

## THE IMPACT OF THE PLURILINGUAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING ON LEARNERS' COMPETENCE IN INTERLINGUISTIC MEDIATION

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the impact of plurilingual teaching on the ability of secondary school students to mediate interlinguistically. The objective of the presented study was to investigate the effectiveness of the plurilingual approach and its influence on students' abilities to transfer information obtained in one language to another. The seventh graders (n=22) were divided into two groups: the experimental group (11) and the control group (11). The intention was to identify the extent to which the plurilingual approach can enhance one mode of communication (mediation). Furthermore, the experiment initiated in 2022 permitted a comparison of the students' achievements in mediation with other abilities that were developed intentionally over a two-year period. This correlation serves to reinforce the reliability of the results.

**Keywords:** interlinguistic mediation, plurilingual approach, plurilingualism, translanguaging

### 1 Introduction

The communicative approach, sometimes known as communicative language teaching (CLT), is commonly used as an umbrella term to outline a major shift in language teaching in Europe in the 1970s. In contrast with previous language education focused on language systems, CLT puts an emphasis on how these systems are employed in real-life communication. In consistency with other CLT proponents, Savignon (2001) asserts that the primary objective of CLT is the enhancement of functional language proficiency through learner participation in communicative situations. The concept of communicative competence, consisting of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences that are interrelated, has been operationalized in language teaching, or better to say, language learning as learner needs and learning styles are analysed, contributing substantially to the focus on a learner.

The introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (Council of Europe, 2001), commonly called the CEFR, has enabled language educators to integrate different views on language competence, providing them with a comprehensive description of the components of language proficiency at all levels and a range of skills. The notions of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism occurred in the original CEFR, reflecting linguistic and cultural diversity in multilingual and multicultural Europe, and became the starting point for the development of descriptors presented in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion Volume (2020). As stated in the Guide to Action-oriented, Plurilingual and Intercultural Education (Council of Europe, 2023), the goal of this holistic approach to language education is to encourage language teachers and learners to appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity „as a source of educational enrichment“ (Council of Europe, 2023, p. 1).

Another significant shift in language education, presented in the CEFR, was a new classification of the traditional model of four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). In the light of the intricate nature of communication, communicative language activities are categorised into four modes: reception, production, interaction and mediation. While the former three were adequately described in a number of descriptive scales in the original document, the latter was developed subsequently, with specific scales of mediation presented in the CEFRCV (2020). There are many different aspects of mediation, which are interrelated and cannot be separated from one another.

In Slovakia, the concept of mediation has just started to be discussed. However, not many studies can confirm the significant impact of employing this concept in language

teaching. The study tries to answer the following research questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What impact does the plurilingual approach have on learners' ability to mediate interlinguistically?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Does the ability of learners to mediate interlinguistically correlate with other abilities measured in the experiment?

### 2 Review of Literature

In the 1970s, communicative language teaching was rapidly developing. Two distinct schools of thought regarding how communicative theory should be employed in practice emerged: the strong form of CLT (learning a language by using it) and the weak form of CLT (learning a language and then using it). However, currently there are many sets of practices that characterize current communicative language teaching as CLT theory draws on various educational paradigms and diverse resources. According to Richards (2006), current practices in communicative language teaching embrace the active engagement of learners in meaningful communication, providing opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, viewing communication as a holistic process calling upon the use of several language skills in integration, considering errors as a natural way of acquiring a target language and developing own routes to language learning. The concept of learner autonomy covers effective learning and the use of communication strategies, viewing self-assessment as a natural way for further improvement and considering collaboration and sharing with others as a natural source for enhancing learner language learning. In addition to the typical characteristics of CLT, which include authenticity, contextualization and the utilization of real-life scenarios, Savignon (2001) expands the scope of CLT to encompass process-oriented, task-based and discovery-oriented approaches.

