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LITERATURE AS A VEHICLE FORDEVELOPING AND ASSESSING MULTIMODALCOMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND MEDIATION SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. *The Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2020) has not only enriched our understanding of the essence of communicative competence, but also underlined the key role of developing mediation skills when teaching and learning a foreign language. The main implication of this new conceptual understanding for our work as language teachers involves adopting a more functional, action-oriented approach to the teaching of the target language which goes beyond the practice of the four skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) for their own sake, zooming in on what learners can actually do with the acquired linguistic competence when they communicate in a variety of contexts, constructing and conveying meaning multimodally, through all channels of communication (verbal, visual, auditory, kinesthetic), i.e. the focus is now on the four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation.

The present article briefly outlines the essence of multimodal communicative competence and goes on to illustrate the potential of using literary texts in the language classroom to develop learners' multimodal literacy and mediation skills. A case study illustrating the rich affordance of literature as a linguodidactological resource is also presented.

Keywords: linguodidactology; multimodal communicative competence; mediation skills; action-oriented approach to language learning; teaching language through literature

Theoretical Framework

1.1. Multimodal communicative competence

Today we are witnessing a major change in the way we communicate, which has brought about a corresponding change in our understanding of literacy and the nature of communicative competence, as well as in our concept of cognition and how it happens, how we improve our communication skills (Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022; Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023). In our digital and media-obsessed age, with

the unprecedented advancement of technological innovation transforming various aspects of daily life, there is much more to literacy than knowing the language (i.e. how to understand and use language elements accurately and appropriately), and communication is increasingly multimodal in nature, not just verbal/linguistic, but incorporating and combining multiple modes of communication in addition to the linear alphabetic text: visual (e.g. still and moving images, illustrations, signs, symbols, emojis, and emoticons), aural (e.g. audio and sound representations, voice features, sound effects, music, background noise, and even silence), gestural (e.g. body language, face expression, gestures, movement), and spatial(e.g. positioning and spacing, structural organization, physical layout of a text, space between interlocutors) (Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023, p. 8). In other words, today more than ever in order to communicate effectively, to utilize linguistic competence to its full potential in successful communicative performance, people need to possess multiple literacies which go far beyond the concept of literacy as solely knowledge of language (how to comprehend and create alphabetic texts). Contemporary texts, which reflect the change in our communication practices, are themselves very often multimodal in character: meaning is constructed and conveyed through a combination of modes, such as text, audio, imagesand video. So, to understand and appreciate them fully, to be able to create meaning in a similar multifaceted way and achieve our communicative purposes in real life, we need to acquire and develop multimodal literacy (Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022, p. 38). The construct of contemporary communicative competence should "integrate the skills of viewing (the process of comprehending and responding to multimodal texts) and representing (the process of communicating information and ideas through the creation of multimodal texts) alongside listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills"(Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023, p. 5).

The good news is that young people, our foreign language learners, are already digital natives (Prensky, 2001), they "have lived their entire lives immersed in digital technologies" (McCrindle, 2016, p. 53) and they are usually quite competent in dealing with multimodal texts in their mother tongue, as well as in the other languages they know and use– i.e. they can "comprehend, respond to, and compose meaning through multimodal texts in diverse forms ... for effective communication in their private, social, academic and work lives"(Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023, p. 5) – so the journey to mastering multimodal literacy in the foreign language does not need to start from scratch. Language teachers should maximize on this learner potential and facilitate the transfer of these competences to the new language milieu by stimulating learner agency[1] and providing opportunities for the students to exercise and enhance their multimodal communicative competence in a challenging and engaging way, so that they can feel a sense of ownership and control over their own learning and become motivated not only to learn in the classroom, but develop the autonomy to carry

on with the learning process in real-life communicative settings (Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao & Mercer, 2021, p. 2).

The *Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2020) has attempted to reflect this major change in our understanding of the essence of communicative competence, zooming in on 'languaging' (*ibid*., pp. 34 – 36) or language performance, i.e. on what learners can actually do with the acquired linguistic competence when they communicate in a variety of contexts, constructing and conveying meaning multimodally, through all channels of communication (verbal, visual, auditory, kinesthetic). This conceptual shift towards the parameters of language behavior has led scholars to revise the construct of communicative competence, going beyond the definition of the four skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) as its major constituents, and focusing more on the four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, and mediation (Fig. 1).

