Translation as a Mediation Tool for Developing Speaking Skill: CEFR Perspectives

الترجمة كأداة وساطة لتطوير مهارة التحدث: وجهات نظر لإطار المرجعي الأوروبي المشترك

Slimane Boukhentache[*]

Mohammed Sddik ben Yahia University_ Jijel (Algeria)
Laboratory of Research Studies in Literature, Language, Didactics, and Translation
s_boukhentache@univ-jijel.dz

Abstract:
The Common European framework of Reference (CEFR) introduced in 2001 a new language competency called mediation. Mediation refers to the process in which an individual closes the gap of communication between interlocutors who cannot understand each other, and it primarily uses translation. This review of the literature attempts to demystify this relatively new competency and show how it can be applied to develop the speaking skill. The CEFR mediation categories are explained, and it is shown how they exploit translation to simplify input and make messages more accessible in communication. Consequently, this paper suggests the use of mediation translation activities to develop speaking skills as well as to equip future citizens with modern mediation values such as conflict resolution capacities.
Keywords: CEFR; Mediation; Translation; Speaking.

الملخص:
أقدم الإطار الأوروبي المرجعي المشترك (CEFR) في عام 2001 كفاءة لغوية جديدة تسمى الوساطة، وهذه الأخيرة هي عملية يقوم بها الفرد لسدّ الفجوة بين المحاورين التي الذين لا يستطيعون فهم بعضهم البعض، وتستخدم الترجمة في المقام الأول.

تحاول هذه الدراسة إزالة الغموض عن هذه الكفاءة الجديدة، وإظهار كيف يمكن تطبيقها لتطوير مهارة التحدث. يتم شرح فئات وساطة CEFR، كما يتم توضيح كيفية استغلال الترجمة لتبسيط المداخلات، وإتاحة الوصول إلى الرسائل التواصلية.

وتقترح هذه الورقة استخدام أنشطة ترجمة الوساطة لتطوير مهارة التحدث، وكذلك لتزويد مواطني المستقبل بالقيم الحديثة للوساطة مثل القدرات على حل النزاعات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإطار الأوروبي المرجعي الأوروبي؛ وساطة؛ ترجمة؛ تكلم.

---

*Boukhentache Slimane.

Introduction:

Mediation is considered a basic communicative language ability. It was introduced for the first time in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in 2001 as an additional language ability along with interpretation, interaction, and production. It means the creation of means to convey communicative meanings. Simply put, it is a process wherein the language speaker acts as a mediator between two or more speakers (Blanchet, Raha, & Moore, 2009, p. 168) . Thus, the mediator attempts to facilitate communication among other interlocutors. This mediation could be intralingual or interlingual, that is, within one language or across languages.

This study is concerned with interlingual mediation via the use of translation. The latter is considered here as a tool not only to learn a language, but also to facilitate communication. For example, if two speakers do not understand each other, a third agent can mediate between them by translating only what is relevant for understanding the appropriate message.

The mediation approach is based on cooperation and active agency. It teaches the strategies that language users can employ to facilitate joint communication between speakers.

The interpreters have background knowledge about the interlocutors taking part in the communicative event and, consequently, translate only what is relevant for each speaker, ignoring unnecessary details. Thus, meaning is not passively received, but rather jointly constructed.

After the initial introduction of mediation competency in 2001 in CEFR, it was further described in more detail in the CEFR companion Volume (CEFR-CV) in 2020. This latest version of CEFR included the descriptors of the communicative competency of mediation in order to

permit language course designers to integrate it into their communicative language teaching frameworks. It clearly shows what skills or techniques could be taught to students to elaborate, explain, simplify and interpret communicative messages for other speakers (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90).

Based on what has been discussed, this study intends to demystify the competency of mediation, notably forforeign language teachers and course designers. It asks the following research questions:

a) How does the concept of mediation contribute the development of speaking in CEFR?

b) How does the concept of mediation-translation contribute to the development of speaking in CEFR?

c) What are the mediation-translation activities outlined in CEFR?

I. Review of the Literature

This section discusses the most important concepts related to translation use as a mediation activity in CEFR. It includes an overview of CEFR, an explanation of the basic language competencies from CERF perspectives, an illustration of mediation descriptors, and a bird's eye view of translation from the 19th century to the present day.

I.1. Common European Framework of Reference

CEFR is an outcome of long years' laborious work. During the 1960s when the European nations set up the Common European Market and felt the need for more communication among themselves, the Council of Europe (a European cultural and educational commission) was entrusted with the task of identifying of basic level of mastery in terms of communication abilities for each European language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 84). This language teaching collaborative project culminated in significant breakthroughs, which are the division of language proficiency into six levels of achievements, the adoption of a communicative approach

to language teaching, and the design of a framework of reference for developing communicative syllabi and textbooks.