The Council of Europe have been concerned with encouraging, supporting, and coordinating the efforts of member states to improve language learning through national and international cooperation of governmental and non-governmental institutions to meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The CEFR (2001) emphasizes international mobility and close cooperation between the member states and promotes mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect. Translated into 40 languages and adopted as a reference by almost all countries in Europe and several beyond, a survey held in member states in 2006 suggested that the CEFR had become the most influential publication in language education in Europe, and its impact continues as a stimulus for language educational reforms or new curricula development (Council of Europe, 2023).

#### 2.1 New Concepts in the CEFR

While the original CEFR (2001) introduced the majority of its core concepts, its primary use pertains to the alignment of national educational curricula and local final examinations with the CEFR levels and specific scales as an external reference point. The CEFRCV, published in 2020, presents the concepts of action orientation, social agency, and the scales for mediation and plurilingualism, which were developed and refined between 2014-2016.

An action-oriented approach posits that a learner is to be regarded as a social agent, requiring the capacity to perform actions in language. North (2014, p. 107) emphasizes that this approach “propagates language learning for a social purpose, not as an intellectual pursuit”. An action-oriented approach used in language teaching can be characterized by the terms of naturalistic communicative action, free use and tasks. The task-oriented approach is also referred to as „the deep-end approach“ (Brumfit, 1980; Brumfit, 1984). This alternative approach to a

traditional approach involves the presentation of language, pair work to improve fluency, and the use of the target language in broader tasks (North, 2014). Ellis (2003) defines a task as a work plan that prioritizes meaning and real-world processes of language use, engaging cognitive processes. Such activities may involve any of the four language skills and have a clearly defined communicative outcome (Ellis, 2003, p. 10). In the action-oriented approach, since language itself is generated by action, language tasks are driven by action and in turn require an action (Richer, 2009).

In accordance with the CEFR, Piccardo and North (2019) regard language learners as social agents who are encouraged to embed those speech acts and those usages in a socially and culturally realistic context through real-life tasks, in which the aforementioned ones are meaningful as tasks are as authentic as possible. The tasks are intended to facilitate the acquisition of the target language, requiring learners to engage with the language in a manner that activates the necessary skills and strategies.

Tasks should be designed in a way that allows for both situational and interactional authenticity (Piccardo & North, 2019). While situational authenticity relates to the accuracy with which tasks represent language activities from real life, interactional authenticity implies the naturalness of the interaction between learner and task and the mental processes accompanying it (ALTE, 2011). Piccardo (2014) presents an initial attempt to capture the complexity of the action-oriented approach, which encompasses a variety of elements. These elements are presented in three concentric circles surrounding the core language learning. The outer circle encompasses feedback, assessment tools, self-assessment, formal and informal assessment, and peer assessment. The middle circle, in contrast, synthesizes the key aspects that characterize the action-oriented approach, namely competencies and communicative activities, autonomy, intercultural awareness, tasks, the cognitive strategic dimension, the social dimension, and plurilingualism. The inner circle contains the core methodologies.

## 2.2 Plurilingualism and Translanguaging

The CEFR (2001, p. 163) presents a definition of plurilingual and pluricultural competence as „the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction“. A language user is viewed as a social agent with proficiency in several languages, not at the same level, and with experience in several cultures. In the past, different languages and related cultures were typically taught in isolation, with a compartmentalized approach; however, the concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence views a language user as a person who can use the skills and strategies, developed in one or two languages, in different social situations in another/other languages. Piccardo and North (2019, p. 217) view plurilingualism as “a dynamic competence, in which capacities in one language or variety may be very different to those in another language but make up one holistic communicative repertoire”. In accordance with the learner as a social agent in the action-oriented approach, the CEFR (2001) posits that the objective of language education is to cultivate a linguistic repertoire in which all linguistic abilities are represented (Council of Europe, 2020).

The scales that enable language educators to introduce the concept in the national curricula or to broaden the perspective of language education with the acknowledgement and value of the linguistic and cultural diversity typical for the current world focus on building on pluricultural repertoire, plurilingual comprehension and building on plurilingual repertoire (Council of Europe, 2020).

