

РОЗДІЛ 2 ГЕРМАНСЬКІ МОВИ

УДК 378.147:811.111'243

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2026.45.3.13>

BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE: INTEGRATING CEFR-CV MEDIATION DESCRIPTORS INTO ESP COURSES.

ВІД ТЕОРІЇ ДО ПРАКТИКИ: ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ ДЕСКРИПТОРІВ МЕДІАЦІЇ CEFR-CV У КУРСИ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ДЛЯ СПЕЦІАЛЬНИХ ЦІЛЕЙ

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The 2020 CEFR Companion Volume significantly enriches the original descriptive apparatus of the Common European Framework of Reference. Most notably, it provides, for the first time, validated and calibrated descriptors for mediation, a concept already present in the 2001 CEFR but until then lacking the empirical grounding necessary for practical application. Importantly, the approach to mediation adopted in the Companion Volume is considerably broader than that outlined in the 2001 CEFR: it extends beyond the mediation of texts to encompass the mediation of concepts and communication. Further, it distinguishes between mediation activities and strategies, the techniques employed to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding. Alongside new descriptors for online interaction, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and sign language, these additions reflect the theoretical and societal shifts reshaping language education since the original publication. Crucially, they do not revise the CEFR's foundational construct or alter its Common Reference Levels; instead, they extend and refine the existing framework in response to evolving understandings of language use and learning.

This article explores how these descriptors might reshape English for Specific Purposes teaching and proposes a framework that bridges conventional skills-based instruction with the collaborative demands of contemporary professional environments. Moving beyond the traditional "four skills" model, it focuses on curriculum design that better captures how language actually functions in workplace settings, where professionals facilitate and negotiate meaning rather than simply producing texts in isolation. Drawing on sociocultural theory and a more comprehensive approach to needs analysis, the proposed framework organises mediation into three interconnected areas: the cognitive processing of texts, the collaborative construction of shared understanding, and the relational management of communication. By making these often-tacit competencies explicit, the article offers ESP practitioners a more systematic vocabulary for addressing the realities of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary professional communication.

Key words: CEFR Companion Volume, mediation competencies, ESP curriculum design, needs analysis, professional communication

Доповнений том Загальноєвропейських рекомендацій з мовної освіти, оприлюднений у 2020 році, став вагомим внеском у розвиток описового апарату Загальноєвропейських рекомендацій з мовної освіти. Центральним здобутком цього видання є вперше представлені науково обґрунтовані дескриптори медіації – категорії, що були введені ще в ЗЄРР 2001 року, однак тривалий час залишалися без належної емпіричної бази, потрібної для їх повноцінного практичного застосування. Варто підкреслити, що підхід до медіації, закладений у Доповненому томі, є значно ширшим порівняно з тим, що був окреслений у першому виданні: він не обмежується медіацією текстів, а охоплює також медіацію понять та медіацію комунікації. Особливої уваги заслуговує і проведене в томі розмежування між видами медіаційної діяльності та стратегіями – тобто між конкретними прийомами, що слугують роз'ясненню смислів, та засобами, які забезпечують досягнення взаєморозуміння між учасниками комунікації. Поряд із новими дескрипторами онлайн-взаємодії, плюрилінгвальної та плюрикультурної компетентності й жестових мов, ці доповнення відображають теоретичні та суспільні зрушення, що трансформують мовну освіту з моменту виходу оригінального видання. Принципово важливо, що вони не переглядають базову концепцію ЗЄРР і не змінюють його загальних рівнів володіння мовою – натомість розширюють і уточнюють наявну систему відповідно до сучасного розуміння використання мови та її опанування.

У цій статті досліджується, яким чином зазначені дескриптори можуть трансформувати викладання англійської мови для спеціальних цілей, а також пропонується концепція, що розглядає мовну компетентність і вміння співпрацювати, як нерозривно пов'язані складники фахової підготовки. Відходячи від традиційної моделі «чотирьох навичок», стаття зосереджується на розробці навчальних програм, які точніше відображають реальне функціонування мови в умовах професійної діяльності – там, де фахівці виступають посередниками у творенні та узгодженні смислів, а не створюють тексти відокремлено від контексту взаємодії. Спираючись на соціокультурну теорію та більш всебічний підхід до аналізу потреб, медіація розглядається за трьома взаємопов'язаними вимірами: когні-

тивне опрацювання текстів, спільне конструювання розуміння та управління реляційними аспектами комунікації. Через експлікацію цих нерідко імпліцитних компетентностей стаття пропонує більш систематизований понятійний інструментарій для осмислення й опрацювання реалій міжкультурної та міждисциплінарної фахової комунікації.

