## CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox

Video scripts for “The four modes of communication and the four skills”

This is the script of the videos in the VITbox module on the “Four modes of communication and the four skills”. The scripts follow the order of the videos, starting with a very brief introduction that summarises the topic for those who are interested in becoming familiar with it but do not wish to go any further and a second video that presents the topic in more detail. There is also a list of references in each of the sections.

# Video 1: The Four modes of communication – an introduction

## Slide 1

The four modes of communication – an introduction

## Slide 2

In the CEFR Companion Volume the focus is no longer on the four language skills “listening”, “reading”, “speaking” and “writing”. This “traditional model” has been replaced by the communicative language activities and strategies, which are presented under the four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation. The descriptor scales and descriptors are now grouped according to these four modes of communication, focusing on the function of the activity.

## Slide 3

This diagram from the CEFR Companion Volume (2020, p. 34) shows the relationship between the four modes of communication, i.e. reception, production, interaction and mediation.

The illustrative descriptors are no longer listed according to one of the language skills but they are categorised according to the mode of communication in order to focus more on the purpose or macro-function of communication. When it comes, for example, to speaking, the descriptors distinguish whether somebody gives a presentation (“production”) or whether somebody speaks during a meeting and takes part in the conversation (“interaction”).

The CEFR (2001) made a distinction between oral production and oral interaction, but not between written production and written interaction, as this distinction “did not meet with much public recognition” (Council of Europe 2020: 34). This has changed with the rise of new formats of online communication.

## Slide 4

The CEFR Companion Volume therefore focuses on the purpose or macro-function of communication, i.e. the four modes of communication help to distinguish between creative, interpersonal language use, transactional language use and evaluative, problem-solving language use.

In university and vocational language teaching, we focus on professional contexts, i.e. we address “transactional language use”, but also “evaluative, problem-solving language use”. In reading students will, for example, be asked to find relevant information on a specific topic, which they will later use in the productive phase. In speaking, they will have to give a presentation on a specific topic in a sustained

monologue. In interaction, they will discuss their findings (“exchange information”) and in mediation they will present and discuss their findings or ideas with their peers or a specific target group.

## Slide 5

The new model of the four modes of communication allows to distinguish different language strategies – as presented in table 4 of the CEFR Companion Volume.

## Slide 6

The following slides visualise the four different modes of communication. Reception covers listening and reading, i.e.

* listening to radio, television, video, podcasts, but also presentations at conferences or lectures at university, on the one hand,
* and reading of newspapers, articles, books – printed or online – on the other hand.

## Slide 7

Production comprises writing (by hand or on a digital device) and speaking, e.g. giving a presentation or lecture, or making a podcast or video – i.e. a sustained monologue.

## Slide 8

In interaction, two or more people communicate with each other face to face, on the phone or online – in conversations or discussions; people exchange information and take turns in the conversation. In written interaction they will communicate, e.g. in a chat or exchange emails.

## Slide 9

In mediation the focus is on explaining ideas or concepts to a partner or team, i.e. mediating texts or concepts, or mediating communication. This includes adapting the language to the target audience, e.g. by streamlining the text or amplifying a dense text or breaking it into different sections. Furthermore, the focus is often on the co-construction of meaning when teams collaborate on a project and develop ideas and outputs together with their partner or team.

## Slide 10

This diagram taken from Fasoglio (2023) shows how the role of the learner or test-taker changes depending on the mode of communication.

In reception, the learner is a listener or reader, in interaction a participant and in mediation a social agent.

## Slide 11

So to answer the question concerning the relationship between the four modes of communication and the four language skills, we can say that the four language skills are still relevant in teaching, learning and assessment, as we still need to help learners to improve their language competence in each of these skills.

So, on the one hand, in curriculum design we need to look at the macro-functions or the purpose of language use, i.e. the four modes of communication, but on the other hand, we still need to make sure that our learners master the four language skills.

## Slide 12

While the model of the four language skills puts the focus on the specific skills only, the model of the four modes of communication addresses the macro-functions of communication. This diagram shows how the

four skills are activated in the different modes of communication, i.e. when we communicate, interact or mediate.

*(For more details please watch the second VITbox video on the four modes of communication and the four skills.)*

# Video 2: The four modes of communication and the four language skills

## Slide 1

The CEFR stresses the importance of the four modes of communication and in this presentation we would like to explain how the four modes of communication are related to the four language skills.

## Slide 2

“Reception”, “production”, “interaction” and “mediation” were already mentioned in the 2001 version of the CEFR; I quote: “The language learner/user’s communicative language competence is activated in the performance of the various language activities, involving reception, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpreting or translating).” (p.14), but the term “four modes of communication” was not used. The four modes were described as different types of language activities.

