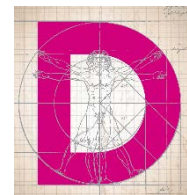


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USING MOODLE'S BRANCHING SCENARIO TOOL TO TEACH AND ASSESS LINGUISTIC MEDIATION STRATEGIES

EL USO DE *BRANCHING SCENARIOS* EN MOODLE PARA ENSEÑAR Y EVALUAR ESTRATEGIAS DE MEDIACIÓN

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Abstract

In the current global context, languages are the most direct expression of our culture, and linguistic diversity is a reality we need to protect and boost. Existing since 2001 and being officially introduced in the Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) curriculum in 2019, the concept of linguistic mediation mainly aims at boosting plurilingualism. Both teachers and students across Europe start using linguistic mediation strategies to perform different mediation activities relying on the descriptors for all levels provided by the new Companion Volume and extensive cascading formation programs. In this article, we intend to prove Moodle's branching scenario tool to address the teaching and assessing of mediation strategies to explain new concepts through synchronous and asynchronous sessions by making a contribution to the teaching and evaluation process of H5P content for C2 level in the field of adult education, more precisely in the Official School of Languages (OSL). Thus, having provided a theoretical and methodological framework supporting those mediation tasks, we will then provide a sample action-oriented scenario using Moodle's branching scenario tool to facilitate the acquisition of the mediation strategies to mediate texts, communication and concepts using an AOA and taking potential difficulties in its implementation into consideration. We will finally share observations and suggest further research.

Key Words: FLT; linguistic mediation; synchronous and asynchronous sessions; OSL

Resumen

En el contexto global actual, los idiomas son la expresión más directa de la cultura, y la diversidad lingüística es una realidad que debemos proteger y fomentar. Presente desde

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el 2001, y oficialmente en el currículo de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras (ELE) desde 2019, la mediación lingüística busca impulsar y fomentar el plurilingüismo. Tanto profesorado como alumnos empiezan a trabajar la mediación interpretando los descriptores del Companion Volume y recibiendo formación en cascada. En este artículo pretendemos demostrar la viabilidad de la plataforma virtual Moodle para enseñar y evaluar algunas de las estrategias de la mediación lingüística a través de sesiones síncronas y asíncronas, compartiendo el desarrollo y evaluación de contenido H5P en el nivel C1 en el ámbito de la formación de adultos, más concretamente en la Escuela Oficial de Idiomas (EOI). Así pues, una vez hayamos abordado el marco teórico-metodológico para situar la mediación lingüística, explicaremos cómo crear y usar contenido H5P facilitando la adquisición de distintas estrategias para mediar textos, comunicación y conceptos usando un enfoque orientado a la acción (AOA), teniendo en cuenta posibles dificultades en su evaluación. Finalmente compartiremos observaciones y posibles estudios e investigaciones futuras.

Palabras clave: ELE; mediación lingüística; sesiones síncronas y asíncronas; EOI

1. INTRODUCTION

A vast amount of research dealing with theories of language acquisition leading to the creation of the companion volumes has been provided over time. There is already an extensive group of linguists and psychologists who have analyzed linguistic mediation in the teaching and learning field and provided plenty of research and data. However, the cultural aspect present in the creation of the linguistic mediation is not to be ignored. It is bound to the concept of mediation, since culture is definitely one of the reasons, apart from language, why we might not understand a certain type of input or concept. The growing transit of people and goods and the enriching yet chaotic melting pot of cultures brought by globalization has considerably boosted the learning of foreign languages. Having as standards the ones initiated by the European Cultural Convention¹ in 1954, linguistic mediation is understood as an interactive process by which people who speak different languages manage to communicate, or when someone does not understand any new concepts or ideas:

... 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 [spoken or written] source text to which this third party does not have direct access (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 4)

By the same token, picture for instance the situation where you are trying to set a schedule in your new Roomba vacuum cleaning robot and you really struggle at a first reading and feel the need to pause and try to carefully think of every order given and understand each part and setting buttons. There is also a process of decoding and digesting the information before acting in which we mediate for ourselves. However, it is also important to consider mediation for ourselves as well, since the concept of linguistic mediation is often restricted to a third party, and this is understood as a different speaker: part serves as a bridge and intermediary given any mediation activity (Trovato, 2019).

