

“Kannst du mir mal auf Deutsch sagen, was im Seminar wichtig war!?”

How to define language mediation competences
in multilingual academic contexts

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overview

- Research context: language mediation as everyday language activity in a multilingual academic context
- What language mediation means: modelling language mediation competences
- What does the CEFR say? Current developments and research on language mediation
- Scenarios: Where and how language mediation takes place
- Design of an explorative study on language mediation in the Unibz (as an example for multilingual academic setting)
- Consequences on curriculum: integrating language mediation competences in our language teaching and assessment

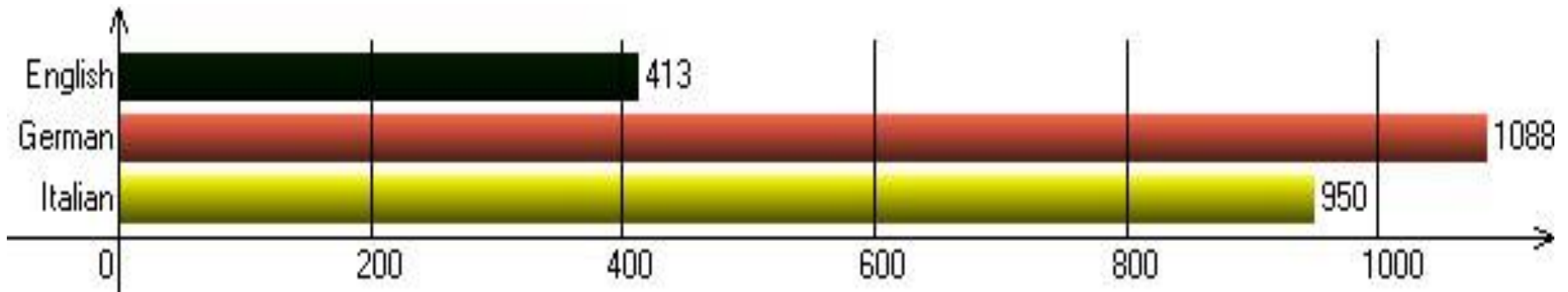
A glance onto the Free University of Bolzano

- Young and small university in the very heart of Europe
- Trilingual concept - official languages: German, Italian, English
- Multilingual reality: international students and staff, local dialect, Ladin
- Currently (2015): 2451 students, coming from 74 different countries
- Most of them locals: South Tyrol and Italy, Austria, Germany with mostly German or Italian as first language
- However, a considerable part from Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Iran ...) where English is often the language of instruction

Language competences of our students

(<https://aws.unibz.it/sis/statistic-zone/index.asp>)

„strong“ language of communication



research questions

- How do students, administrative staff and teachers deal with multilingual reality and how do they handle such a multilingual environment in daily academic life?
- What multilingual phenomena can we observe in the increasing language contact situations like an university?
- Findings of research on multilingual contact situations: *Dylan* project (*Dynamics and the Management of Diversity*, 2006-2011)
- Wide range of strategies
- Functional mastering several languages according to situational needs
- Aim: to include/integrate all interacting participants of interaction
- One special aspect in this context: **language mediation**

*Common European Framework
of Reference for Languages:
Learning, teaching, assessment*



Modern Languages Division, Strasbourg

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Niveau A1·A2·B1·B2·C1·C2



Langenscheidt



What does the CEFR say?

„In mediating activities, the language user is not concerned to express his/her own meanings, but simply act as an **intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly** – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages.“ (CEFR, 2001: 87)

However, no scales to describe language mediation competences

⇒ European Council Project (Brian North et al.): *Validation of Extended Set of CEFR Illustrative Descriptors* (to scale competences in language mediation, in plurilingual/pluricultural etc.)

Running since 2013, results will get published by 2017

Which ways of mediation can we observe?

- First language/“strong” language → foreign language
- Foreign language → first language
- Foreign language → foreign language

scenario: first language → foreign language

- Austrian student Peter and his peer Francesco from Palermo are studying Design in Bolzano. They attend a lecture on „Internationale Trends im Industriedesign“ hold by German professor Müller.
- Francesco has got difficulties to follow in detail because he has started to learn German only one year ago.
- Therefore, after the lecture Peter writes a summary in Italian for Francesco pointing out the main ideas and concepts of Prof. Müller.

szenario: foreign language → first language

- Federica and her peer Paola, both from Bologna are students of Economics in Bolzano, they are sitting in the Unibar talking about last week's lesson (usually held in English), which Paola couldn't attend.
- Federica reports in Italian the main points of the lesson and tells Paola what they are asked to prepare for the next session.
- She also gives Paola the notes she has taken during the lesson. These notes are partly in English, partly in Italian.

What is required in such situations?

language activities and strategies, such as:

- paraphrase, sum up, reduce information
- explain, including extra information

cognitive and social competences:

- anticipate the other's information need
- filling gaps of knowledge, amplifying text
- reduce information
- pluricultural/plurilingual competences

strategical competences:

- taking notes
- provide glossaries or information material

What is required in such situations?

The mentioned Council of Europe-Project on the validation of language mediation descriptors lead by Brian North et al. includes even mediation strategies like

- adjusting language
- breaking down complicated information
- spoken translation of written text (sight translation)
- ...

To conclude ...

Language Mediation is understood in a broad sense:

- receiving, processing and producing information
- paraphrasing, summarizing, reducing, amplifying information
- social dimension: considering the communicative needs of the partner / target group

The overall competence is **flexibility** (towards situations, persons and their communicative needs)

Need of research: how does language mediation is used in multilingual academic situations?

- Explorative study with multimethod design
- Collecting qualitative data on language mediation in a multilingual academic environment: Unibz as example
- Semi-structured explorative interviews
 - with students, teachers and administrative staff,
 - in different faculties, levels and linguistic settings
- Video-recording of language mediation activities and situations,
 - working in group
 - discussion in laboratory
 - developing together a draft or a presentation
 - lectures, classes, tutorials, office hours
- Retrospective data on video-recordings

Main questions, aims and desiderata

- Data-based modelling of language mediation competences
- How relevant are these language activities for daily life?
 - not only in academic settings, but also at work place, in school, for social work ...
- How successful are we doing language mediation ?
- How to measure such competences?
- How to link language mediation competences to the CEFR?
- What conclusions may we draw?
 - towards multilingual education
 - towards higher education pedagogy

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grazie – giulan – danke - thank you

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