

# Cross-Language Mediation in Foreign Language Teaching

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It has become a commonplace to point out that international discourses on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) have often been inappropriately dominated by writers who are native speakers of English generally from British, Australasian or North American backgrounds, and are assumed to conduct classes monolingually, discouraging use of the learners' first language (Phillipson, 1992; Holliday, 1994). The German academic, Wolfgang Butzkamm, has explicitly complained of a global cartel of 'English' and American academics and publishers, influenced by commercial considerations:

*Es gibt ein weltweites von Engländern und Amerikanern beherrschtes Meinungs- und Zitierkartell... und englische und amerikanische Lehrwerke lassen sich in unvergleichlich höheren Auflagen verkaufen, wenn die Muttersprachen unberücksichtigt bleiben.* [There is a worldwide cartel of opinions and citations controlled by English and Americans... and English and American textbooks sell in incomparably higher numbers if mother tongues are not considered] (Butzkamm, 2002, xv, all translations are the author's).

Admittedly, in more recent years, one can note an increased number of publications which, aimed at native speakers, seek to reverse this trend and deal with how the learners' L1 can be used in the classroom (e.g., Deller and Rinvoluceri, 2002; Kerr, 2014). But in Japan it appears to be the case that most of us who are professionally involved in reflecting on TEFL still look to the native-speaking countries for orientations and pedagogical stimuli. Of course this is an unsurprising phenomenon since Japanese specialists in English are precisely that – specialists in English – and much of the literature on TEFL in other countries is written in languages other than English. Nevertheless, the overwhelming dominance of native speakers is a pity because Japan is a foreign, not a second language environment, and the nation may be missing out on potentially valuable experiences from other foreign language countries. This article, therefore, tries to mitigate this bias a little by introducing an interesting concept that the writer has become acquainted with from his own reading of the German-language professional literature. The concept is known in German as *Sprachmittlung*. In fact, it is a concept which has already been the subject of a monograph in English by the Greek researcher, Maria Stathopoulou (2015), who uses the English term *cross-language mediation*. However, Stathopoulou's book is both recent and expensive (retailing at about 15,000 yen), and may as yet not be well known in Japan.

## WHAT IS CROSS-LANGUAGE MEDIATION?

Cross-linguistic mediation is a concept which represents an expansion of the conventional understanding of translating and interpreting. However, it is not mentioned in Guy Cook's (2010) prize-winning book which seeks to rehabilitate what is sometimes considered the 'discredited' pedagogical deployment of translation. It should not be equated with the term *cross-cultural mediation* as used in Vygotskian-inspired

sociocultural theory. The origins of the term as used in foreign language teaching are generally thought to lie in the CEFR, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Teaching, Learning, Assessment (Council of Europe, 2001), and in the explicit ideological commitment to a multilingual Europe enshrined therein. As Hämmerling (2011) points out, in CEFR, mediation is divided into categories of oral and written mediation. The former include professional simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, as well as informal interpreting (for example, for foreign visitors to one's own country or for friends and family abroad), while the latter include exact translation, literary translation, as well as summarizing and paraphrasing translation. However, Friederike Bohle differentiates mediation in foreign language teaching (*Sprachmittlung*) from professional translation, drawing on the writings of German-speaking pedagogical specialists such as Andrea Rössler, Wolfgang Hallet, Heidemarie Sarter and Inez de Florio Hansen (Bohle, 2012). Unlike professional interpreting and translating which aim at achieving as close as possible equivalence between source texts and target texts, cross-language mediation aims to offer information to the audience that is contextually optimal and relevant, usually in common 'everyday' situations where the stakes are lower than they would be in high-stakes exchanges such as diplomatic negotiations, trade contracts, or courtroom proceedings. It is of note that cross-language mediation is an ability that is tested in high-stakes school-leaving tests in Germany and Greece, as it is deemed a competency necessary for a multilingual global society. For the Greek situation, Stathopoulou makes the following interesting comment:

Greek people face a new reality with the influx of economic migrants, and it is very common for a Greek user of the English language to assume the role of interlingual mediator in his/her everyday interactions – e.g., to explain, to advise and to assist – and relay messages from a Greek source text into English either orally or in writing (Stathopoulou, 2015, p.52).

Although Japan is not a destination for English-speaking migrants, situations where Japanese citizens will also have to assume the role of interlingual mediator seem certain to increase in the future, as the number of exchanges increases in areas such as trade, tourism, and education.