In their attempt to identify the threshold level for each European language, the Council of Europe further identified other superior levels until they finally divided language proficiency into six levels: A1, A2, B, B2, C1, and C2. According to Trim (2011), these levels are more representative of language than the previous ones of beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Besides, level identification, the framework offered details of each level in terms of contents, topics, and skills (Nunan, 2007, pp. 428-429)

In addition to the division of language proficiency, the Council of Europe described the language proficiency in terms of the can-do level or language functions because it was not possible to describe it in terms of content as each language has its proper content. Language functions are common features for all natural languages. For example, in each language we need to express requests and invitations. Based on these language functions, the content or language exponents are identified. This procedure allowed the development of the first communicative syllabus formulated by Wilkins in 1972 (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 86).

Furthermore, another important contribution of the council of Europe is the establishment of a framework of reference that could be exploited by syllabus designers and textbook writers to design language-teaching materials. The reference document includes descriptors and classroom vignettes for each proficiency level (Nunan, 2007, pp. 428-229). Descriptors refer to the behaviors expected from the learner (e.g., can interact using basic English), and classroom vignettes are description samples of classroom teaching procedures. In fact, the framework offers a practical guide for the teaching and assessment of all European modern

languages. In brief, this curriculum document is a significantly helpful tool for devising standardized and principled language courses.

I.2. Basic Language Competencies

Unlike traditional language curricular documents that divide language into the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, CEFR segments language competency into interpretation, interaction, and production(Council of Europe, 2001). Interpretation refers to listening and reading. The choice of this word is meant to capture the active agency of the listener or reader. In other words, the reader or listener is not a passive recipient; rather, he/she is involved in an active process of interpretation.

Similarly, interaction refers to the joint construction of communication. In other words, speakers do not simply produce speech; rather, they build their productions on the basis of what has been said by their interlocutors. For example, if the speaker says, 'I went skiing', the interlocutor could respond saying, 'I like skiing'; hence, the interlocutor builds his/her speech on the basis of what has been said to him. It is this joint construction of communication-called interaction- that was not captured in the tradition division of language skills into listening, reading, speaking and writing.

The third language basic competency outlined in CEFR is production. Production refers to both speaking and writing. It is the process wherein an individual produces linguistic input for communicative purposes, either in written or spoken modes.

I.3. Mediation

Mediation is a further language competency that was introduced in the CEFR in 2001 and later illustrated in CEFR-CV in 2020(Council of Europe, 2001). Mediation refers to the process of simplifying input to others taking into account the cultural and linguistic knowledge of the interlocutor. Here, the speaker is concerned with the making of the

communicative message clear to others. For example, at the hotel, the interpreter would explain to the interlocutor only the relevant information he/she needs while ignoring unwanted information. Thus, when the hotel attendant describes the hotel to a Muslim, the interpreter (mediator) would mention only the facilities the interlocutor would use like the location of the payer room.

Mediation includes three categories, namely, mediating texts, mediating concepts, and mediating communication (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 44). Mediating texts refer to the explanation of texts to people who cannot understand them, but the interpreter who creates a kind of bridge explains only what is relevant to the interlocutor. Mediating concepts refer to the collaborative explanation of ideas inside the classroom. Mediating communication refers to assisting comprehension among individuals

I.4. Mediation Descriptors

Like the other language competencies of interpretation, interaction, and production, mediation has its own descriptors that were outlined in the latest edition of CEFR of 2020. They are basically as follows:

Table n°1: Mediation Descriptors

Mediating texts	Mediating concepts	Mediating communication
-Relaying specific information	-Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers	-Facilitating pluricultural space
-Explaining data		-Acting as an intermediary
-Processing texts	-Collaborating to construct meaning	-Facilitating communication
-Translating texts		
-Note-taking	-Managing interaction	

Source: Adapted from (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90)

I.5. Translation as a Communicative Tool

Translation use for foreign language teaching had been almost excluded from the landscape of foreign language teaching since the downfall of the Grammar Translation Method. Although the 19th century reform movement did not completely banish translation use in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching, the subsequent language teaching methods such as the Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method completely excluded mother tongue use to take full advantage of target language use in the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 2). Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching discouraged the use of the learner's native language and reduced it to an inevitable minimum. In short, the end of the 19th and the 20th centuries were marked by the dominance of the monolingual approach (Howatt, 1984, p. 135).

However, recently a body of studies made a case for translation. Developments in language theories have shown that the learning of a foreign language cannot be isolated from the mother tongue and, thus, challenged the monolingual approach that Skopečková (2024, p. 22) considered purely commercial than scientific. According to Blanchet, Rahal, and Moore(2009), the learner first language and the target language dynamically interact both during the process of language learning and use; in other words, it is impossible to create two distinct language systems. Consequently, bilingual activities are nowadays devised to support foreign language teaching.

II. Discussion

After reviewing the basic background and concepts relative to the issue at hand, this section attempts to answer the research questions outlined in the introduction. They are about the role of mediation competency in promoting speaking, the role of translation in promoting communication, and the mediating translation activities outlined in CEFR.

