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SHIFTING THE PARADIGM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HEIS TOWARDS EU RECOMMENDATIONS

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The article deals with recent amendments in CEFR and their influence on school and university education in Ukraine in terms of teaching foreign languages. The article outlines what mediation is and what the rationale of developing mediation competencies is. The authors provide examples of the situations, where mediation competencies application is vital to build mutual understanding. The article gives the understanding of the current situation in secondary education in terms of mediation competencies development. They share hands-on experience of challenges the English teachers are facing in terms of changing the focus of their lessons to mediation skills. Also the article flags up the potential threats for HEIs connected with the requirements of the State Standard for Upper-Secondary Education to summatively assess mediation competencies only at the schools with advanced language learning. And the authors provide certain recommendations for HEIs, how to develop mediation competencies of the students enrolled and what the university professors can do to shift the focus of their language lessons to mediation competencies development.

Key words: Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, HEIs, mediating a text, mediating communication, mediating concepts, mediation competencies, mediation strategies



Стаття розкриває нещодавні зміни у Загальноєвропейських рекомендаціях з мовної освіти та їхній вплив на викладання англійської мови в українських школах та університетах. У статті надано визначення медіації, подано причини, які обумовлюють важливість розвитку медіаційних компетентностей. Автори наводять приклади ситуацій, де застосування медіаційних компетентностей є важливим для взаєморозуміння співрозмовників. Стаття також надає розуміння поточної ситуації у середній освіті стосовно розвитку медіаційних компетентностей. Автори діляться практичним досвідом реальних викликів, з якими стикаються викладачі англійської мови при переорієнтації уроків на розвиток медіаційних компетентностей. Також у статті порушено питання потенційних загроз, з якими стикнуться ЗВО, через вимогу Державного Стандарту для старшої школи щодо підсумкового оцінювання набутих навичок медіації, яке має застосовуватися тільки у школах з поглибленим вивченням іноземної мови. Автори також надають певні рекомендації ЗВО щодо розвитку медіаційних компетентностей студентів, і поради викладачам університетів, як змінити фокус занять з англійської мови на розвиток медіаційних компетентностей.

Ключові слова: Загальноєвропейські рекомендації з мовної освіти, ЗВО, медіаційні компетентності, медіація комунікації, медіація концепцій, медіація тексту, стратегії медіації.

Introduction. In 2018, there were changes in the Common European Framework of References (CEFR): the concept of mediation was expanded, since that time mediation is not perceived only as a means of overcoming misunderstandings between different cultures, where the emphasis was on translating and referring the text, but as a means of "creating bridges, building and revealing meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes within two languages, where the focus falls on the role of language in the process of creating space and conditions of communication, in teaching, in cooperation to build a new meaning, in encouraging others to build or understand a new meaning, and transmitting information in an appropriate form in a social, pedagogical, cultural, linguistic or professional context." (CEFR, 2018, p. 103).

In CEFR types of mediation competencies and descriptors for each of them were added to mediation as a separate type of language activity, the following activities and strategies were outlined: "text mediation (relaying specific information, explaining data, processing text, translating a written text, note-taking, expressing a personal response to creative texts, analysis and criticism of creative texts, mediation of concepts (facilitating collaborative interaction with peers, collaborating to construct meaning, managing interaction, encouraging conceptual talk), mediating communication facilitating pluricultural space, acting as an intermediary, facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements), and mediation strategies (linking to previous knowledge, adapting language, breaking down complicated information), amplifying a dense text, streamlining a text)" (CEFR, 2018, p. 25 - 30). In 2024 the State Standard for Upper-Secondary education was accepted, where mediation competencies and the criteria for their assessment were developed (State



Standard, 2024, p. 22 – 29).

Already, teachers of English in secondary schools are being trained in the methodology of teaching mediation competences in such courses as 'ENCOURSE: English and New Competencies for Ukrainian Reformed School Education', developed by the British Council Ukraine (ENCOURSE, 2024). However, English teachers in HEIs, unfortunately, are not involved in any systematic trainings on methodology of mediation competencies development.

Main text. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the positive influence of such changes on the upper-secondary education level, to build understanding of the HEIs, how crucial mediation competencies are for the students in their future professional life, and to develop the recommendations in terms of what can be done by the university professors to introduce the focus on mediation in their classes.