Mediation often necessitates a condensation of the information in the source text, and yet may also require expansion if, say, additional background information is required by the audience for smooth communication to be achieved. Rather than a skill, it requires an overall competence that is built up from a number of sub-competencies including linguistic competence, intercultural competence, and interpersonal competence. Linguistic competence involves both the receptive skills necessary to understand what is being said in both source and target languages and the productive skills necessary to adequately transfer the information. Intercultural competence involves knowledge of differences in beliefs and values of the participants in communicative situations requiring mediation. For example, intercultural concepts such as low-context vs. high-context cultures may help Japanese speakers of English to offer extra information when mediating for, say, German speakers of English. Extra information supplied by the mediator about why something is happening in a particular way can make communication smoother with German speakers of English who may be unfamiliar with cultures such as that in Japan where information is often assumed to be understood from context without being made explicit. A neophyte German may need extra information about the nature of *sempai-kohai* hierarchical relationships in Japan, whereas a Korean is probably extremely familiar with this concept. Intercultural competence helps the mediator make these kinds of judgements. But, even if the mediator possesses linguistic and intercultural competence, communication is unlikely to proceed

smoothly if the mediator is unable to manage the interaction between the participants. To do this requires interpersonal skills such as appropriate non-verbal communication (distance, gesture, touch, expression) and active listening using checks, confirmations, and clarifications.

## **CROSS-LANGUAGE MEDIATION TASKS**

According to Stathopoulou (2015, p.61), mediation entails “the use of the target language in particular social contexts in ways that are based on certain social needs”. In other words, mediation tasks used in foreign language teaching should issue from the same kind of ‘backwards design’ principle that applies to monolingual task-based language teaching. The tasks should be designed after learner goals and needs have been identified. Friederike Bohle quotes her colleague Maria Thurmair: “There’s no point in making a translation apart from a situation involving real interlingual communication” (Bohle, 2012, p.46).

Daniela Caspari (2013) categorizes mediation tasks into oral production tasks and tasks for the production of written target texts, and lists a number of examples from teaching materials produced in Germany. One type of task from her first category is mediation tasks requiring the learner to relay information in the L1 based on listening or reading comprehension of non-interactive L2 texts, an example being answering questions in German on the basis of information written in Spanish about a pre-paid phone card. The second type mentioned is that of mediation as a situational framework for practice in spoken interaction, an example being mediation between a Spanish police officer and a non-Spanish-speaking German tourist who has lost her passport. A third type is tasks paraphrasing formal written L1 texts into colloquial L2: for example explaining German regulations for an open-air swimming pool in everyday French. For the second category of mediation tasks, those requiring written production, an example Caspari cites is writing in an L2 the program for a day’s outing with exchange students on the basis of various sources of tourist information which are written in German. Other types of tasks in this category include summarizing in the L2 the gist of the L1, or picking out and rewriting in an L2 relevant information from L1 texts in response to specific informational needs, for example questions about the outbreak of a virus in a local region.

Elisabeth Kolb (2009) has also outlined a categorization of mediation tasks, which is roughly similar to Caspari’s. Whereas the latter author describes mediation tasks between German and other continental European languages such as French, Spanish, and Italian, Kolb gives examples from English teaching in *Gymnasien* (academic high schools) in Bavaria. Her first category is paraphrasing information presented primarily in graphic forms such as signs. This can be either from L1 to L2, or L2 to L1. An example of the latter is a task requiring young German learners to explain to their grandparents the meaning of American signs such as *No Thru Traffic*, *Ped Xing*, and *Don’t Be A Litterbug*. Kolb’s second category is summarizing in an L1 information presented orally, but non-interactively, in the L2, an example being a German homestay student in Colorado sending an e-mail to friends back home summarizing an interesting talk about working on a ranch. Another category also requires information to be presented in an L1, but from written rather than oral L2 texts, Kolb’s example being answering parents’ questions about a real tourist brochure for hikers in the Lake District of England. Perhaps the prototypical category comprises role-plays involving relay interpreting, for example between non-English-speaking German parents and a rent-a-car clerk in America. Kolb’s final category involves summarizing in an L2 information from L1 sources. The example task rubric she supplies is the following:

*Tom, your e-mail pal from New York, has asked you if you know any truly German customs. This makes you think of “Sankt-Martin’s Umzug”. Write an e-mail to Tom in which you tell him about this custom. Use the following [German] information you found on the Internet [followed by a German text about St. Martin’s processions ] (Kolb, 2009, p.82).*

Kolb’s categorization differs from Caspari’s by including *pre-mediation* and *post-mediation* activities. An example of a pre-mediation activity is pre-teaching vocabulary for circumlocutions that help explain semantic relations:

- opposites (*not...*)
- synonyms (*is another word for...*)
- special and general words (*are all words that mean...*)
- parts and the whole (*are all parts of a...*).

