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Come si dice in italiano?
Language Mediation Skills
in Multilingual Academic Contexts

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Abstract

Language mediation is a frequent language activity in globalised, intercultural and multilingual communication. It is playing an increasingly important role in everyday situations, especially in academic environments, due to the globalised nature of academia. However, we still lack knowledge regarding how language mediation works and what role it plays in the broad range of multilingual communicative situations in academic contexts. Multilingual institutions in higher education like the trilingual Free University of Bolzano (Unibz) are ideal places to conduct research in this field. The present paper outlines examples of language mediation situations and activities in multilingual academic contexts and discusses language mediation approaches. The design of an exploratory study at Unibz is outlined. The study is based on interviews and the analysis of verbal data of daily communication at the university. The data presented represents observable language mediation activities. The aim of the study is to understand language mediation in the context of academic communication. The findings allow an improved design for the language mediation activities and strategies used in academic language and knowledge transformation. It will be argued that language mediation skills should be part of language instruction curriculums in order to provide future globally oriented academics with adequate language skills to live, work and study in multilingual environments.
Keywords: language mediation, multilingualism, plurilingual competence, academic language use, translanguaging

1 The Context

Due to globalisation, we are now facing more and more multilingual communication in our private as well as our professional lives. This is especially the case in academic contexts where international mobility, made possible by exchange programs and international scientific projects, allows students, researchers and teachers to communicate in multilingual settings. In such situations, the same

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language tool or one common (national) language is not available, so *linguae francae* are used or information is translated into the language(s) of the other interlocutors involved. It is in situations like these that strategies and activities of language mediation are used so that mutual understanding can be guaranteed.

The trilingual Free University of Bolzano (Unibz) in northern Italy is an ideal place to observe language mediation activities in academic contexts. Bolzano is the capital of the autonomous region of South Tyrol (*Alto Adige*), a multilingual region on the Austrian border where daily life is marked by communication in Italian and German (in oral communication especially the South Tyrolean dialect) and in some of the valleys, Ladin, a Romance language consisting of various dialects. Unibz was established in 1997 and currently has 3,600 students. It describes itself as a trilingual institution, meaning that German, Italian and English are used for instruction, research and administration, with all three having equal status. Teachers, researchers, students and administrative staff are from different countries and have different cultural backgrounds. Unibz strongly supports its teaching staff, its administrative personnel and its students in developing sufficient foreign language skills so that they can study, teach and conduct research in multilingual settings.[2]

The multilingual feature of this small institution has made Bolzano an attractive university beyond the borders of Europe, and a significant percentage of students and the academic staff is from abroad.[3] Consequently, the people working and studying at Unibz must constantly communicate in multilingual settings. Successful communication in such settings requires strategies integrating all interlocutors. Mediation is thus managed between students, between students and teachers, between researchers, and between colleagues, but also in administrative settings, evidencing the important social role that language mediation plays in this international setting.

2 Language Mediation in Multilingual Settings

The topic of language mediation in multilingual contexts has been neglected in the literature, and in particular, there appears to be a lack of research on mediation in academic multilingual situations.[4] Previous research on multilingualism, however, has shed some light on language mediation strategies. The findings of the DYLAN project in particular help us to understand multilingual communication in – inter alia – academic settings.[5] Probably the most important finding of the Dylan data collected at a multilingual university like Unibz is what is termed

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[2] Detailed information about the Free University of Bolzano and its trilingual language policy is provided by Nickening (2009) and Franceschini & Veronesi (2013).

[3] 35% of the academic staff and 17% of the students are from abroad. Students and staff at Unibz come from over 70 different countries (cf. https://www.unibz.it/en/home/profile/; 05.11.2018)

[4] For a recent overview cf. Stathopoulou 2015, especially Section 3. See also the brief overview in Nied Curcio & Katelhön (2012: 17ff), as well as the discussion of various definitions of mediation and language mediation by Dendrinos (2006).

the 'All languages at a time' (ALAT) strategy, i.e. interlocutors make intensive use of their plurilingual repertoire[6] to meet their mutual communicative needs. Moreover, the data analysed in this project includes strategies such as paraphrasing, summarizing information in all languages, giving extra information to make content understood for speakers of other languages, and translating specific terms into other languages. All of these language activities can be categorized as language mediation strategies, and they all play an important role in academic settings (Veronesi & Spreafico 2008, Veronesi et al. 2013, Vietti 2009). The Dylan project, however, did not specifically focus on language mediation strategies. For deeper insights into language mediation, empirical research on mediation strategies and functions in such academic contexts is required.

Before the design of such a study on language mediation in academic settings is outlined, it is necessary to have a closer look at the characteristics of language mediation activities and strategies.

2.1 Language Mediation

Language mediation has traditionally been defined as translation for written information and interpretation for oral information. However, in more recent approaches, the concept is understood more broadly. Rösler (2008: 58), for instance, states that language mediation represents the transformation of written or spoken text from one language to another, taking not only the main ideas of the text, but also the target group as well as the communicative situation into account.

