a Foreign Language students at UCL, catering to a diverse international student population. The plurilingual environment created in the classroom allowed for validating students' different perspectives and bridging cultural, epistemological, and linguistic gaps. Furthermore, with future developments in mind, it is important to point out that these activities were specifically designed in a creative manner to confidently prevent the use of AI in our language classrooms.

In the first sequence of tasks, students explored the controversy surrounding the film *Roma*, using mediation to analyse Spanish diversity and intralinguistic subtitling. The focus was on oral expression, group work, and active debate involvement, which fostered critical thinking and the development of complex language skills. The subsequent writing task encouraged collaboration and summarisation of arguments, further strengthening students' mediation abilities. The second sequence of tasks aimed to revise cohesive devices and consolidate their use in argumentative texts. Students engaged in an information gap activity, utilising mediation to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps while summarising and presenting key information to their peers. The focus on complex language skills and the incorporation of linking words enhanced their vocabulary and discourse abilities.

Overall, these activities demonstrated the importance of mediation in language learning, enabling students to effectively relay information, navigate linguistic challenges, and bridge cultural divides. By incorporating mediation strategies, educators can empower students to become proficient communicators in diverse contexts, fostering intercultural understanding and promoting inclusivity in language education.

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6 Biographies

Dr Macarena Jiménez Naranjo earned her PhD in Spanish Literature from the University of Málaga in 2012, where she specialised in aesthetic modernity, avant-garde prose, and biographical studies. She has furthered her education with postgraduate studies in Literature and Language Teaching. She has taught at the University of Málaga and public universities in the Jiangsu province of China. Currently, she is a Lecturer at University College London, teaching Mexican literature and Spanish as a Foreign Language, with a focus on language varieties and curriculum decolonisation.

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