Ключові слова: доповнений том Загальноєвропейських рекомендацій з мовної освіти, компетентності з медіації, розробка навчальних програм з англійської для професійного спрямування, аналіз потреб, фахова комунікація

Introduction. Walk into any modern workplace – a hospital ward, an engineering firm, a multinational corporation’s negotiation room – and you might notice something worth considering. Professionals do not simply read technical documents, write reports, listen to presentations, or speak in meetings. They often do something more complex: they mediate. A nurse translates complex medical jargon for anxious patients. An engineer explains intricate specifications to non-technical clients. A project manager facilitates understanding among team members with diverse linguistic and professional backgrounds. These acts of mediation may represent an important dimension of professional communication that ESP curriculum design could explore more fully.

The historical focus on the four skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – has served ESP well, providing a clear organizational framework for course design and materials development [10, p. 69-70]. At the same time, we might consider whether this paradigm fully captures the collaborative, interpretive, and mediational dimensions of contemporary professional communication. Workplace communication appears to be fundamentally interactive, with professionals frequently bridging linguistic, cultural, and knowledge gaps to create shared understanding across diverse audiences [14, pp.19-21].

As workplaces grow increasingly globalized and interdisciplinary, it seems worth exploring whether there is a widening gap between traditional pedagogical approaches and evolving professional realities. Research into workplace communication needs suggests that professionals sometimes struggle not with producing technically accurate English, but with adapting, simplifying, and reconceptualising information for varied audiences [1, pp. 86-88]. Many appear to need skills in facilitating collaborative problem-solving in multilingual teams, mediating between expert and lay discourse communities, and navigating the complex interplay of technical knowledge and interpersonal communication.

The CEFR Companion Volume, published in 2020 after extensive international validation involving over 1,200 educators and practitioners from more than 50 countries, offers a way forward [8, p.20]. Its mediation descriptors provide the first comprehensive, empirically validated framework for understanding and developing these crucial competencies. Mediation in the CEFR-CV extends far beyond the

traditional notion of translation or interpretation. It encompasses creating conditions for communication and learning, co-constructing new meaning, and conveying information while adapting it to meet the needs of different audiences.

For ESP practitioners, the CEFR-CV mediation descriptors may present both opportunities and challenges. The opportunity lies in having a structured framework for addressing competencies that have been implicit in professional communication but difficult to systematize. The challenge is to reimagine curriculum design, learning objectives, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices to integrate mediation alongside traditional skills instruction meaningfully. This article aims not to replace existing ESP pedagogical frameworks but rather to propose ways to enrich them, exploring how mediation competencies could complement skills-focused instruction in preparing learners for the complexities of professional communication.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Mediation in the CEFR-CV

The concept of mediation has undergone substantial evolution within the CEFR framework. In the 2001 CEFR, mediation appeared as the fourth mode of communication alongside reception, production, and interaction, but it received minimal elaboration [7, p. 87]. The original text described mediation primarily in terms of enabling communication between persons unable to communicate directly, with examples that focused mainly on translation and interpretation. This conceptualization, while valid and valuable for many contexts, may not have fully captured the broader mediational processes that characterize much authentic language use.

The CEFR-CV offers a broader understanding of mediation, viewing it as a pervasive aspect of communication rather than purely as a specialized activity [11, p. 456]. Drawing on sociocultural perspectives on learning and communication, mediation now encompasses any instance where language users create space and conditions for understanding, construct new meaning collaboratively, or convey information while adapting it to meet interlocutors’ needs. This broader interpretation recognizes that mediation occurs not only across languages but within a single language, as speakers constantly adjust their discourse to bridge knowledge gaps, cultural differences, or varying levels of expertise.

The CEFR-CV organizes mediation into three interconnected categories, each of which may be essential for professional communication [8, pp. 92-119].

Mediating a Text involves processing information from one source and conveying it to an audience without direct access to that source. This includes relaying specific information, explaining data and visualizations, processing written or spoken texts to extract key points, and translating between languages. In professional contexts, this might involve summarizing research findings for stakeholders, explaining technical documentation to end users, or synthesizing information from multiple sources into accessible formats.

What distinguishes mediating a text from simple comprehension and production is the element of adaptation. The mediator must not only understand the source text but also recognize the target audience's needs, knowledge level, and potential barriers to understanding. A professional mediating a text would seem to demonstrate metalinguistic awareness, strategic competence in simplification or elaboration, and sensitivity to audience characteristics.

