

The reading-to-write construct across languages: Analysing written mediation tasks and performance

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Abstract

This paper discusses the nature of mediation tasks as reading-to-write tasks which ask test-takers to relay in one language messages purposefully extracted from a source text into another language, so as to restore communication gaps between interlocutors who do not share the same language (i.e., cross-language mediation). Drawing data from the Greek national multilingual exam suite (KPG), which innovatively assesses users' ability to mediate, an ability also included in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, this paper adds to the theorization of the particular notion in an effort to demystify the nature of mediation (Stathopoulou 2009, 2015, 2016a, 2016b), a rather unexplored area in the field of foreign language didactics.

Keywords: reading-to-write construct, cross-language mediation task, testing translanguaging

1 Introduction

The acts of composing from sources in which writing influences reading and reading affects writing have been discussed as hybrid acts of literacy (Bracewell et al. 1982) while the tasks themselves have been seen as hybrid (Plakans 2009) because writing and reading cannot be viewed as separate (Esmaili 2002). Research into the reading-to-write construct is scarce especially in the field of (foreign) language testing. Spivey

(1990: 259) explains that the hybrid nature of the tasks, which “cut across two lines of research that have their own paradigms and issues hence does not fit neatly into one or the other”, may account for the scarcity of research in composing from sources. Hirvela (2004) also observes that connections between second language (L2) reading and writing remain largely unexplored because a construct or model of L2 reading-writing is lacking in the field.

This paper addresses the reading-to-write construct which does not involve one language (as for instance in the case of summarization tasks) but *two* languages (i.e., reading in L1 and writing in L2). It thus touches upon the notion of cross-language mediation as translanguaging practice, which appeared in the language teaching scene through its inclusion in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001). The focus of the paper is on written mediation tasks, i.e., tasks which involve reading a text in Greek and relaying information into another text in English for a given communicative purpose, and presents relevant research thus contributing to our understanding of written mediation as a reading-to-write process.

2 Towards an understanding of cross-language mediation

2.1 Why we mediate

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. As it seems, it is an everyday practice in public, academic, and professional life while in today’s globalised world and multilingual societies, mediation is frequently cross-linguistic (Stathopoulou 2015). Cross-linguistic mediation is actually defined as the process of extracting information from a source text in one language and relaying it in another language for a specific communicative purpose. It involves the interpretation of meanings articulated in source texts and making of new meanings in the target language expressed appropriately for the context of situation (Dendrinos 2006).

According to North & Docherty (2016: 24), the practice of mediation seems to involve “a self-effacing bridging effort to get something across and facilitate the

(mutual) understanding of other people.” Coste & Cavali (2015: 12) claim that “the aim of the mediation process, defined in the most general terms, is to reduce the gap between two poles that are distant from or in tension with each other.” They move on to argue that

“To mediate is, *inter alia*, to reformulate, to transcode, to alter linguistically and/or semiotically by rephrasing in the same language, by alternating languages, by switching from oral to written expression or vice versa, by changing genres, by combining text and other modes of representation, or by relying on the resources – both human and technical – present in the immediate environment. Mediation uses all available means and this is its attraction for language learning and the development of a range of discourse competences.” (ibid.: 62-63)

Mediation ability, which forms part of both the multilingual/plurilingual competence – as defined by Coste & Simon (2009: 174) – and translanguaging competence, is “not conceived as the sum of competencies in distinct languages but as one global but complex capacity”. It may be more or less developed, depending on the mediator’s proficiency in each of the two languages or his/her linguistic experiences (Stathopoulou 2015: 6).

Irrespectively of the context the notion of mediation is used and practiced, it occurs where there is sharing, bridging and exchange and as Swain et al. (2015: 151) put it, “mediation is the process which connects the social and the individual”.

2.2 Mediation in foreign language education

In 2001, the notion of mediation became an object of concern in foreign language education through its inclusion in the CEFR. The CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 87-88) defines mediation as following

“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.”