This definition is clearly based on the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), which has also had a strong impact on language mediation approaches. The CEFR also takes the relevance of language mediation into account (Council of Europe 2000: 87f., Section 4.4.4). Moreover, the CEFR regards mediation as a central function of human communication in general, both in oral as well as written communication. Even in the first edition, the following definition is given:

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[5] The Language Dynamics and Management of Diversity (DYLAN) project, which ended in 2011, was financed by the European Union. It included 20 research institutions in twelve EU countries and analysed the real-life communicative activities and the multilingual repertoires of Europe's linguistic diversity in specific communicative situations. The study concentrated on multilingualism in three settings: companies, EU institutions and educational systems (www.dylan-project.org; 05.11.2018). Unibz took part in this project and contributed its findings for multilingualism in an educational system. Empirical data was collected in various settings at a trilingual university such as lectures, seminars and administrative communication (Veronesi & Spreafico 2008, Veronesi et al. 2013, and Vietti 2009).

[6] For a recent definition of the term *plurilingualism*, cf., for example, Concil of Europe (2001: 4-5).

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. Mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies. (Council of Europe 2001: 14)

In spite of its important role in the framework's view of communication, the first editions of the CEFR could not provide scales for language mediation and plurilingual competence. In the meantime, however, extensive work has contributed to the development and validation of new scales describing and ranking mediation competence. One example is a project financed by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Unit and supervised by Brian North et al. (2014), which published its results in September of 2017[7]. Most of the new scales in the extended version of the CEFR[8] now deal with mediation aspects, such as:

- Translation and interpreting as special forms of mediation

- Online interaction, which sometimes involves mediation activities

- Plurilingual and pluricultural skills, which are considered basic for any mediation activity

- Reactions to literature that require the ability to mediate and interpret written texts

Furthermore, the results of this EU project will provide answers to the question regarding the difficulty of mediation tasks. Further analysis of the data collected in the study will reveal the factors of difficulty in each language mediation activity (or task) (Dévény 2013) and language mediation situation. The next step will be to hold a workshop to define a standard. In this workshop, experts on multilingualism, competence description and the CEFR plan to link the observed skills to the CEFR scales on mediation. The method will be based on the standard setting procedures (Council of Europe / Language Policy Division 2009). At the end of these activities a practical tool will be available to measure and describe mediation competence to answer the following questions:[9]

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[7] The overall aim of the project was to improve the descriptors in the CEFR levels and fill the gaps in earlier versions. These included descriptors for young learners, for online interaction, for reaction to literature and language mediation as well as exploiting plurilingual repertoire (Council of Europe / Language Policy Unit 2016: 10). The first edition was published in English, and French and German translations are expected to appear in the spring of 2018.

[8] Council of Europe / Language Policy Unit (2017). *Common European Framework of Reference* for Languages: *Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with new descriptors.* Strasbourg. (https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989; 07.11.2018).

[9] North, Brian & Enrica Piccardo (2016): Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): A Council of Europe Project.

- What are the difficulty factors of language mediation activities and tasks?

- How can language mediation skills be described and modelled?

- And how can such skills be properly linked to the new CEFR scales?

This will form the basis of future steps integrating mediation competence into foreign language curricula.

While the 2001 version of the CEFR primarily concentrates on learner proficiency in separate languages (Spanish *or* German *or* Italian), the revised scales allow a broader approach to communicative competence, integrating a person's ability

to simultaneously deal with various languages and language varieties in the same communicative situation, and to take different perspectives into account. Plurilingual speakers thus have the ability to interact with others, to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluations of difference. (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001)

We can thus dispense with the idea of an additive multilingual profile of an individual learner, with each language and partial proficiency assessed by language testing (for example: for French B1 proficiency in oral interaction, B2 proficiency in reading, for Arabic A2 listening proficiency and A1 writing proficiency). Consequently, in the new CEFR scales,

overall, mediation is interpreted as any procedure, arrangement or action designed to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness. (North & Panthier, 2015: 1).

It is this plurilingual feature of communication which is especially relevant in academic contexts such as those that can be observed at multilingual universities like Unibz.

A useful approach to understanding language mediation in multilingual settings is the relatively new concept of *translanguaging*, which was initially proposed by García (2009ff). Although García uses the notion of translanguaging to describe the communication of bilingual children in classroom situations, it can be extended to include the complex discourse strategies used by plurilingual individuals in heteroglossic situations like those at Unibz. Translanguaging is based on François Grosjean's idea that multilingual competence does not consist of proficiency in several separate languages, that is to say that a bilingual is not two monolinguals in one (Grosjean 2010).

The notion of translanguaging thus does not focus on multilingualism achieved by the addition of single languages to a speaker's repertoire, but rather on the communicative aim of multilingual communication, on the communicative strategies exploiting plurilingual repertoires. It thus draws attention to "the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable in order to make sense of their multilingual worlds." (García 2009: 140).

This approach also reflects the overall trend to study communication that integrates all languages that language people may make use of instead of focussing on a single language or variety (code). Consequently, mediation cannot be understood as a simple shift of information from one language to the other, but rather as an integrated language-based activity with the aim to achieve a common understanding in a specific multilingual communicative situation: the group co-constructs meaning by mediating content between languages.

2.2 Categories of Language Mediation

One way to categorize language mediation is by the criteria of its communicative direction:

- Information provided in an individual's first language is mediated and transferred to a foreign and / or second language.

- Information provided in a foreign and / or second language is mediated and transferred to an individual's first language.

- Information is mediated between foreign and / or second languages.

Deciding on the direction of mediation primarily depends on the factors present in the communicative situation and on the needs of the participants.