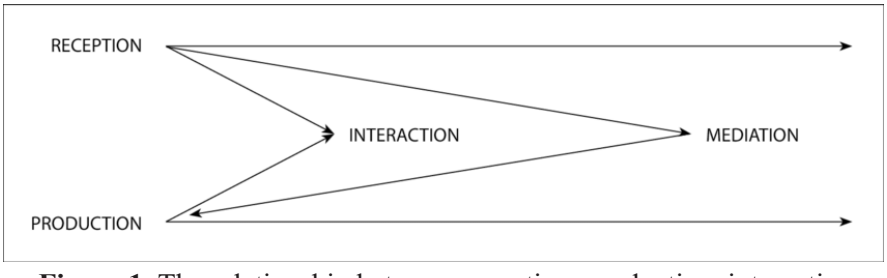


Figure 1. The relationship between reception, production, interaction, and mediation (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 34)

The traditional four skills are encompassed in the categories of *perception* and *production*, both of which could be either spoken (listening/watching and speaking) or written (reading and writing). *Interaction*, which emphasizes the social use of the language and the role of communicative context (i.e. when we directly engage in communication with others, during a conversation or discussion, or in some form of correspondence or online transaction), "involves both reception and production, but is more than the sum of those parts" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 34), as in the process of languaging we need to mobilize all our resources (cognitive, emotional, [pluri-]linguistic, and [pluri-]cultural), to capitalize on our sociolinguistic awareness and pragmatic competences and to activate various interaction strategies in order to exert our social agency and achieve our communicative goals (North, 2022a). Unlike interaction, "where new content is created in response to something that has just been heard, read or seen" (Cambridge English, 2022, p.3), *mediation* is often about modifying the same written or oral content so as to suit a different context or bridge a gap in the conversation, which was created by the specific conditions

and constraints imposed by the socio-cultural context in which the communication takes place (North, 2022a).

1.2. Mediation skills

The concept of mediation was introduced in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (*CEFR*) back in 2001, but there it was not developed to its full potential– its interpretation was only confined to what an intermediary does when the interlocutors are unable to understand each other directly, i.e. to mediating a text or mediating communication – and there were no descriptors for it. The *Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020) takes a step forward in defining mediation as a key component of communicative competence, which combines reception, production, and interaction activities to ensure the success of the communication:

"In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities(e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form" (Council of Europe, 2020, p.90).

In the *CEFR Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020), the construct of mediation is decomposed into its building blocks (mediation activities, relating to *mediating concepts*, *mediating communication,* or *mediating a text*, and mediation strategies) and validated descriptors are provided for each of the components, sc*a*led from level pre-A1 to C2,in the familiar format of *Can do* statements.

Mediating a text "involves passing on to another person the content of a text to which they do not have access, often because of linguistic, cultural, semantic or technical barriers" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91) – for instance translating a text from one language to another, but also describing verbally or interpreting graphically represented data (in the same language); notably, this skill also includes mediating a text for oneself (e.g. a student taking notes during a lecture or summarizing the contents of an article to include in a term paper) or such activities as expressing reactions to creative and literary texts or retelling a story from a different point of view (to display an understanding of a certain character for example).

Mediating concepts "refers to the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others, particularly if they may be unable to access this directly on their own. This is a fundamental aspect of parenting, mentoring, teaching and training, but also of collaborative learning and work" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91). In other words, mediating concepts presupposes thinking things through together (e.g. cultural stereotypes) and cooperating with others to effectively share ideas and create meaning together. This skill is especially needed for effective team

work when learners or colleagues work on group projects, negotiating meaning, refining the understanding of concepts through discussion and explanation, providing constructive feedback on each other's ideas, suggestions, and solutions, collaboratively planning the needed steps to achieve their communicative goals and contributing to the creation of a joint product, ensuring the contribution and equal participation of all group members.

Finally, *mediating communication* is concerned with regulating personal encounters in which the mediator "aims to facilitate understanding and shape successful communication between users/learners who may have individual, sociocultural, sociolinguistic or intellectual differences in standpoint" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91). It requires cultural sensitivity and willingness to accept and acknowledge different behaviors and ways of thinking, ability to understand disagreements between parties involved in the communication, showing respect for cultural differences and the capacity to interpret and discuss them constructively, and, last but not least, skills to negotiate mutual understanding and avoid potential conflict/misunderstanding or facilitate the reaching of an acceptable resolution. This skill is most directly linked with plurilingual and pluricultural communicative competence, for which the *CEFR Companion Volume* also provides detailed descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 123 – 128).