The CEFR did not develop the concept of mediation to its full potential. The place of mediation is limited and there were no illustrative descriptors suggested for this particular ability. However, the inclusion of mediation therein was a fundamental step towards the development of the notion thus triggering research in the field. As North & Piccardo (2016: 11) point out, by including mediation, the CEFR emphasizes the constant movement between the individual and social level in language learning, mainly through its vision of the user/learner as a social agent.

In response to the aforementioned gap regarding mediation descriptors in the CEFR, since January 2014 the Council of Europe¹ has developed and validated a new set of illustrative descriptors for mediation (North & Panthier 2016).² Ultimately, in 2018, the new *CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors* has been published on the Council’s website (Council of Europe 2018), a document which is intended as a complement to the CEFR. Descriptor scales are provided for mediating a text, for mediating concepts, for mediating communication, as well as for the related mediation strategies and plurilingual/pluricultural competences (see North and Piccardo 2016).

In the meantime, in 2003, mediation had become a basic component of the Greek national multilingual exam suite (KPG), which includes the assessment of candidates’ oral and written mediation performance across proficiency levels and is actually the only exam battery in Europe which assesses mediation performance.³ In fact, it is assessed through tasks in speaking and writing tests from B1 level onwards. What is labelled as mediation in the KPG exams involves verbal activity intended to bridge the gap between a source text in Greek and a target text in L2 (Dendrinou 2013), in our case in English. As shown in Appendix 1, test-takers are provided with a Greek text and are given a task which provides about who is speaking or writing to whom, with what purpose, what topic, and what text type they are required to produce.

¹ The authoring group of this project was Brian North -coordinator, Enrica Piccardo, Tim Goodier, and Maria Stathopoulou.

² Find the recent publication here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

³ For further information, see http://rce12.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/en_index.htm

2.3 Mediation as a translanguaging and social activity

Being concerned with the purposeful relaying of information from one language to another, mediation is considered to be a translanguaging practice, a view which is in line with that of García et al. (2011), who see translanguaging as a hybrid practice of languaging and an act of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages in order to maximise communicative potential (García 2009). Mediation is seen as a language practice which involves the interplay of linguistic codes (Stathopoulou 2013a, 2013b, 2015) thus emphasising the relationship amongst the languages involved which are not seen as separate. Swain & Lapkin (2013 as found in North & Piccardo 2016: 19) suggest that students should be given an opportunity to use their first language during collaborative dialogues or private speech, so that they could “mediate their understanding and generation of complex ideas (languaging) before they produce an end product (oral or written) in the target language” thus being involved in a process of translanguaging.

Mediators, whose actions are situated in a social context, employ knowledge they have developed through social experience, including their knowledge of discourse conventions and their socio-cognitive knowledge of language’s possible effect on an audience (Stathopoulou 2015). In fact this is the main reason why Dendrinos (2006) sees mediation as social practice and mediators as social agents.

2.4 Written mediation as a reading-to-write construct

In an effort to theorise mediation, this paper moves a step forward and sees written mediation as a reading-to-write construct since it involves both reading and understanding a text and writing another. Three research projects, along with their main results, are presented with the intent to show that written mediation can be considered as a reading-to-write construct. Generally speaking, theorising mediation is crucial if we consider the urgent need to incorporate it in classrooms, syllabi and materials. Teachers should be trained and be provided the opportunity to reflect on this aspect during their education, and “to develop more principled, theoretical knowledge of multilingualism in order to grow and develop as teachers in multilingual societies” (Meier & Conteh 2014: 296).

