

INTRODUCING MEDIATION STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PLURILINGUAL ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new linguistic landscapes, affecting English Language Teaching (henceforth, ELT), confirms the importance of considering the current societal changes and their impact on education and on teacher education in defining innovative approaches and trends in language teaching. In this sense, learners' perceptions, attitudes and practices cannot be disregarded, especially, in terms of their impact on language teaching as well as on teacher training, starting from issues of identity, learning practices, out-of-the-classroom experience, proficiency levels, intercultural communication and language awareness of learners of any age.

More precisely, understanding the paramount changes in the use of English in intercultural communication, and consequently on language teaching and its connection to English used as a global lingua franca (henceforth, ELF), means raising teachers' awareness and attention towards issues that they have rarely considered before.

In other words, teachers should be given the opportunity to experiment and adapt these innovations in their training and then in their teaching: the integration of practices, methodologies, skills, and strategies towards the enhancement of the communicative functions of the language in a multilingual and intercultural context. In this sense, ELF-awareness (Sifakis, Bayyurt, 2018) may considerably increase, first of all, through the observation of different examples of ELF communication and the exposure to the way in which English syntax, morphology, lexis, and phonology are shaped in the communicative process by ELF users.

ELF-awareness, as a consequence, inevitably impact on the relationship between "classroom experience" and "real life experience". A first important result in considering this crucial aspect is learners' self-confidence in their skills and abilities. Very often, the conformity to a standard model, to what is 'native', takes learners a considerable effort and sometimes causes a great frustration. On the contrary, if their teachers change their perspective in an ELF-oriented approach, learners will be more relaxed and produce better outcomes, in terms of performance and self-esteem. If teachers are able to guide them, they will be more satisfied and motivated. Learners should be gradually asked to use English with the same communicative objectives and creativity that they employ when they use it outside the classroom.

In this perspective, introducing language mediation in the classroom reveals its effectiveness with specific reference to the pragmalinguistic processes activated by ELF users, involved in intercultural encounters, who differently appropriate the English language according to their communicative goals. Very often, mediation can be defined

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as a distinctive element of ELF interactions, as long as it facilitates socialization and cooperation among participants who ‘otherwise may not be able to participate’ (Hynninen, 2011: 965).

The following suggested activities, designed for the English language classroom, are aimed at practicing mediation strategies, by starting from the new profile outlined in the *Companion Volume with new Descriptors* (2020) where mediation strategies are represented with reference to the two main ways in which it tends to occur: “to explain a new concept” (CEFR, 2020: 128) and “to simplify a text” (CEFR, 2020: 129).

In order to stress the pedagogical value that an ELF-oriented approach to lesson planning may have on the practice of mediation strategies in the EL classroom, activities will be presented here not only according to the mediation scales presented in the CEFR, but also taking into account the main ELF communication strategies that can be observed within the practice of mediation.

2. RESEARCH FOCUS: MEDIATION AND HYBRIDIZATION PROCESSES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Mediation is becoming increasingly related to migration policies, socio-cultural inclusion, intercultural communication, language teaching, translation strategies and the use of English as a global language or as a lingua franca (ELF) (Lopriore, 2015; Sperti, 2017, 2021). In European multilingual and multicultural contexts, mediation has become an essential measure aimed at reducing the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness. Mediation is a notion which was officially introduced into the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference (2020), where mediation acquires a crucial role as a new form of managing the interaction in classroom activities as well as in daily communicative situations, and as a factor in communicative competence. Mediation is presented here as fundamental in problem-solving and recommended as indispensable in plurilingual educational contexts.

Mediation and mediation strategies are central in communication contexts where non-native speakers interact in environments where there is an increasing use of English as a lingua franca. Mediation emerges as a process activated in ELF communication, as it facilitates socialization and cooperation among participants involved in the interaction. In European contexts, the flow of migrants within countries traditionally identified as monolingual and monocultural, has radically changed the linguistic landscapes, providing a place for multicultural and plurilingual scenarios where communication is inevitably intercultural and mostly carried out in a lingua franca such as ELF (e.g. Guido, 2008, 2012; Sperti, 2017, 2019).

In this conceptual perspective, authentic processes of cross-cultural mediation, especially in migration contexts, are very often characterized by the use of ELF variations. The negotiation of meaning is carried out through simultaneous action on different linguistic levels – namely linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic ones – creatively exploited by ELF users in various ways. Indeed, speakers involved reveal the use of different strategies of appropriation of the English language according to L1 linguacultural schemata and pragmlinguistic processes. In these multifaceted interactional dimensions, where English may be a foreign language for the host speakers but a native language for the migrant, very often “gatekeeping” and status asymmetries (Guido, 2008) among the participants in interactions influence the natural exchange of illocutionary intentions (meant as the speaker’s attitudes and meaning conveyed) and perlocutionary effects (meant as the receiver’s responses and reactions). The exchange of

speech acts affects the whole communicative process from speakers' prosodic strategies to register and conversational dynamics (Sperti, 2017). In the investigation of mediation processes involving ELF, gatekeeping asymmetries between the participants in interactions often emerge, especially in migration domains, where communication is often characterized by accommodation strategies and cross-cultural miscommunication (Guido, 2008; Roberts, Sayers, 1987; Seidlhofer, 2011; Sperti, 2017).

