CEFR Extended Set of Illustrative Descriptors: Focus on Mediation:

Introduction to the Validation Workshops

1. Background
The context to the current development of the descriptors for mediation is the following. The Council of Europe’s Education Department decided at a meeting in May 2013 to:

(a) Commission a text to situate the CEFR’s descriptive scheme within the broader educational context for language learning that has developed over the past 20 years.

(b) Commission an Extended Set of CEFR Illustrative Descriptors, exploiting CEFR-related descriptors developed, validated and calibrated to CEFR levels in projects in Europe and overseas that have reported in the last few years. At the end of 2013, it was decided to go a step further and develop from scratch descriptors for mediation, which had not been included in the CEFR in 2001. As a result the working group for mediation descriptors have, since January 2014, been refining a collection of descriptors from a range of sources.

The approach to mediation adopted for the text and the descriptors in the current project (work in progress) extends the concept of mediation beyond that presented in the CEFR in 2001. In the CEFR, Mediation is presented as conveying received meaning and is first introduced in the following way:

In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediation language activities, (re)processing an existing text, occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies. CEFR Section 2.1.3.

Language activities

The concept is further developed in CEFR Chapter 4 as follows:

In mediating activities, the language user is not concerned to express his/her own meanings, but simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly, normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. Examples of mediating activities include spoken interpretation and written translation as well as summarising and paraphrasing texts in the same language, when the language of the original text is not understandable to the intended recipient … (CEFR Section 4.4.4. Mediating activities and strategies)

2. Categories for Mediation Descriptors

The view of mediation taken in the current project takes on a much wider scope, although this does not invalidate the sense in which it is used in the CEFR 2001 text. Overall, mediation is interpreted as any procedure, arrangement or action designed to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness. The mediator facilitates access to knowledge, the grasping of concepts, the reduction of tensions, building bridges towards the new, the other. The social groups one encounters, otherness and mobility through groups and stages of life (collectivités, alterité and mobilité) are more and more relevant in our increasingly diverse societies.
In addition to categories for *Conveying received meaning*, in line with the 2001 interpretation, the current draft scheme for *Mediation Activities* therefore has categories for *Constructing meaning* (grouped with *Conveying received meaning* under the heading *Cognitive Mediation*) and, in addition, categories for *Relational Mediation*.

*Cognitive Mediation* refers to the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts that an individual may be unable to access directly on his/her own. The difficulty in access may be caused by the novelty and unfamiliarity of the concepts and/or by a linguistic or cultural barrier.

*Relational Mediation* refers to the process of creating and managing a positive, collaborative environment to enhance the effectiveness of mediation. It is crucial in education as well as in society, facilitating the conditions for Cognitive Mediation.

Descriptors are presented for both spoken and written forms of Cognitive Mediation, whereas descriptors for Relational Mediation are provided only for spoken language. In addition to Mediation Activities there are a number of descriptor scales for *Mediation Strategies*.

In the course of its work, the working group has also considered other interesting and important areas that were also not included in the original CEFR descriptors:
- translation and interpretation (which are specialised types of mediation);
- online interaction (which involves some aspects related to mediation);
- pluricultural and plurilingual competences (often drawn on in mediation);
- reactions to literature – both personal interpretation and critical analysis (which requires an ability to mediate with a text).

The full set of current draft categories being considered in these validation workshops is therefore as follows. All the descriptor scales for Mediation Activities and Mediation Strategies apply both to communication in one language and to communication across languages, with the exception of interpretation and translation, which apply only across languages.

**MEDIATION ACTIVITIES**

**Spoken Mediation**

**COGNITIVE MEDIATION**

Constructing meaning
1. Collaborating to construct meaning
2. Generating conceptual talk

Conveying received meaning
3. Relaying specific information in speech
4. Explaining data (graphs, diagrams, etc.) in speech
5. Processing (an entire text or texts)
6. Interpreting
7. Spoken translation of written text (Sight translation)

**RELATIONAL MEDIATION**

Facilitating relationships
8. Facilitating collaborative interaction
9. Managing interaction in plenary and in groups
10. Resolving delicate situations and disagreements

**Written Mediation**

**COGNITIVE MEDIATION**

Conveying received meaning
11. Relaying specific information in writing
12. Explaining data (graphs, diagrams, etc.) in writing
13. Processing (an entire text or texts)
14. Translating
MEDIATION STRATEGIES

