

MUDE_xI-ACTION 2
CASE STUDY ON LINGUISTIC MEDIATION IN HE
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Seminar for staff and students
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WHAT IS THIS CASE STUDY ABOUT?

- How university students mediate with their fellow students, their peers, *across different languages* (cross-linguistically) and *within the same language* (intralinguistically) in multilingual encounters.
- The significant functions of linguistic mediation as a ‘skill’ to be taught in school and as social practice by social agents were examined at length in a recent publication entitled *Mediation as Negotiation of Meanings, Plurilingualism and Language Education* (Dendrinos 2024). In this book, I maintain that linguistic mediation is socially-situated practice¹.
- To test this postulation i.e. that linguistic mediation is socially situated or context and task specific², this case study was set up to investigate how mediation occurs between members of a particular group of people (university students) in a specific social context (the university environment).

AIMS OF THE CASE STUDY

- Apart from testing the postulation that mediation is socially-situated practice, the Case Study aimed at investigating:
 - How and why students mobilise their linguistic repertoire when they communicate with each other in the academic context – universities being multilingual spaces.
 - What type of mediation tasks they perform for what communicative and educational purposes and on which occasions, as well as how they perform them and what is required of them to be able to do so efficiently.
 - If taking part in this Case Study as research participants helped them become aware of the social and educational meaning of their mediation practices and to use these practices for peer learning (exchange of knowledge production and transmission) at university from and with each other.

THE 2 PHASES OF THE CASE STUDY

- **Phase 1:** Nearly 300 students from MUDExl partner institutions (8 universities from Europe, Asia, South America and Africa³) volunteered to respond to a Survey-Questionnaire (S/Q) and provided information about:
 - their linguistic profile, i.e., languages they speak, where and how they use them,
 - the types of cross-linguistic (and intralinguistic) mediation tasks they perform when with family and friends, and when with their university peers.
- **Phase 2:** About 30 students (from 4 universities in Europe) from among those who participated in Phase 1 volunteered for the second phase to:
 - perform mediation tasks with their peers at university,
 - complete a Verbal Protocol Form for each mediation task performed.



RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY
QUESTIONNAIRE



FINDINGS FROM PHASE I



Respondents' linguistic profile

- While the total number of student population who responded to the Survey-Questionnaire speaks more than 50 languages, only about 30% identify themselves as bilingual (one as trilingual) and the rest identify themselves as monolingual.
- The 50 languages that the respondents know⁴ are used differently: Some are languages they speak at home, in or beyond their communities; others are languages they use for their academic studies at university, and the society in which they live permanently or while studying; others are languages they have learnt as foreign languages and use them for their studies and/or for international communication.
- A little less than 40% of the respondents has a mother tongue (MT) which is different from the official language of their university and are proficient in both.

Respondents' language resources use

- Respondents who have a different MT from the language of the university use it at home – rarely at university, and not for academic purposes.
- The languages the respondents use in social events, social media activities, and when using the internet are said to be English, French, German, Spanish and Italian, but also Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Ewe, Greek, Japanese, Kabiye, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Swedish, Tem, Thai, and Turkish.
- When respondents were asked if they mix the languages that they know (producing hybrid forms) or switch from one language to another (eg. from their home language to the official university language, from the official university language to a language they have learnt as a foreign language), the majority answered that they do, but not for their academic work.
- The biggest percentage of respondents use more than one language in their daily lives for both private and public communication.

Respondents' cross-linguistic mediation for others

- Respondents disclosed that they mediate for others helping them communicate across languages by performing tasks, such as:
 - Interpreting/explaining what someone has said
 - relaying/rendering messages written or spoken
 - translating parts of an oral or spoken text
 - speaking or writing on someone else's behalf in language A with information from language B
 - filling in a form in language A with information in language B

Respondents' cross-linguistic mediation for themselves

- Respondents disclosed that they mediate for themselves across languages by performing tasks such as reading or listen to something in language A and doing something else in Language B (eg. use information from a news article in say French to write a report in Italian; render in English the basic idea of a book or a talk in Spanish; summarise in Swedish a speech in German)

Respondents intra-linguistic mediate to help out

- Respondents disclosed that they mediate within the same language, when others are in need of:
 - understanding, say, a scientific text by using simple, non-specialised language
 - comprehending instructions, directions, guidelines, procedures by using plainer or more detailed explanations and examples.
 - getting the gist of a whole or parts of an oral or written text
 - filling in a formal document, an application form, or a survey and they don't know how

Respondents intra-linguistic mediate to support others

- Respondents disclosed that they mediate within the same language when others need them to:
 - speak on their behalf in a difficult, awkward, problematic situation
 - write on their behalf an official document, a formal letter, a petition.
 - take notes for them or highlight key points in a text for them
 - share their ideas, concepts, theoretical positions
 - report facts and figures or data from a paper, a book chapter
 - explain ideas, positions from a lecture or teaching session
 - expounding on information presented in a chart, graph, diagram, infographic
 - rendering in speech a situation, ideas, concepts, or feelings conveyed non-verbally, i.e. through image, sound, gesture, movement.

