Plurilingual and pluricultural competence in the new CEFR: the mediated nature of language learning and use

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Plan of my presentation

- Evolution of societies: dynamic trajectories and repertoires
- Change of perspective: not everything is visible
- Mediation: from theory to the classroom
- From *languaging* to *plurilanguaging*
- Conclusion: innovation potential of mediation and plurilingualism
A street in Toronto
Different languages side by side: always good?
A stroll in Zurich
What’s the difference?
Multi- vs pluri-
two latin prefixes used
as conceptual springboards

Multilingualism: languages side by side
addition of elements

multiplication of singularities - adding together a series of elements like numbers in a multiplication, or people in a multitude

Plurilingualism/Pluriculturalism: a network with multiple connection
dynamic interrelationships

a more holistic way: valuing – and building on – plurality, considering embedded difference
Plurilingualism: the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner (CEFRCV, 2020: 30)

*Plurilingual competence* is defined as the ability to use a plural repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources to meet communication needs or interact with people from other backgrounds and contexts, and enrich that repertoire while doing so. ... (Beacco et al, 2015: 23)
liquid modernity (Baumann, 2000) as lack of barriers in our post-modern societies

flows of linguacultures across national boundaries (Riesager, 2007)

“a highly dynamic social tapestry” (OECD, 2000: 8).

deterritorialized and reterritorialized societies (Defert, 2012)

immigrants’ languages and cultures as catalyzers for change (Piccardo, 2013)

Contextualization: increasing social mobility and linguistic and cultural diversity
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When it comes to languages what we see is just the tip of the iceberg.
Language use

Language as an emergent phenomenon

Language is an activity, it is something we do but, more importantly, it is something we do together

“[L]anguage (even when written) is first and foremost a dialogical and intersubjective activity. Language is an activity that allows us to coordinate actions, perceptions and attitudes, share experiences and plans, and to construct and maintain complex social relations on different time scales.” (Fusaroli et al., 2014, p. 33)
Language emerges from complex webs of actions, which all require some form of mediation. Mediation is at the centre of understanding, thinking, meaning-making, collaborating – acting as a social agent.
Mediation: a new prism to make the invisible visible

Through mediation we can see:

- the **interdependence of individual & collective, cognitive & social**: higher mental functions are mediated by psychological & cultural tools, especially language (Vygotsky’s theory)

- the **dynamic process of meaning making** through ‘languaging’ (Swain, 2006) and ‘plurilanguaging’ (Lüdi, 2015; Piccardo, 2017) both individually and socially

- the cultural/intercultural dimension that calls for developing **symbolic competence** (Kramsch, 2002) and **critical-cultural awareness** (Byram, 1997)
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Mediation: a crucial but complex and elusive notion

How can it be conceptualized and operationalized in the (language) classroom?

How can teachers make learners aware of the implications of the complex webs of actions from which language emerges?
The CEFR 2001 pioneered a new vision:

- Levels and descriptor scales > curriculum alignment
- From four skills to four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, mediation
- Co-construction of meaning in interaction
- Learner as social agent/acteur social
- Action-oriented approach (tasks)
- Plurilingual and pluricultural competences

The CEFRCV 2020:

- Updates the CEFR
- Completes the CEFR > new scales, examples of domains
- Broadens CEFR concepts > mediation
- Refines pedagogical vision > AoA
- Develops constructs (phonology and pluri)
In the CEFR descriptive scheme
Mediation: a notion to develop
Before the CEFR 2001

Listening  Reading
Speaking  Writing

Speaker/Hearer

Code: accuracy / fluency

Mobilising learned language
CEFR 2001

Reception

Production

Speaker/Hearer

Code: accuracy / fluency

Mobilising linguistic resources

Interaction

Mediation

Participant

Social agent

Social use of language
Reception

Production

Speaker/Hearer

Interaction

Mediation

Participant

Social agent

Code: complexity, accuracy, fluency

Social use of language

Co-construction of meaning

Mobilising general and plurilingual/pluricultural competences

CEFRCV 2020: new vision developed
Mediation is the pivot of a holistic, ecological view of language use and learning.

Through mediation learners/social agents are engaged in:

- creating plurilingual/pluricultural space for communication and learning;
- reducing affective blocks/tensions;
- building bridges towards the new, the other;
- (co-)constructing new meaning;
- passing on information (and simplifying, elaborating, illustrating or adapting);

Not only (as in the CEFR 2001) acting as an intermediary or (re) processing an existing text.
Mediation conceptual model

Plurilingual & Pluricultural

Cognitive

Relational

across languages and cultures

across media

across worlds

Online

Literature

emotional

emotional

emotional

emotional
The new CEFR Companion Volume (CoE, 2018) operationalizes this extended conceptualization into a wide array of calibrated and validated descriptors.
Mediating communication
- Facilitating pluricultural space
- Acting as an intermediary
- Facilitating communication in delicate situations / disputes

Mediating a text
- Relaying specific information
- Explaining data (e.g. in graphs)
- Processing text
- Translating written text
- Listening & note-taking
- Expressing a personal response
- Analysis and criticism

Mediating concepts
- Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers
- Collaborating to construct meaning
- Managing interaction
- Encouraging conceptual talk