Research shows that written mediation involves a double process. Involving some interplay of reading and writing (Delaney 2008), mediation tasks can be

described as reading-to-write tasks. Source texts serve as ‘sources of information’ and reading comprehension serves the following purposes: to access topic knowledge, to understand the task (Hayes 1996), to help the mediators establish new meanings from the reading that they later transfer on paper. It should be stressed, however, that candidates are offered the flexibility to add their own ideas drawing on their world knowledge, rather than just heavily relying on the source text. Ruiz-Funes (1999: 46) defines reading-to-write tasks as tasks that require learners to write a text based on the reading of an assigned source text. According to Stein (1990 as cited in Ruiz-Funes 1999: 46), such tasks require the learner to be able to read and comprehend source material(s) on a given topic, material(s) that may have different information on the topic and then distinguish what is relevant to the writing task at hand figuring out at the same time how to apply their prior knowledge on the topic.

Mediation tasks require a reading-to-write ability, which does not involve just reading in order to comprehend, but it implies more than this; mediators’ reading is directed towards writing or in other words, they read with a writing goal, i.e. to select and relay information from a Greek source in order to produce another in English. As the reader slips into the role of writer, the need to test and transform a source text is brought to the fore (Flower et al. 1990).

It becomes evident from the above that in reading-writing activities, like mediation activities, reading and writing processes blend and co-occur, an aspect of mediation this paper attempts to shed light on. As Spivey (1990: 259) points out, it would be inaccurate to portray intentional acts of composing from sources as linear, two step procedure in which a person reads a source text simply for comprehension in a text-driven way before beginning the process of writing.

3 Researching written mediation: Towards considering it as a reading-to-write process

3.1 Research project 1

The first research project, involving written mediation with a view to exploring the test-taking strategies candidates of different proficiency levels use when mediating in writing, initiated in 2008 (see Stathopoulou 2008; Stathopoulou and Nikaki, 2008). It was within the framework of a larger project carried out at the *Research Centre in English Language Teaching, Testing and Assessment (RCeL)*, University of Athens,

which dealt with test-taking strategies; i.e., the techniques or 'tricks' consciously used by candidates so that they can respond to test requirements. Subjects consisted of university students attending two experimental courses. These courses, planned by RCeL staff, with the intent to prepare interested parties to sit for the KPG exams, were offered in the Spring and Autumn of 2008, just before the May and November exam administrations of the same year (Dendrinou & Stathopoulou 2009) for the B2 and C1 level respectively.

Through questionnaires and verbal protocols, twenty two (22) prospective candidates i.e., eleven (11) from the B2 level group of respondents and eleven (11) from the C1 level were asked in relation to what test-taking strategies they use when they mediate in writing. The results, which have been presented by Stathopoulou (2013c) indicate that apart from the writing strategies which go hand in hand with written mediation, the particular practice also requires the use of a number of *reading* strategies, as shown in the table below. In fact, the table shows that the majority of respondents claim that they resort to their background knowledge on the topic they have to deal with. Other frequently used reading (support) strategies are a) underlining information in the source text, and b) going back and forth in the text to find relationships between ideas. Finding relationships between ideas is an important process which may lead to successful mediation performance, but this is a complex procedure and can be achieved only through multiple-readings of some parts of the text, a technique that the subjects claimed to use frequently. The participants also argued that they read the source text slowly and carefully, focusing on some extracts of the text which seem more relevant to the task.

1 st STAGE OF MEDIATION: COMPREHENSION		% subjects
The most 'popular' strategies		
01.	activating and using prior knowledge	95.5%
02.	reading the text more than once	90.1%
03.	focusing their reading on some parts of the text	90.1%
04.	reading slowly and carefully	86.4%
06.	underlining	81.8%
07.	going back and forth in the text	81.8%
08.	adjusting reading rate	77.3%
The least 'popular' strategies		
09.	putting subheading under each paragraph	9.1%
10.	taking notes while reading	36.4%
2 ND STAGE OF MEDIATION: PRODUCTION		
The most 'popular' strategies		
11.	using synonyms	95.5%
12.	grouping information	86.4%
13.	paraphrasing	77.3%
The least 'popular' strategies		
14.	translating word-for-word	0%
15.	transferring all the information included in the source text	5%
16.	note-taking in Greek	22.7%
17.	note-taking in English	36.4%