2. LINGUISTIC MEDIATION IN THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES (CEFR)

2.1. General overview

Nowadays, the CEFR plays a crucial role in foreign language (FL) teaching since it facilitates transparency and coherence between curriculum, teaching and assessment between institutions, educational sectors, regions, and countries. The emphasis the CEFR

¹ Adopted on 1954 in Paris, The European Cultural Convention mainly aims at developing and boosting both mutual understanding and cultural diversity among the peoples of Europe, to safeguard European culture, encouraging in particular the study of languages (Paris, 1954).

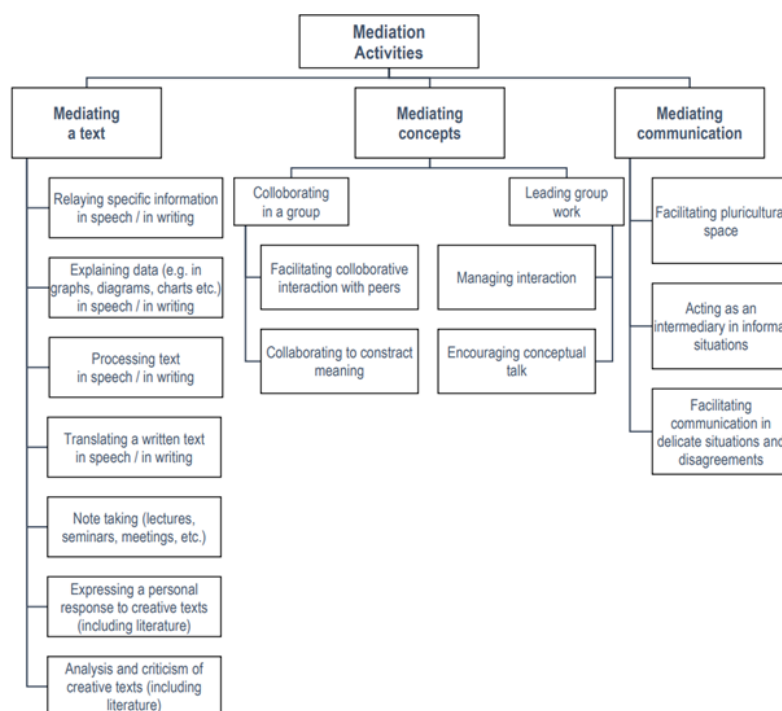
has put on the co-construction of meaning to accomplish a real-life task and its vision of learners as social agents has positively influenced FL (Piccardo & North, 2019).

It was in the CEFR 2001 when the Council of Europe first presented linguistic mediation as the fourth communicative ability together with interaction. According to the information provided by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe Languages (ECML) web page,² *mediation* was originally conceived as “an activity in which the user/learner creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation)” (2023, n.p.). With this same goal, the CEFR 2018 incorporates the can-do descriptors to connect the syllabus to the real world’s needs, devoting an illustrative set of descriptors for mediating activities and for mediation strategies.

In the CEFR 2020, “the approach taken to mediation is broader than that presented in the CEFR 2001”. It mainly consists of updates and adaptations, and “it replaces the scales in the 2001 version” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 24). The most relevant updates concerning linguistic mediation were the scales for mediating communication and concepts; it was not just mediating only texts anymore, as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Mediation activities (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90)

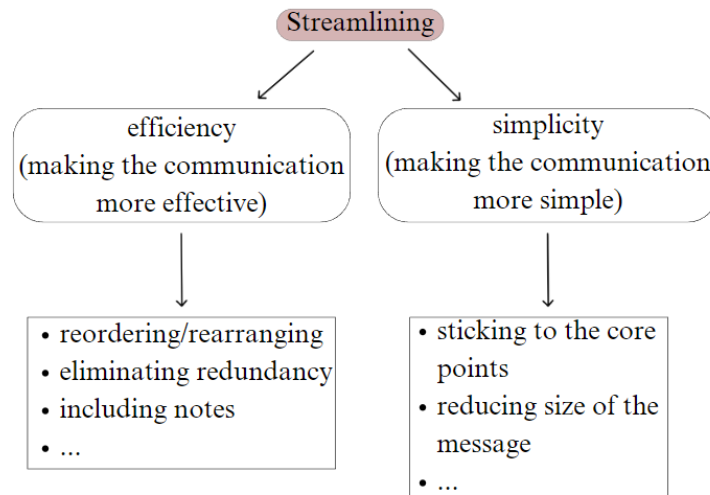


² For more details, visit ECML > Programme 2020-2023: Inspiring Innovation in Language Education: Changing Contexts, Evolving Competences > Mediation in the Council of Europe: <https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2020-2023/Mediationinteachingandassessment/MediationintheCouncilofEurope/tabid/5534/language/en-GB/Default.aspx> [last accessed: 19 August 2023].