The following scenarios represent prototypical multilingual communicative situations at a higher education institution in which language mediation is crucial. These scenarios illustrate the role of language mediation in academic contexts. They are based on the author's own, albeit anecdotal, observations at the trilingual university of Bolzano:[10]

> Peter, a student from Austria whose native language is German, and his fellow student Francesco from Palermo are studying Design in Bolzano. They attend a German lecture entitled "Internationale Trends im Industriedesign" ('International Trends in Industrial Design') held by German professor Susanne Müller, and the language of instruction is usually German. The PowerPoint presentations with important terms, however, are usually provided in English. Francesco though encounters difficulties in following the lecture in detail because he began learning German only a year ago. For that reason, Peter whispers to Francesco in Italian from time to time, pointing out the main ideas and key information of the professor's presentation. Peter already has a good command of Italian and thus feels he is training his skills effectively.

> Federica and her fellow student Paola, both from Bologna, are students of Economics in Bolzano. They are sitting in the university cafeteria talking about last week's session (held in English), which Paola was not able to attend. Federica tells

> Paola about the main points of the session in Italian and what the students were asked to prepare for next time. She also gives Paola the notes she took during the session. Some of the notes are in English and some in Italian.

> During a faculty meeting, the department dean, Professor Guilia Egger from South Tyrol, usually speaks Italian, whereas the meeting minutes prepared by the dean's secretary are always redacted bilingually in Italian and German. During the discussion, the faculty members may use Italian, German or English. Local colleagues usually speak in German or Italian, while those from other countries sometimes prefer English.

> Miljia from Finland accompanies her friend Fatima from Morocco, who has an appointment with the administrator in the university office. Miljia wants to help Fatima in dealing with her administrative affairs. Fatima's Moroccan university certificates (all in French and Modern Standard Arabic) must be approved by Unibz. Fatima does not understand the Italian university system very well and has difficulties understanding the administrator's English. Miljia studied German in school and is now taking a B1-level Italian course. She has an excellent command of English due to a long-term stay in London as an *au-pair* when she was 18. She does not speak Arabic, but does understand some French (thanks to her proficiency in Italian).

These cases illustrate that language mediation is an everyday activity in multilingual settings like the University of Bolzano. However, it also shows that language mediation requires special cognitive, intercultural and plurilingual skills and strategies, as well as social skills and empathy for the communicative needs of others.

In the first scenario, for example, Peter, the Austrian student, does not translate Professor Müller's lecture, but summarizes the main ideas. Similarly Federica provides an oral summary for her fellow student, selecting the important aspects that will help Paola follow the next lecture even though she was not able to attend the last session. They both reduce or add information, taking the previous knowledge of their peers into consideration.

Professor Müller presents information using various channels and languages: terms of special importance for the module are provided visually in English on the PowerPoint slides used in the lecture.

Writing a summary or summarizing information orally requires content or subject knowledge. This means that there must always be a purpose for a summary: What is important and why? Peter and Federica must both anticipate their peers' needs. For instance, they must have some idea about what might be important to know to pass the final examination. Mediation thus requires various skills, including the following:

- Faculty or content knowledge of the subject: in all the scenarios described above the mediators must know either what the lecture is about or what the administration officer in the student's secretary is talking about. Without understanding, without content knowledge, there can be no reliable or feasible mediation.

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[10] The scenarios described here have been observed by the author. Some information, however, has been changed for privacy reasons including the names, languages, nationalities and gender of the participants. The scenarios are provided solely for purposes of illustration and are not based on empirical data.

- Language proficiency in the respective languages:

  ○ The language in which information is presented. In the first scenario this language is German, Peter's mother tongue, and in the second scenario it is English, a foreign language for Federica. In the third case, however, we observe a multilingual setting in which Milija has to deal with various (foreign) languages for which she has different proficiency levels: Italian, English and French.

  ○ The language that the information is transferred to. In the first scenario, this is Italian, a foreign language for Peter, and in the second scenario, it is also Italian, Frederica's native language. In the case of Milija, the target language might change according to content or communicative needs, and also depend on Fatima's own proficiency in a particular language. Milija will have to use her plurilinguistic repertoire to perform her mediation task.

- Strategic skills are necessary to process information for others such as selecting information, note-taking during a lecture and transforming these notes into a written or oral summary, which requires a coherent form to facilitate understanding for others. This means that multilinguals must constantly make decisions regarding the selection of the right content to fix in a written form, the organization of such notes and the use of visual elements. Moreover they must also decide whether to take notes in the language of the presentation (German in the first and English in the second scenario) or in their mother tongue. This decision will most likely depend on what they intend to do with this reduced and memorisable information later. Are notes taken for exam preparation, or for the purposes of writing a paper? (Arras, 2015a)

- Social competence: to provide understandable information Peter, Federica and Milija have to anticipate the communicative needs of others. They must constantly determine what their fellow students already know and what they do not know yet, but should know. They may include additional information, i.e. provide more content or even explain certain features that they think may be needed. They may decide to reduce information if it is clear that it is not necessary. If they are unsure about this, they might ask about what is needed or what their peers have understood, reassuring the mutual understanding through questions. The major social competence required here, therefore, is empathy.