Mediating Concepts focuses on collaborative knowledge construction. Rather than simply transmitting information, mediating concepts involves facilitating processes where groups develop shared understanding. The CEFR-CV identifies three key aspects: facilitating collaborative interaction with peers, leading group work to foster idea development, and generating conceptual discussion. These competencies are particularly valuable in modern workplaces where innovation often emerges through cross-functional collaboration [2, p. 45].

Consider a project meeting in a multinational engineering firm. Team members bring different technical specializations, native languages, and organizational cultures. Mediating concepts in this context might mean more than managing turn-taking or resolving linguistic misunderstandings. It could involve helping participants articulate half-formed ideas, building bridges between different disciplinary perspectives, and fostering an environment where genuine conceptual breakthroughs can occur. The language user becomes a catalyst for collective thinking rather than merely a skilled speaker or listener.

Mediating Communication addresses the interpersonal and intercultural aspects of professional interaction, encompassing facilitating pluricultural spaces where diverse perspectives can coexist productively, managing informal situations as an intermediary, and supporting communication

where linguistic, cultural, or social barriers impede understanding. Unlike mediating texts or concepts, which focus on information and ideas, mediating communication emphasizes relationship building and the social conditions for successful interaction.

In professional contexts characterized by increasing diversity, these competencies take on particular importance. A manager mediating communication between team members from different cultural backgrounds must navigate not only linguistic differences but also varying communication styles, expectations about hierarchy, and approaches to conflict [15, pp. 186-190]. This requires sophisticated awareness of cultural dynamics, interpersonal sensitivity, and the ability to create psychological safety for all participants.

Beyond the activity categories, the CEFR Companion Volume provides descriptor scales for mediation strategies – the specific techniques language users employ when mediating. The strategies are communication strategies, that is, ways of helping people to understand, during the actual process of mediation. They fall into two categories: strategies used to explain a new concept and to simplify a text.

By connecting new information to what audiences already know, communicators can render unfamiliar concepts accessible through building upon familiar foundational knowledge. Effective communication also requires breaking down complicated information into manageable components, a skill that proves particularly crucial when experts communicate with non-specialist audiences. The density of information is often an obstacle to understanding. Amplifying dense text requires expanding condensed or technical language into more accessible forms, a process frequently achieved through examples, analogies, or additional context that bridges comprehension gaps. The opposite scale, concerned with pruning a written text to its essential message, is streamlining. This technique may include condensing information without sacrificing essential meaning, an ability that becomes especially critical in professional communication contexts where time constraints are prevalent.

These strategies highlight what appears to be an active, strategic nature of mediation. Effective mediators do not simply switch between languages or repeat information in simpler terms; they make conscious, context-sensitive decisions about how best to bridge the gap between source and audience.

Why Mediation Matters for ESP

By focusing on specialized vocabulary and text types, courses sometimes produce learners who can read technical articles or write formal reports but might struggle when asked to explain the same con-

tent to a non-specialist colleague or collaborate on a problem with team members from different backgrounds. The integration of mediation into ESP may help address specific aspects of professional communication that have been less central in traditional approaches. While ESP courses have successfully taught specialized vocabulary and text types, there might be room to explore more fully the dynamic, interactive nature of workplace communication [9, pp. 133- 140]. Mediation could provide a framework for addressing these authentic communication demands. It recognizes that professionals operate at the intersection of multiple discourse communities, frequently translating between them. Whether it is a radiologist explaining complex scan results to a worried patient, a software developer bridging the gap between technical specifications and what users actually need, or a business consultant making sense of data analytics for a boardroom, professional communication is, at its heart, an act of mediation. Moreover, mediation foregrounds the collaborative, socially embedded nature of professional communication. While skill-based approaches have provided clear frameworks for instruction, they may sometimes emphasize individual performances – writing a report, delivering a presentation, participating in a meeting – over the collaborative dimensions of workplace communication. Professional communication often involves collective sense-making, distributed cognition, and negotiated meaning [10, p.16]. Mediation descriptors help ESP instructors design activities that prepare learners for both individual and collaborative realities.

The CEFR-CV mediation framework also addresses the increasing plurilingualism of professional contexts. In many workplaces, English functions as a lingua franca among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Communication in these contexts often involves mediation not just across languages but also between different varieties of English, communicative styles, and cultural assumptions [11, p. 13]. Traditional ESP courses focused on “standard” professional English may inadequately prepare learners for these complex multilingual realities.

Integrating Mediation into ESP Needs Analysis. Expanding Traditional Needs Analysis.

Needs analysis has long been central to ESP course design, typically involving some combination of target situation analysis (identifying what learners need to do with the language), present situation analysis (assessing learners’ current competence), and means analysis (considering contextual constraints

and resources) [9, p. 146]. However, traditional needs analysis frameworks have often focused on identifying which texts learners need to read or write, which topics they must discuss, and which grammatical structures appear in their discourse.