To agree on the scales and define the descriptors appearing in figure 1, numerous piloted projects were conducted to calibrate and finally put them into operationalization. One thing that helped at the beginning, according to Dr. Enrica Piccardo, was to create a mindmap with all the aspects related to mediation: textuality, the idea of communication in the communication flow, in the digital media modality, etc. The idea was basically to make language more accessible to others by using strategies to support the already existing competences. Figure 2 is an adaptation of part of the mindmap Dr. Piccardo shows in 2021's PlurilingualLab online conference:

Figure 2

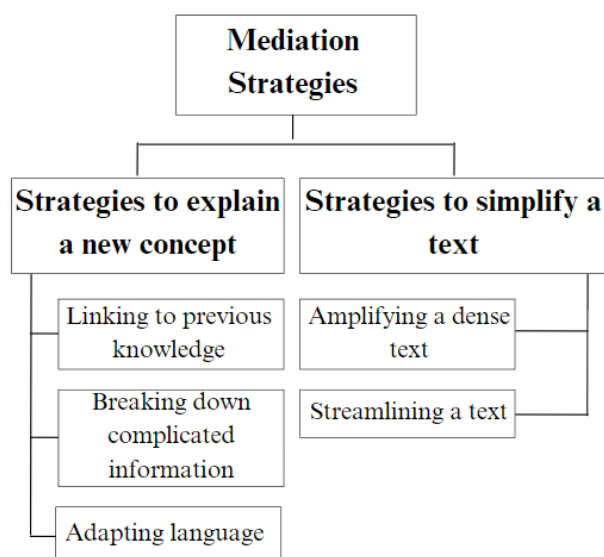
Adaptation of mediation strategies in Dr. Piccardo's Mediation project map (Piccardo, 2021)



Already from here, we could see a real attempt to balance all aspects and build a clear conceptual model that would finally turn into the descriptors scales for mediation strategies we now have in the CEFR (2020). They include five scales concerning strategies ‘employed during the mediation process, rather than in preparation for it’, as summarized in Figure 3:

Figure 3

Mediation strategies (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90)

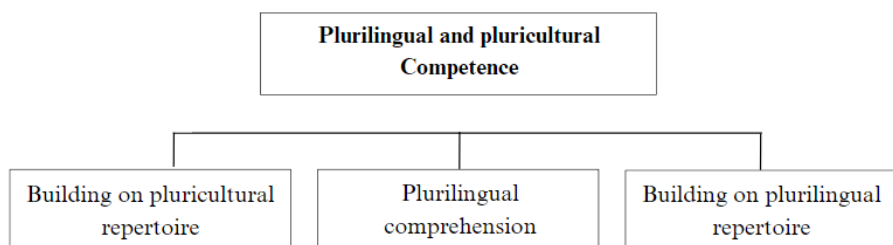


Together with the same aim of promoting pluriculturalism and plurilingualism, there was also a process of reconsidering the notion of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, which aligns not only with the main objective of mediation but also makes mediation possible and feasible, and there actually needs to be a synergy between them.

Briefly explained in Figure 4, the CEFR (2020) adds the following new scales for pluricultural and plurilingual competence:

Figure 4

Chart with new scales for pluricultural and plurilingual competence (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 123)



Worth mentioning is the shift of focus to skills rather than knowledge in this update. For example, the first scale building on pluricultural repertoire, closely connected to the scale of sociolinguistic appropriateness we have since the CEFR (2001), describes how learners use their pluricultural repertoire in a given communicative situation.

2.2. The case of the OSL

The situation of the OSL is a complex one considering the fact that local governments have had the freedom to take different approaches to their structure and organization. Considering this fact, it is worth looking at the CEFR's implementation in the OSL curriculum, and most specifically, the practical implementation of linguistic mediation.