Mediation strategies
- Linking to previous knowledge
- Breaking down complicated information
- Adapting language
- Elaborating a dense text
- Streamlining a text
Inseparability of different mediation types

For ex: relational and cognitive + linguistic, cultural, and probably emotional too:

- *Can highlight inconsistencies in thinking, and challenge others’ ideas in the process of trying to reach a consensus.* (Level C1; ‘Collaborating to construct meaning’)

- *Can encourage members of a group to build on one another’s information and ideas to come up with a concept or solution.* (B2; ‘Encouraging conceptual talk’)

- Also at lower levels of proficiency: *Can ensure that the person they are addressing understands what they mean by asking appropriate questions.* (B2; ‘Encouraging conceptual talk’)

Mediation is informed by the plurilingual/pluricultural dimension

For ex. pluricultural and relational + emotional, linguistic and cognitive:

• Can collaborate with people from other backgrounds, showing interest and empathy by asking and answering simple questions, formulating and responding to suggestions, asking whether people agree, and proposing alternative approaches. (B1; ‘Overall mediation’)

• Can encourage a shared communication culture by expressing understanding and appreciation of different ideas, feelings and viewpoints, and inviting participants to contribute and react to each other’s ideas. (B2; ‘Facilitating pluricultural space’).

• Can act effectively as a mediator, helping to maintain positive interaction by interpreting different perspectives, managing ambiguity, anticipating misunderstandings and intervening diplomatically in order to redirect the conversation. Can build on different contributions to a discussion, stimulating reasoning with a series of questions (C1; ‘Overall mediation’).
Other forms of mediation

Plurilingual & Pluricultural

across languages and cultures

Relational

Cognitive

Online

across media

across worlds

Literature

emotional
**Plurilingual/cultural competence**
- Building on pluricultural repertoire
- Plurilingual comprehension
- Building on plurilingual repertoire

**Online interaction**
- Online conversation and discussion
- Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration

**Literature**
- Expressing a personal response to creative text (including literature)
- Analysis and criticism of creative text (including literature)
- Reading as a leisure activity
For example there is mediation in online interaction

For ex: social, cultural, linguistic, emotional

*Can anticipate and deal effectively with possible misunderstandings (including cultural ones), communication issues and emotional reactions occurring in an online discussion.* (C2; ‘Online conversation and discussion’),

*Can deal with misunderstandings and unexpected problems that arise in online collaborative or transactional exchanges by responding politely and appropriately in order to help resolve the issue.* (B2; ‘Goal oriented online transaction and collaboration’).
Mediation is at the core of descriptors of plurilingual and pluricultural competence

In the scale ‘Building on plurilingual repertoire’ the learner/social agent mobilizes their repertoire in different languages

• for a purpose, explaining a problem or asking for clarification (A2),

• to facilitate comprehension with between third parties (B2) > acting as a mediator through languages,

• to create the conditions for others to use different languages (B2) > role modelling openness to linguistic plurality.

• to facilitate communication by using all their agency in a multilingual context, in which they can alternate between languages and also employ different forms of linguistic/textual mediation (C1) > mediating between people in a social context
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Embracing a mediational perspective allows us to move from language as an entity to language as a process (languaging).

Plurilingualism refers to the dynamic, creative process of ‘languaging’ across the boundaries of language varieties.
In the languaging process various dimensions – emotional, cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, textual – come into play in different combinations and at different stages.

In *Mediating concepts*, social agents are languaging as they think things through together.

In *Mediating communication* they are languaging in the process of self-other regulation.

In *Mediating a text* they are languaging to find formulations that enable understanding of the text itself for themselves and for or with others.
New ‘pluri’ scales: support **plurilanguaging**: “a dynamic, never-ending process to make meaning using different linguistic and semiotic resources” (Piccardo, 2018: 216)
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Learning happens through “perception in action” (van Lier, 2007: 97) with learners/social agents perceiving affordances as invitations to act (Kaüfer & Chemero, 2015).

The learner/social agent is constantly engaged in a process of doing that requires mediation at different levels. They mediate:

- when they communicate across languages and cultures but also across language varieties;
- within and across social communities;
- for themselves in a cognitive development process, e.g. in an ideal dialogue with fictional characters;
- in online environments and distant communication;

and in all this they engage their minds, their senses, their emotions.
Mediation as a lens to plurilingual vision: Breaking down the myth of ‘pureness’ of languages and cultures

• The mediation that individuals make when (pluri)language opens up the possibility of a new positioning vis-à-vis languages, communication and their own worldview.

• Plurilingualism empowers individuals to see possibilities where others see barriers. It helps them to positively conceptualize difference as the nurturing feature of our increasingly diverse societies.
Mediation at the core of knowledge (co)construction, (re)construction

Innovation potential in language education

- Making learners (and teachers) aware of the mediated and complex nature of language (learning)
- Foregrounding the plural and dynamic nature of learners' language repertoires
- Empowering learners through recognition of their trajectories and funds of knowledge
- Broadening the scope of (language) education: Facilitating social integration
Caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar
Antonio Machado

to thanking

mercio grazie gracias
"danke tesckkuler thank you efcharisto obrigada

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