Introducing authentic materials, derived from ELF speakers' cross-cultural exchanges in migration contexts into the language classroom may have important pedagogical implications. Authenticity in language teaching implies not only authentic materials, but also authentic tasks and learning environment. Features of authentic materials are mainly related to learners' motivation, autonomy, communicative ability and linguistic knowledge (Widdowson, 1996). Language learners – in secondary education as well as in undergraduate and postgraduate courses – can become aware of the possible miscommunication and communication breakdown resulting from status asymmetries in unequal encounters during cross-cultural mediation processes as well as daily spoken interactions in a multilingual and multicultural communicative dimension. This is particularly relevant when insights are gained from the new descriptors in the 2020 Companion Volume: here new scales for mediation are introduced with the aim of promoting more integrated, cooperative and collaborative classroom tasks, the implementation of cross-linguistic mediation and the development of plurilingual/pluricultural competence among language learners.

The employment of authentic data, derived from ethnographic research into ELF, mediation and migration, and its impact on language use, is aimed at suggesting practices and strategies for the introduction of real ELF instantiations and the implementation of language activities in the practice of mediation within the language classroom. In these situations, the “mediator” is called on to bridge gaps and resolve misunderstandings, to cope with hybridization processes activated in the use of a lingua franca, and to enter into Kramsch's (1993) “third space” in which a speaker/learner might adopt some distance from his/her cultural norms so as to think critically and act as a social agent in two-pole interactions.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE ROLE OF MEDIATION IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Mediation has always been related to the negotiation and resolution of disputes: it is a human ability which has been explored in research studies from a variety of angles and has received, in recent decades, great attention in learning theories and in the exploration of intercultural communication in plurilingual contexts. The notion of mediation has been studied in psychology, pedagogy and the social sciences. Firstly, mediation is an underlying notion in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (1934, 1987), where he claimed that higher forms of thought are “mediated” by culturally derived artifacts, such as signs, and that language use, forms, and structure are the primary means of mediation. In the SCT perspective, more specifically:

when we communicate socially, we appropriate the patterns and meanings of this speech and utilize it inwardly to mediate our mental activity, a phenomenon called private speech (Lantolf, Thorne, 2007: 202).

The emerging vision of language acquisition as socialization into communities of practice through the mediation of signs and its implications in the field of language education has informed the CEFR illustrative descriptors and scales for mediation (see for example, CEFR, 2020; North, Piccardo, 2017; North *et al.*, 2022) and further influenced the research field of intercultural communication (Byram, 2008; Baker, 2015).

In recent decades, mediation has been redefined in different fields of scientific research, from a socio-cultural and anthropological perspective, where the intercultural mediator is someone who can:

operate their linguistic competence and their sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language and culture and the context in which it is used, in order to manage interaction across cultural boundaries, to anticipate misunderstandings caused by difference in values, meanings and beliefs, and thirdly, to cope with the affective as well as cognitive demands of engagement with otherness (Byram, 1995: 25).

In the area of language teaching, mediation has acquired paramount importance not only in the updated CEFR edition (2020), but also in a wider pedagogical perspective, where mediation:

involves a constellation of teachers' conceptual frames, practices and ways of being that are at the play in any given moment and which are interwoven over time in the act of language teaching (Kohler, 2015: 193).

At the same time, the cultural aspects of communication cannot be ignored when considering mediation and its relation to language. Communication is becoming increasingly defined through the use of the adjectives 'intercultural' or 'transcultural' to highlight the bridging function of cultural power in interactional contexts, especially in plurilingual ones. And as suggested by Beneke (2000), this frequently happens in ELF communicative settings:

to account for the relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication through ELF, it is necessary to view it from a more complex perspective than the culturally deterministic or culturally neutral perspective described above. [...] It is crucial that the connections between language and culture are explored as situated in the instances of communication investigated (Beneke, 2000: 13).

As a consequence, communication strategies for effective inter-lingual exchanges are essential in plurilingual contexts, and the ability to mediate across languages, and cultures, by means of inter-lingual mediation is central in the language learning process. As underlined by Stathopoulou (2020: 41):

mediation, which always occurs in a social context, is considered to be a purposeful activity or social practice in which language users may become involved when there is a communication gap.

Mediation strategies represent "those techniques used by mediators to perform successfully when moving from one language to another" (Stathopoulou, 2015: 90).

It is within this perspective that mediation becomes pivotal in developing learners' awareness and understanding of successful communication strategies in multicultural exchanges. Mediation reveals its usefulness, particularly with multilingual learners if their

internal thinking process is also stimulated by the use of an additional language, which may thus become part of classroom practice as a tool to scaffold learners' thinking and their L2 acquisition.