As we explained in section 2.1, it was in 2001 CEFR when the Council of Europe first mentioned linguistic mediation as the fourth communicative language skill, but it was not until the publication of the Royal Decree 2019 that it was finally official in terms of assessment at the OSLs. Nonetheless, the OSLs adopted the CEFR 2001's vision of linguistic mediation in terms of oral and written mediation, and until nowadays, only mediating texts are assessed in certification examinations. This limitation could be solved if the OSL curriculum updated the vision and rubrics they have for mediation, and thought of mediation activities and strategies.

Creativity, openness and mutual understanding are key to mediating communication and are reciprocal, in other words, solving conflicts. It involves an effort of translation from one's own perspective to the other, keeping both perspectives in mind (Enrica Piccardo, 2019). Despite being key in speakers' development of linguistic mediation skills, this mediation activity is not understood as such by the OSL, which sees mediating communication as part of mediating texts and presents mediating activities as something individually done, with no interaction, in their assessments. Thus, reciprocal comprehension is limited to a desperate effort of the candidate to effectively adapt the message, hoping to be understood by the listener.

This has negatively influenced students' learning and understanding of linguistic mediation, since the tasks presented are limiting students' potential mediation strategies and do not allow them to perform everything the assessment rubrics required.

3. LINGUISTIC MEDIATION IN THE CEFR: METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

In parallel with the needs of globalization, the CEFR first suggests the Action-Oriented Approach (AoA) in 2018, where the learners are 'social agents' and responsible for their own learning:

The CEFR's action-oriented approach represents a shift away from syllabuses based on a linear progression through language structures, or a predetermined set of notions and functions, towards syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 26).

The key innovation of AoA is skill integration, making it possible to work on communication when training each of the skills. In real life we use different skills to communicate or just combine them all to interact with others and mediate communication

in general. In this new vision of language, the adding of new communicative situations and tasks opens the way to performing new speech acts and thus leading language learners to proficiency in the language. Besides, this new approach added a fifth dimension to speaking, involving both linguistic and social activity, two indivisible components. Thus, what this approach suggests is that we must work on the linguistic part supported by social activity by creating meaningful learning and seeing learners as social agents, who develop social skills inside the classroom.

Whereas in the CLT Krashen, S. & Terrel (1988) talk about learning being an individual process, with the AoA, students complete the task as a group, not only making communication more effective, but also task completion more meaningful. As North and Piccardo explain, the AoA is more like a comprehensive philosophy that relates curriculum planning, teaching and assessment in a coherent way that has inspired practices influenced by context-related factors, and the CEFR is therefore proving that updated methodologies are not to be totally discarded, they can always be revisited and replaced (Piccardo & North, 2019). By presenting its view of language use and learning as action-oriented, the CEFR provides the perfect scenario where individuals are actually related to the social context, suggesting real-life situations with their implications and inputs.

All in all, it is worth mentioning that the AoA, contrary to other second/foreign language methodologies, has shaped itself through practice rather than being first theorized and then applied. The entire point of the AoA is to equip users/learners for real life language use, and part of that process must involve experience of tasks as authentic as possible. Having analyzed the main tenets of the AoA, we present now the action-oriented scenarios we will use to contextualize mediation strategies within tasks.

3.1. Towards action-oriented scenarios

Considering the notions of competence and language as socialization, it is necessary to bear in mind how the paradigm shift has affected this generation's notion of competence. Despite the fact that the methodology the CEFR suggests in the AoA, which encourages learners to mobilize not only their linguistic repertoire but different sociocultural competences, this generation of learners feels more comfortable with the old notion of competence in the language, which was mainly memorizing a linguistic repertoire and using it, not connected to real-life scenarios.

To cover the former and many other potential difficulties and weaknesses in the practical implementation of linguistic mediation in centres, the Council of Europe, in the LINDICRE project, among many others to help implement the CEFR, offers templates of action-oriented scenarios. We will adapt one of those models to elaborate the scenario in which we will show how to teach linguistic mediation strategies using H5P content. These scenarios aim at helping teachers organize their teaching and calibrate the scales of descriptors for mediation strategies and activities to make them seem less dense and overwhelming to put together in a descriptor-balanced way.

3.2. Planning the action-oriented scenario

We will offer first the planning and structure of the activity provided within a table following the LINDICRE project model explained in the previous section. This one offers a brief overview of the scenario together with different sections for the different language competences, mediation activities and strategies.