In the integrative approach, the use of several languages concurrently, a phenomenon known as translanguaging, plays a pivotal role. As stated by Galante (2019), despite certain similarities, the term translanguaging should be distinguished from the term code-switching. Code-switching is said to

strengthen the perception of languages as isolated, non-related codes, whereas translanguaging is said to view them as part of one linguistic repertoire. Similarly, Garcia and Lin (2016) view translanguaging as a heteroglossic and dynamic mode of communication, implicit in the integrated linguistic system of a plurilingual individual.

The term *translanguaging* was used for the first time in Wales and was suggestive of pedagogical procedures used in the 1990s, in which students alternately used different languages in productive and receptive activities, for example, they read the text in English and wrote about it in Welsh. It was only later when the term started to qualify the way in which plurilingual individuals and communities communicate (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Garcia and Wei (2014) call attention to the concept of translanguaging based on the language perception that is fundamentally different from its perception in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: it is an epistemological change contingent on the ways of communication in a contemporary, strongly globalized, and technical world.

The use of translanguaging in its original form is the way of teaching during which students are provided with information in one language and are consequently expected to produce their performance in another language. Baker (2001) views this way of teaching as desirable in bilingual education while teaching technical subjects. According to his view, one of the advantages is better and more profound comprehension of the subject matter based on dealing with it in two different languages. Another advantage can be seen in improving language skills and abilities in a less-acquired language. In the Slovak educational context, the utilisation of translanguaging in this manner does not appear to be possible at present. However, it is a potential approach to employ when teaching technical topics at a particular language level. The drawbacks include teachers who commonly command only the foreign language they teach, and therefore, they cannot include such activities in their teaching. Stathopoulou (2013) views mediation as one form of translanguaging.

## 2.3 Mediation

While mediating, a person takes the role of an intermediary, mostly between two or more people who cannot communicate directly due to various reasons (CEFR, 2001). In contrast with production and interaction, a language user does not express their ideas. The CEFR (2001, p. 87) distinguishes between two types of mediation:

- a) spoken mediation, which includes simultaneous interpretation, consecutive interpretation, and informal interpretation, for example, while communicating with foreign tourists, in social situations for friends, family members, clients, etc.;
- b) written mediation, including word-by-word translation, artistic translation, paraphrasing, core text summarizing, etc.

The CEFR CV (2020) introduces the concept of mediation in its broad-spectrum use. In mediation, a language user is viewed as a social agent who creates bridges and helps construct or convey meaning either within one language or more languages or across modalities. Mediation is central to acting as a social agent, which is conceptually central to socio-constructivist and sociocultural theories of language education (Piccardo & North, 2019). Dendrinos (2013) emphasized that the role of an intermediary is not to produce text that is meaningfully equivalent and similar to the original text in form. An intermediary produces their text, selecting important content from the text and choosing an appropriate form. They are entitled to alter the discourse, genre and linguistic register. The approach described above is employed in the study.

From the perspective of using one or more languages, Beacco et al. (2016, p. 56) differentiate two types of mediation:

- a) intralinguistic mediation (input and output texts are in the same language);
- b) interlinguistic mediation (input and output texts are in different languages).

While interlinguistic mediation deals with the transfer of ideas from the source language into a target language, intralinguistic mediation can take its course in the following ways:

- a) utilizing an alternative communication channel (e.g. summarizing the keystone, essence, and core of the phone call in face-to-face communication);
- b) employing alternative vocabulary – primarily utilizing a different register or style, paraphrasing, and simplifying;
- c) expressing the main ideas in a specific manner due to the context provided;
- d) sharing selected information or speech to meet the context provided (Dendrinos, 2006, p. 20).