In order to effectively cope with the mediation activities, one needs to apply a wide range of *mediation strategies*, classified in two major categories: strategies to explain a new concept (*ibid*., pp.118 – 120) and strategies to simplify a text (*ibid*., pp. 121 – 122). The first set includes *linking the new concept to previous knowledge* (which presupposes activating prior knowledge and existing schemata in the process of its interpretation), *adapting the language in which the concept is presented* in order to understand it better (usually done by paraphrasing and explaining), and *the breaking down of complicated information* (which is related to clarifying the new concept by identifying its main points or outlining its component structure). The second set of strategies includes *amplifying a dense text*, thus enabling its understanding by paraphrasing, modifying its style and/or giving examples, and *streamlining a text*, which refers to highlighting relevant points and excluding irrelevant ones.

From the description of mediation in the *CEFR Companion Volume* it becomes clear that it involves various skills, strategies, and activities, linked to the other three modes of communicative behavior, i.e. "mediation combines reception, production and interaction" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 35). In the words of Brian North (2022a, p. 22), mediation is "the pivot of a holistic, ecological view of language use and learning", since mediation allows for creating an inviting plurilingual/pluricultural space conductive to communication and learning, reducing affective blocks and tensions, building bridges towards the new/the other and p*a*ssing on information effectively or (*co*-)constructing new meaning/knowledge. Mediation spans across languages and cultures, bringing them closer together; it sp*ans* across media and

modalities, scaffolding communication and making understanding possible regardless of the milieu; it even sp*a*ns across worlds, embracing reading as a leisure activity and provoking the critical response, emotional reaction, and the imagination of the recipient (North, 2022a, p. 21). What is more, mediation requires critical thinking and higher order cognitive skills, such as analysis, application, evaluation, and synthesis, which makes it one of the most complex and essential communicative skills.

The concept of mediation as part of communicative competence and real-life language behavior emphasizes "the two key notions of co-construction of meaning in interaction and constant movement between the individual and social level in language learning and language use", as well as the vision of the user/learner as "a social agent" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 36). In addition to cross-linguistic mediation, "it also encompasses mediation related to communication and learning, as well as social and cultural mediation. This wider approach has been taken because of its relevance in increasingly diverse classrooms, ... and because mediation is increasingly seen as a part of all learning, especially of all language learning" (*ibid*., p. 36). Thus, the description of mediation in the *CEFR Companion Volume* underlines its key position in the action-oriented approach to language learning. "The mediation descriptors are particularly relevant for the classroom in connection with small group, collaborative tasks. The tasks can be organized in such a way that learners have to share different inputs, explaining their information and working together in order to achieve a goal" (*ibid.*, p. 36).

1.3. Action-oriented approach to language learning

Enrica Piccardo and Brian North (2019) argue that an action-oriented approach to language learning is rooted in a constructivist paradigm of language acquisition where learners are involved in genuine, real-life communicative practices, i.e. they do things with the language, not just memorize and repeat things (such as vocabulary items, grammar structures, pronunciation patterns, etc.). It epitomizes "the dynamic vision of language education" (Piccardo & North, 2019). According to Brian North (2022a/b), the action-orientation to language learning presupposes engaging students in purposeful, collaborative tasks that integrate the different modes of communicative behavior (reception, production, interaction, and mediation) in the achievement of real-life communicative goals and that

(a) allow students' initiative, so that "learners can purposefully and strategically exert their agency";

(b) have a "defined mission for the learners" (i.e. they often require learners to cr*e*ate some kind of product, an art*e*fact);

(c) require co-construction of meaning through mediation in interaction with other learners;

(d) set communicative conditions and/or constraints (i.e. define the communicative context and outline the task to be performed, the challenge to be overcome or the problem to be solved); and

(e) specify 'language policy'(i.e. when to "plurilanguage", when to use one language or another) (North, 2022a, p. 11).

Thus "knowledge is constructed socially in the classroom as learners work with one another...learners from different backgrounds and experiences bringing multiple perspectives into the classroom" (Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022, p. 26) that could be capitalized on in the production stage of the integrated task, enhancing the quality of the task outcome/the produced artefacts.