Table 1

Action-oriented scenario

Title: I can't get no sleep

Overview: a friend of yours is suffering from somniloquy and asks you for advice to soften the symptoms. You have read somewhere that being a bilingual, the chances of suffering from sleepwalking are higher, and he actually is. You recently came across an Instagram reel video explaining this sleeping disorder by listing symptoms and causes, debunking myths about it and offering various ways to limit or even eliminate the episodes. Talk to your friend and calm him down by explaining the concept of somniloquy using the information you recently found out.

Target learners: adults

Languages:

- main target language: English
 - other language(s) involved: various, depending on the input's technical vocabulary and students plurilingual repertoires (Spanish mainly)
-

CEFR level: C2

Domain: personal

Plurilingual and Pluricultural competence

- Building on plurilingual repertoire: can interact in conversation with friends on sleep disorders by alternating flexibly between English and Spanish/any other languages they speak and if necessary explaining the different contributions made.
-

Communicative language competences expressed through Can Do statements (HOW):

- Linguistic competence:
Phonological control: can employ the full range of phonological features in English with a high level of control- including prosodic features such as word and sentence stress, rhythm and intonation- so that the finer points of their message are clear and precise.
 - Sociolinguistic competence:
-

Sociolinguistic appropriateness: can effectively employ a wide variety of sophisticated language to command, argue, persuade, dissuade, negotiate and counsel.

Mediation activities expressed through CAN Do statements (What):

Mediating a text: explaining data in speech

- Can interpret and describe clearly and reliably recorded lecture on somniloquy.
-

Mediation strategies expressed through Can Do statements (HOW):

To explain a new concept:

- Linking to previous knowledge: can introduce somniloquy by providing extended definitions and explanations that draw on previous knowledge on different sleep disorders.
 - Adapting language: can adapt medical jargon in order to present the different symptoms and causes of somniloquy in an informal register.
-

Moodle resources and activities

- H5P branching tool:
 1. Video: to contextualize the scenario at any time for more visual learners.
 2. Text: to present the task, provide feedback and guide the student throughout the scenario.
 3. Image: support meaning.
 4. Discarding statements: help students select the most effective definitions.
 5. Single choice question: help students activate listener's prior knowledge.
-

Note. The Illustrative Descriptors for C2 level of Proficiency have been used to elaborate this scenario.

4. H5P BRANCHING SCENARIO TOOL: A PRACTICAL PROPOSAL

HP5³ is a plugin that can be embedded to create interactive content like interactive books, games, and quizzes on Moodle and has varied and useful functions. All content types are easy combinable, that is to say, it can be easily combined and mixed to create tailored practice for students. For example, the interactive book or the branching scenario allow users to work on other H5P content types. In terms of scoring and tracking, all H5P content allows users to edit the scoring options, including type and timing⁴. Translations options and help sections are also provided, with illustrative animations if needed.

³ To get more information on how to install the plug in or create content go to [H5P](#).

⁴ Problems concerning scoring in branching scenarios have been reported, given this case, please visit [H5P](#).

Finally, the metadata sections will allow users to add licensing information about each specific activity, together with a comment section for students.

Launched in 2019 and no longer a beta version, the branching scenario tool seems to be tailored to linguistic mediation practice. Users can create dilemmas, self-paced learning scenarios and other types of adaptive learning, having the freedom to add a video or use a combination of other H5P content. All this is undoubtedly, a game-changing tool for both teachers and learners.

4.1. Replicating the scenario with the branching tool

Editing this tool might seem tedious requiring users to act out and create their own videos, but it actually has a very intuitive user interface. Whereas in the interactive book⁵ users have the chance to add all H5P types, with the branching tool users can add up to 6 different types - course presentation, text, image, image hotspots, interactive and standard videos. As in the interactive book, users can also count on old activities in their H5P question bank for creating new ones by clicking in the left-sided option reuse content. Users have multiple tutorials on the internet for further help.

In our task about explaining this new concept, we reproduce a sample conversation where students need to use different mediation strategies by navigating through different short activities.