The CEFRCV (2020) posits that mediation is a pivotal element in the teaching process, extending beyond the interaction between teacher and learner to encompass that between learners themselves. In the relatively cultural and linguistic homogenous environment of the Slovak schools, intralinguistic mediation occurs in everyday life contexts. However, every individual encounters foreign cultures and their representatives due to globalization and advances in information-communication technologies. This enables interlinguistic mediation to be used. In the context of mobility, university students are enabled to participate in study exchange programmes at foreign universities. Teams of big companies are of international origin, and communication is held between employees in local branches situated in different countries. It seems prudent to integrate interlinguistic mediation into foreign language teaching.

In sociocultural theory, mediation is essential for the co-construction of meaning (Piccardo & North, 2019). As presented in the CEFRCV (2020), mediation is an everyday activity when acting as an intermediary between individuals with no common language (interlinguistic mediation), as well as an intermediary between individuals sharing the same language when processing the content of unknown text or topic for them (intralinguistic mediation). In the CEFRCV (2020), the complexity of the concept was facilitated through three broad categories: mediating texts, mediating concepts, and mediating communication.

Since translation was mentioned in the CEFR (2001) as one activity of mediation, applied linguists supported the idea of using translation activities in language classes. As proposed by Zvereva and Chilingaryan (2019), translation should have its place in language education; however, in a different way as used in the grammar-translation method. They imply that translation enables learners not to use a target language appropriately nor to develop communicative skills. Nevertheless, they consider it a useful and naturally practical activity, which is increasingly vital in communication in the modern globalized world. This translation is designated as a pedagogical translation, which can serve as a foundation for communication activities. When students work in groups, they can engage in discussions about the meanings of specific words and identify suitable equivalents, utilizing the translation. Consistently, Moe et al. (2015, p. 89) argue that translation activities should be viewed as a communication activity, which enables students to use a language authentically and employ several language skills and cognitive processes.

The CEFRCV (2020) presents the key concepts for the scale referring to translating a written text in speech or writing, which seems to be the reproduction of the substantive message of the source text rather than translations expected from professional translators. Therefore, the key concepts operationalized in the scale include the comprehensibility of the translation, the extent to which the original formulations and structure influence the translation and the capturing of nuances in the original. However, the quality of translating a written text depends on the reference level.

Dendrinos (2013) proposes to start teaching mediation in the following steps: to start training at a lower proficiency level, during which it is important to transfer from the target language to the mother tongue (not vice versa). Gradually, it is necessary to include the comparison of expressing the same content in both languages to enable learners to understand that the structure and form of verbalizing the same content in different languages can differ. Later, searching for essential information in more complex texts and expressing the main idea of the text is trained until learners will achieve free speaking or writing based on a text in another language.

### 3 Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method research methodology to explore the impact of plurilingual education on students' ability to use interlinguistic mediation. In this mixed-method design, two data collection tools were used: a qualitative analysis of students' performances and quantitative data.

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants were seventh formers, with English achieved at reference level B2, studying it four lessons per week, and German at A2+ (three lessons per week). The total number of participants (22) was divided into two groups: an experimental group (11), comprising six females and five males, and a control group (11), represented by three females and eight males. Upon commencement of the experiments, the participants were between the ages of 14 and 15. At the time of testing, they had reached the age of 16 and 17, respectively. All participants spoke Slovak as their first language and had been studying English for nine years, with German being their second foreign language for six years.

#### 3.2 The Experiment

The students of the *eight-year gymnázium* started to learn English during their primary education in Year 3, achieving level A1 in different primary schools. When they were admitted at the *eight-year gymnázium*, they started to learn German. Two years ago, they were invited to participate in the experiment, the main goal of which was to measure the impact of plurilingual and pluricultural concepts in language teaching on the learners' ability to develop linguistic and cultural repertoire in German, using the acquired language skills and learning strategies in English. Other data from the experiment are used in the correlation process.

One of the activities planned within the experiment, which commenced in September 2022, was to assess the impact of the plurilingual approach on the development of interlinguistic mediation. A group of students with the same background (English competence at level A1 and without any competence in German) was divided into two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group was instructed by a teacher with a qualification in teaching both English and German. The role of the teacher was to facilitate the acquisition of German through the implementation of the plurilingual approach. In addition to the various activities that reinforced the concept of plurilingual education, the students' abilities to mediate inter-linguistically were evaluated qualitatively using the analytic scale (Appendix A).