II.1. Role of Mediating Competency in Promoting Speaking

Mediating is a promising tool in promoting speaking. Learners should be taught how to interpret texts, concepts, and communications to people who cannot understand them. Texts refer to written documents and videos. Inside the classroom, foreign language learners or even native language learners can practice explaining orally to their peers, for instance, written messages found in emails and videos. In simplifying the language and illustrating it more clearly, they are called upon to stretch their linguistic capacities to the limits.

Similarly, mediating concepts promote collaborative interaction between learners and co-construction of meaning (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 90). When a student, for example, understands a concept very well, he can discuss it with peers until they reach a reasonable understanding. This bridge allows not only to practice speaking, but also to discuss abstract concepts.

Likewise, communication mediation can promote speaking capacities and the capacity to behave positively with others. This mediating competency refers to bridging communication among participants, notably in delicate situations (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 86).The process of negotiation when creating shared spaces to resolve conflicts and disputes can immensely develop speaking and communicative abilities.

II.2. Role of Translation as a Mediating Skill in Developing Speaking

As noted previously, translation should not be precluded in the language classroom. CEFR promotes the use of translation as a pedagogical tool to promote language competency. Byram and Lynne (2012) argued that a foreign language should be learned in relation to the language and identity of the learner. Pluringualism and pluriculturalism are

sufficiently promoted in CEFR, that is, the learner's culture and identity are valued and integrated into the frame of foreign language teaching.

To develop speaking skills, students can be engaged in both discussing linguistic and cultural aspects of the mother and target languages. They can discuss, for instance, the formation of plural in both languages or the conversion of sentences from active to passive. Additionally, they can discuss in groups aspects of the competing cultures and reinforce their understanding of the self and the other. Overall, cross-linguistic and-cultural discussions can promote macro communicative skills, especially with advanced students.

II.3. Mediating Translation Activities Outlined in CEFR

In this sub-section, the mediating translation activities highlighted in CEFR are discussed. The focus is on speaking activities rather than writing. CEFR encourages the use of an active pedagogy and cooperation. Consequently, most of its translation activities are implemented in groups and they require hands-on tasks.

Internet-based activities are among the translation techniques recommended in CEFR. For example, a mediator can relay specific information read online to his/her peers in a more accessible manner. Other types of activities could include explaining data, acting as an intermediary in informal situations, using bilingual dictionaries, and summarizing course content in the mother tongue (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 90-123). More taxonomies of translation activities can be found in Wagstaffe (2014, p. 19)

Conclusion:

This article has attempted to make a case for the use of translation as a mediating activity to promote the speaking skill. Despite the unjust rejection of translation, its use has always imposed itself within the confines of EFL classrooms. Actually, developments in bilingual settings

and plurilingual as well as multilingual learning theories (Byram & Lynne, 2012) have vehemently supported the use of translation and the learner's mother tongue in its full sense.Additionally, this paper has tried to elucidate the use of translation as a mediating technique to promote speaking in EFL classroom following the CEFR principles. An overview of CEFR is provided to familiarize the reader with this prestigious language-teaching framework.

Furthermore, the three fundamental mediation activities of texts, concepts, and communications are explained. They are based on the student active agency and cooperation. In other words, they substantiate the principles of CEFR can-do model of teaching and learning.

Finally, illustrative translation mediation activities such as web-based tasks are specified. The reader is referred to further tasks formulated by experts and advocates of translation use in EFL, such as Skopečková, 2024(p. 93dem). These communicative activities bridge the gaps of understanding between interlocutors and aid the learner in acquiring a genuine speaking capacity. Equally, such activities prepare learners to operate more effectively in real-life situations.

The study recommends investing in translation use as a mediation activity to promote speaking and develop life skills. This mediating technique can be adopted as a didactic tool to facilitate language acquisition, and it can be implemented to inculcate values of autonomy and citizenship, especially in the globalized world.

References:

1. Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* .Oxford : OUP.

2. Blanchet, P., Raha, S. A., & Moore, D. (2009). *Plurilinguisme et enseignement des langues en Algérie. Rôles du français en contexte didactique.* Fernelmont: EME Editions.

3. Byram, M., & Lynne, P. (2012). *The common European framework of reference:the globalization* . Bristol: Multilingual matters .

4. Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Laguages: learning,teaching, assessment* . Strasbourg: Language Policy Unit .

5. Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Frame work of reference for languages: learning, teachin,assessment-companion document* . Strasbourg: Language policy unit.

6. Howatt, A. P. (1984). *A history of english language teaching.* Oxford : OUP.

7. Nunan, D. (2007). Standard-based approaches to the evaluation of ESL instruction. In *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 421-438). United states: Springer.

8. Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* . Cambridge : CUP.

9. Skopečková, E. (2024). *ranslation and Own-Language Use in Language Teaching: The Quest for Optimal Practice.* Palgrave: Springer.

10. Trim, J. (2011, May). Critique of CEFR. *Critique of CEFR.* (N. Saville, Interviewer) Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhCYc7rGOUo

11. Wagstaffe, S. (2014). Translating, Interpreting, Mediating:The CEFR and Advanced-level Language Learning in the Digital age. *International conference: ICT for language learning* (p. 17). Edizioni: libreriauniversitaria.