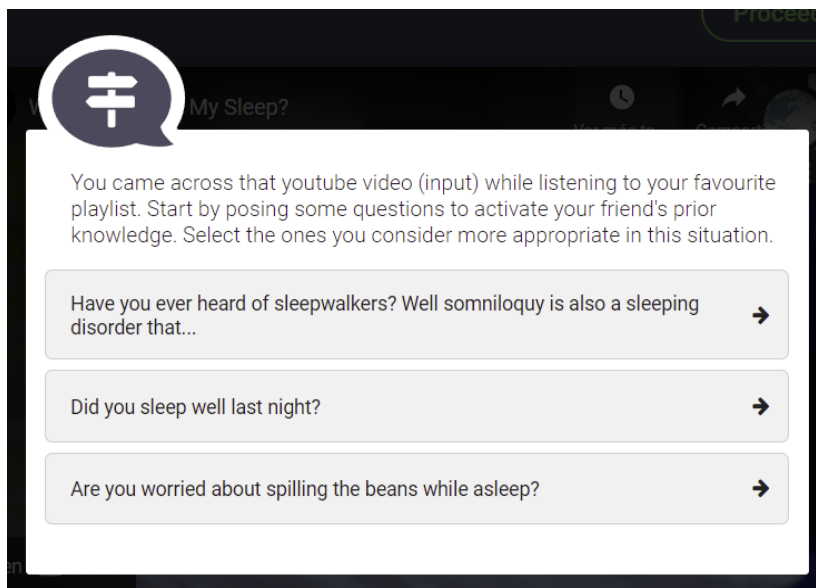
4.1.1. Linking to previous knowledge

In this scenario, students need to make sure they find the way to explain this sleep disorder to someone who has not even heard of it before, so we start by showing students concrete examples to link to previous knowledge. Figure 5 shows our first branching question for students to choose the one they think can activate the listener's prior knowledge on the topic. Of course, more than one option is correct.

⁵ The H5P interactive book is a free content type that allows users to put together large amounts of interactive content like interactive videos, questions, course presentations and more on multiple pages.

Figure 5

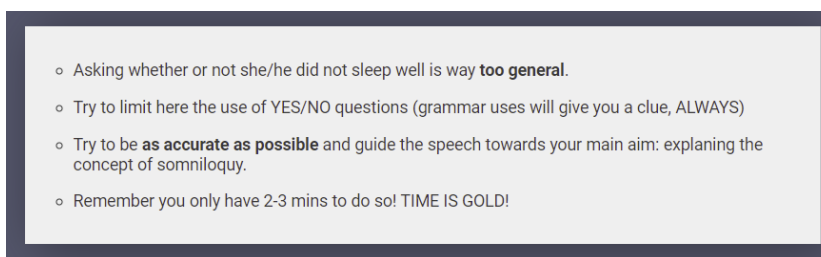
Branching question with examples to link to activate prior knowledge



The feedback they get will let them know why some of them were not really tapping into the listener's memory, and it can be added as text:

Figure 6

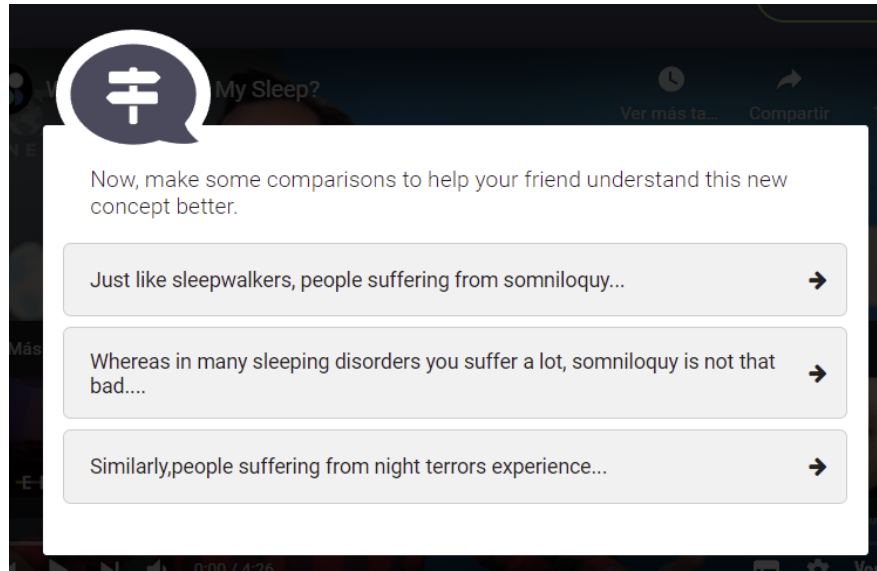
Text providing feedback to first branching question