Why mediation skills are so important to be focused on in the teaching and learning process? Mediation is something that helps interlocutors to avoid misunderstandings or to be on the same wavelength in terms of encoding and decoding the message. As an example of the possible challenges in translation that we might face, let's look at such notion as 'joint venture'. Which, on the one hand, has the exact equivalent in Ukrainian 'спільне підприємство' and does not need the application of descriptive translation, while, on the other hand, if to dig deeper in the legislation, the exact translation does not mean absolutely the same type of business in Ukraine and English-speaking countries. Thus, in English 'joint venture', according to Cambridge dictionary, is 'an arrangement between two or more companies to work together on a particular project' (n.d.) and Marshall Hargrave adds that 'joint venture is a business arrangement in which two or more parties agree to pool their resources to accomplish a specific task, such as launching a new project or entering a new market. Each participant is responsible for the venture's profits, losses, and costs, but the joint venture itself remains a separate entity from the participants' other business interests, allowing flexibility in choosing its legal and operational structure' (Hargrave, 2025). Thus, 'joint venture' in English means a temporary union of two or more companies in order to work on a certain project/s, after which they can split and continue their business activity as separate businesses.

However, in Ukraine the notion 'спільне підприємство' used to mean a business with joint assets, joint capital and joint management that functions on the permanent basis. Moreover, according to the Law of Ukraine 'About the Amendments to the Law of Ukraine 'About the Enterprises in Ukraine' (1998) the notion 'спільне підприємство' was eliminated from the list of the types of the enterprises in Ukraine and replaced with the notion 'господарське товариство'. Furthermore, according to the Letter of the State Committee of Ukraine for the Issues of Regulation Policy and Entrepreneurship 'About the Organizational and Legal Form of a Joint Venture' (2005) one more form of joint ventures was introduced in Ukraine: 'підприємство з іноземними інвестиціями', if the stake of a foreign company is more than 10%. Thus, translation of the notion 'joint venture' as 'спільне підприємство', without explaining such differences in legislation, will lead to certain misunderstanding between the interlocutors, what stands behind the type of the enterprise mentioned. Same types of misunderstanding might appear in professional jargon application. For instance, the



word 'bus' for an IT specialist might not mean 'a type of public transport', but rather 'an electronic pathway through which data can be transferred' (Lenovo, n.d.). And even in the well-known acronym 'USB' that we are using in the meaning of 'memory stick', the last letter B stands for the word 'bus' – 'Universal Serial Bus' (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.). In such situations, only mediation competencies will help to build the bridge to mutual understanding of the counterparties.

Another example, demonstrating the necessity of mastering mediation skills, namely, facilitating pluricultural space, can be as follows: once one British researcher, who visited our department was complaining about the email, he had got, which was closed with the words: 'Regards, Name Surname'. He was asking if he had offended that person somehow, and they responded him 'Regards', rather than 'Kind regards', 'Best regards' or just 'Best'. If we open any course book on email-writing, we might see that 'Regards' is given as one of the options, how we can close a formal or semi-formal email. However, the described situation shows, how taking into consideration this cultural aspect sometimes may be crucial for further successful communication with the foreigner. By our mentality, we are quite direct in our communication and quite often we are saving language resources (words that we consider to be not that important), because the content of the message, the purpose of our communication act is much more important for us than conventions, politeness, etc. It is a well-known fact that foreigners very often consider us as quite 'rude' people, because we always forget that politeness in English 'measures in kilometers' and do not add such words as: 'Would you be so kind to ..., please', 'Could I ask you to ...', 'If you don't mind, I'd prefer ...', etc. As a result, people, who do not know, forget or just are reluctant to use such phrases, might fail in their communication with foreigners. Furthermore, facilitating pluricultural space is not only about achieving mutual understanding between the representatives of different nations, countries, but this is also about filling the gaps in communication between different corporate cultures or even between different generations. In terms of communication between various corporate cultures the necessity of mediation competencies arises when the company is expanding to other (not only overseas) markets, mergers with another business (not only with a foreign one), hires personnel from different cultures, etc. Mediation skills are also helpful for successful communication between parents and children, between different generations at the company (baby-boomers, generations X, Y (Millennials), Z, and very soon generation Alpha will also join the list). And the gap between these generations is not only in specific jargon each generation uses, but also the way they approach the tasks, the level of responsibility, the way, how they can be motivated. Bearing in mind that the staff of any company, organization or business might consist of the representatives of 2-4 generations, they have to find out the way to successful communication and mutual understanding, and mediation competencies are a helping hand here.

Another block of mediation competencies is connected with group work, namely, leading the group work and active participation in the group discussions. It is not a rare situation in the education process that teachers or professors are giving students a group task. But do they teach the students, how to collaborate successfully in a group? Sometimes professors take it for granted that their students a priori know,



how to work in a group. Nevertheless, the reality is quite different: some students don't want to work with certain students, but prefer to work with others, some students dominate during the group discussions, others are reluctant, pretty often students don't know, how to interrupt in a polite way, or how to deal with interruptions, if they want to hold the floor. In their future professional life, if their mediation skills are not developed appropriately, they may face difficulties while working in a group on a number of projects, where they pretty often will have no choice, who to work with, and where they will need to defend their point of view, idea, plan, etc.