- Strategies incorporating language proficiency and social skills: Plurilinguals must not only take their peers' information needs into account, but also their language skills. The mediator might choose to adapt the language to the peer's level. Milija, for example, might try to simplify the (linguistic) complexity of the administrator's explanations because she assumes that Fatima will not understand enough, either because of her cultural background and experience or her limited command of English (as foreign language or lingua franca). This could include explaining special terms to Fatima, thus amplifying information. Milija could also break down complicated information and link it to previous knowledge. She might use a simplified language that is below her own level, i.e. adjust

her language use to the proficiency level she assumes Fatima has to facilitate understanding.

The examples of language-mediation situations in university settings described above demonstrate the complexity of the required strategies and underlying skills which are still not fully understood. For that reason, the following section will present a study designed to investigate language mediation situations and skills based on empirical data with a special focus on mediation in academic communicative environments.

3 Exploring Language Mediation in Multilingual Academic Contexts

3.1 General Remarks

The study outlined in this section has an exploratory character, i.e. it aims to determine how often and in which situations language mediation is actually used and what functions and goals language mediation has in these situations. Furthermore, the study focuses on the strategies used in language mediation with the aim to categorize language mediation activities, challenges, situations and reason for mediation.

The study has a multimethod design and is based on empirical data, thus following the criteria used in qualitative research (Flick et al 2003, Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth 2001, Lamnek 2010). The following tools are used:

- Semi-structured explorative interviews with representatives of the three main groups at Unibz,

- Audio and video recordings of multilingual academic situations at Unibz: thirteen qualitative semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2008) with university members in Bolzano were conducted including the following target groups:

  ○ Students at different stages of their studies and from different departments

  ○ Teachers and researchers from different departments

  ○ Administrative staff employed in different university offices and at different hierarchy levels

This population works and studies in the following five university departments:

- Economics and Management

- Computer Science

- Design and Art, and

- Educational Sciences and Science & Technology.

They are located at three different campuses:

- the main campus in Bozen / Bolzano, the capital of South Tyrol;

- in Brixen / Bressanone and

- in Bruneck / Brunico in the very north of the region.

Eight professors were interviewed, four administrative personnel and three students. Most of the administrative staff is from South Tyrol and from Italy and thus speak German or the regional dialect as well as Italian as their first or second language, while the students and teachers are international, mainly from other parts of Italy and other European countries and other continents.[11] The interviewees were free to choose the language of the interview. The interviews were mainly conducted in German and English, with one interview with a student from Ecuador being mainly in Spanish. Italian was rarely used as the interviewees knew that the interviewer had limited proficiency in Italian. All interviewees, however, are multilingual, and can switch with ease between the different languages used at Unibz, although they prefer the language they feel the most confident in. Sometimes the matrix language of the interviews changed periodically.

One aim was to determine how frequent language mediation is actually used in the perception of the interviewees. The interviews thus focused on the question regarding the situations in which such strategies are used and what their motivation is. A global analysis of the data was then performed. Those parts with key information were transcribed for the purpose of performing a qualitative content analysis (Aguado 2013). The findings were then used to describe and categorize language mediation situations and activities. The main purpose of the interviews was to explore the field and allow decisions for the following steps. Two situations with multilingual groups were recorded:

- A teacher training workshop (summer of 2016) for teachers of different foreign languages at the Unibz Language Center[12], conducted by the author. The workshop consisted of presentation phases *ex cathedra* and work in small linguistically heterogeneous groups. The groups had to

[11] The Department of Statistics provides current data on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students enrolled at Unibz. The students enrolled in the 2015-2016 academic year came from 74 countries, mainly from Italy and other European countries, but also from Asia, including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, China and from Latin America (https://aws.unibz.it/sis/statistic-zone/index.asp; 05.11.2018).

[12] The Language Center at Unibz offers language courses for students, administrative and teaching staff. The three languages used at Unibz, German, Italian and English, are the main languages taught. However, other language courses such as Chinese, Russian and French are also offered.

work on several collaborative tasks at different stations, discuss problems and find solutions.[13] The data contain extensive discussions in which participants switched between languages and focus on content. This was in part due to the fact that the participants were colleagues who knew each other. The atmosphere was private and language errors were tolerated. Moreover, the participants were all professional language teachers and thus showed a high degree of language awareness. Workshop participants collaborated using various language resources as well as the material provided. However, the task was designed to meet the needs of specific teacher training. There was no specific focus on language mediation *per se*. Therefore a second setting with different participants was arranged for the specific elicitation of language mediation.

- In this language mediation experiment, participants were informed beforehand that the experiment had the aim to observe language mediation strategies. Two groups of three people each were given a specific collaborative task in which a statement or brief talk on a current and highly controversial topic in Bolzano had to be prepared, namely what to do with the Bolzano Airport. There was an ongoing public debate and there had even been a referendum on whether to close the provincial airport since many in the region viewed the facility as inefficient and not necessary. The groups were instructed to use the multilingual material provided. The idea was to prepare for an open discussion on the topic in the "University Club", a debating society at Unibz.[14] The groups were provided with authentic material on the topic, such as statistics on the economic implications of regional airports, scientific articles on the environmental impacts of airports and propaganda flyers. The material was in English, Italian and German as well as Spanish to evoke the use of plurilingual skills. The participants were of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, some having Italian, some German, some Russian and some Spanish as their first language. In terms of professional background and faculty membership the groups were heterogeneous (including linguistics, natural sciences and computer sciences). They did not know each other but did have one important thing in common, namely the academic surrounding they lived and worked in: the university. The work in the two groups was video- and audio-recorded. In sum, in an initial exploratory step, interviews were conducted with administrative staff, teachers and students at Unibz, that focused on the individual perception of language mediation activities in university contexts.