Action-orientation to developing mediation skills would involve using the language (or sometimes 'plurilanguaging') in order to complete an integrated task through collaborative group work (North, 2022a/b). It presupposes the simulation of genuine, real-life communicative scenarios and requires the use of "relevant authentic materials creatively", as well as the application of various mediation strategies for successfully achieving the communicative goal (North, 2022a, p.31). Task completion would probably involve the following stages[2]:

– collaborating with team members (interaction) to mediate main concepts and make sense of the task, as well as to plan the steps to facilitate collaborative interaction with peers for completing the task;

– doing some research, which would involve reading or watching/listening to some authentic materials (reception) to make sense/mediate content for oneself (this would require the application of the *skills of viewing*, i.e. comprehending and responding to multimodal texts (Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023));

– collaborating with team members (interaction) to mediate acquired content and refine the understanding of concepts through group discussion and explanation, providing constructive feedback on other team members' ideas and suggestions and piecing together individual contributions;

– creating artefacts (e.g. a multimedia presentation/a book-review/a sketch script and dramatization, a short video, etc.), which would predominantly require production and interaction skills, or the *skills of representing* (i.e. communicating information and ideas through the creation of multimodal texts (Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023)).

When considering the potential of using literary texts in the language classroom (i.e. using fiction as an example of 'authentic material'), Victor Lim and Lydia Tan-Chia's (2022) methodological framework for multimodal learning processes might be better suited. It encompasses four stages: encountering, exploring, evaluating and expressing. *Encountering* focuses on "the emotional engagement of the learners". Teachers provide the scaffolding needed for the "encounter" of the learners with the authentic text (e.g. ask them to read a text or watch a movie based on it) and encourage them to retell it in their own words, describing their initial reaction to the content and sharing their emotional response to it. The *exploring* stage is related to "the cognitive understanding" of the text. Learners try to identify evidence from the text to support their interpretation of its content. The learning

process of exploring can be both guided by the teacher or the learners can take the initiative and navigate the text, exploring text meaning(s) amongst themselves (teachers still monitor their performance and offer constructive feedback on the learning process and/or summarize the understanding of the text with the whole class at the end). During *evaluating* the focus is on "critical perspectives": learners move from just describing and interpreting to critically analyzing and evaluating the text and the author's message, which again can be done individually or in a group. The final stage of *expressing* engages learners in "meaning-making" and is an outlet for their creativity and imagination, sparked off by the text. It allows for the production of a multimodal artefact, expressing their individual interpretation of the content and its significance (Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022, pp. 23 – 26). This model is well in tune with the action-oriented approach to language learning as advocated in the *CEFR* (Council of Europe, 2001 and 2020). "Through these processes, teachers are able to design more well-rounded multimodal learning experiences. These reflect the importance not only of thinking but also of feeling and doing in learning" (Donaghy, Karastathi & Peachey, 2023, p. 21). The same applies to "languaging", i.e. effective language behavior is the result of the synergy between the cognitive and the emotional, between competence and performance.

1.4. Teaching language through literature

Finally, some words about the benefits of using literature (literature with small 'l', going beyond the classical 'canonical' texts by renowned authors, also encompassing the works of contemporary writers from a diverse range of cultures and literary schools using English as their means of expression, even song lyrics, comics or film scripts(see McRae, 1994) in the language classroom. As it has often been pointed out (Lazar, 1993; Hall, 2005; Dimitrova-Gyuzeleva, 2019), literary texts may serve as a rich source of contextualized authentic language material for the students to improve their communicative competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic); additionally, skilled reading comprehension of a literary text requires the fine coordination of text with context in a way that goes far beyond simply chaining together the meanings of a string of decoded words. Literary texts also offer ample opportunities to learners to improve their language skills (not only reading) in an integrated way, e.g. by reacting to the content and/or the aesthetic impact of the literary text, deciphering and critically reflecting on the author's message, reviewing and evaluating, expressing their own ideas and opinions on the topic and sharing relevant personal experience, using the text as a springboard for their own productive creativity. Literary texts are also a wind*o*w to the culture of the target language through which learners develop a better understanding of "otherness" and enhance their intercultural competence, as well as their awareness of their own cultural identity. Last but not least, they are a powerful motivator for the learners to communicate on topics which interest them and/or they can relate to, involving them personally and engaging them emotionally; literary texts put

language learners in touch with the real world – a connection which the 'sanitized' content of global language coursebooks can hardly make (Gray, 2002). Literary texts, as pointed out by the adherents of the reader-response theory, are especially open to interpretation – according to them "meaning does not reside solely in the text, but it is constructed in the mind of the reader and the text functions only as a canvas onto which the reader projects whatever his or her reactions may be"[3], i.e. literary texts more than any other authentic type of text prompt learners to exert their learner agency in the process of their interpretation and critical evaluation.