The data collection process involved the rating of students' performances by two professionally trained teachers. The ratings were then calculated, and the raters were required to justify their decisions in order to facilitate the final decision-making process. In order to ascertain reliable responses to the research questions, the quantitative data obtained from students' performances in interlinguistic mediation were compared with other quantitative data collected from students' written performances and the scores achieved in the test in the final stage of the experiment. Correlation is a statistical measure that indicates the extent to which two or more variables fluctuate in relation to each other.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was chosen due to its ability to measure linear correlation between two sets of data.

#### 4 Results

RQ1: What impact does the plurilingual approach have on learners' ability to mediate interlinguistically?

In order to obtain accurate data, it was essential to conduct a quantitative analysis of learners' performances in interlinguistic mediation. The students' ability to mediate interlinguistically was judged by matching their performances against the judgement scale descriptors, indicating the transfer of information from one language into another. The scale was employed in the international online workshop, "Exploring ways to test mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural skills in the classroom", which was held on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021. The learners' performances were judged in four qualitative aspects: task achievement, range, accuracy and register.

The task (Appendix B) was achieved by all the students from the experimental group. Only one student in the control group was unable to fulfil the criteria based on the established descriptors. This student demonstrated a significant difficulty in transferring the majority of the required information from English into German. In his talk, he discussed the topic of traveling but was unable to present the specific details he had read in the English reviews of the hotel. Instead, he was discussing his travel preferences and was able to convey only one message regarding the limited functionality of the hotel's wireless internet connection.

The experimental and control groups exhibited a notable disparity in the scope of their achievements. A student was deemed to have fulfilled the task if they were able to transfer at least some of the information presented in the task. The descriptors of the lowest band matched the performance of one girl from the experimental group and eight students from the control group. The second band required the mention of the majority of the required information, which was achieved by three students from the experimental group and three students from the control group. The highest band encompasses the descriptors referring to the transfer of all the requisite information. Seven students in the experimental group and no students in the control group were able to provide all the relevant information.

In terms of linguistic range, the reference level employed for evaluating student performance was A2. At this level, it is not anticipated that learners will utilize complex grammatical structures or advanced vocabulary beyond that observed at B2. While mediating, eight students from the control group and one student from the experimental group demonstrated a limited range of grammar and vocabulary, as described in band 1. These students used simple words and simple sentences, with some even using isolated phrases. In task completion, an appropriate range of vocabulary and compound sentences was demonstrated by nine students from the experimental group and three students from the control group. The vocabulary and grammar used enabled them to convey the majority of the required information. Only one student in the experimental group demonstrated the capacity to utilize complex grammar and a sophisticated command of lexis.

The most problematic area was the same in both groups: accuracy. The assessment scale indicates that even the student at the lowest level employs grammatical phenomena and vocabulary with quite a high degree of accuracy relevant to level A2, with only occasional errors that may impede comprehension. Consequently, as many as eight students in the control group failed to meet even the basic requirement for accuracy. It was frequently observed that the students were unable to isolate German from English (\**nein private beach*, \**gut location*, \**ich finde this hotel nicht so gut*, \**das Hotel hat gut balcony*, \**das Schwimmbad ist nicht open*, \**While we essen, Mann spielt on piano*). This inability to differentiate between the two languages

was accompanied by deficiencies in vocabulary. Some words were expressed with incorrect descriptions (*gutes Frühstück = \*gut Morgen Essen*, *der Klavierspieler = \*die Mann an die Klavier*). Incorrect words (\**Das Hotel hat schwierig Wi-Fi*, \**Sie bieten Zimmers mit Meer Augenblick*) or non-existent words (\**Hotelpersonellen*, \**Busbahn*) were also used. The most prevalent errors in grammar were related to the use of incorrect articles and incorrect inclination (\**das Parkplatz kostet 12 Euro*, \**gut Platz für Hotel*, \**Hotel hat ein schönes Blick*), as well as mistakes related to incorrect verb conjugations (\**Du braucht Auto*, \**Das Frühstück sind super*) or incorrect word order (\**Die Hotel also hat ein Pool*). As evidenced by the examples, a considerable number of sentences exhibited multiple errors, encompassing both lexical and grammatical deficiencies. In several instances, the errors in question already posed a challenge to comprehension.