In terms of mediation strategies let's analyse the situations, when adapting, amplifying and streamlining the texts are crucial for successful communication. Nowadays, people quite often use AI (GPTchat, Gemini or other programmes) to do some tasks, to create a text, to generate a speech. And it is not a rare situation, when the generated text is so difficult for understanding, is full of difficult words, repeated information, complex speech patterns, etc. It is almost impossible for a person to deliver an impressive and fluent speech or presentation using this text, and for the listeners it is equally quite difficult to perceive such texts, while reading or being read out loud. The same might happen to the scientific texts, which might hardly be understood by the general public or by non-specialists in this field. And here such mediation competency as streamlining a text may help. A difficult text can be introduced as a list of bullet points, as a mind map, complex language can be replaced with the simpler one, unnecessary repetitions can be abolished, key moments can be emphasized, etc (CEFR, 2018, p. 28; ENCOURSE, 2024, p. 75). Also the text can be adapted to lower levels of language competency, e.g. from C1 to B2 - B1, technical terminology can be adapted or explained (CEFR, 2018, p.28; ENCOURSE, 2024, p. 73). Sometimes people can face a different challenge, when there is a dense text, which is difficult to understand, and here such mediation strategy as amplifying a text can help: some examples can be added to illustrate the difficult moments, the style can be changed, and paraphrasing or additional explanation can be applied (CEFR, 2018, p. 28; ENCOURSE, 2024, p. 72).

All of the above-mentioned facts justify that mediation competencies development is a timely necessity, and bearing this in mind the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has already included the requirements to mediation skills in the State Standard of Upper-Secondary school (2024). Moreover, school teachers are already undergoing the course on mediation competencies development methodology in the framework of the British Council ENCOURSE project (2024). Although it should be noted that according to the requirements of the State Standard of Upper-Secondary Education, the assessment of mediation competencies will be introduced in high school in 2027 and only in schools with advanced language learning. Consequently, there is a high probability that prospective students who will enter the universities after graduating from schools without advanced language learning, might not have or have a low level of mediation competencies. Such a situation, as well as problems with communication of the younger generation caused by long distance learning, can lead to difficulties that students may face when performing certain types of tasks that involve teamwork, in an intercultural environment (academic mobility, etc.), and they



might have difficulties with eliminating gaps in communication, which may later affect their professional activities.

It should be mentioned that during the British Council course school teachers are familiarizing themselves with the following: what mediation is, why it is crucial to develop mediation competencies, what the mediation activities and strategies are, what the descriptors for each of them are, how to develop mediation competencies, how to shift the focus of the lessons from language skills development to mediation competencies development, etc. The added value of this course is that it is highly practical: teachers are getting the input, and then they have a week or two to apply these changes in their own classroom. The feedback from their learners is positive: even the most reluctant learners were engaged during the lessons focused on mediation, later on such learners shared their feedback, where they emphasized that they felt, how real-life these competencies that had been developed were. Such favorable feedback and the engagement of the students are quite inspiring, they show that we are on the right path.

Unfortunately, university professors do not have such kind of systematic training programme on mediation. So, what can be done at HEIs? University professors can start with familiarizing themselves with mediation competencies and their descriptors in CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors (2018). The second thing that can be done is studying the British Council materials on mediation, moreover,; it should be mentioned that during the ENCOURSE Ukrainian teachers are designing TBL lessons with the focus on mediation. After their trials in the real classrooms, polishing in regard with the results of reflection and learners' feedback, and after checking of these lessons by the British Council experts, they will added to the bank of TBL lessons with the focus on mediation. Thus, professors of HEIs also may be able to familiarize themselves with the developed materials and adjust their lessons in terms of shifting the focus to the development of mediation competencies. By the way, such approach does not mean that we should develop mediation competencies at each and every lesson. The idea is in raising awareness of what mediation is, and why it is important for future professional life of the learners, and shifting the focus of certain lessons from language skills development to mediation competencies development. If such approach is applied, university graduates will become highly competitive applicants on the labour market.

Conclusion. Consequently, mediation is a necessary competence of future specialists in many areas, which should be developed in particular in universities. HEIs should not forget that according to the MoES recommendations and State Standard for Upper-Secondary Education requirements mediation competencies should be developed at the schools with advanced language learning. Thus, there is a high probability of entering the universities by the applicants with low-level or lack of mediation competencies. As a result, university professors should be ready to focus on the development of these competencies during their lessons. And, in order to prepare students for successful functioning in the professional field, it would also be advisable for in-service English teachers to study the existent materials on mediation. And for pre-service instructors it would be beneficial to undergo training in the methodology of teaching mediation competencies in order to understand how to shift the focus from



studying purely language (vocabulary and grammar, language skills (receptive and productive skills) to mastering mediation competencies. Of course, shifting the focus to mediation competencies is not about reorienting the entire educational process to the development of mediation competencies, however, it would be worthwhile to focus at least sometimes on these competencies during the lessons in HEIs.

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