Mediation activities are often associated with the use and the adaptation of authentic materials in ELT classrooms. The notion of authenticity has mostly been explored in terms of constructed vs. authentic language samples as used in course-books. Its nature has recently been further researched because of globalization and of ICT use and of the emergence of new understandings of authenticity and the relevance of localized language use. Local teachers become the local and legitimate authors in classroom-based curriculum and teaching materials development. They may thus be the only ones capable of identifying appropriate local resources, responding to learners' needs and engaging them in authentic exchanges through meaningful tasks, whereby learners would use all their language resources within and outside the classroom. This type of approach can thus empower learners as confident language users and encourage teachers to develop materials to accompany course-books or grammar books, building strong local teacher communities (Lopriore, 2017: 189).

The following part of this contribution describes some language mediation activities as carried out in courses for English language translation and intercultural mediation in multilingual classrooms, where students are prepared as future language and cultural mediators to act in transcultural encounters, in migration contexts or refugee organizations. The activities were also implemented in EL teachers' pre- and in-service courses.

4. INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE OF MEDIATION IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

4.1. *Mediation in ELF-Aware Language Learning Contexts*

This section introduces the use of language mediation activities within ELF-aware (i) language learning courses – preparing language and cultural mediators to act in cross-cultural encounters, such as migration contexts and refugee organizations – as well as (ii) seminars and workshops for EL teachers.

Starting from the previous theoretical background which has outlined the convenience of introducing mediation concepts and practices within pedagogical scenarios, the main objective is here to define the role of mediation in cross-cultural interactions involving EL learners as well as ELF users – coming from divergent cultural contexts – who constantly employ negotiation strategies to obtain an effective communicative outcome (Hynninen, 2011; Jenkins, 2011; Bjorkman, 2011). Besides, the need for a definition of new competences in enhancing cross-cultural communication has arisen along with innovative practices in ELT multilingual settings. Therefore, a proper teachers' training is required in order to provide an aware use of cross-cutting strategies and competences as crucial pedagogical instruments, consolidated into the learning process. In other terms, this attitude implies a deep care of the potential given by the new multilingual landscapes in pedagogical contexts that involve ELF variations in order to avoid cases of high communicative vulnerability which very often lead to the breakdown of the communicative interaction among non-native speakers, especially in a multicultural environment.

The research context of this study is the practical experience and the learners' feedback that informed the development of a set of mediation tasks and activities aimed at enhancing learners' awareness of ELF variations within multilingual classrooms.

The promotion of a successful implementation of novel ELT activities and the production of new teaching materials – which include mediation practices and tasks, as well as an ELF-aware approach to English varieties and variations, aimed at developing an awareness of the use of English as a ‘lingua franca’ in multilingual contexts – derives not only from the innovative theories behind the teaching of foreign languages but also from new needs in teacher development with consequent implications for the current methodologies at the basis of the teacher education itself (Sifakis, 2017).

Revealing cues and insights derived from the exploration of the new Descriptors in the CEFR – where mediation is particularly emphasized – are the fundamental assumptions underlying the projecting, the implementation and the monitoring of the following ELT activities that can be adapted to any L2 teaching context, especially in multilingual classrooms.

Mediation activities can suit different educational landscapes, either at school and in different academic and professional settings. They reveal their effectiveness if carried out in small groups through an operational framework based on cooperation and interaction among participants. Mediation tasks may also be adopted in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) or EMI (English-Medium Instruction) contexts and thus, not only within an educational process strictly related to language learning.

The following activities have been variably tested in an academic setting, at different stage of the ELT process, in courses for English language translation and mediation in multilingual classrooms with students from first year to third year at Roma Tre University. However, they can be adapted and modified according to the learners’ proficiency level or the classroom context, being assumed that their methodological structure represents an effective model to be used in any pedagogical setting. The following teaching tools have been planned within a well-structured supporting design including: (i) objectives, (ii) strategies, (iii) learners’ needs, (iv) tasks, (v) feedback and evaluation.

The sample of mediation tasks presented below is based on the new profile outlined in the *Companion Volume with new Descriptors* (2020) where mediation is represented with reference to the three main ways in which it tends to occur: *mediating a text, mediating concepts, mediating communication*.

4.1.1. *Mediating a text*

Mediation considered in its textual dimension is defined as:

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 (North *et al.*, 2018: 106).

In this sense mediation tasks are very effective for intermediate or advanced learners. Mediating a text means processing specific information, especially in specialized discourse, as well as working on translation, reformulation, transcreation of written texts in speech or in other texts, with a special reference to creative texts. For that reason, the tasks planned and assigned for this purpose include the analysis and criticism of creative texts, e.g. advertising campaigns in the specialized discourse of tourism or marketing for cultural or food-and-wine heritage.

