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Book review

Cross-Language Mediation in Foreign Language Teaching and Testing.

Maria Stathopoulou (2015). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Stathopoulou's book *Cross-Language Mediation in Foreign Language Teaching and Testing* aspires to delve into an underexplored area, namely, crosslanguage mediation, within the context of multilingual and bilingual education. More specifically, it attempts to investigate the strategies that effective mediators use in their struggle to transfer information from one language to another.

Apart from defining mediation and exploring its application in written discourse, this book attempts to identify whether international language testing institutions which prioritise monolingual testing can adopt the practice of assessing the candidates' cross-language ability. Although the notion of mediation was embraced in CEFR (2001), no guiding descriptors were developed. The first testing body to adopt mediation activities was the Greek national foreign language examinations (Kratiko Pistopoitiko Glossomathias, KPG) rendering, thus, necessary the design of relevant leveled descriptors through thorough research.

In the introduction, Stathopoulou starts by highlighting that the mingling of languages in the contemporary multilingual society has attracted foreign language (FL) theorists' interest in the terms translanguaging, polylinguaging, crosslinguaging, code-switching and code-mixing (p.1). She describes the focus of the book i.e. cross-language or interlingual mediation through which mediators are required to "bridge communication gaps between speakers of different languages" (p.1). Stathopoulou acknowledges two dimensions in interlingual mediation: the interaction between languages and the communicative process whereby the mediator selects information from a written text in one language in an attempt to relay it in another language by means of the target text. This information transference entails transformation in the new context or "recontextualisation" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 51) which requires specific strategies. Recontextualisation differentiates mediation from translation, in that certain parts of the text and source meanings (rather than the whole text itself) are transformed (p. 3). Referring to Dendrinos (2006) she claims that a mediator acts as a link between languages and cultures (p. 4). She does not expect the mediator "to be totally fluent" in the two languages and corroborates that the mediator creates texts comprising components from "two texts and two languages" (p. 4). Moreover, she supports that a competent mediator capitalises on both linguistic and cultural resources (p. 4).

Stathopoulou's research was conducted within the framework of her doctoral thesis (p. 13 footnote 4) drawing information from the KPG exams. The KPG was put in effect in 2003

following the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) specifications. It includes exams in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Turkish and the test papers are designed by experts of the University of Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education. The KPG includes four components which test candidates' performance in 1) reading comprehension and language awareness, 2) writing production and written mediation, 3) listening comprehension and 4) speaking production and oral mediation. According to Dendrinos (2009), the theoretical foundation of this exam battery is systemic functional linguistics, whereby language is considered as a means for decoding meaning (Halliday, 1975) as well as a system for meaning potential (Halliday, 1985). In the KPG framework, language exists in context rather than a vacuum and, thus, it must be taught and tested accordingly (p. 10, 11). More specifically, Stathopoulou investigated two parts of the KPG exams, namely, writing mediation tasks, which are in accordance with the guidelines of the European Commission to boost multilingualism.

In an attempt to describe the mediation process, Stathopoulou claims that mediation comprises two dimensions, namely translanguaging from one language to the other and employment of strategies appropriate to the specific context. (p. 4). These strategies may entail combining information from various sources i.e. the mediator's prior knowledge of a topic or the original text, summarizing and synthesizing to mention but a few (p. 5). Stathopoulou (p. 5) regards selection of appropriate linguistic data as a prerequisite for successful mediation. This selection is affected by the social milieu and the "interpersonal relationships involved while mediating". An important issue raised by the author is the fact that rather than being compartmentalised, the two languages and cultures are interwoven (p. 6). A competent mediator takes into account the context of mediation, that is who mediates, for what reason, what the appropriate register is and the type of both the original and the target text. It is worth mentioning that the mediator may have to produce a hybrid text in order to create a successful translanguaged piece of writing (p. 6).

The author used data retrieved from two sources: the database of the past papers of KPG and the KPG English corpus which includes the candidates' written scripts. The KPG written mediation component requires candidates to extract information from a Greek text and transfer it in English, taking into account contextual requirements (p. 7). The first stage of the research focused on task analysis and descriptions of linguistic categories with a view to identifying variations in text features produced by candidates of different proficiency levels (p. 7, 8). This analysis resulted in the creation of relevant descriptors that can inform teaching and testing (p. 8). In the second stage, the candidates' texts were investigated with the aim of determining the employed strategies. The author stresses that her main preoccupation was the linguistic and social dimensions of the scripts. The focal point of this phase was the exploration of strategy use which resulted in the formulation of an inventory of mediation strategies (IMS) which is deemed a major contribution by the author (p. 8) as no leveled descriptors are included in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). This IMS contributed to the identification of the applied strategies at different learners' proficiency levels and the relationship of strategy use to task requirements. The quantitative analysis of the data yielded numerical results concerning strategies but it could not account for the variations traced among different levels. In this sense, qualitative analysis was also employed to justify the differentiation of strategic use "as the level increases" (p. 9). Stathopoulou states (p. 9, 10) that the purpose of her research was not only to produce an original piece of work in the underexplored areas of translanguaging practices but also offer practical and pedagogical implications as follows: 1) it could provide specific benchmarks for the complementation of the CEFR, 2) it could serve as a guide for curriculum, syllabus and materials designers 3) it could be useful for teachers as regards the selection of medi-

ation tasks and strategies to be used in classroom and 4) finally, other theorists, such as sociolinguistics or critical discourse analysts may exploit it for their “own research purposes” (p. 10).

