

Mediation – a *Great!* way to Enjoy it

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF): now in an extended version with a new core competency: Mediation.

Mediation is a linguistic competency that combines receptive, productive and interactive competencies. It was already implicit in the original 2001 CEF descriptors. This article will take a closer look at how mediation has moved centerstage to become a core competency in the new (2018) version of the CEF and how it features in some Klett coursebooks.

A new core competency

The 2001 CEF revised the traditional model of language teaching, learning and testing. The focus was placed on developing the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Phonological and grammatical correctness as well as language norm-abundance were given priority. The 2001 CEF described in detail what a language user 'can do' for each of the skills at a certain level. In the 2018 version, the four skills have given way to core competencies that are minutely described in terms of task-based and goal-oriented language activities and communicative strategies. The core competencies are: reception, production, interaction and – now a core competency in its own right – mediation.

There are two main reasons for this change: First, there is the growing use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). This means English is used as a mediating language among speakers who do not share a common language and who would therefore not otherwise be able to communicate with each other directly. The second and related reason is the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of

society as a whole and in our classrooms in particular.

Mediation defined

Mediation is, in the widest sense, a reformulation and/or interpretation of any text, utterance or idea by an intermediary making communication possible and communicative intent clear.

Mediation does not always have to be a cross-language activity. For instance, helping a friend to file taxes by 'translating' the legalese of the forms to be filled in, also counts as a mediation activity.

Mediation activities in coursebooks

The 2018 CEF describes mediating activities for texts, concepts and communication.

As for texts, descriptors range from relaying information gathered from a text, translating, summarising, and note-taking in lectures or seminars to expressing reactions to a text in the form of feelings, opinions and interpretations.

All of these have long been standard practise in coursebooks and classrooms. Just look at any given text in your coursebook and the accompanying activities and tasks. You will see that most of the pre-reading tasks and comprehension checks train mediation skills.

Take this example from Klett's *Great! B1* coursebook (Fig. 1) illustrating mediation of texts. Exercise 5a asks students to paraphrase the main idea of the text by completing two sentence heads. 5b then allows learners to practise what they have read

5a Read the text then complete the statement.

You shouldn't describe people by their ..., it's better to describe them by their ...

Better safe than sorry!

Politeness and political correctness (or PC) are very important, especially when you're describing people. It is especially important to be politically correct when you're talking about people of a different nationality or skin colour. It is better and safer to describe people by their other features like the length, colour or style of their hair, their height or their clothes. Here's a quick guide to some other words that it is better to avoid saying. Better safe – than sorry!

Avoid saying	More polite alternatives
fat, overweight	large, well-built
old	senior, mature
thin	slim
short (♀)	petite
ugly, horrible	interesting, unusual

5c Think of examples of words that are acceptable and/or unacceptable in your language. What advice would you give a visitor?

You can say ... but you should avoid saying ...

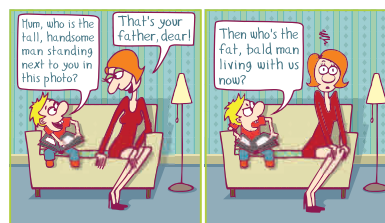


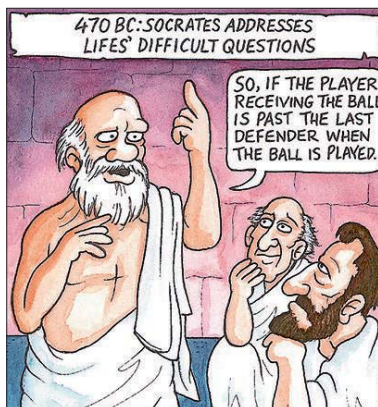
Fig. 1



Zum Autor

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in the text. Exercise 5c asks students to think of taboo words in their own language and give some advice on what to say or not to say. An extension of 5c could ask learners to provide reasons why certain expressions are taboo, in this way crossing over to the mediation of concepts.



What's the game and can you name the rule Socrates is trying to explain?