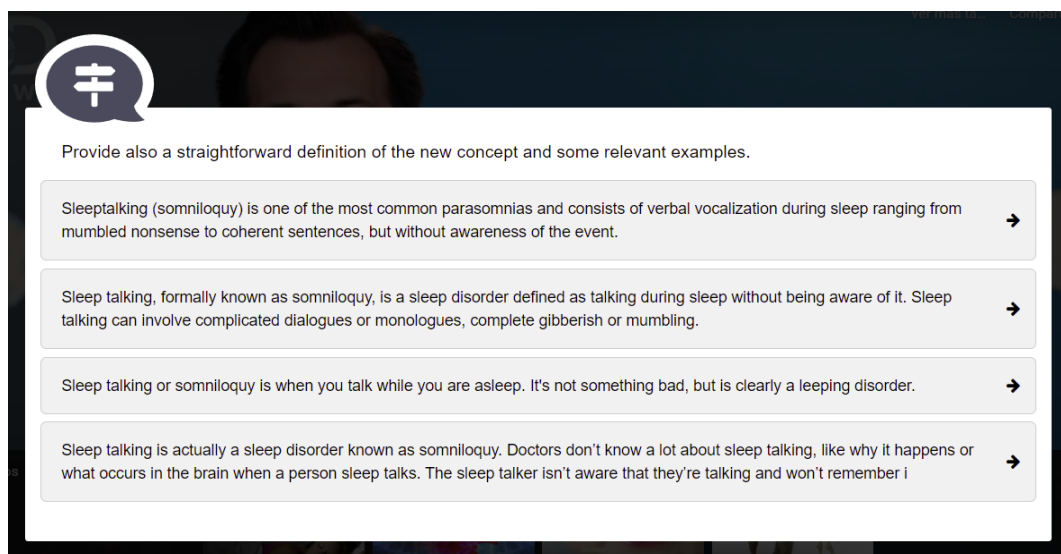
With the branching scenarios tool, students get constant feedback and their answers are also validated when they are allowed to move through the activity without being interrupted. According to our experience, this has proven to be a more relaxed way to correct students and avoid the group pressure of in-face learning. Students can also obtain different types of feedback – with clear text, more branching questions, videos, links, visual aids including mindmaps for example...- catering for a wider range of different types of learners. If they select correct answers, they are redireceted to the feedback and then to our next braching question (Figure 7) to teach students another way of linking to previous knowledge: making comparisons, for example, using a single choice question:

Figure 7

Comparisons including useful connectors and phrases



Here, any option they select will take them to feedback text providing a link on how to compare and contrast effectively. Feedback should not be restricted to wrong answers, but aimed at expanding and leveling up their skills whether they are right or wrong. The way they will know whether their choice was right or wrong is by providing a specific feedback to every alternative added in the branching questions. This is exemplified in figure 8, showing the feedback to our next branching questions where we train one more way to link to previous knowledge: providing straightforward definitions and effective examples:

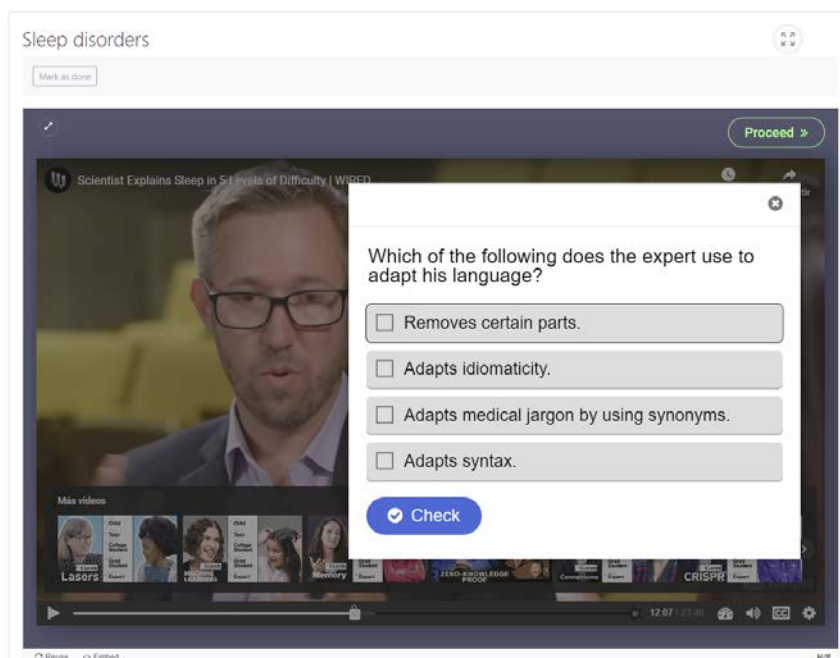
Figure 8*Providing definitions and examples*

Once they have worked on how to activate prior knowledge by posing the right questions, we move into adapting language by adding an interactive video this time.