Other circumlocutionary templates that help in paraphrasing can also be taught:

- *a thing that...*
- *a person who...*
- *a place where...*
- *that’s when...* (adapted from Kolb, 2009, p.75).

Post-mediation activities, according to Kolb, could take the form of brief reflection on the different mediation solutions produced by different groups of learners, with feedback being offered on various lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic issues in these solutions.

## **CROSS-LANGUAGE MEDIATION AND ASSESSMENT**

In most formal educational settings some kind of assessment of learners and learning is required. In the case of cross-language mediation, we need to recall that defining features of this type of translational activity are that the source and the target texts do *not* express the same meanings, and that the mediator, unlike most professional interpreters, is a visible and active participant in the interaction. To use the terminology of translation theory, the criterion for success is not *equivalence* but *adequacy*. Is the attempt at mediation adequate in such-and-such a particular situation? Does it meet the needs of a particular addressee? Friederike Bohle writes as follows:

*Das Hauptkriterium bei der Bewertung einer Sprachmittlungsaufgabe muss sein, ob bei der Lösung das Kommunikationsziel erreicht wurde, das heißt, ob die Informationen richtig ausgewählt und vollständig und verständlich übermittelt wurden [The main criterion in the evaluation of cross-linguistic mediation must be whether or not the communicative aim is achieved in the (mediating) solution; that means, whether the information has been correctly selected and relayed completely and understandably] (Bohle, 2012, p.96).*

In addition to judging whether the necessary amount of information units have been supplied, Bohle also alludes to the need to offer feedback on the use of compensation and other communication strategies in mediation tasks. By way of providing concrete details of assessment methods, she reproduces in an appendix to her monograph the frameworks suggested by Nicole Gregorzewski (Bohle, 2012, p.142-143). In the framework for spoken mediation, out of a maximum total of 60 points, half the points are awarded for completely relaying all the units of information required in the task. For example, if the task requires 10 units

of information, the learner would be awarded three points for each unit successfully conveyed in his or her performance. The remaining 30 points are divided equally (a maximum of five points each) between four facets of interactional ability (reaction ability, non-verbal communication, requests for repetition, and use of paraphrasing and other circumlocutionary strategies) and two facets of expressive ability (appropriateness vis-à-vis the addressee(s) and appropriateness vis-à-vis the situation). In Gregorzewski's scheme, the teacher is also able to add up to 15 extra points for the difficulties caused by culture-specific lexis and the learner's ability to engage with and explain them. Finally, the teacher should also make comments about the types of linguistic mistakes and errors made and their frequency. Daniel Reimann (2013) bases his evaluation framework on a model of competency in informal interpreting using levels of *adequacy* (0-6) to differentiate fully competent, partially competent, and non-competent mediation performances. Reimann's framework has five categories which overlap considerably with those of Gregorzewski. (Or, as no chronological claim is being implied, Gregorzewski's may be said to overlap considerably with Reimann's.) One category is comprehensive performance of linguistic and cultural mediation (*sprach- und kulturmittlerische Gesamtleistung*). In order to achieve the top grade in this category, it is specified that the student-mediator must convey all the central contents and intentions of the source. There are similarities here with Gregorzewski's concern with information units. Also, similar to Gregorzewski, one of Reimann's categories is intercultural performance, including the ability to explain things which may be specific to one of the cultures involved in the mediation. Reimann also, like Gregorzewski, includes the category of interactional performance (including speed of reaction, non-verbal communication, explanations, circumlocutions, and corrections). Another Reimann category is linguistic performance, which may perhaps be thought to correspond to Gregorzewski's *Ausdrucksfähigkeit* (expressive ability). Unlike Gregorzewski, however, Reimann includes a separate category for what he terms cognitive performance (*kognitive Leistung*). This has to do with how the mediator selects, reduces, and structures the information and, where necessary, adds any supplementary information that may be required by the addressee.

In Greece, Maria Stathopoulou has conducted in-depth research analysing answers to mediation tasks from the KPG national examinations for foreign language proficiency (Kratiko Pistopiitiko Glossomathias). Initially using only written mediation tasks, her ultimate aim is to produce descriptors that characterize cross-language mediation ability across the CEFR levels of A1 to C2, and to specify what mediation tasks are appropriate for each level. Her analysis is based on a systemic-functional view of language, using categories such as text type, generic process, topic, discourse environment, addressor/addressee, and communicative purpose. From her research up to now, she has been able to show, on the basis of analysing 32 mediation tasks at B1, B2, and C1 levels, that different task features are appropriate for different levels. For example, differences between levels B1 and C1 can be illustrated as follows (adapted from Stathopoulou, 2013).