[13] The main topic of the workshop was the Common European Framework (CEFR), and the aim was to familiarize teachers at the Unibz Language Center with the CEFR. Material for different learning stations was provided, all of which were in the three Unibz languages English, Italian and German. Only the discussions at the stations were recorded.

[14] https://www.unibz.it/it/news/?topics=2&page=2, 07.11.2018.

These data allowed interesting conclusions to be drawn in providing answers to the following questions:

- How frequent is language mediation in academic multilingual settings?

- What happens in these situations? What language activities and what cognitive, interactional and intercultural skills are required? What role does language mediation play in multilingual communication in university settings?

- What difficulties do communication partners face and how do they solve these?

Analysis of the data revealed a broad range of mediation activities relevant for multilingual academic settings. Some of these will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Findings: How Mediation Functions in Multilingual Groups

Mediation has several functions in multilingual communication. In this chapter, some main findings will be outlined and categorized.

3.2.1 Clarifying Terms and Definitions Together (Example W1/2, 37:15ff.)[15]

The five female colleagues work together at one of the stations and discuss CEFR scales.[16] In the following excerpt they are using Italian.[17]

F1   vi/ guardano d/ i film allora hanno espressioni molto nativi americani qua anche in hm () parlano un po' così () come () usano *jargon* **non so in italiano**

F2   hm_hm

F5   <u>jargin</u> ?

F1   ehm

F4   *jogging*

F1   no

F6   *jargon* un un

F4   ah no ? ah xxx

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[15] *W* stands for Workshop, and *37:15ff* refers to the relevant passage in the audio file.

[16] F1 is a teacher of English as a foreign language at Unibz. Her first languages are Maltese and English. She speaks Italian fluently, and her academic language is English. F2 is from South Tyrol's German speaking community. She is a researcher in linguistics, thus providing the group discussion with expertise in this field.

[17] The matrix language in this example is Italian. To represent the code switching used, the English parts are in italics, whereas French is underlined. The parts that articulate the mediation strategy is set in boldface. "xxx" is a word which is not understandable in the audio data.

F5   ah ok ok

F1   sì *jargon*

F2   REGISTRO **diciamo**

F5   **ok sì sì sì sì**

F1, a teacher of English as a foreign language at Unibz, expresses her concern that her students sometimes seem to have good lexical proficiency, but lack adequate grammar competence. She thus observes a gap between a good command of vocabulary and weak grammar skills. As an example, she mentions the fact that students sometimes use colloquial expressions that they have learned from watching American movies. She does not know the Italian word for *jargon*, so she uses the English expression, but marks in Italian "non so in italiano". The purpose of such a marker is to ask for a translation in an indirect way. It is a signal to peers for help to find the right word in Italian.

Consequently, the group members start looking for the correct term to describe the example that F1 has given. Hesitation signs like *hm_hm* or *ehm* can be understood as hints for corresponding cognitive processes. F5, whose proficiency in English is limited, repeats phonetically the term that F1 mentioned, but she obviously does not know the word. F6 – a trilingual speaker of French, Italian and English from Canada – also repeats the word, but she does so in French. In the end, it is F2, the linguist, who offers the Italian word, *registro* (marked in capitals, because it is stressed by F2). The group is clearly content with the solution because *registro* is an adequate equivalent.

This example illustrates several important strategies:

- The members of the group with their differing language backgrounds contribute their individual plurilingual skills, pronouncing "jargon" in different manners on their way to finding the correct form and expression. The example shows how they collaborate in looking for the equivalent to clarify a language related problem and co-construct meaning.

- One member translates the word *jargon* with *registro*. Semantically there might be differences between *jargon* in English and *registro* in Italian. However, in the given situation, for the mutual understanding of the example mentioned by F1, this translation sufficed and was effective.

- The key for understanding, however, is the example given by F1. To make herself understood, she illustrates her observations by using an example, thus amplifying the information. She also explains her observation by stating that students sometimes seem to have a good command of vocabulary, but lack grammar skills.

This strategy of using different language resources in a single communicative situation was also a central finding of the Dylan project in which teaching situations in multilingual settings like seminars were analysed. The following example from the Dylan data illustrates this strategy (Franceschini & Veronesi 2013: 64):

"HI, 00:24:02-00:24:14

LEC   se il con- i: soldi li pagasse comunque la società,

a quel punto gli azionisti potrebbero vere un incentivo

a fare **quella che viene chiamata** <u>noisy litigation</u>,

cioè (.) a litigare su ogni cosa tanto loro alla fine (.)

non pagano il prezzo (my emphasis, UA)"

Although the matrix language used in the session is Italian, the teacher uses the English expression *noisy litigation*, signaling language switching by *quella che viene chiamata* and explaining the expression afterwards with the marker *cioè*. He thus utilises his own plurilingual repertoire as well as the presumed repertoire of his students, anticipating that they can better follow the lecture if he provides them with the technical term. Moreover, linking *litigation* with the Italian verb *litigare* while explaining the English term, he shows language awareness.

3.2.2 Bundles: Combinations of languages and strategies (Example W 2/4, 43:00ff.)

The following example illustrates how communication partners all use the languages available to them in combining different mediation activities to achieve mutual understanding. The group is working on the evaluation of a written text using the CEFR descriptors. All the necessary CEFR scales in English, German and Italian are on the table in front of them, but the matrix language in this situation is Italian.