4.1.2. Adapting language

Here we need to make sure students adapt medical jargon used in order to present the different symptoms and causes of somnolquy in an informal register. We decided to use an interactive video this time within our branching scenario. With the interactive video we can add a wide range of questions to make students interact with it: true/false questions, navigation hotspots, fill in the blanks, links, etc.

The video selected is one in which a scientist explains sleep in 5 levels of difficulty: to a child first, then a teen, level 3 is a college student, then graduate student, and finally expert. We decided to choose this one to give them examples of adapting language to levels of both more and less accurate/technical. The idea was to show, not to give them the language for the task adapted, so that is why the video is about sleep and not about sleep disorders, so we give them the tools. We then use a multiple choice question to ask about the aspects of language that are adapted according to the different explanations of sleep, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9*Interactive video displaying multiple-choice question*

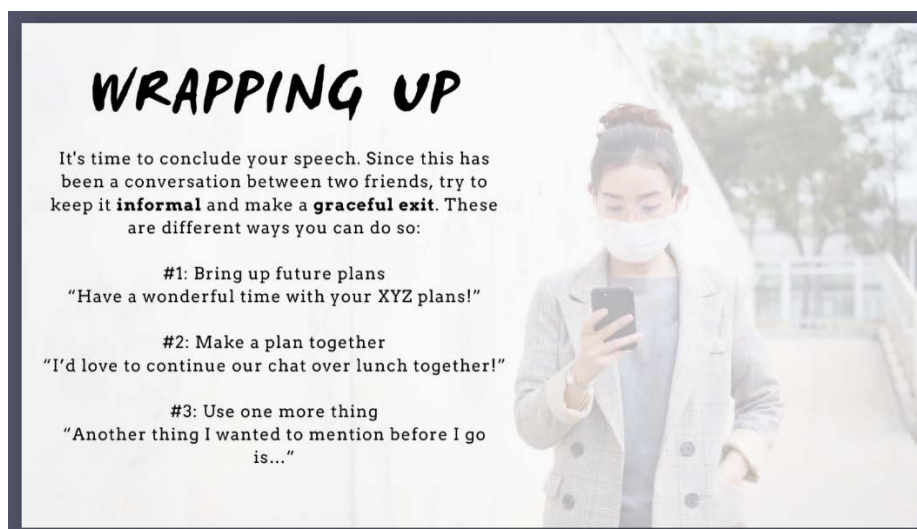
It is important to respect the accuracy of the illustrative descriptors planned for the scenario, since in our way to create the questions and adapt to the digital format sometimes we tend to simplify the descriptor.

4.1.3. Breaking down complicated information

As stated in the target descriptors in our scenario, students need to facilitate the understanding of a complex issue by explaining the relationships of parts to the whole and encourage different ways of approaching it. Thus, we now work on different ways to wrap up a conversation. This time, instead of asking the student to perform first, we will first present and help them with some tips about different ways they can let the other person know the conversation is about to end.

Figure 10

Image showing tips to finish the conversation



This branching scenario, together with all H5P content, can also be used in synchronous sessions by sharing the screen and reaching an agreement as a group or in more reduced groups to debate the answers and provide peer feedback, which involves students in the process.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has provided an insight into the way of teaching and assessing linguistic mediation using H5P content in Moodle, especially in the education of adults, specific to the context of the OSL in the Canary Islands and for the C level of English. By means of a contextualization of linguistic mediation and the AoA as suggested methodology by the CEFR, we have an approximate idea of the actual linguistic mediation strategies that are being assessed in certification examinations.

To analyze whether Moodle H5P content allows us to work on the different strategies, an example of a branching scenario activity is shared to teach how to explain new concepts. Observations made and the type of Moodle content shared in this study allow us to use the methodology proposed by the CEFR and enough room for creativity and flexibility, which is highly effective for addressing different students' profiles, and therefore engage them into linguistic mediation activities and strategies.

Future studies could fruitfully explore this issue further by working with different students' profiles and different official institutions where ESL is taught.

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