All the students in the experimental group achieved the minimum criterion of accuracy. However, eight students in the control group failed to do so. In the experimental group, four students demonstrated an ability to use vocabulary and grammar mostly correctly, although errors were occasionally made, which may have affected comprehension. Three students in the control group demonstrated the use of grammar and lexis at the same level. Correct use of lexis and grammar, with the avoidance of errors that would have interfered with comprehension, was demonstrated by seven students from the experimental group, whereas none from the control group exhibited such proficiency. The most prevalent errors pertained to the incorrect use of endings for adjectives (\**das leckeres Essen*, \**keinen private Strand*), as well as the misalignment of word order in the subordinate clauses (\**..., dass man im Restaurant muss warten*), and the misuse of prepositional phrases (\**Man muss für den Kellner lange warten.*). In the case of the latter error, a negative transfer from English (*wait for*) can be identified in the example above, which is indicative of a transfer of linguistic structures from the source language to the target language. This phenomenon persists to some extent in students who have been taught using the plurilingual approach, despite the teacher's efforts to highlight the differences. The use of both advanced vocabulary and complex grammar with minimal errors was demonstrated by only one student in the experimental group, whereas none of the control group exhibited such proficiency.

In the judgement, the final qualitative aspect pertained to register. Three students from the control group, who communicated solely by verbatim naming of facts derived from the hotel reviews, were unable to interact and therefore failed to achieve the basic performance level. This necessitates the selection of an appropriate degree of formality in the language used, which is contingent upon the communication situation. It could be observed that five students from the control group and one student from the experimental group were able to select the appropriate linguistic register. The most prevalent errors pertained to the use of formal greetings (e.g. „*Guten Tag*” and „*Auf Wiedersehen*”) or the inclusion of expletives, despite the informal nature of the communicative context (conversing with a friend). The appropriate language and a degree of formality were employed by three students from the control group and eight students from the experimental group, in accordance with the communicative situation. In some instances, the use of formal language or expressions (e.g. „*ich würde gern sagen*”) was observed with a low frequency. One student employed the address „*Lieber Helmut*”, which is typical of written communication but not of spoken discourse. Two students from the experimental group demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the appropriate linguistic register, whereas none of the students from the control group exhibited this ability. A qualitative analysis of the data indicates that the students in the experimental group, who were systematically trained to mediate, exhibited significantly greater efficiency and quality in transferring information from one language to another than their counterparts in the control group. The assessment scale for learner performance in transferring information from one language to another specifies three levels for each qualitative aspect (task completion, extent, accuracy, and register). The

analysis revealed that the majority of students in the experimental group could be ranked one level higher than the majority of students in the control group for each qualitative aspect.

Most students from the experimental group (63.6%) could transfer all the required information from English into German in contrast with the students from the control group whose performances were aligned with band 2 (72.7%) as they could transfer only part of the information. A comparable disparity is evident in the qualitative aspect of range, with the majority of students in the experimental group (81.8%) employing complex language, whereas the extent of language used by the control group was considerably constrained. The most striking difference was observed in the domain of accuracy, with the majority of pupils in the control group (72.7%) failing to meet even the minimum criterion. This result is consistent with the control group's low success in solving the language use tasks in the post-test, as well as the low accuracy ratings in their argument compositions. In contrast, the majority of students in the experimental group (63.6%) demonstrated correct use of grammar and lexis without such errors that would impede comprehension. Additionally, in the domain of linguistic register, the majority of students (45.4%) in the control group selected inappropriate linguistic devices, whereas the majority of pupils in the experimental group (72.7%) selected language that was mostly appropriate to the communicative situation. In light of the aforementioned findings, it can be posited that the implementation of a plurilingual approach to teaching has a considerable and positive impact on students' interlinguistic mediation skills, in accordance with the initial research question.