15. Establishing a positive atmosphere
16. Establishing connections
17. Amplifying text
18. Streamlining text
19. Breaking down complicated information
20. Visually representing information
21. Adjusting language

OTHER NEW SCALES

Online Interaction
1. Online conversation and discussion
2. Goal/oriented online transactions and collaboration

Text
Additional scales:
1. Expressing a personal response to literature and art
2. Analysis and criticism of literature and art

Plurilingual & Pluricultural Competences (new category)
1. Exploiting pluricultural repertoire and intercultural knowledge
2. Exploiting plurilingual repertoire

The scale Processing, presented in CEFR Section 4.6.3. Text, has been expanded in the scales for Mediation Activities into three descriptor scales in both spoken and written language (Relaying specific information; Explaining data, Processing). Interpreting and Translating have been added to complete the section on Conveying received meaning. The other two categories for spoken construction of concepts concern stimulating and developing ideas within a group (Collaborative development of ideas) or as the person leading a group (Generating conceptual talk).

The first two categories under Relational Mediation reflect the other side of these two activities: from within a group (Facilitating collaborative interaction) and as the person leading a group (Managing interaction in plenary and in groups). These activities both involve creating the environment and organising the talk in order for the work to be effective. The final category in this group reflects sorting out problems that may occur in such contexts, as well as more formal resolution of disagreements.

Not all mediation strategies would be appropriate in all mediation contexts. For example, it is not normally considered appropriate for a translator to amplify or streamline a text, though they may very well need to restructure it in order to meet the cultural expectations of the target context as to how it should be organised. On the other hand, in informal interpretation, it is common to amplify or streamline. Various mediation strategies could apply when processing a text for someone else, or when acting as an animator, teacher or trainer. However, when working within a group, much of the time strategies will be interaction strategies, such as those already covered in the CEFR illustrative descriptors: Taking the floor (Turntaking), Cooperating, and Asking for clarification.

As mentioned above, the other categories included in the set of descriptors for validation are areas that in some way relate to mediation and were studied in detail during the project.

3. The Design and Purpose of the Validation Activities

The purpose of the validation activities is to identify and refine the most successful descriptors, to determine whether distinctions between the categories are feasible, and to calibrate the best
descriptors to the scale that underlies the set of illustrative descriptors that were published in 2001. The methodology follows the one used successfully to develop the original descriptors.

There are three rounds of activities: Workshop 1 (February-March); Workshop 2 (May-June) and an Online survey (August-September). The materials are only available in English.

- **Workshop 1, (Closed)**

  In this (circa 3-hour) face-to-face workshop that took place February-March 2015, participants were asked to discuss in pairs a given set of about 60 descriptors presented in random order on paper. The task, in pairs, was to identify the category descriptors are intended to describe and judge the quality of the descriptor shows in relation to different criteria and suggest changes to wording. The results are enabling the working group to weed out less popular/less clear/less useful descriptors, and revise descriptors as suggested.

- **Workshop 2: (Window: 11th May to 19th June):**

  For this second (circa 3-hour) workshop a computer with internet access is necessary for each participant.

  - Participants will be asked to judge the level of descriptors, each entering decisions on their separate computer.

  The workshop has two phases:
  - **Familiarisation: Pairs / plenary:**
    a) Identify the CEFR levels and plus levels on the worksheet showing the salient characteristics of the levels, simplified from CEFR Section 3.6.
    b) Identify the CEFR levels of 10 descriptors.
  - **Individual rating: Alone**
    a) Each person (alone) judges the level of each of descriptor on a printout of a SurveyMonkey questionnaire. This questionnaire starts with 10 CEFR descriptors and then presents descriptors in random order for 2–5 different categories
    b) Each person reviews his/her decisions
    c) Each person enters his/her decisions in SurveyMonkey on his/her computer.

  The results will enable the working group to weed out or revise descriptors for which people have difficulty judging level. Descriptors for which there is a very high consensus of agreement on level may be calibrated with the data from this workshop.

- **Online survey: (Window: late August-month of September):**

  The survey can be completed at home, or at a meeting convened for that purpose – individually. The data from the survey will be used to identify descriptors that are interpreted in an inconsistent fashion, in order to discard them and then to calibrate the validated descriptors to the CEFR levels. It is possible that we may need to seek volunteers in October to complete a different questionnaire, if the data collection turns out to be uneven.
4 Publication

The Extended Set of illustrative descriptors for the CEFR will then be published on the Council of Europe’s website in English and French mid-2016.

All institutions participating in the validation will be acknowledged at publication.

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