Table 1. Claimed mediation strategy use by prospective KPG candidates

3.2 Research project 2

The second research project, which completed in 2009, investigated when and how the Greek source text in the written mediation activity of the KPG writing test of the B2 level English exam regulates candidates' scripts in English, and in what way it regulates it. The analysis occurred at the level of the sentence and involved a total number of two hundred and forty (240) scripts produced over a period of three years, during six different KPG administrations (from April 2005 to November 2007). The notions of source text regulation and hybridity were explored while the analysis led us to argue that in mediation, the source text exerts such a control over the target text, that the latter may include (source text) regulated formations i.e., formations that 'violate' the rules of usage and use in varying degrees and creative linguistic fusions (linguistic hybridizations) (Stathopoulou 2009, 2010a, 2010b). To put it differently, the study showed that mediation seems to be dependent upon a source text which regulates the target text. A very specific part of this research project compared the incidence of source text regulated formations in tasks which do not involve a Greek text (KPG writing test, Activity 1) with those which include a Greek one and can be

considered as mediation tasks (KPG writing test, Activity 2).⁴ Specifically, sixty (60) such scripts were compared with sixty (60) mediation scripts produced by the same candidates, in the same test papers (of two examination periods), as the chart below indicates. The ‘English-only’ scripts were examined in order to see whether these also contained hybrid formations and Greeklish structures violating English norms. The results indicated the degree of control that the source text exerts over the target text is higher in scripts as a result of mediation.

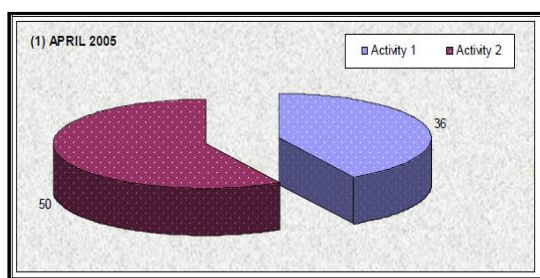


Chart 1: Number of hybrid formations in the English-cue scripts of April 2005

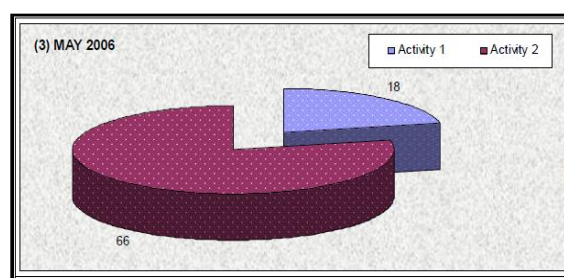


Chart 2: Number of hybrid formations in the English-cue scripts of May 2006

3.3 Research project 3

The third project which involved longitudinal research (2009-2013) aimed at demystifying the very nature of the mediation practice. It was conducted in the field of language testing and involves the assessment of translingual literacy (see also Stathopoulou 2018). Specifically, thirty-two (32) KPG written mediation tasks and 653 scripts produced by mediators of different proficiency levels over a period of six (6) years, were linguistically analysed in order to identify which mediation strategies led to successful mediation. Specifically, while the KPG *tasks* were described on a basis of genre-oriented model with predefined categories (i.e., topic, text-type, discourse environment, communicative roles etc) adopting the Hallidayan view of language as a social semiotic, the analysis of mediation *scripts* was based on an inductively developed framework of analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in order to discover the extent to which task parameters affect mediation performance and which mediation strategies differentiate successful from less successful mediation scripts and scripts of differing proficiency levels.

⁴ This is the activity in the KPG B2 level writing test which requires candidates to produce a script on the basis of cues and occasionally an opening statement in English.