RQ2: Does the ability of learners to mediate interlinguistically correlate with other abilities measured in the experiment?

In order to address RQ2, it was necessary to obtain quantitative data related to students' performances in the field of interlinguistic mediation. The scale used for the qualitative analysis was also employed as a means of quantification of the results. For each qualitative aspect, students whose performances matched the descriptors of the lowest band were attributed one point, those matching the second band two points, and those matching the highest band three points. Consequently, the maximum achievable score was 12 points. Those students whose performances did not meet even the lowest criteria were attributed a score of zero. Subsequently, the data was compared with the data retrieved from a didactic test and students' written performances, which had been a part of the experiment (Table 1).

The didactic test comprised three distinct tasks, each designed to assess a different language skill. The listening comprehension task was a dichotomous one, comprising eight items. The reading comprehension task was also dichotomous, with 12 items, while the language in use task was a multiple-choice one, with 20 items. The test corresponded to the level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The writing task required the creation of a letter to a student magazine, as detailed in Appendix C.

The evaluation was conducted in an analytical manner, with a focus on four qualitative aspects: task achievement, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. For each of these aspects, students could achieve a maximum of five points, which equates to the maximum number of points for the entire essay, which was 20.

The correlation between learners' ability to mediate interlinguistically and the quantitative data obtained from their written performances, as well as the scores achieved in the test, was statistically tested using the Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ). The coefficient can take on values between -1 and 1. A value of -1 represents a very strong negative correlation, while a value of 1 represents a very strong positive correlation. The closer the value is to zero, the weaker the correlation. The results of the statistical test indicate a strong positive correlation between students' ability to mediate and their written performances ( $r(9)$

= .85,  $p < .001$ ) and between students' ability to mediate and their test results ( $r(9) = .87$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The  $p$ -value is used to assess the significance of the correlation analysis. If the  $p$ -value is less than 0.05, the correlation coefficient is deemed to be statistically significant. In both cases, the  $p$ -value was less than 0.001, indicating that the results were statistically significant.

Tab. 1: Students' Results – Mediation, Written Performances, Test

Student	Mediation	Written performance	Test
Student 1	9	17	33
Student 2	5	9	21
Student 3	10	17	35
Student 4	7	10	30
Student 5	9	12	32
Student 6	7	10	28
Student 7	9	12	28
Student 8	10	20	36
Student 9	10	18	34
Student 10	8	12	29
Student 11	9	16	37

The above-mentioned findings allow us to draw the conclusion that the results of learners' ability to mediate interlinguistically are strongly correlated with other data collected in the experiment, namely the results of students' written performances and their test results.

## 5 Discussion

The countries that initiated the incorporation of mediation as a subject for instruction and assessment were Germany and Greece. The concept was introduced into the German national educational standards for foreign language education in 2003 (Kolb, 2016), with a focus on spoken interpretation and written translation from one language to another, as well as summarisation and paraphrasing of texts from one language into another. In the Greek context, linguistic mediation was described in line with the CEFRCV (2020), which views language learners as social agents who help convey meaning either through collaboration or encouragement of others to construct new meaning and pass on new information in an appropriate form (Dendrinos, 2024). The introduction of mediation in both forms (intralinguistic and cross-linguistic) was facilitated by a high-stakes foreign language examination, known as the KPG, an acronym for the Greek state certificate in language proficiency, entitled *Kratiko Pistopiitiko Glossomathias* (Dendrinos & Karavas, 2013).

The concept of cross-linguistic mediation is applicable in numerous multilingual countries across Europe. In light of the current global phenomenon of mass migration, it is reasonable to encourage communication involving different languages in today's multilingual and multicultural societies. Such circumstances present a challenge to countries that find themselves in a position of initial contact or those that are perceived as desirable destinations. In response to this challenge, these countries have implemented measures to facilitate the learning of foreign languages, thereby enabling students to be educated in multilingual classes.