Learners are trained to act on their linguistic and metalinguistic skills and competences, through the processing of a critical discourse analysis of text genres. The task assigned may be that of reformulating, mediating and translating a multimodal text from one

language to the other, through an intra-linguistic phase aimed at identifying the communicative needs of the audience to whom the target text is addressed and its socio-cultural dimensions, always respecting the pragmatic equivalence to the source text. This kind of activities require deep skills in managing and exploiting learners' multilingual repertoire, from the exploration of the source textual structure to the ELF-aware usage of words, images, soundtracks, and extralinguistic signals in the target reformulation.

The communicative dimension of multimodality is thus very useful in training mediation skills and abilities, especially in multicultural teamwork, since it enables the productive discussion, evaluation and co-construction of new meaning aimed at an effective impact on the interlocutors. Thus, in the monitoring phase, learners in multilingual academic contexts report (i) a revisional process of personal vulnerabilities, by means of self-correction and self-assessment, and (ii) an increased awareness of language power relations and their socio-cultural potential.

Here the outline of the activity:

Activity 1. *Mediating multimodal dimensions of language*

Mediation task	ELF-aware reformulation and translation of an advertising campaign for responsible tourism by means of the use of multimodal and multisensorial communication in specialized discourse reformulations; and the production of an effective communication process, to be assessed through interlocutors' feedback.
Objectives	Expanding learners' communication competences through work on specialized textual and discourse genres.
Mediation Strategies	Reformulating in another language, through intra- and inter-linguistic translation; and identifying language resources, and social dimensions of the audience reception.
Learners' needs	Critical analysis of cultural relativity; ability to identify and adapt to other socio-cultural frames; and ability to use languages in a wider range of situations.
Learners' feedback	Revised personal difficulties encountered, by means of self-correction; and raised awareness of language power relations and their socio-cultural potential.

Learners' voices

Here some final comments from students involved in the activity:

S1: "Overall, it was really interesting and I had fun doing it with my group. Our cooperation has been not too bad since it's our first try. I hope maybe we can do this again in the future to make up for things we didn't get to do well today.

I'm happy and satisfied with how we prepared for this activity. Regarding the practice of mediation, I think we did a brilliant job, intervening at the right moment by helping the side at a disadvantage."

S2: "I believe this session was engaging and useful. I think I could have done better, but it was the first time I tried something like this and I know it is not easy. In the future I would like to work at the airport and I know that I will have to face situations very similar to this one, so I am really thankful because

I had the chance to test myself and to see what it looks like to work in the field of mediation.”

Final comments

Learners are trained to act on their linguistic and metalinguistic skills and competences, through the processing of a critical discourse analysis of text genres. These activities require essential skills in managing and exploiting learners' multilingual repertoires, from the exploration of the source textual structure to the ELF-aware usage of words, images, soundtracks, and extralinguistic signals in the target reformulation.

The communicative dimension of multimodality is thus very useful in developing mediation skills and abilities, especially in multicultural teamwork, since it enables the productive discussion, evaluation and co-construction of new meaning aimed at an effective impact on the interlocutors. Mediating and translating a text often require the empowerment of interpretative filters, an operational detachment from culture-oriented perspectives towards the socio-culture references of the target audience.

4.1.2. Mediating concepts

The mediation of concepts, meaning and intentionality among speakers belongs to the basic features of negotiation as it

refers to the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others, particularly if they may be unable to access this directly on their own (North *et al.*, 2018: 106).

This kind of ability may be developed since the first stage of the SLA (Second Language Acquisition) process as it involves a series of essential actions embedded into the development of linguistic skills, such as facilitating collaborative interactions to construct meaning and encouraging the mutual exchange of concepts within a group, which need to be intensely trained.

This kind of activities, hence, are planned on the basis of well-defined objectives, i.e. (i) developing interactional competences in English in a multicultural professional or specialized context; and (ii) analysing intercultural encounters considering verbal and non-verbal aspects of conversational dimensions.

The tasks usually assigned in this phase are based on the training of communicative strategies aimed at the problem-solving and the management of lexical and semantic repertoire and register, that learners have acquired as theoretical notions throughout their academic experience. Thanks to these activities they are able to empower sociolinguistic concepts as well as socio-cultural competences taking into account power relationships and political, economic, and social aspects affecting the use of the English language, in its use as a 'lingua franca' as well.

In the academic or professional development courses the tasks assigned often consist of a role-play activity set in a precise communicative background and with an assigned interactional framework that learners analyse, discuss and enact in group, recognizing their hypothesis, expectations, and – often unpredictable – conversational dynamics. It is very useful the adoption of these mediation exercise within a real communicative setting, such as legal, medical, institutional or diplomatic contexts, through the regular exposure to

authentic materials which learners may draw on to perform a mediation process in a very likely situation based on realistic personification.

Learners' feedback is often very positive: they may expand their personal awareness of the potential of individual cross-cutting competences, and plurilingual and pluricultural skills in managing professional mediation processes, where concepts and their semantic power – inevitably subject to culture-bound interpretations – could not be conveyed through a mere linguistic transition.