F5 uses the expressions *grammatikalische Korrektheit* and *Beherrschung* from the German language CEFR scale, but evaluates the text using the Italian expression *buona competenza* in Italian. The group members suggest the word *padronanza*, so F5 continues evaluating the text paraphrasing and citing (in italics) the CEFR descriptors and concludes that this example of written performance is at B2 level.

F5:   secondo me la <u>grammatikalische korrektheit</u> è un B2
       buona competenza äh ke/
       <u>beherrschung</u> **come si dice** <u>beherrschung</u> ?

F4:   hm_hm

F2:   xxx äh padronanza

F4:   padronanza

F5:   padronanza della grammatica alcuni scivoloni äh o
       „errori non sistematici" () e
       „piccole mancanze" nella costruzione della frase (.)
       ma „sono rari e () possono essere corretti in caso di una revisione"
       secondo me **in questo caso** per esempio

sarebbe così (...) o comunque
buona padronanza della grammatica ()
„non fa errori che portano a äh incomprensioni" ()
quindi comunque è un B2
a livello grammaticale è sicuramente un B2

A combination of mediation activities can also be observed in this situation:

- asking for help: here asking for translation of an expression

- translation: in this case translation from German into Italian

- paraphrasing and citing material: in this case CEFR descriptors in Italian

- giving an example to clarify an idea or a decision

3.2.3 Utilising the Plurilingual Skills of Group Members (E8: 1:30:00- 1:31:45)

In the following example, German is the matrix language and the communication partners are aware of the plurilingual conditions of the situation. MEI3 is a young scholar and researcher with Italian as his native language, and he also has a very good command of both German and English. He is thus an experienced plurilingual speaker who has developed mediation strategies. He can be regarded as a good example of a globalised plurilingual academic who is accustomed to communicating in multilingual settings.[18]

MEI3   da gab es auch die <u>water pollution</u>
        für die () *impermeabilisierung* (..)
        eh aber das ist auch nichts für bozen
        also eh wie wird das//

FED2   aha ehm die
        ehm wie kann man das () nennen ?
        eh (.) zu viel zu viel (....) moment (lacht)
        zu viel boden wird ehm dicht gem/
        nein wie sagt man ? wie sagt man ? ehm (..)
        es fällt mir nicht ein
        ich hab auch nichts dazu gelesen

MEI3   mir auch nicht
        ich hab das auf spanisch gelesen deshalb

FED2   aha (lacht)

MEI3   impermeabilizacion de grandes superficies
        soll ich das auf spanisch ?

FEX1   ja sehr gut

FED2   ja

---

[18] The switch to English is underlined and the Spanish expression cited is in italics. The parts in bold represent the articulation of mediation strategies.

MEI3   warum nicht also auf spanisch ?
warum sollen wir das übersetzen

FED2 ja

In the end, they decide not to translate any expressions because it is not necessary since the communication partners have worked on the same problem, know the subject and, moreover, also speak various languages. They thus anticipate that the audience of the presentation will understand the technical term in Spanish due to content knowledge and plurilingual proficiency.
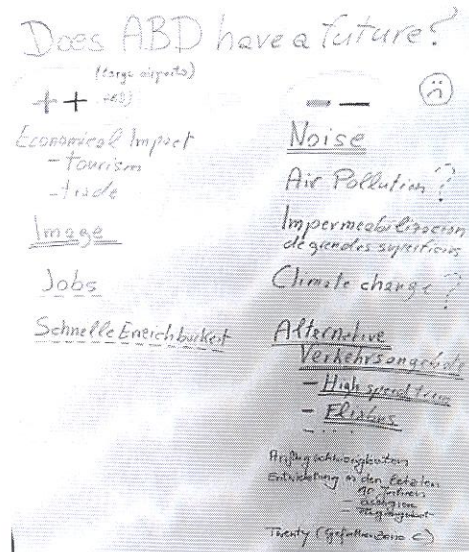

Figure 1: Flipchart for Group 1 (1 July 2017)

Based on the categories of mediation activities and strategies proposed by Stathopoulou (2015) and North (2016), two fundamental types of mediation activities can be identified:

- Activities serving to adapt or transform language: translation and interpretation from one language into another as well as paraphrasing or simplification

- Activities serving to adapt or transform content: processing information by amplifying, reducing information or by illustrating information with examples

- The mediation activities analysed, however, frequently contain combinations of strategies and linguistic repertoires, transforming mediation activities to strategy bundles. Analysing the data thus allows language mediation activities and strategies to be categorized by a communicative need and a communicative mode.

- Situational communicative need: questions coming into play here are the following ones:

  o Why does it become necessary in a certain situation to utilise language mediation?

  o Why and in which situation do interlocutors decide to mediate, to transform and process information across languages? Is it because potential misunderstanding or incomprehension is perceived?

  o How is misunderstanding or incomprehension expressed?

  o Which strategy is necessary for a particular communicative need?

  o How successful are such strategies?

- Situational communicative mode: relevant questions for this mode are the following ones:

  o Is the mediation presented in a written or an oral form?

  o In what situations and based on what criteria do interlocutors decide to use one mode over the other?

  o Are the interlocutors sharing space and time or is the mediation performed across time and space gaps?