Practical implications: A case study

A case study is presented below in which an action-oriented approach was applied to the completion of a multimedia project task related to the interpretation of a literary text and aiming at developing/ showcasing learners' multimodal communicative competence and mediation skills in English as a foreign language. The task itself was part of an international language competition – the first edition of the International English Language Olympics, which was held in Bucharest, Rumania in September 2023 and whose main objective was "to encourage high-school students with remarkable academic achievements in the study of English as a foreign language to further develop their linguistic and intercultural competences" by fostering their imagination and originality, as well as to assess the participants' linguistic proficiency and communicative competence, "namely their oral/written message reception and production skills, as well as intercultural communication"[4]. The team project task in question focused on holistic assessment of learners' oral production skills by inviting competitors to prepare in advance a 15-minute "digital/multimedia presentation of a scene from a novel which the team consider of particular relevance for the action of the novel"[5] (different non-adapted works of fiction were assigned for the three respective levels at which the participants competed – B1, B2 and C1). The task did not further specify what kind of digital/ multimedia project the students had to produce, nor how they should go about it, probably in order to provoke their own idiosyncratic interpretation of the task prompt and encourage their personal, creative response to the literary message; it was only emphasized in the regulations that the presentation had to be a group effort with all members of the team contributing to it. It should also be noted here that although the team project task purportedly focused on assessing the participants' oral production skills as displayed at the presentation stage of the project in front of the jury, in order to prepare their digital/multimedia presentation the students had to employ the other three modes of language behavior too, i.e. reception (during the reading of the novel), interaction (during the team discussions at the planning and production stages) and mediation (when interpreting the selected scene from the novel and transforming the written message of its author into multimodal oral performance).

The case study below presents and discusses the prize-winning performance of the Bulgarian team at level B2, which earned the team the gold medal for this category of the Olympics[6]. All the competitors at this level had to read Markus Zusak's "The Book Thief" and, working collaboratively, show their understanding of the author's message by creating a team multimedia presentation on a relatable scene from the novel. The fact that they also had a choice regarding the modalities (in addition to the linguistic one) to include in the presentation of the project further motivated the students and increased their confidence that they could cope with the challenge and be able to effectively demonstrate their communicative abilities.

The four members of the Bulgarian B2 team decided to produce a 2D animation motion graphics video based on a fragment of the story, retold by one of the characters in the book – Max Vandenburg, the Jew whom the book thief's family (i.e. Liesel's foster family) shelters in their house basement during World War II to save from persecution. This rendition of the story also involved modifying the original text of the novel by scripting the lines of the new narrator (Max Vandenburg)[7] to be used in the videoclip and audio recording his words; producing the storyboard for the film (providing visual images for the described events and characters involved) and creating the animated motion graphics; selecting an appropriate soundtrack (recognizing the fact that the accompanying music can stir up emotions, set the tone, and enhance the verbal message of the narrative);and last but not least, staging an emotionally-charged live monologue by one member of the team in the role of Max Vandenburg at an appropriate moment during the video clip, in the absence of any other sound effects (the video being paused), only the narrator standing in the spotlight on the stage, recounting his experience in the Nazi concentration camp (a passage inserted by the students themselves, which is absent from the book), which added a layer of depth and poignancy to the storytelling, enhancing the emotional resonance of the story with the live audience. An interesting artistic touch was added to the video clip which presented the animated motion graphics in the making, from sketching the scenes to choosing the most appropriate colors from the paletteto fit the overall narrative and enhance the visual impact – this artistic procedure is reminiscent of the process of speaking, where the speaker carefully chooses his words to most accurately convey what he wants to say (and words, as pointed out by the students themselves, hold a significant symbolic power in "The Book Thief": they can be manipulated to harm like when used in Nazi propaganda, but they can also offer comfort and build connections like the one between Liesel and Max). Admittedly, some basic art and graphic design skills were required, as well as technical knowledge to synchronize everything together: the audio recording, the music, the motion graphics – the students capitalized on both their linguistic competences and non-linguistics skills, and worked collaboratively[8] to produce a truly remarkable multimodal artefact[9]. Their prize-winning performance is an indicative example that modern language learners are ready for such an

action-oriented approach to language education and they welcome this type of multidimensional integrated language tasks simulating real-life 'languaging' practices in which they can showcase their linguistic proficiency, communicative competence and mediation skills to their full extent.

