THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN THE STUDENT, THE TEXT AND THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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ВИКЛАДАЧ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ ЯК МЕДІАТОР МІЖ СТУДЕНТОМ, ТЕКСТОМ І ЦИФРОВИМ СЕРЕДОВИЩЕМ

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The rapid digitalisation of higher education is changing not only the tools used for foreign language teaching but also the professional role of the teacher. Students increasingly encounter academic and professional information through textbooks, research publications, online databases, multimedia resources, educational platforms and generative artificial intelligence. Access to a large amount of information, however, does not automatically result in understanding. Students may experience linguistic, conceptual, technological and cognitive barriers when working with foreign-language texts and digital resources. This situation makes the mediating role of the foreign language teacher particularly significant.

The concept of mediation has become an important component of contemporary language education. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume* (CEFR Companion Volume) conceptualises mediation as one of the four modes of language activity and emphasises the learner's role as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey

meaning [1, pp. 90–91]. Mediation therefore goes beyond the transmission of information or translation between languages. It involves facilitating communication, supporting learning and helping participants overcome linguistic, cultural or conceptual barriers [1, pp. 90–93]. The CEFR Companion Volume distinguishes three broad areas of mediation: mediating a text, mediating concepts and mediating communication [1, pp. 103–120].

This broader understanding of mediation creates grounds for reconsidering the role of the foreign language teacher in higher education. The teacher should not be viewed merely as a transmitter of linguistic knowledge or an intermediary who explains difficult vocabulary. Rather, the teacher can be conceptualised as a mediator who creates meaningful connections between the student, the text and the digital environment. Such an approach is consistent with the action-oriented perspective of the CEFR, in which learners are regarded as social agents who use language to perform meaningful actions in particular contexts [1, pp. 27–29].

The relevance of this approach is particularly evident in professional foreign language education. University students increasingly need to work with authentic disciplinary texts, interpret research findings, compare sources, explain professional concepts and communicate information to audiences with different levels of expertise. In such contexts, the central educational problem is not simply whether students can understand a foreign-language text, but whether they can transform, interpret, evaluate and communicate the information contained in it.

The present paper proposes a conceptual model of the foreign language teacher as a mediator based on three interconnected elements: the student, the text and the digital environment. The teacher’s role is understood as facilitating productive relationships among these elements rather than occupying a traditional position between the teacher and the learner. The proposed model incorporates five complementary functions of pedagogical mediation: linguistic, conceptual, digital, communicative, and critical-ethical mediation.

The first function is *linguistic mediation*. Academic and professional texts frequently contain specialised terminology, complex syntactic structures, compressed information and discipline-specific discourse conventions. The teacher's task is therefore not limited to translating unfamiliar words. Linguistic mediation involves helping students identify meaning from context, recognise relationships between parts of a text, reformulate complex statements and adapt information to a particular communicative purpose. These practices correspond to CEFR mediation descriptors related to processing a text, explaining information, adapting language and relaying specific information [1, pp. 94–101].

The second function is *conceptual mediation*. Understanding a professional text requires more than linguistic decoding. Students need to relate new information to existing knowledge, identify relationships between concepts, interpret evidence and reconstruct the author's argument. The teacher can facilitate this process by activating students' prior knowledge, asking interpretive questions, using visual representations and organising collaborative tasks. The CEFR Companion Volume specifically includes strategies such as linking new information to previous knowledge, explaining data and breaking down complicated information into simpler elements [1, pp. 108–111].

The third function is *digital mediation*. The contemporary foreign language classroom is embedded in a digital information environment. Students may use online dictionaries, academic databases, institutional repositories, digital corpora, educational platforms, video materials and AI-based tools. The teacher therefore has to mediate not only linguistic content but also students' interaction with digital resources.