Mediation is also required in everyday activities in academic situations such as note-taking during a lecture or talk and writing excerpts while reading an article (Arras 2015a, Arras 2015b, Arras & Fohr in press), techniques that are extremely important in academic life. In fact, notes and excerpts are products of cross-language mediating activities, but they are not necessarily designed for others (a colleague, a student, a client in the student's office or the supervisor in a professional context), but for the note-taker him or herself. It is not an activity between persons, but an intra-personal mediation activity: an individual paraphrases, reduces, extends, elaborates and processes knowledge and information for him or herself, i.e. for his or her own needs. This original information is presented in one language (either an individual's mother tongue or a foreign language such as the lingua franca in his or her academic field) and transferred to another language. The decision regarding which language the information is to be transferred to will depend on the project for which the mediated information is required. If an excerpt or notes are required for an article a person intends to write in his or her mother tongue, it will most likely be more convenient to fix the information in that person's first language. However, if the project involves writing an article in a foreign language, a person might prefer to note down the information in the language of this project so that this text can be included in the paper directly. Thus, the decision to use a particular language will primarily depend on which language is to be used for a particular project.

An abstract in scholarly writing, however, often written in the *lingua franca* English, which represents the most important foreign language for many in academia (Busch-Lauer 2012), is a text in which information is mediated between persons having similar academic backgrounds, but often with different language backgrounds. It serves to summarize the main ideas and results of scientific research. In sum, the communicative need is the determining factor for a particu-

lar mediation activity, but aspects of the communicative situation also play a role. Academic situations in which language mediation takes place are either

- Face-to-face-situations requiring active language skills, such as discussions in multilingual groups or in university seminars or situations in which participants listen to a lecture and take notes either in the same language as the speaker or in another language. Thus, university teachers may present their material in English with PowerPoint slides in Italian so that key words and concepts are expressed in different modi and different languages;

- Situations requiring passive language skills (reading and writing), for example situations in which information is paraphrased in German while someone is reading an article in English or when someone wants to write a paper in Italian based on articles written in Spanish and English, while the notes taken when reading are in German. Language mediation is thus an integral part of academic communication: it is used either in oral or in written contexts;

- Situations in which space and time are shared with interlocutors or in which communication takes place across time / space gaps interpersonally (between persons), intrapersonally (by a single person for him or herself), interlingually (between different languages) or intralingually (in the same language).

4 A Model for Language Mediation in Academic Contexts

The following model for language mediation in multilingual contexts is at the interface of four central activities involving language use:

- Knowledge transmission and academic language:
  Academic language is used to teach and explain content, and for this purpose, technical jargon is used in specific text types such as *lectures*, *scholarly articles*, and *faculty discussions* in seminars and student groups.

- The multilingual repertoires of the interlocutors:
  Students, teachers, and student groups develop a common code utilising all available repertoires, including their first language(s) and their proficiency in a second language. When interacting, they make assumptions regarding which lexical item or structure other participants might understand, and decide how to present their ideas to facilitate understanding.

- Knowledge transformation strategies:
  These include skills involving the elaboration of information or texts such as *note-taking*, *citing information* or *writing excerpts* to transform and mediate content to prepare for an exam, to write a paper or design slides for a presentation.

- Language based activities essential for academic communication:

These include *teaching*, *presenting* and *explaining* content to others (such as the audience of a lecture or peers in a student group). Additional examples are *paraphrasing*, *summarizing* information and *outlining* content for oneself.

These four components provide the linguistic and social means allowing language users to mediate between languages, other people and texts in everyday academic settings and thus represent important aspects of academic communication in multilingual situations:
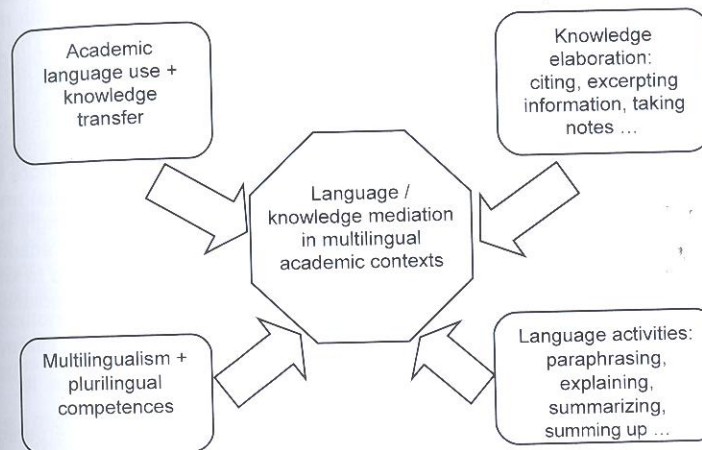

Figure 2: Language use and knowledge mediation in multilingual academic contexts

5 Conclusions

Language mediation is not just a language activity across languages but primarily a "social practice" (Stathopoulou 2015: 50). In this regard Dendrinos observes:

When we perform as mediators, we become meaning-making agents; that is, we create meaning for someone else, who is unable to understand what is going on, to comprehend a text, whether this is in a language s/he knows well or it is in a foreign language. We create and interpret meanings through speech or writing for our interlocutor(s), with whom we may or may not share linguistic, cultural and/or social experiences. (Dendrinos 2014: 142)

She concludes:

that we mediate when there is need to make accessible information that a friend, a colleague, a family member, etc. does not grasp; it originates from the need to have something clarified, to interpret or reinterpret a message, to sum up what a text says for one or more persons, for an audience, for a group of readers, etc. (ibid.)