In chapter two, Stathopoulou traces the origin of the term mediation in the ancient civilisations of Phoenicia, Babylon, Greece and Rome (p.15). According to Dendrinos (2006, pp. 11-12) mediation served as a means of diplomacy in the Mediterranean nations. The author, then, presents an interdisciplinary overview of mediation discussing the use of the term mediation in various disciplines, namely resolution studies and international affairs, communication studies and technology, philosophy, society and education, translation studies and foreign language education. Discussing the relationship between mediation and translation, she maintains that in the existing literature (Hatim & Mason, 1990; Federici, 2007) mediation and translation seem to be used interchangeably with mediation being viewed as a determinant prerequisite for successful translation which involves both linguistic and cultural negotiation (pp. 25- 27). Mediation gained momentum in foreign language education as it was embraced in the CEFR (2001). Moreover, it has prevailed in Greek FLT since the early 1980's (Dendrinos, 1988, 1997, 2000, 2003) and it was incorporated in the Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (IFLC- 2011) (pp. 28, 29). Important as mediation may be in the CEFR (2001), it is considered as synonymous to translation. This attitude runs contrary to Stathopoulou's opinion who considers mediation and translation dissimilar. In an attempt to raise the differences between mediation and translation, Stathopoulou, echoing Dendrinos' position (2014, p.152) that “mediators bring into the end product their own voice”, states that the mediator selects only those pieces of information from the source text that serve the communicative purpose determined by the task. She concedes, however, that translators are allowed to make some cultural adaptation to the sentence level (p. 32). On the contrary, the mediator may use the source text as the springboard to produce a piece of writing with different discourse and register and of diverse genre depending on the communicative goal set by the context (p. 33). Going a step further, Stathopoulou (p. 34) labels mediation as both interlingual and intralingual, providing the intervention of a doctor who interprets the results of a test to his patient as an example of mediation within the same language.

Chapter 3 theorises mediation, by stating that it is a social practice meant to repair a communication gap (Dendrinos, 2006). More specifically, she corroborates that the population mobility in recent years has rendered languages and cultures hybrid (Canagarajah & Said, 2010) and resulted in the emergence of multilingual societies, whereby the need for mediation arose (p. 39) (Shohamy, 2006a, p. 13).

Stathopoulou, then, defines translanguaging as a process of relaying information through languages based on the communicative environment. Her attitude is in alignment with Garcia et al. (2011) (p. 40) who define translanguaging as a hybrid language practice maximizing the communicative aspect. Rooted in bilingual theories (Garcia & Kano, 2014, p.260), translanguaging has expanded to multilingual environments (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401; Wei, 2011, p. 1222) (p.40). Discussing translanguaging in the classroom, Lewis et al., 2012, p. 655) (p.45) claim that it enables students to exploit all linguistic resources to optimize communication. Consequently, it contributes to the enhancement of the learners' cognitive, linguistic and literacy capacity (Garcia et al. 2011, p. 8) (p.46) as well as their metalinguistic ability and metacognitive awareness (Garcia, 2009a, p. 153) (p. 46).

After providing this brief history of translanguaging, Stathopoulou claims that mediation is a way of translanguaging, as it entails interplay between languages (Stathopoulou, 2013). In

order to elaborate more on this issue, she attempts to put forward that mediation constitutes a form of translanguaging, as it involves language alternation and its theoretical foundation lies on the tenet that, rather than being separate entities, languages and cultures are interrelated semiotic systems (p. 47). By considering mediation as a form of translanguaging, the emphasis is shifted to the use, the user, the process as well as the purpose and context of the communication (p. 49). This view is in line with the Hallidayan attitude of language and reflects the view of the author of the book, implying that language must be studied in a context rather than in a vacuum (pp. 49-50). This linkage of language to context led Stathopoulou to the statement that mediation is not only a type of translanguaging but it also constitutes a social practice (p.50).

Moreover, she supports the view that both in oral and written discourse, mediation results in a hybrid text displaying the traits of two texts. Moreover, she differentiates mediation from code-switching, code-crossing, polylinguaging, intercomprehension, metrolingualism etc. all of which pertain to parallel language use.

Polylinguaging is typical of people who draw elements from different languages, even though, their competence in one language may be limited (Jorgensen, 2008, 2010) (p.41). Metrolingualism was introduced by Pennycook (2010) to describe the hybrid practices whereby people capitalize on the linguistic means at their disposal in specific milieus (p. 42). Code-switching involves alternation of L1 to L2 both in everyday life and in classroom (Canagarajah, 1995) (p.42). Seen in this light, translanguaging is regarded an umbrella term encompassing code-switching (Garcia, 2009) (p. 43). Furthermore, code-switching captures language compartmentalisation (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 659), whereas, translanguaging is “part of the metadiscursive regimes that students in the twenty-first century must perform...” (Garcia, 2011, p. 147). (p.44) and signifies a non-separatist methodology concerning the use of language.