Here follows a more detailed analysis of the methodological framework of the multimedia project task in the light of the language learning theories discussed above. As pointed out earlier, an action-oriented approach (AoA) was adopted in the fulfillment of the task (the task completion stages are listed in the first column of the table) and the focus here is on showcasing students' multimodal communicative competences and mediation skills applied at each stage (the latter are highlighted in the second column of the table). In the words of Brian North (2022a, p. 31), such an integrated task (the multimedia project) presupposes the simulation of genuine, real-life communicative scenarios (the personal recount of past experiences is an example of such a scenario) and requires the use of "relevant authentic materials creatively" (in this case the literary text of the novel), as well as the application of various cooperative and mediation strategies for successfully achieving the communicative goal.

Table 1. Action-oriented task stages and multimodal communicative competences and mediation skills practiced during the production of the multimedia presentation

Stages of the action-oriented activity	**Modes of language behavior adopted and mediation skills practiced**[10]
AoA stage 1	
– collaborating with team members to mediate main concepts and make sense of the task, as well as to plan the steps to facilitate cooperative interaction with peers for completing the task: as the four team members did not know each other previously and lived in different places around the country, they set upa Google Chat group and organized periodic voice and video calls to ensure effective communication at the preparation stage.	[**reception**] *Can understand detailed instructions well enough to be able to follow them successfully.* [**interaction**] *Can establish a relationship with interlocutors through sympathetic questioning and expressions of agreement plus, if appropriate, comments about third parties or shared conditions.* *Can express their ideas and opinions with precision, and present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly.* *Can account for and sustain their opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments.* [**mediation**] *Can organize and manage collaborative group work efficiently.* *Can stimulate discussion on how to organize collaborative work to achieve goals.*

AoA stage 2	
– doing some research, which would involve reading or watching / listening to some authentic materials to make sense / mediate content for oneself – *encountering*: students read the literary text for gist, focusing on their initial reaction to the content and emotional response to it (this helped them choose a scene they can relate to for their multimedia presentation); – *exploring*: students focused on understanding the text in more detail and identifying evidence to support their interpretation of its content; – *evaluating*: students tried to analyze and critically evaluate the text and the author's message.	[**reception**] *Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not these relate to their own area of speciality.* *Can understand a wide variety of texts including literary writings, newspaper or magazine articles, and specialized academic or professional publications, provided there are opportunities for rereading and they have access to reference tools.* [**mediation**]*Can describe in detail their personal interpretation of a work, outlining their reactions to certain features/aspects (characters, plot, style, etc.) and explaining their significance.* *Can explain the attitude or opinion expressed in a source text on a topic, supporting inferences they make with reference to specific passages in the original.* *Can recognize the subtleties of nuanced language, rhetorical effect and stylistic language use (e.g. metaphors, abnormal syntax, ambiguity), interpreting and "unpacking" meanings and connotations.* *Can give a critical appraisal of creative/literary works of different periods and genres (e.g. novels, poems, and plays).* *Can critically evaluate the way in which structure, language, and rhetorical devices are exploited in a work for a particular purpose and give a reasoned argument concerning their appropriateness and effectiveness.*
AoA stage 3	
– collaborating with team members to mediate acquired content and refine the understanding of concepts through group discussion and explanation, providing constructive feedback on other team members' ideas and suggestions and piecing together individual contributions to construct new meaning: before creating the multimedia presentation, team members gathered together to share and discuss their individual interpretations of the literary text, to decide on the design and format of their multimodal presentation (this was when they came up with the idea of "Draw My Life Video", decided on Max Vandenburg as the new narrator and picked out moments from the book to be included in the project).	[**interaction**] *Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustained relationships with users of the target language, quite possible without imposing strain on either party. Can highlight the personal significance of events and experiences, and account for and sustain views clearly by providing relevant explanations and arguments.* [**mediation**] *Can stimulate discussion on how to organize collaborative work to achieve goals.* *Can exploit information and arguments from a complex text to discuss a topic, glossing with evaluative comments, etc.* [**production**] *Can plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipients.*