Nevertheless, the circumstances in Slovakia are unique due to a number of factors that must be taken into account when evaluating the country's stance on the matter. The relatively modest size of the Slovak Republic means that it does not experience a significant inflow of migrants who wish to remain in the country and pursue their education there. In addition to Slovak-speaking students, primary and secondary schools are predominantly attended by students of other Slavonic languages. The similarities between the languages facilitate the integration of students, with few obstacles to overcome.

The second issue is that the educational system presents languages in isolation. Consequently, the majority of educators

are only able to attain proficiency in one language and the associated cultural context, having pursued their studies in this field at the university level. A further noteworthy factor is that English is the primary foreign language taught in schools, with few exceptions. This has resulted in a situation where students' preferences have led to a particular focus on this language, which has had an adverse impact on the learning of other foreign languages.

In this context, the presented study represents an initial investigation into the potential of mediation as a pedagogical tool for facilitating the acquisition of target languages. The results permit the formulation of a positive conclusion regarding the enhancement of interlinguistic mediation abilities through the application of plurilingual teaching. The findings of this study can contribute significantly to the ongoing professional discussion on plurilingualism, as evidenced by the recently introduced national curriculum for lower-secondary education in Slovakia.

## 6 Conclusion

A new vision of language, the learner and the way in which learning happens has the potential to move a static vision of language education towards its dynamic dimension. The concept of mediation is closely related to the concept of „languageing“. Mediation appears to be fundamental to all learning, as it is crucial to understanding, meaning making and collaborating, which are central features of acting as a social agent. This therefore supports a dynamic vision of meaning as it is constructed and mediated in action. Due to the inherent complexity of the concept, our study contributes only to one aspect of the mediation of a text. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight the potential of the concept of mediation to stimulate innovation and reform in language education.

It is important to acknowledge that this study on the efficacy of the plurilingual approach was constrained in several respects. Firstly, the study was conducted in a single class, which limits the generalisability of the findings at this stage. Nevertheless, it constituted the inaugural attempt in the Slovak educational context. Secondly, the study did not present all the activities that the students had to undertake in order to experience the plurilingual approach to language learning. This may be useful for language teachers who are at the crossroads of moving from a static view of language education towards more dynamic ones. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study indicate that new challenges should be addressed to raise language teachers' awareness of the mediated and complex nature of language learning. This is of significant importance in improving language teaching.

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**Primary Paper Section: A**

**Secondary Paper Section: AM**

## Appendix A: Judgement Scale Descriptors

Qualitative aspect	Descriptors
Task achievement	Includes some information required by the target audience and the task Includes most information required by the target audience and the task Includes all information required by the target audience and the task
Range	Uses limited lexical and grammatical range Uses appropriate lexical and grammatical range Uses vivid, sophisticated lexis; complex yet appropriate grammar
Accuracy	Mostly uses lexis and grammar correctly, errors occasionally impede understanding Uses lexis and grammar correctly, errors don't impede understanding Uses precise lexis and complex yet appropriate grammar, very few errors
Register	Chooses formality and language partly corresponding to audience and genre Chooses formality and language mostly corresponding to audience and genre Chooses formality and language fully corresponding to audience and genre

## Appendix B: Mediation Task

You want to travel to a seaside resort with a friend from Germany who does not speak English. You have chosen a hotel and found a couple of reviews written in English. Based on the reviews, inform them about the advantages and disadvantages of the hotel and explain to them why the hotel is suitable for you.

## Appendix C: Written Performance Task

A German-speaking school magazine has announced a competition for the best essay (100 – 150 words) on young people's travel preferences. Write an essay (in German), including the following points:

- Do you prefer travelling to the seaside or to the mountains?
- Which means of transport do you prefer to use? Which of them don't you like?
- What type of accommodation do you prefer? How is it equipped?