

Review of Cross-language mediation in foreign language teaching and testing, by Maria Stathopoulou

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Cross-language mediation in foreign language teaching and testing, by Maria Stathopoulou, Bristol, Multilingual Matters, 2015, 320 pages, £99.95 (hardback), £24 (e-book) ISBN: 9781783094110

This book explores the mediation strategies deployed by learners when encountering texts written in their first language. The authors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) recognized mediation, alongside production, reception and interaction, as a key skill area. They did not, however, define formal descriptors for mediation within the CEFR. *Cross-language mediation in foreign language teaching and testing* addresses this shortcoming.

Stathopoulou's book is based on an English proficiency test, aligned with the CEFR, that targets Greek students: the National Foreign Language Exam System (Kratiko Pistopiitiko Glossomathias; KPG). The KPG, perhaps uniquely, incorporates mediation tasks of different types (although never pure translation) at all the proficiency levels at which it operates. As well as presenting useful theoretical and background information, the book analyses examples of scripts in the KPG mediation section, at the various CEFR levels at which the test is offered. The analysis is based on a learner corpus of scripts, annotated according to an Inventory of Mediation Strategies (IMS;) devised by the author.

Stathopoulou starts out by explaining the concept of cross-language mediation. She draws the distinction between mediation and translation, and makes the important point that in order to mediate successfully, it is not just skills in both languages that are called upon, but also the ability to "move between languages" (p. 4) and use "different mediation strategies" (p. 5). It is the discussion of these strategies that is the main thrust of the book.

Chapter 2 presents a useful overview of mediation in other disciplines as well as language education, while Chapter 3 describes mediation as a social practice to be seen in the context of translanguaging. Evidence is provided that translanguaging can also be effectively deployed in language education.

Chapter 4 characterizes the mediation tasks that are used in the KPG tests. Typically, the tasks involve reading a ST in Greek and creating a TT in English, based on the ST, which will elucidate the ST for a non-speaker of Greek. The TT may take the form of an email, a student newspaper report, or a variety of other text types.

Chapter 5 presents Stathopoulou's Inventory of Mediation Strategies. The IMS distinguishes between Type A strategies, which involve the manipulation of ideas by the test taker, and Type B, where test takers simply render the language of the ST into English, with the additional use of techniques such as paraphrase and expansion. Users of Type A strategies bring a greater degree of maturity and sophistication to the task (p. 97), for example interweaving their own ideas and experience with their rendering of the ST language, in a strategy that Stathopoulou terms "creative blending", (p. 94). This chapter also describes the coding scheme used to mark up the corpus of test scripts.

The relationship between different types of test task and the mediation strategies employed by students is described in Chapter 6, while Chapter 7, the core chapter of the book, presents both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the links between mediation strategy used and student proficiency level. A key finding was that test scripts at higher proficiency levels typically make greater use of Type A strategies, including creative blending.

Chapter 8 sets out conclusions and future directions. The author recommends the investigation of "naturally occurring instances of mediation" (p. 214), and the use of mediation strategies outside the testing context, as avenues for future research. Prospective readers will wish to note in this connection that Stathopoulou does not discuss negotiation of meaning between interlocutors, so there is no account of mediation practice in the classroom, for example; nor is there any analysis of spoken data. Wisely, the book confines itself to a thorough qualitative and quantitative treatment of the KPG test data, and this limitation is noted by the author.

The book ends with a stimulating "envoi" chapter, which discusses the future of mediation tasks in foreign language education. The author relates mediation to English as a lingua franca, and the "abandonment of the native speaker model" (p. 222) in language assessment. A significant role for mediation in the promotion of a multilingual society is predicted.

There are a few areas where greater clarification would have helped. For example, it is not made clear to the reader what kind of training test takers would need to have in completing mediation tasks, and how much more than literal translation was in fact expected of them. Full details are presumably available to the test raters, but whether this is made explicit to test takers is not revealed to the reader.

Question is also raised as to why the author compares strategies used by "fully satisfactory" test takers at different levels, rather than different "satisfaction" scores (say, "fully satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory") at the same level. The fact that they were undertaking different tests and different tasks could have introduced unpredictable variables into the analysis.

There are also a few referencing and formatting issues which to some extent weaken the credibility of the book. For example, Carroll & Mackie (2006) is erroneously referenced as Eileen & Mackie; several works by L. Wei are listed as if that author's surname were Li Wei, with no given name or initial. There are also places in the book where the author betrays a misunderstanding of how translational equivalence works.

It would be helpful, too, if references to appendices give the page number. Labelling is also unusual. For example, page 254 carries 3 appendices of only one graph or table each). Tables on pages 252-3 appear to have been printed upside down.

In summary, and despite the above minor misgivings, this book is a well-researched and thorough analysis of an under-discussed and highly significant language skillset. It would appeal to teachers, researchers and general readers interested in language proficiency testing, translanguaging, multilingualism and English as a lingua franca.

Reference

Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

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