AoA stage 4	
–collaborating with team members to create artefacts (the multimedia presentation), which would predominantly require the application of the skills of *representing* and*expressing*(i.e. communicating information and ideas through the creation of multimodal texts/ artefacts): sparked off by the literary text, team members united efforts in producing the 2D animation motion graphics video based on a fragment of the story, retold by Max Vandenburg; the multimedia presentation (incl. the staged dramatization) became an outlet for their creativity and imagination in expressing their interpretation of the novel's content and its significance for them.	[**production**] *Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.* *Can describe the personal significance of events and experiences in detail.* *Can give clear, smoothly flowing, elaborate and often memorable descriptions.* [**mediation skills**] *Can convey clearly and fluently in well-structured language the significant ideas in long, complex texts, including evaluative aspects and nuances.* *Can explain inferences when links or implications are not made explicit, and point out the sociocultural implications of the form of expression (e.g. understatement, irony, sarcasm).* *Can outline a personal interpretation of a character in a work: their psychological/emotional state, the motives for their actions and the consequences of these actions.*

The task analysis above lends further evidence to the fact that such integrated tasks involving language learners in the production of multimodal texts (such as the multimedia presentation described above)prepare them for real-life communicative contexts, as in the process of completing the project students need to mobilize all their resources (cognitive, emotional, linguistic and extralinguistic), to capitalize on their sociocultural awareness and pragmatic competences and to activate various interaction and mediation strategies in order to achieve their communicative goals (cp. North, 2022a). The learning experience not only improves their language skills, increases their confidence in using the language and fosters learner agency, but also kindles their motivation and creativity in the learning process as well as contributes to the development of their cognitive abilities and critical thinking, their emotional intelligence and social skills.

Admittedly, this type of tasks might be a bit challenging to complete in the mainstream language classroom, but it is always worth providing learners with the opportunity to show their understanding of a text (literature provides a rich set of affordances for text interpretation and reader [inter-]action, as well as general language acquisition and improvement – cp. Krashen, 2023) and display their language knowledge in a way which they feel confident about (choosing their modality of expression) and through which they can convincingly showcase their strengths.

Conclusion

The CEFR Companion Volume (2020) has not only enriched our understanding of the essence of language behavior, but also highlighted the importance of developing learners' multimodal communicative competence and mediation skills when teaching a foreign language. The main implication of this new conceptual understanding for our work as language teachers involves adopting a more active approach to the teaching of the target language which goes beyond the traditional practice of the four skills for their own sake, zooming in on what learners can actually do with the acquired linguistic competence when they use the language in a variety of communicative contexts. The present paper attempted to illustrate the rich affordance of literary texts as an authentic resource in the foreign language classroom for developing and assessing learners' multimodal communicative competence and mediation skills and strategies, as well as for promoting learner agency and motivation in the process of language acquisition.

NOTES

1. "Learner agency refers to the feeling of ownership and control that learners have over their own learning", which allows them to become more confident, engaged and effective in the process of learning (Larsen-Freeman, Driver, Gao & Mercer, 2021, p. 6).
2. These stages are loosely based on Brain North's (2022a) methodological framework for mediation tasks.
3. https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100406762
4. See the Regulations of the International English Language Olympiad (I.E.L.O) 2023, https://ienglo.com/ielo2023/
5. As above.
6. See https://www.bta.bg/en/news/culture/738987-bulgaria-wins-distinctions-at-international-english-language-olympiad.
7. In the book Death is the omniscient narrator, although he asserts it is Liesel's story and follows the action through the eyes of the book thief.
8. In the credits at the end of the video clip the contribution of each of the four members of the team is acknowledged (narration/ voice-over: Kliment Mihaylov, script/ dramatization: Seyrula Lyutvi, art/ animation motion graphics: Jessica Petkova, editing/ technical support: Anton Lazarov).
9. The video clip is available at the following link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Q1vRP7y26-Oht2i5YaF-QwtFUQqHxD1t/view?usp=sharing [07/07/2025].

10. The Can do statements are taken from the descriptors of the respective language activities and strategies as outlined in the CEFR Companion Volume(2020). The list of selected descriptors does not aim at comprehensiveness, but tries to highlight some of the key aspects of the language behavior involved in completing the task.

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