Integrating mediation requires expanding needs analysis to capture the bridging, facilitating, and adaptive aspects of professional communication. Rather than simply asking “What texts do professionals in this field encounter?”, we also need to be asking “How do they adapt those texts for different audiences?”, “What knowledge gaps do they routinely bridge?”, and “How do they build shared understanding among colleagues or stakeholders?”

This shift parallels broader changes in workplace communication research, which increasingly emphasizes the social nature of professional discourse [5, p. 57]. In the professional sphere, writing is rarely a fixed destination but a shifting current. The initial draft is a creature of compromise, molded by many hands before it ever finds a reader; it undergoes a constant evolution as professionals prune reports for executives, soften proposals for clients, or synthesize a chorus of sources into a single, unified voice. Similarly, research on spoken workplace communication highlights the collaborative construction of meaning through meetings, consultations, and informal conversations.

Key Questions for Mediation-Focused Needs Analysis

To identify mediational needs effectively, ESP practitioners might consider incorporating questions such as:

For mediating texts:

- What kinds of information do professionals in this field regularly handle, and who ultimately receives it?
- Who are the likely audiences, and in what ways do their backgrounds, expertise, or expectations shape how the message needs to be delivered?
- How much does the original content typically need to be simplified, expanded, or reshaped for that audience?
- In what formats or genres is information most commonly recast: reports, briefings, presentations, emails?

For mediating concepts:

- In what kinds of situations are professionals expected to bring people together around a shared problem or help a group build understanding collectively?
- Whose voices, disciplines, or cultural assumptions tend to be in tension during collaboration, and how are those differences typically navigated?

– How do professionals help colleagues think through half-formed ideas, find the right words, or move toward a clearer position?

For mediating communication:

– What intercultural or interpersonal tensions do professionals most commonly run into? In what kinds of situations do they tend to flare up?

– When communication breaks down, or a misunderstanding takes hold, what do professionals actually do to get things back on track?

– To what extent are professionals expected to actively broker understanding among people with different backgrounds, agendas, or levels of authority?

Implications for ESP Practice and Research. Theoretical Contributions

Integrating CEFR-CV mediation descriptors into ESP curriculum design may contribute to both ESP theory and broader applied linguistics discussions about communicative competence.

The mediation framework challenges the traditional four-skills paradigm that has long dominated ESP curriculum design. While the four skills remain useful as organizational categories, mediation reveals them as perhaps artificially separated aspects of integrated communicative action. In authentic professional communication, reading, writing, listening, and speaking seem to flow together in service of mediational purposes. The framework developed here suggests ESP might productively reorganize around communicative actions – mediating texts, mediating concepts, mediating communication – rather than around isolated skills.

A longstanding tension in ESP involves the relationship between general English proficiency and field-specific communication [3, p.144]. The CEFR-CV mediation framework may help bridge this divide. Mediation descriptors provide a common metalanguage, applicable across contexts yet flexible enough for contextualization. A descriptor like “can explain data in graphs and charts” applies broadly but

takes on a specific meaning in medical, engineering, or business contexts.

Mediation highlights the strategic dimension of communicative competence. Effective mediation is not just about knowing vocabulary or grammar, but also about making strategic choices about when to simplify versus elaborate, how to gauge audience understanding, and which mediation strategy best serves the current purpose. In this respect, ESP joins a wider conversation in applied linguistics about the role of strategic competence [6, pp. 111-127], and arguably does so with more practical precision than most frameworks have managed before.

Future Research Directions

Future research might usefully explore whether mediation-enhanced ESP curricula actually improve learners’ professional communication over time, particularly their ability to work across cultures and disciplines. Comparative studies across different ESP fields could also help identify best practices and reveal how mediational needs vary by domain.

Conclusion. The 2020 CEFR Companion Volume does not merely add new categories to the language teacher’s toolkit; it invites a fundamental shift in how we perceive the “expert” communicator. In the professional world, language proficiency is no longer defined by the solitary mastery of the four skills, but by the ability to act as a linguistic and conceptual bridge. By integrating mediation descriptors into ESP curriculum design, we move towards a pedagogy that better reflects the realities of professional life, one in which competing demands and multiple voices invariably shape written documents, and in which meetings require participants to negotiate and construct meaning together actively. While this framework requires practitioners to conduct more nuanced needs analyses and embrace more complex classroom dynamics, the reward is a generation of learners who are not just technically proficient but truly capable of navigating the intricate, human, and transformative realities of the modern workplace.

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Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 25.02.2026
Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 30.03.2026
Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 07.05.2026