Here the outline of the activity:

Activity 2. Mediating concepts in a workplace

Mediation task	Role-play in a mediation workplace in migration contexts which encourages learners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • switch registers and genres; • set up unbiased expectations and hypotheses; • choose an appropriate conversational framework.
Objectives	Developing interactional competences in English in a multicultural professional or specialized context; and analysing intercultural encounters considering verbal and non-verbal aspects of conversational dimensions.
Mediation Strategies	Problem-solving and management of personal plurilingual and register repertoire; encouraging learners' sociolinguistic and sociocultural awareness.
Learners' needs	Awareness of dynamics in power relationships and political, economic, and socio-cultural factors which affect the language usage.
Learners' feedback:	Expanded awareness of the potential of the individual's cross-cutting competences, and plurilingual and pluricultural skills.

Learners' voices:

What follows is students' feedback on the effectiveness of the activity carried out during the course:

S3: "I am somewhat disappointed about my attitude just because I would have liked to do more but I need to stress how tricky to take part of a discussion is, in particular during this sort of setting. But it must be said that my task was to intervene, as a mediator is supposed to do, when suitable, and to calm things down or to interact when it was needed. I also found some students too much attached to their roles and someone has not considered to give the word to their colleagues too, as requested in a role-playing game setting. However, I think that all in all, I was not so bad, but I am pretty sure I need more practice and I need to learn to release tension ASAP because every time I am going to do something like that, I feel tense and unready."

S4: "I believe this activity was relatively challenging since it was a simulation of a mediation experience, a relevant topic for languages students. In fact, all the members of both groups struggled to convey a faithful idea of what happens during a real mediation event. I believe this roleplay session was entertaining and useful at the same time, mainly because it helped me understand the mediator's role and functions."

Final comments:

It may be very effective setting these ‘concept-mediating activities’ within a real communicative setting, such as legal, medical, institutional or diplomatic contexts, through the regular exposure to authentic materials which learners may draw on to perform a mediation process in a very likely situation based on realistic personification. Learners’ feedback is often very positive: they may expand their personal awareness of the potential of individual cross-cutting competences, and plurilingual and pluricultural skills in managing professional mediation processes, where concepts and their semantic power – inevitably subject to culture-bound interpretations – could not be conveyed through a mere linguistic transition.

4.1.3. *Mediating communication*

A proper mediation of *concepts* and *texts* underlies a successful communicative negotiation in order to

to facilitate understanding and to shape successful communication between users/learners who may have individual, sociocultural, sociolinguistic or intellectual differences in standpoint. The mediator tries to have a positive influence on aspects of the dynamic relationship between all the participants, including the relationship with him or herself (North *et al.*, 2018: 107).

In this sense learners are prepared to exploit ELF variations and their multilingual repertoire in facilitating interactions within a pluricultural space and acting in as mediators, in informal situations as well as in delicate encounters, where misunderstandings and disagreements may easily occur.

This kind of task may be proposed from the pre-intermediate level of language proficiency since it is aimed at enhancing spontaneous daily conversations, at school, or in any other mediation space. The objective underpinning this exercise is the development of critical and interpretative approaches, often lacking in cross-cultural communicative dimensions. These skills disclose precise learners’ needs, which often affect their personal satisfaction at performing oral interactions. To this extent during the implementation of this activity students may discuss, project, process and analyse language and linguistic aspects taking into account their personal representation of the world in order to deconstruct stereotypes and working on cognitive processes at the basis of their linguistic-cultural references. In this case, the teacher or the trainer plan a task-based activity requiring a simulation of a cross-cultural encounter likely respondent to daily settings usually experienced by learners, such as a conversational exchange with a “newcomer” to a well-established group (e.g. at school) or an ELF interaction based on mere communicative purposes (e.g. asking/giving information, directions, assistance).

Conversational and interactional activities exposed to learners’ observation and critical analysis enhance group discussion and the investigation of linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the intercultural communication which are at the basis of the development of mediation competences. Students are encouraged in taking advantage of personal experiences to test their own linguistic and cultural repertoires as well as the ability to negotiate meaning in interactions with people belonging to other cultures.

Here the outline of the third activity:

Activity 3. *Cross-cutting dimensions of mediation in intercultural communication*

Mediation task	A task-based group activity to deconstruct stereotypes by working on transversal skills, and lingua-cultural references. The task assigned may have the following topic: “A young Pakistani classmate has just arrived: he does not speak our languages very well. I help him to understand the rules of the University library and explain how to take out a book”.
Objectives	Developing mediation abilities in daily language usage; and enhancing learners’ critical and interpretative skills.
Mediation Strategies	Switching from one communication task to another; and exploiting learners’ perception of the world and the society they live in.
Learners’ needs	Distancing from learners’ own cultural ‘schemata’ (i.e. background knowledge); and managing learners’ plurilingual potential and cross-cutting competences.
Learners’ feedback	Taken advantage of personal experiences to test linguistic and cultural repertoires; and the ability to negotiate meaning in interactions with people belonging to other cultures.