It is precisely this integrative aspect that makes language mediation an important social skill in multilingual and multicultural contexts. This, however, requires far more than mere language skills. Empathy for others and the will to collaborate and help each other in multilingual situations to co-construct meaning are also central elements.

In view of the scenarios discussed in Section 3.1 and the presumed linguistic, strategical and social skills required in such situations to mediate information to ensure mutual understanding, it is important to have a closer look at what the interlocutors in academic mediation situations do and how they deal with mediation tasks involving different languages, faculties and social groups. The findings presented here can contribute to a better understanding of the role and benefit of mediation in such contexts and provide convincing evidence that language mediation competence should be taken into consideration in foreign language classes. Due to increasing globalisation and the increased movement of people all over the world, languages and knowledge mediation is far more than simply transporting information. It is a social behaviour allowing mutual understanding in multilingual groups and one which is becoming increasingly more important for people to possess. Language mediation, especially in academic settings, should thus be viewed in a broad sense and be closely linked to knowledge transformation: language mediation is a form of knowledge mediation in which language, communication and content are all integral parts.

Language mediation in academic contexts has three important features. It:

- integrates different language-based, cognitive, social and interpersonal abilities and strategies

- involves the reception, processing and (re-)production of content

- includes activities such as paraphrasing, summing up, amplifying or reducing information

These activities can be:

- either interpersonal (between persons) such as translation or interpreting, or intrapersonal (done for oneself) such as note-taking

- either oral (interpreting, face to face explanation, discussion), or

- in written form (abstract of a paper, excerpt, notes, summary)

- either intralingual (in one language) such as the language of the reference text or interlingual (between languages) such as mediating from one language to another.

During these activities interlocutors:

- utilise their plurilingual repertoires and focus on mutual understanding and problem solving

All mediation activities require empathy and flexibility with regards to the situation and to the communicative needs and the linguistic conditions of the interlocutors involved.

- Language mediation is an integral part of everyday academic communication in multilingual settings and can be viewed in the wider context of multilingualism, academic language use and pedagogical aspects. In view of the central role language mediation plays in daily academic life at multilingual higher education institutions, the educational aims are twofold.

Language mediation should be integrated in language teaching plans, such as the curriculum, teaching materials and assessment, thereby promoting multilingual education, viewed as part of higher education pedagogy to help teachers consider the multilingual conditions of their students while conveying important concepts in their lectures.[19]

For this purpose, however, more specific qualitative data is needed to learn more about the skills and strategies required. This in turn will allow teachers to develop curricula and methods based on empirical research. A follow-up study should thus be based on video-recorded language mediation situations with interlocutors from different language and cultural backgrounds and from different university departments. The following communicative situations could be analysed:[20]

- group work (students, researchers) laboratory discussions (researchers): development of a draft or a presentation (students, researchers), lectures, classes, tutorials (students, teachers), office hour discussions (students, teachers),communication in administration settings such as counselling services and the library (students, researchers, administrative staff)

- staff meetings (administrative and teaching staff, university executive board).

Subsequent retrospective interviews could shed light on certain mediation activities and problem solving activities (Kvale & Brinkmann 2008).[21] Increasingly

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[19] One helpful strategy could be to use a language other than the language of instruction or to provide the translation of key terms. Very frequent at international conferences or multilingual institutions like Unibz is the combination of languages and channels, i.e. speaking in one language (spoken input) with PowerPoint slides in another language (written input).

[20] The Dylan project (www.dylan-project.org) could again be used for the research design.

[21] Retrospective interviews aid in data analysis as they allow a focus on selected sequences in video recordings. They provide deeper insights into and subjective explanations of how certain situations and communication needs are perceived and why certain mediation activities are used. Retrospection should be conducted shortly after the session in which the mediation activities have occurred, i.e. no later than one day after the recording.

heterogeneous populations are causing increasingly more multilingual and multicultural communication in many different situations, such as at school or university and in people's private and professional lives. The result is that more and more people are in need of the appropriate communication skills to meet the needs of multilingual cooperation. Crucial for current academic and / or professional communication needs is the following approach: instead of developing a language competence profile in which proficiency in various individual languages is added (like language A = mother tongue, language B = C1 level competence, language C = B1 level and language D = A0), increasingly more people require plurilingual and pluricultural skills, and they should be more flexible whenever they find themselves in linguistically and culturally changing situations and communicative settings.

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Appendix

Collaborative task for an experiment on language mediation at Free University of Bolzano: Experiment on language mediation skills within academic contexts

Work in groups on the following task

- You and your peers are members of the Unibz academic community. You will join the next session of the F6 University Club, which will deal with the Bolzano Airport issue, i.e. the question of whether or not to close the ABD-airport.

The Unibz F6 University Club

invites you to discuss current social, political and academic issues.

The next session is scheduled for today, 19.15 p.m.

The following subject is to be discussed:

Does ABD have a future?

Open discussion on the future of the Bolzano airport

- In your group, prepare for the discussion, using the material placed on your desk (articles, statistics etc. on the pros and cons of an airport in Bolzano).

- Discuss the material in your group. Note down your main points using flipcharts the way you would like to present them during the next University Club event.