MAIN CONCLUSION FROM PHASE 1

- Respondents mediate differently when they are with their university peers, communicating about issues that have to do with their academic life, as opposed to when they are with family or community members and friends and are dealing with affairs of everyday social life.



DESIGN, FINDINGS,
CONCLUSIONS

ABOUT PHASE 2



Design

- The findings and the conclusion of Phase I served as a basis for the design of Phase 2, which involved 30 of the students who had participated in Phase I, and who served both:
 - as subjects of research, who were asked to perform 10 cross- and intra-linguistic mediation tasks each, over a period of 20-30 days.
 - as junior researchers who were asked to complete a Verbal Protocol Form (VPF) as soon as they had completed each mediation encounter.

Instrument used

- The Verbal Protocol Form (VPF) was designed so that junior researchers would record (in English or French):
 - the context of each mediation encounter
 - the linguistic and non-linguistic resources used during the mediation encounter
 - the interaction process and types of meanings negotiated
 - the accommodation techniques used
 - the input (source texts) and output
 - how the outcome benefitted the parties involved in the encounter

Data collected

- The data collected consists of 114 mediation encounters, recorded by the junior researchers in the VPF. An initial analysis of the data was performed, and more detailed analysis is pending.

Main conclusions

- University students mediate with one another (using their entire linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire to interact with their peers) in order to facilitate learning and daily life at university.
- In mediating for/with their peers, across languages and within the same language, students:
 - help one another learn by sharing linguistic or content knowledge, individual experiences, opinions, views, etc. They are involved in *peer learning*
 - work with each other to gain knowledge or develop skills by solving problems, completing tasks, processing and synthesizing views and opinions, locating data, material or evidence to support opinions, learn new concepts, reframe ideas. They are involved in *collaborative learning*.

Findings from initial analysis

- University students' Collaborative Peer Learning (CLP) mediation encounters do not involve orderly Q&A exchanges, nor of speaker-centred, unidirectional language activities.
- The mediation encounters recorded all involve a two-way process during which meaning is constructed between interlocutors who are sharing knowledge, attempting to resolve communication gaps, while also developing their language awareness and literacy skills.
- This process implicates complex communication practices that require the use of students' entire repertoires and their linguistic, sociolinguistic and cultural awareness.
- All students involved in the encounter may profit from the interaction in different ways (not just the party to whom information, advice, is provided via the mediation act).

Conclusions and inferences

- Cross- and intra-linguistic mediation between learners is a means (i.e. a facilitator) to an end (i.e. to learning), not an end in itself.
- When mediation is a learning facilitator, emphasis is shifted from the linguistic performance of the mediator to the interaction process of the mediation encounter.
- The mediator is affected by his/her own mediation performance and how it affects the recipient.
- Both mediator and recipient are constructing meaning that makes sense to them and therefore crucial to learning.

CPL MEDIATION

- Collaborative Peer Learning (CPL) mediation is meaningful for students when they themselves or their peers need to work in more than one language or semiotic mode to:
 - understand information (about the modus operandi at university)
 - comprehend instructions and guidelines
 - grasp new concepts, course content, ideas, standpoints, attitudes
 - address misunderstandings
 - clarify misconceptions
 - interpret messages for oneself or for their fellow students
- It is useful for them when:
 - they are preparing or working on an assignment
 - they are to select or choose a project
 - they require technical assistance or support
 - when they socialize with other students, exchanging information and experiences.

ASSUMPTIONS THE CASE STUDY CONFIRMED

- **People in mediate differently in different contexts. University students mediate differently when they communicate with family and friends in their community and when they communicate with their peers in the academic context at university. They perform different mediation tasks, they articulate things differently, and the reason for their mediation performance is different.**
- **The basic purpose of university students' cross- or intra-linguistic mediation in the wider social environment, their community is to help others understand and communicate, whereas in the academic context mediation serves collaborative peer learning purposes.**
- **University students use their linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic resources to interact with their peers, helping them and being helped to understand texts and concepts, to resolve communication gaps, and much more.**

WHAT THE CASE STUDY REVEALED

- **How and why university students mobilise their linguistic (and non-linguistic) repertoire when they communicate with each other in the academic context – universities being multilingual spaces.**
- **What type of mediation tasks they perform for what communicative and educational purposes and on which occasions.**
- **How they perform them and what is required of them to be able to do so efficiently.**
- **Subjects of research taking part themselves in the research may help them become aware of the social and educational meaning of their practices.**

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- CLP mediation practices at university involve:
 - Teamwork in a (multilingual) learning community.
 - Critical enquiry, reflection and plurilingual exchange.
 - Managing and (re)constructing knowledge.
 - Managing plurilingual learning and how to learn.