Learners’ voices:

Here the final feedback provided by students who acted as mediators during the activity:

S5: “I believe that regardless of everything, this touch of improvisation was really important, because in some moments of our life, it can happen that everything does not go according to plan, and for this reason I think it was a fantastic experience, both as a group leader but also as a student like me who “put herself on the line” talking and having fun with students of my age. Therefore, I truly hope, one day, to relieve a beautiful experience like this.”

S6: “I must say that this activity shed light on what I want to do in the future. Despite the fact that I already knew that I wanted to work with people rather than being alone in an office, today I realised how important the role of mediator is. Indeed, I would like to help people belonging to vulnerable categories. For instance, after today, I figured out that I would like to be a mediator in the migration field, even though I know that it won’t be easy for me.”

Final comments:

Conversational and interactional activities, boosting learners’ observation and critical analysis, may enhance group discussion and investigation of linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the intercultural communication which are at the preliminary steps for the development of mediation competences. Students are encouraged to take advantage of personal experiences to test their own linguistic and cultural repertoires as well as the ability to mediate interactions with multicultural and multilingual interlocutors, in their daily academic experience as well as in their future workplace.

4.2. *The impact of mediation on learners'*

The previous teaching materials have been presented with the aim of focusing on pedagogical implications of mediation activities, with reference to the use and adaptation of authentic materials in ELT classrooms and teacher education courses.

The activities intended to exploit the pedagogical power of mediation processes that usually occur in professional contexts where ELF variations are used through the use of different appropriation strategies, because of L1 mental lingua-cultural 'schemata' (Carrell, 1983) as well as pragmalinguistic processes which reveal underlying status asymmetries among participants involved in the interaction (Guido, 2008).

These theoretical and operational assumptions, typical of specialized and professional contexts, may be transferred to the SLA and teaching practices and, as a result, it means raising awareness and innovating the methodological approach towards a concrete promotion of those dynamics which are at the basis of the meaning co-construction and the comprehension process that clearly emerge in the cross-cultural mediation from the co-operative negotiation of attitudes, beliefs, emotions and misunderstandings derived from each speaker's socio-cultural 'schemata'.

Learners' feedback and evaluation received after each mediation activity confirm the need to expose them to authentic materials and realistic situations. Role-play and simulation activities may help in the initial introduction of mediation strategies in the language classroom. Moreover, in multilingual classrooms, especially where migrant students struggle to enter into a new community, the practice of mediation may be very effective with those learners who need the assistance that mediation can offer. Mediation tasks and activities raise migrants' awareness of the linguistic tools that are used for mediation purposes and develop their mediation strategies. It may also improve students' general confidence as participants in a multicultural and multilingual society and raise their self-esteem.

So far, the research has disregarded the systematic observation of development of intercultural competence as well as of cross-cultural awareness aimed at successful communicative practices, transactions and negotiations among ELF users in various intercultural contexts (from migration to the social welfare). Similarly, ELT and SLA research needs to be devoted to the pedagogical impact that these aspects may have on the teaching contexts in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, as well as in the teacher education, where instead the crucial influence of mediation and its theoretical and methodological assets may reveal decisive.

4.3. *Implications for language teaching, training and material development: insights from two research studies*

The new linguistic and socio-cultural landscapes in educational as well as professional contexts require a process of revising the current pedagogical perspectives, especially in the language classroom where, as argued by Piccardo *et al.* (2019: 20):

language learning follows dynamic, iterative, contextually and socially driven paths, mediation takes a crucial role with its capacity to enable and support the user/learner as a social agent in their development processes.

Research has shown that there is an urgent need to raise language teachers', teacher educators', educational policy-makers' and researchers' awareness of the current role of

mediation, communicative skills and, of course, English as the most frequently employed means of international and intercultural communication, i.e. a global lingua franca (ELF), in educational and professional contexts (e.g. Galloway, 2018; Lopriore, Vettorel, 2016; Dewey, Patsko, 2018; Sifakis, Bayyurt, 2018). In such contexts, English is the language of choice among people who come from different language and cultural backgrounds and need to communicate.

In the light of the above, in the last part of this paper insights from two research studies on innovative teacher education will be provided.

The first study originates from the Erasmus+ ‘English as a Lingua Franca Practices for Inclusive Multilingual Classrooms (ENRICH)’ Project², Cavalheiro *et al.*, 2021) which aimed at developing and implementing an innovative and free-of-charge online Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Course, which empowers teachers to adapt their teaching practices in view of the role of ELF in today’s multilingual and multicultural contexts, thanks to a network of researchers and teacher trainers from Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Turkey.