The mediation of concepts looks at how knowledge and ideas can be accessed through language, either collaboratively or by way of a teacher or trainer, for example through explanations, paraphrasing, translating or using examples in context: in just the way Socrates is, in the cartoon here. Imagine you want to 'translate' or express the idea of a 'Feierabend' or 'Brückentag' to someone who doesn't know the concept. We all know that saying 'bridge day' won't do the trick. A straightforward task that practises mediating concepts is given in the example in Figure 2. Learners are asked to think of slang words or phrases and explain them to a foreign visitor. This could be extended by asking them to think of local terms for, say, food.

The descriptors for mediating communication refer to an individual who is plurilingual and pluricultural and mediates communication between speakers of different languages. Basically, the mediating language user creates a 'shared space between

and among linguistically and culturally different interlocutors'. In other words, he/she creates 'a positive interactive environment for successful communication' (CEF companion volume, p. 122).

'Plurilingualism' refers to an individual's evolving 'single, interrelated linguistic repertoire'. This means a person is bi- or multilingual (AND plurilingual) if they are able to communicate in two or more languages effortlessly. However, a person is plurilingual (and NOT multilingual) if they 'know' more than one language, dialect or accent solely because they have studied it or learnt it at some point in the past (but haven't used it actively since). The point here is that the person can still draw on previously gained knowledge when mediating communication.

Here's an example of mediating communication: there is a party where

5b 1/25 Now read the article and check.

G'day, mate!

As a visitor to Australia – or Oz – you don't need to speak with an Australian or Aussie (pronounced Ozzie ['ɔ:zi]) accent or speak Aussie slang. But it helps if you can understand it.

"G'day, mate! How are you to die?" is a typical Australian greeting. In plain English it means, quite simply, "Hi there! How are you?" Australians say "G'day!" (Good day) as a greeting at any time of day or night. "Mate" simply means friend. And Australians often say 'I' [ai] for 'ay' [et], so 'today' becomes 'to die'!

Australian English is also called 'Strine'. Why? Well, first you shorten the word Australian to Stralian. Then you say it quickly through your nose with your teeth together and pronounce 'stra' the Australian way [strai]. The result is ... Strine!

It's also worth knowing that when Australians speak, their voices often rise at the end of a sentence. So they often sound like they are asking questions. But you don't need to answer!

Aussie slang also has many of its own special phrases. If an Australian invites you to "Come over in the arvo and we'll boil the billy and then crack a tinny," you should arrive in the afternoon and you can expect to get a cup of tea and then a can of beer. And if your host adds "Fair dinkum," you can be sure he really means it.

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5c Think of regional or slang words and phrases in your language and your region. Explain them to a foreign visitor.

In this part of Germany we say *Gsälz* not *Marmelade* for jam.

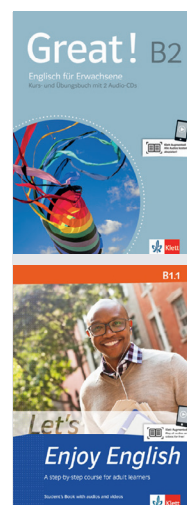
Fig. 2

an English-Spanish bilingual person (A), who learnt some French at school, meets and talks to an English monolingual person (B). The two are engaging in a conversation when a monolingual French speaker (C), who learnt some Spanish at school, joins them. Speaker C can now talk to Speaker B via Speaker A, who acts as a mediator.

Training mediating communication basically means accessing and developing the plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire of a language learner. Coursebooks and teaching materials help to achieve this in the EFL classroom. On page 75 of Klett's newest coursebook, *Let's Enjoy English B1.1*, students read a text about differences between Canada and Canadian English compared to the USA and American English.

While the text doesn't focus on mediating communication directly, it familiarizes learners with cultural and linguistic differences between both countries. This way, their awareness of the multicultural and multilingual nature of the two countries is developed further and adds to their plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire.

Source:
<https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>



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Great! B2
ISBN 978-3-12-501584-5
www.klett-sprachen.de/great

Let's Enjoy English B1.1
ISBN 978-3-12-501644-6
www.klett-sprachen.de/lets-enjoy-english