# CEFR Extended Set of Illustrative Descriptors:
# Focus on Mediation:

## Introduction to the Validation Workshops

### 1. Background

The context to the current development of the descriptors for *mediation* is the following. The Council of Europe's Education Department decided at a meeting in 2012 to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 2. Categories for Mediation Descriptors

The view of mediation taken in the current project takes on a much wider scope, although this does not invalidate the sense in which it is used in the CEFR 2001 text. Overall, mediation is interpreted as **any procedure, arrangement or action designed to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness**. The mediator facilitates access to knowledge, the grasping of concepts, the reduction of tensions, building bridges towards the new, the other. The social groups one encounters, otherness and mobility through groups and stages of life (collectivités, alterité and mobilité) are more and more relevant in our increasingly diverse societies.

In addition to categories for *Conveying received information,* in line with the 2001 interpretation, the current draft scheme for **Mediation Activities** therefore has categories for *Constructing meaning* (grouped with *Conveying received information* under the heading **Conceptual Mediation)** and, in addition, categories for **Relational Mediation**.

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

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

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

In the course of its work, the working group has also considered other interesting and important areas that were also not included in the original CEFR descriptors:

- translation and interpretation (which are specialised types of mediation);
- online interaction (which involves some aspects related to mediation);
- pluricultural and plurilingual competences (often drawn on in mediation);
- reactions to literature – both personal interpretation and critical analysis (which requires an ability to mediate with a text).

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

## MEDIATION ACTIVITIES

**Spoken Mediation**

*CONCEPTUAL MEDIATION*

### Constructing meaning
1. Collaborating to construct meaning (in a group)
2. Generating conceptual talk (as an animator/teacher/trainer)

### Conveying received information
3. Relaying relevant information in speech
4. Explaining data (graphs, diagrams, etc.) in speech
5. Processing text in speech
6. Interpreting in formal and informal situations

*RELATIONAL MEDIATION*

### Facilitating relationships
7. Facilitating collaborative interaction (within a group)
8. Stimulating interaction in plenary and in groups (as an animator/teacher/trainer)
9. Resolving delicate situations and disagreements

**Written Mediation**

*CONCEPTUAL MEDIATION*

### Conveying received information
10. Relaying relevant information in writing
11. Explaining data (graphs, diagrams, etc.) in writing
12. Processing text  in writing
13. Translating

**MEDIATION STRATEGIES**

1. Establishing connections (to previous knowledge, to the wider context)
2. Restructuring text (in appropriate discourse culture)
3. Amplifying text  (adding redundancy, exemplifying, illustrating, using metaphor)
4. Streamlining text (regrouping; condensing)
5. Adjusting language (simplifying, changing register)

**OTHER NEW SCALES**

**Online Interaction**

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

**Text**

Additional scales:
1. Interpreting literature etc.
2. Analysing and criticising literature etc.

**Plurilingual & Pluricultural Competences** (new category)

1. Exploiting pluricultural repertoire and intercultural knowledge
2. Exploiting plurilingual repertoire

The scale *Processing,* presented in CEFR Section 4.5. Text, has been expanded in the scales for Mediation Activities into three descriptor scales in both spoken and written language (Relaying relevant information; Explaining data, Processing text). Interpreting and Translating have been added to complete the section on *Conveying received information.* The other two categories for spoken construction of concepts concern stimulating and developing ideas within a group (Collaborative development of ideas) or as the animator/teacher/trainer leading a group (Generating conceptual talk).

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

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

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

### 3.  The Design and Purpose of the Validation Activities

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

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

- **Workshop 1, (Window: 16th February to 26th March):**

  In this (circa 3-hour) face-to-face workshop, participants are asked to discuss in pairs a given set of about 60 descriptors presented in random order on paper. The necessary files (worksheets, instructions etc.) will be emailed beforehand to the coordinator. One form is to be completed by each pair.

  The task, in pairs, is to:
  - o Identify the category descriptors are intended to describe, from a choice of 3-5 categories given.
  - o Judge which, if any, of the criteria they agree that this descriptor shows (i.e. is it clear, pedagogically useful, relevant to real world language use?).
  - o Suggest changes to wording.

  The results will enable the working group to weed out less popular/less clear/less useful descriptors, and revise descriptors as suggested.

- **Workshop 2: (Window: 14th May to 15th June):**

  For this second (circa 3-hour) workshop a computer with internet access is necessary for each participant. After discussion, participants will be asked to judge the level of descriptors, each individually on their separate computer.

  The results will enable the working group to weed out or revise descriptors for which people have difficulty judging level.

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

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

**4 Publication**

The Extended Set of illustrative descriptors for the CEFR will then be published on the Council of Europe's website in English and French mid-2016. All institutions participating in the validation will be acknowledged at publication and arrangements can be made for participating institutions to provide a certificate jointly with the Council of Europe to individuals who participate in all of the three rounds of validation.

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