The project investigated EL teachers’ (over 600) as well as learners’ (over 500) current habits and perceived needs, EL teaching and learning practices, routines, attitudes and beliefs, and, at the same time, identifying both teachers’ and learners’ current teaching and learning needs in the diverse ELT educational contexts of the five countries, all differently affected by recent migration flows and, consequently, by new scenarios in terms of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and representing different foreign language curricula and teaching traditions.

As a result, the online CPD Course has been directly addressed to pre- or in-service teachers and was implemented in 2020 using a specially designed Moodle platform. Even if in an asynchronous mode, modules and activities of the course were designed in the platform to promote successful interaction among the participants. A series of activities engaged the participants in thinking about a particular topic each time and then sharing their thoughts in a specially designed forum.

The CPD Course used a blended learning methodology in that it incorporates an online and an offline experience: participants teachers could view the video lectures of each Section online at their own pace, they carried out the activities in each section and were prompted to share their thoughts with other colleagues.

The course infrastructure was specifically meant to produce an impact on teachers primarily in terms of their professional empowerment and the ability to exploit the benefits of the role of English as an international lingua franca, so as to adopt an ELF-aware inclusive pedagogical approach in their multilingual classrooms.

Voices from the field presented in the following paragraphs have been collected during the 5-month course in 2020. The CPD involved more than 200 teachers from several geographical, socio-cultural and professional backgrounds. Among others, specific aspects related to teachers’ awareness of mediation and communication strategies, their experiences, their attitude and their teaching practices and objectives, emerged and provided relevant inputs and hints for reflection.

The second research study refers to the PRIN Project “Uses of English as a lingua franca in domain-specific contexts of intercultural communication”, which aimed to develop a cognitive-functional model for the analysis of variations and registers of ELF in intercultural communication as well as to promote a pedagogical approach to ELF aware teaching to be applied to the training of teachers, mediators and digital media specialists operating in multicultural environments (Lopriore *et al.*, 2021).

² <http://enrichproject.eu/>.

During the third year of the study, in 2018, the Roma Tre Team planned the overall organization of the first teacher education course at an Italian university, aimed at introducing the notion of ELF in ELT³. The course “New English/es landscapes” adopted an ELF-aware approach and developed an innovative syllabus. The tasks and the activities were linked to the innovations introduced in each session and participants were asked to devise lessons that would include these innovations, and at the same time consider how to plan ways to implement them in their own classes. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon their own teaching context and to start investigating their own teaching, while involving their students to observe the lesson and provide regular feedback and opinions.

Within these two training courses the importance of introducing communication strategies and mediation activities in language teaching was repeatedly stressed. Participants were encouraged to introduce new tasks and activities in the emerging multilingual and multicultural classrooms by means of role plays or simulations where learners can have the opportunity to put into practice strategies that they will use in their daily life, in their daily conversations and exchanges. Teachers discussed about the importance of inviting learners to consider and reflect on their use of strategies in communication, in negotiation of meaning, in accommodation processes, in order to promote the construction of a cooperative cross-cultural communicative environment, at school and in their future professional dimensions.

What follows are some of their end-of-the-session comments and feedback:

I think I use a lot of communication strategies in my classrooms, as I find some of them particularly effective with young learners. This is because they help reinforce the sharing or passing of information through other channels. The ones I most often use are probably topic control and repair. In my context they are also probably the ones that enhance cross-cultural communication among learners.

Of course my students may benefit from strategy training because I think it will help them to organise their thoughts and to be able to take time to listen to the others without interrupting and to improve their communication skills. I think that in my classes the most effective actions to enhance communication could be the restriction and topic control as they are young learners and still need to be guided.

As for the introduction of mediation activities, here is what two other teachers wrote in response to this reflective activity:

I didn't know the CEFR mentioned these descriptors, but I have always worked on some of these with my pupils, especially those concerned with mediating a text. I think these activities are quite important when evaluating the learners because they can reflect how autonomous and confident learners are in the use of language. Besides that, they seem essential for collaborative work.

I think that mediation is important in a global world for several reasons and sometimes it is the only way people can get messages (oral or written). Every school year I try to make students aware of the importance of mediation

³ The teacher education course “New English/es landscapes” was implemented at the Department of foreign languages, literatures, and cultures at Roma Tre University in the academic year 2018/19.

because I think it is always present. I use written texts in the area of interest of the students and try to draw their attention to the differences in language and cultures and also to the problems that may arise during translation. I also think it is important for their language learning.

To conclude, teachers were asked to discuss about the opportunity given to the classroom when written or spoken authentic materials, showing real-life ELF, are introduced in the classroom. Here three different replies from the course participants:

If I taught upper levels I think it could be a good example to show real-life ELF interactions in my classrooms. Students could benefit with it, because they would be engaged with language, and could compare the desired product (correct and appropriate language in reference to native-speakers norms) to the process of communication. Learning language through language use would also allow a spontaneous interaction among learners.