<b>B1-level learner is able to:</b>	<b>C1-level learner able likely to:</b>
- relay information about topics of everyday life	- relay information about abstract topics
- produce familiar text-types using simple language	- produce a wide range of text-types using complex language
- produce texts of the personal domain	- produce texts from different discourse domains
- basic communicative acts using simple language	- use a wide range of communicative acts using complex language
- address personally-known audiences	- address a wide range of audiences

## CONCLUDING COMMENTARY

This article has itself been an exercise in mediation by virtue of its summarizing information from German-language sources which might otherwise be unknown to the large audience of English teachers who cannot read German. Cross-language mediation research from Greece is available in English, but does not as yet appear to be widely reported or commented on in Japan. This article's purpose is not to advocate that EFL curricula in Japan should be centred on the concept of mediation, but rather that it would be beneficial for curriculum designers, textbook writers, and teachers in general to be aware of it as a professionally accepted practice in other TEFL environments, continental Europe in particular. It offers a way of adapting the traditional means of translation to a more task-oriented and communicative style of teaching. In grammar-translation approaches in Japan, translation is sometimes required in a decontextualized fashion, purely to exemplify grammatical structures, and the emphasis is on grammatical accuracy. An important role for the teacher is to correct the L2 mistakes of the learner. The criticism of this approach is that the example sentences are artificial and would never be used in real-world communication, and that non-native teachers are likely to make mistakes themselves when correcting the translations of their students. In contrast, mediation tasks both embed translational processes in a realistic context and emphasize adequacy of communication more than accuracy of code. While conventional task-based language teaching (TBLT) provides a communicative context for language teaching, it might be argued that it lacks *ecological validity* because it simulates a real-world situation in which the L1 (Japanese) is never used. However, a limitation of cross-language mediation tasks, which also applies to conventional TBLT, is their fundamentally utilitarian orientation. The foreign language is studied with a view to its use as a tool to achieve communicative goals which are determined by social forces external to the learner and are often transactional in nature. Any over-emphasis on cross-language mediation and conventional TBLT could lead to the downgrading of the humanistic and psychodynamic aspects of foreign language learning and the exclusion of potentially valuable alternative TEFL methods such as drama, suggestopedia, and community language learning.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the proviso just mentioned, we can speculate on attractive aspects of cross-language mediation for teachers in Japan. For example, mediation tasks seem a possible means of giving learners a simulated experience of dealing with intercultural issues in a non-nationalist and non-essentialist way. By 'non-nationalist', it is meant that the purpose of speaking English is not thought of as propagating the excellence or superiority of Japanese culture, and by 'non-essentialist', it is meant that Japanese cultural identity should not be thought of as homogenous, unchanging, and hermetically distinct from others. Of course, simulations are more effective and meaningful if they are preludes to real-life events. Thus, it seems to the author that cross-language mediation tasks could be an excellent means of integrating classroom activities with real international exchange visits and study-abroad programs. And cross-language

mediation integrates well with increased interest in English as a global lingua franca. Mediation involving the use of English will probably be required more between L2 speakers who do not know each other's language than between Japanese and English L1 speakers. English learning materials could well, for example, feature German visitors to Japan using English as a lingua franca. Acknowledging cross-language mediation also helps counter any idea that the native speaker of English is the prototypical and 'best' TEFL teacher. In fact, the prototypical professional in TEFL environments is a bilingual L2 speaker of English with the professional skills to mediate between L1 and L2. The use of cross-language mediation tasks as part of a repertoire of teaching skills may give confidence to non-native teachers and empower them to participate in a genuine global discourse in which, for example, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean teachers of English reflect on their own particular practices alongside expatriate native-speaking professionals.

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## 要 約

### 外国語教育における言語間仲介能力の概念の検討

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現在、外国語としての英語教育に関して、英語圏以外の国で作られた有益な情報が、英語または日本語によって未だ翻訳されておらず、それが理由で日本において広く知られていない現状がある。そのような情報の一つの例としては言語間仲介能力についての教育的概念があるが、その概念は一般的に専門性は問わない解釈や翻訳を必要とする。そこで本研究では、ギリシャ、またドイツの学者により執筆された書物をもとに、言語間仲介能力の教育的概念を定義し、またその概念がどのような教育的タスクを伴うのか、またどのように評価へとつなげることができるのか、という点について検討する。

## ABSTRACT

### **Cross-language Mediation in Foreign Language Teaching**

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This article originates in the premise that interesting and useful information about Teaching English as a Foreign Language may not be well-known in Japan simply because it is not written in either English or Japanese. One such case is the pedagogical concept of cross-language mediation, which typically necessitates informal interpreting and translating. Drawing on the writings of German and Greek academics, the author outlines the meaning of this concept, what kind of pedagogical tasks it involves, and how it can be related to assessment.