This role is closely related to the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu), which emphasises educators' ability to select and create appropriate digital resources, use digital technologies to support teaching and learning, and foster learners' digital competence [2, pp. 16–18]. In particular, educators are expected to guide learners in finding, processing, critically evaluating and responsibly

using digital information [2, pp. 63–69]. Consequently, digital mediation should not be understood as the simple introduction of more technologies into the classroom. Its purpose is to establish a meaningful relationship between digital affordances and educational objectives.

The fourth function is *communicative mediation*. Language learning is fundamentally connected with interaction and the collaborative construction of meaning. Students can be encouraged to explain information to peers, summarise a research text for a non-specialist audience, compare alternative interpretations, negotiate meanings and jointly formulate conclusions. In such activities, the teacher gradually moves from being the main mediator to organising situations in which students themselves become mediators. This approach corresponds to the CEFR emphasis on collaborative processes, in which mediation supports communication and shared meaning-making [1, pp. 113–120].

The fifth function is *critical-ethical mediation*. The digital environment has significantly increased the amount of information available to students, but information abundance also creates new risks. Students need to distinguish reliable sources from questionable ones, recognise bias, verify claims, respect intellectual property and understand the limitations of automated systems. These requirements become especially important when generative artificial intelligence is used for language learning and academic work.

UNESCO's *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* advocates a human-centred approach to the use of generative AI and emphasises ethical, safe, equitable and meaningful implementation of these technologies [3, pp. 14–18]. The document also stresses that technology should not be regarded as a substitute for human intellectual capacity and collective educational action [3, pp. 5–6]. Consequently, the foreign language teacher's role cannot be reduced to showing students how to obtain a text from an AI system. Pedagogically meaningful mediation requires students to question AI-generated information, verify it against reliable sources, identify possible

inaccuracies, revise the output and take responsibility for the final communicative product.

The proposed model can therefore be represented as a dynamic relationship: Student ↔ Teacher-Mediator ↔Text ↔ Digital Environment. Within this structure, the teacher performs five interrelated functions: Linguistic mediation → Conceptual mediation → Digital mediation → Communicative mediation → Critical-ethical mediation.

The model is dynamic rather than linear. For example, when students analyse a scientific article, they may initially require linguistic support to understand specialised terminology. They then need conceptual assistance to identify the research problem and interpret the findings. Digital mediation may become necessary when they search for additional sources or compare the article with other publications. Communicative mediation occurs when they explain their interpretation to peers, while critical-ethical mediation becomes relevant when they assess the reliability of the evidence or use AI-generated explanations.

This approach has particular relevance for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In ESP, students work with texts that reflect the discourse practices of particular academic and professional communities. The teacher's task is consequently to help learners cross several boundaries simultaneously: between everyday and professional language, between linguistic form and disciplinary meaning, and between information and its responsible use. Mediation provides a framework for integrating these dimensions within a single educational process. Another practical application is the use of a mediation task cycle consisting of five stages: access – interpret – transform – evaluate – communicate. At the access stage, learners locate and comprehend relevant information. At the interpret stage, they identify meaning and relationships. At the transform stage, they reformulate or reorganise information for a new purpose or audience. At the evaluate stage, they assess the reliability and relevance of the

information. Finally, at the communicate stage, they present the transformed information in an appropriate form.

Such a cycle may be particularly effective in digitally supported and blended foreign language courses. It also provides a practical framework for integrating AI tools without allowing them to replace students' cognitive work. For example, an AI-generated explanation can be treated as an object of critical analysis rather than as a ready-made answer. Students can compare the generated explanation with an academic source, identify discrepancies and produce an improved version supported by evidence.

Thus, the contemporary foreign language teacher should increasingly be understood not simply as a language instructor but as a mediator of meaning, knowledge and communication. The teacher connects students with texts, digital resources and professional communities while gradually transferring responsibility for mediation to the learners themselves. In a digitally saturated educational environment, the teacher's value lies not in controlling access to information but in helping students understand, evaluate, transform and communicate it responsibly. The proposed model places mediation at the intersection of foreign language education, professional communication and digital literacy and may contribute to the development of more autonomous, critically aware and professionally competent university students.

References

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