I would use in my classroom such authentic materials showing real ELF interaction for a number of reasons: to familiarize my students with real life interactions in which meaning negotiation is necessary to achieve intelligibility; to show them the usefulness of various communication strategies; to show them that sometimes the knowledge of English as taught in the classroom is not enough in real life situations and that they can modify and adapt their speech to achieve mutual understanding; to help them become more flexible, autonomous, responsible, active users of the language.

Learners can have the opportunity to practice strategies used in everyday life, in order to help them reflect on their use of strategies in communication and negotiation of meaning. They will become aware of their personal use of strategies, understand what they are and how they can be useful. A cooperative cross-cultural communicative environment will be promoted.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has discussed and outlined how introducing mediation tasks in the training of L2 skills, especially for the practice of speaking abilities in the multicultural classroom, may be helpful and necessary, as also suggested by the new CEFR descriptors. The amount of emotions, attitudes, opinions, perspectives and world representations – conveyed during mediation processes (and the awareness of their impact) – is applied to the communicative co-construction of messages and interactions where ELF variations and plurilingual repertoires are also employed instead of standard varieties, especially in intercultural encounters in specialized educational and professional contexts, e.g. academic, legal or institutional settings.

The pedagogical approach to mediation is here aimed at giving a concrete response to the needs emerged from the new socio-cultural dynamics and components which have affected, in the last ten years, the school environment as well as the academic context, from the novel class arrangement to emerging learning needs.

Seen from this perspective, EL learners may rightly become experts of intercultural communication: to this respect they need an improved awareness of pragmalinguistic aspects and complex processes underlying the discourse strategies, since interpreting as well as translating cannot represent a simple and automatic transferring of semantic structures from one language to the other. In this way, the training of cross-cultural

mediation skills seems useful not only in migration contexts, but also in any multilingual and multicultural communicative setting where each socio-cultural and pragmalinguistic identity – seen as an asset rather than a hindrance – should be respected, mediated and properly conveyed.

The promotion in the L2 classroom of innovative mediation activities and the production of new teaching materials – which include mediation practices and tasks, as well as an ELF-aware approach to English varieties and variations – aim at developing a conscious use of mediation scales and strategies within multilingual contexts. The most recent research in terms of teacher training argues for innovations in lesson planning and teaching materials which implies a consequent reformulation of methods and assumptions at the basis of teacher education itself (Sifakis, 2017).

Moreover, the new descriptors in the CEFR – especially those emphasizing the role of mediation – call for the design, the implementation and the monitoring of mediation tasks that can be adapted to any L2 teaching context, even more in multilingual classrooms.

Mediation activities can suit different educational landscapes, either at school or in different academic and professional settings. They mostly reveal their effectiveness if carried out in small groups with the assistance of an operational framework facilitating cooperation and interaction among participants. Mediation tasks and an ELF-aware approach to intercultural communication may also be adopted in CLIL or EMI contexts and thus, within educational processes involving a plurilingual dimension.

To sum up, the main aspects emerging from this research on ELF-aware teaching/learning attitudes in multilingual contexts are:

- the needs for new methodology in language teaching towards an ELF-aware language learning;
- the adoption of innovative measures, such as mediation tasks, to make teaching more effective, especially in plurilingual contexts;
- the emphasis on learners' cross-cutting skills as a basis for developing plurilingual and intercultural competences;
- the analysis of learners' needs in their sociolinguistic and educational contexts with the aim of empowering tailor-made programmes and professional development courses;
- the promotion of language interaction activities implying the usage of authentic and content-rich materials to build up intercultural awareness and communication strategies.

From this perspective, language learners show the need for an increased awareness of sociolinguistic aspects and complex processes underlying the discourse strategies, because mediating as well as translating cannot represent a simple and automatic transfer of linguistic structures from one code to the other one.

This way, the theoretical assumptions on the development of mediation skills as well as intercultural awareness find a practical actualization in any multilingual and multicultural communicative setting as well as in any L2 teaching context where learners may develop not only linguistic abilities and competences but also social skills to autonomously act as intercultural operators in their daily routines.

Current coursebooks have not maximized yet the chance of adopting an ELF perspective in ELT and are still representing language within a standard norm frame. This manual offers to language teachers a new perspective on teaching within current ELF-oriented scenarios, by adopting a reflective approach, and by offering a number of tasks

and activities for eliciting learners' and teachers' responses within a classroom-based research approach.

Learners in contemporary societies need to develop skills and abilities which cannot be considered as optional anymore. Practising mediation in class, and consequently in their daily routines, will help them enhance the use of appropriate communication strategies and gain valuable knowledge to face the considerable societal changes and transitions of the 21st century.

To conclude, research studies in language teaching as well as in teacher training are fundamental and to be encouraged to investigate learners', from each socio-cultural and educational background, actual demands and wants alongside teachers' training needs. As shown in this contribution, the role of research is crucial to innovations in language education, as long as these innovations can be translated into successful and sustainable classroom practice able to meet the challenges raised by current socio-cultural internal and external factors.

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