Based on the theoretical framework discussed in previous chapters, Chapter 4 focuses on the research conducted by Stathopoulou. First, she defines mediation tasks as cognitively demanding activities requiring learners to transfer information from one language to another for a specific communicative purpose (pp. 61- 62). She classifies mediation tasks into three categories a) summarising, b) extracting information and c) relaying numerical into verbal information (p. 63). She states that “thirty-two written mediation tasks designed for 14 examination periods for the B2 level, 7 for the B1 level and 11 for the C1 level” were put under the lens. Six parameters were determined in her analysis, namely text type, generic purpose (to inform, to narrate, etc), text topic, discourse environment (linguistic context of the text), communicative purpose, addressor and addressee. The statistical analysis was carried out through a specially designed electronic database. The findings revealed that the higher the proficiency level tested, the “greater the demands are in terms of linguistic, pragmatic and generic competence” (p. 78). This result led Stathopoulou to the conclusion that the topic areas of the tasks should correspond to students’ needs and interests activating, thus, the stored schemata which will empower them to do the task successfully. Moreover, she produced level- specific can-do statements for B1, B2 and C1. Finally, guidelines are given to teachers in order to design appropriate mediation tasks for their students.

Since the use of appropriate strategies comprises the backbone of successful mediation, chapter 5 defines mediation strategies and delineates an inductive model of their analysis. Mediation strategies reflect the mediator’s techniques or options in his/her attempt to transfer information from one text or language to another (p. 89). Stathopoulou, then,

introduces the Inventory of Mediation Strategies (IMS) which can serve as a model of investigating mediation strategies in various kinds of corpora (p. 93). The inventory is divided into two Types of strategies, Type A (information-related strategies) and Type B (lexico-grammatical strategies). She maintains that both types may occur both separately and concurrently (p. 96). Her research followed two phases: 1) the pilot one, where a few samples of scripts were analysed with a view to formulating a coding scheme; and 2) corpus analysis resulting in the final coding scheme after evaluating and refining categories (p. 121). The analysis, which was carried out through NVivo 8, involved 600 scripts.

Chapter 6 discusses the results derived from the quantitative analysis. The research sought to trace which types of strategies were employed in diverse tasks. The accrued data pointed to the fact that both the linguistic and mediatory specifications of the activities determine the frequency and variety of mediation strategies applied in various texts. It was found that Type A strategies are mostly used in texts which require picking-up information tasks. On the other hand, the combination of Type A and Type B strategies appears in texts which require summarising which constitutes a demanding mediatory means (p. 145). In this vein, chapter 6 disclosed the significance of activity type in the selection and application of mediation strategies.

Chapter 7 investigated the extent to which proficiency level influences the employment of mediation strategies. Moreover, an effort was made to trace any differentiation in the amount of vocabulary used across levels. The data were triangulated through the use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. As regards the mediation strategies, the quantitative analysis yielded the following results: 1) the higher the proficiency level, the more scripts involved Type A and Type B strategies, 2) the higher the level, the less written products displayed Type B strategies solely, 3) the higher the level the more sophisticated strategies were used (blending, combining and summarising) and 4) a greater variety of strategies were employed in higher levels. In relation to vocabulary use the quantitative analysis disclosed that in higher levels the scripts included more words in order to attain creative blending, summarising and syntax-level paraphrasing (p. 153). The analysis of variations in language use across levels was presented on the basis of 1) sentence semantics (e.g. how sentences are linked) and 2) sentence-grammar, i.e. the employed vocabulary and grammar. The analysis focused on various logico-semantic choices which were either extracted from the Greek text or were ignored during the production of the English text (p. 205). Stathopoulou states that these logico-semantic relations may be utilised in future research to “predict differences in texts that have resulted from different mediation tasks”, even though she admits that the limited number of scripts under exploration does not conduce to generalisations.

The two main research questions addressed in this study were: 1) “Which strategies are linked to which tasks? and 2) which strategies differentiate scripts of differing proficiency levels? Another dimension which could have afforded greater scope to this research would have been to explore any correlation between students’ age, their level and strategy use along with the produced text. Interesting findings might have arisen regarding the interrelation of age and performance, namely older students might employ more sophisticated strategies due to augmented cognition and maturity.

Stathopoulou’s book provides evidence that confirms that mediation is related to context and task, putting forward the linkage between the demands of mediation tasks and the employed strategies as well as the final product. The major contribution of the book is the Inventory of Mediation Strategies and the attempt to develop level-appropriate de-

scriptors. The book addresses curriculum designers, syllabus and materials writers, and language researchers. It could also be helpful to teacher trainers who will train teachers on appropriate ways to implement mediation tasks in classroom in order to foster mediation skills and strategies to their students and, therefore, render them efficient mediators in our multilingual society.

This book could serve as a springboard for further research, that is, besides exploring mediation in an exam context we could try to explore its application in real life situations so that real students' needs could inform classroom practice and exams in a bottom-up approach.

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