The final product of the research was an *Inventory of Mediation Strategies* (IMS) which acts as a guide for effective mediation. This is one of the most valuable contributions of this project as it provides empirically based conclusions which could inform the construction of levelled descriptors (can-do statements) relevant to mediation. The Inventory which was inductively developed as already stated, identifies two types of strategies: Type A strategies require selecting and integrating the relevant information either by means of summarisation of information or of blending with inserted information, of combining information found in different parts of the text, of restructuring (or re-positioning) of source content. On the other hand, Type B mediation strategies (i.e. paraphrasing, condensing and expanding) refer to textual borrowing and syntactic transformations (also see Stathopoulou 2015, 2016a) from the source (Greek) text into the target (English) text.

The results derived from the analysis of scripts as a result of written mediation confirmed the inextricable link between mediation task demands and outcome. The study in other words attempted to demystify the nature of this sort of reading-to-write tasks not only by focusing on the tasks *per se*, but also by analysing candidates' performance (Stathopoulou 2013a, 2015, 2016a, 2019). A very interesting result which is shown through a table in Appendix 2, reinforces the claim that written mediation tasks can be considered as reading-to-write tasks. What is actually indicated is that the more difficult (in terms of syntax, organization, structuring, topic etc.) the source text is (as included in the B1, B2 or C1 level tests), the higher the use of strategies which facilitate the relaying of information from one text to another. The target text is necessarily linked to the source text as in the case of mediation strategy use (see Stathopoulou 2015 for the rest of the results).

4 Researching mediation: Pedagogical implications

The aforementioned analyses indicated that the source and the target text in written mediation activities should be viewed as the one influencing the other as happens in any other cases of reading-to-write tasks. The source text seems to regulate the target text as the target text contains instances of hybridity combining the two texts while the strategies used by the mediators are depended upon the mediation task

requirements, which also involve the creative use of the source text for a given communicative purpose.

Generally, the systematic analysis of mediation tasks and scripts through the aforementioned studies has enabled an understanding of what ultimately counts as successful mediation. The conclusions bring to light the urgent need for foreign language programmes that support linguistic diversity and promote intercultural competence in general, and mediation skills in particular. Given that the translanguistic contact situations seem to necessitate a readiness on the part of language users to engage with a repertoire of codes, “what emerges as a necessity to be stressed, is the need for multilingual approaches to language learning” (Stathopoulou 2013a: 314). Translanguaging and mediation strategies should be a crucial component of any programme which aims at highlighting the links or dynamic relationships existing between languages. The implementation of a programme favouring mediation practices within the classroom would enable learners to make sense of multilingual linguistic landscape they live in (cf. Gorter 2006). By this means, “linguistic homogenization through the spread of English” (Hambye & Richards 2012: 175) will be avoided, linguistic diversity will be promoted and polyphony (with references to languages and social voices) will be appreciated both as resource and asset (Stathopoulou 2013a, 2015).

5 Conclusions

This paper contributes to the general understanding of written mediation as a reading-to-write process. It presents research conducted in the field of language testing, research which suggests that the read-to-write construct probably needs to be extended in order to include mediation. Studies in the field of writing have mainly focused on writing that is not directly associated with reading or ignored the role that reading plays in the construction of a text (Flower et al. 1990; Hamp-Lyons & Kroll 1996; Weigle 2002, 2004). And when the focus is on written mediation tasks, which involve the selective relaying of information from one text to another, examining their nature as reading-to-write tasks contribute to a deeper understanding of the particular unexplored notion.

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Appendix 1: An example of a KPG mediation task (May 2015, B1 level task)

ACTIVITY B1.2

Using information from the text below, write an email (80 words) to your friend Dylan who is in Greece, informing him about the Cultural Park of Athens, and telling him what he can do there if he visits it.

**ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΕΣ
ΔΙΑΔΡΟΜΕΣ | 2015**



Το ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΠΑΡΚΟ βρίσκεται στα Μεσόγεια και είναι ένας καταπράσινος χώρος 25.000 τμ όπου ακμάζουν οι τέχνες, τα γράμματα και ο πολιτισμός. Δέχεται κάθε χρόνο πάνω από 150.000 επισκέπτες από την Ελλάδα και από όλον τον κόσμο! Ο επισκέπτης, κάνοντας τον

περίπατό του στο Πάρκο θα συναντήσει το Μουσείο Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας με μοναδικά εκθέματα και αναγνωρισμένο έργο. Αξίζει να σημειωθεί πως Πανεπιστήμια από την Ευρώπη, την Ασία και την Αμερική των οποίων οι φοιτητές μελετούν την Ελληνική ιστορία και λαογραφία, φροντίζουν να ταξιδέψουν στην Ελλάδα και να επισκεφτούν το Μουσείο Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας, προκειμένου να μορφώσουν ολοκληρωμένη άποψη για τον Ελληνικό πολιτισμό.

Στο πλαίσιο της Παγκόσμιας Ημέρας Περιβάλλοντος, το Μουσείο Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας τιμά και εορτάζει την ημέρα αυτή με μια σειρά από δραστηριότητες περιβαλλοντικής και οικολογικής ευαισθητοποίησης.

Καλούν μικρούς και μεγάλους την Κυριακή 5 Ιουνίου από τις 10.00 μέχρι τη δύση του ηλίου στον καταλληλότερο χώρο για τον εορτασμό του περιβάλλοντος, στο ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΠΑΡΚΟ!

Στόχοι

Ευαισθητοποίηση μικρών και μεγάλων ως προς τη φιλική, διαρκή και υγιή εκμετάλλευση των στοιχείων της φύσης: του αέρα και του νερού.

Περιήγηση στα στενά δρομάκια του Μουσείου, που είναι διαμορφωμένο σαν μικρό χωριουδάκι.

Απόλαυση ενός διαφορετικού περιπάτου σε ένα υπέροχο φυσικό περιβάλλον που θα σας επιτρέψει να έρθετε σε επαφή με τους μοναδικούς τρόπους που ο άνθρωπος μπορεί να φροντίσει το περιβάλλον του, αλλά και να ωφελήσει τον εαυτό του.

Δραστηριότητες

Καθ' όλη τη διάρκεια της ημέρας στο ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΠΑΡΚΟ θα πραγματοποιηθούν παράλληλες εκδηλώσεις με θέμα το «Περιβάλλον»:

- θεατρικές παραστάσεις
- έκθεση βιολογικών προϊόντων
- έκθεση παραδοσιακών προϊόντων
- παρουσιάσεις εναλλακτικών πηγών ενέργειας
- παρουσιάσεις βιβλίων
- έκθεση οικολογικών παιχνιδιών

Μπορείτε να επισκεφτείτε το ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΟ ΠΑΡΚΟ καθημερινά και Σαββατοκύριακα χωρίς ανάγκη προγραμματισμού, όλοι εσείς που θέλετε να κάνετε μόνοι ή με τα παιδιά σας ένα ταξίδι στη λαογραφία και τον πολιτισμό της Ελλάδας ή απλά να χαρείτε το πικνίκ σε έναν πανέμορφο χώρο μέσα στη φύση.

Appendix 2: Degree of popularity of mediation strategies in scripts across proficiency levels

Strategies	Proficiency level					
	B1		B2		C1	
	Count	% of B1 scripts	Count	% of B2 scripts	Count	% of C1 scripts
Type A	6	3.3	19	10.6	7	3.9
Type B	65	36.1	26	14.4	13	7.2
Type A and B	108	60.0	126	70.0	159	88.3
None ^a	1	0.6	9	5.0	1	0.6

Pearson Chi-square tests		Proficiency level
Strategy type	Chi-square	61,511
	df	4
	Sig.	0.000*

^a Note that the item 'none' of the strategies is included in this table. This number has not been considered in the statistical significance tests as it is very low.

* The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.