As far as “mediation” is concerned, the CEFR 2001 focused on interpreting and translating (see chapter 4).

## Slide 3

The 2020 Companion Volume states on page 33 that the four modes of communication replace the traditional model of the four skills: that’s to say, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The quote also states that the activities and the descriptors are now presented under the corresponding category of the four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction or mediation. You will see in the list of descriptor scales and descriptors that they are now grouped according to these four modes. So, the authors actually focus on the function of an activity and less on the linguistic repertoire, i.e. the skills, we use. This model therefore stresses the purpose or macro-function of communication.

## Slide 4

The statement that the four modes of communication “replace the traditional model of the four skills” has caused some irritation among teachers as they ask: “Does that mean that we don’t have to do listening and speaking anymore? Or reading and writing? But reception, production, interaction and mediation?” When it comes to testing and assessment, teachers have asked whether they should no longer test the four skills, but should have four different parts focusing on each mode of communication.

The four skills are, however, still relevant as we need to address each of them in teaching, learning and assessment – whether we look at a skill individually or we address several skills in a more integrative approach.

## Slide 5

These discussions have motivated us to have a closer look at the relationship between the four modes of communication and the four skills.

This presentation therefore aims at discussing how the four skills are actually related to the four modes of communication, in which contexts they are activated in reception, production, interaction and mediation, and why they are still important in teaching, learning and also in assessment.

## Slide 6

So how are the four modes of communication related to the four language skills? The four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are still necessary skills that we have to address in teaching, learning and assessment because we want to improve the language skills in these four different areas, but they are not the same as the four modes of communication. While the four language skills address an individual’s repertoire of linguistic skills, the four modes of communication represent the purpose or the macro-functions (“interpersonal”, “transactional” and “evaluative”) of communication. So, in which context do we actually use language and why in order to reach a specific aim.

## Slide 7

On page 34 of the Companion Volume you will find this diagram that explains how the four different modes of communication are related. There is a receptive mode, where you listen or read something. When looking at skills in an isolated way you can also find a moment of production where somebody speaks or writes. If the two, reception and production, are brought together in communication then we have a situation of interaction; e.g. one person speaks, the other one reacts to it. And mediation goes beyond interaction. There are more skills and activities involved.

## Slide 8

When we only look at reception or production the four skills are addressed in an isolated way. That’s to say, in reception you have listening and reading, and in production speaking and writing. The learner is either a listener (e.g. listening to a lecture) or a reader (e.g. reading a scientific publication) as far as reception is concerned, or a speaker (e.g. giving a seminar presentation) or a writer (e.g. writing an essay or a publication for a journal) in production.

## Slide 9

So, when we look at the diagram that shows the four modes of communication and we want to know how the four skills are related to these modes, when it comes to reception and to production, we can add the four skills to the diagram: listening and reading addressed in an isolated way represent reception, and speaking and writing the production phase.

In assessment, we measure how well learners mobilise their linguistic resources and the accuracy and fluency of their productive skills.

## Slide 10

In interaction, the receptive phase and the productive phase are intertwined. That’s to say that after an input phase there will be a productive phase by the interlocutor. So if we look, for example, at oral interaction, a person listens to a presentation or a question and then reacts by speaking. In a situation of interaction, learners are interlocutors and take an active part in the exchange, i.e. they are participants and will negotiate meaning.

## Slide 11

A typical situation we address in vocational and university language teaching might be the simulation of a job interview. In a discussion on research results the interlocutors will discuss their findings, which involves negotiation of meaning.

But the reaction could also be in a written format; then we have both oral skills and written skills, in this case listening and writing; for example, when you listen to an online presentation and you put a question in the chat, or you reply by an email at a later stage.

Similarly, in writing you may have an email correspondence where you react in writing to a written text, or receive an email and you call the person and you react orally to the email.

## Slide 12

In this diagram we have used the original diagram of the Companion Volume and added the four skills to the interaction phase as well. When it comes to interaction, the arrows don’t necessarily need to be unidirectional, for example, a speaking input is followed by listening and leads to an oral reaction i.e. speaking again, but it can also lead from speaking to writing, e.g. somebody speaks, a second person listens and reacts (later) in writing, as in the examples of the previous slide.

More information on interaction is available in the VITbox module on interaction.

## Slide 13

When it comes to mediation the different partners involved in communication will have used different sources: different written sources but also oral sources. They will use their individual knowledge background and then they will discuss their findings, they will negotiate meaning of certain aspects and they will co- construct meaning when they collaborate e.g. on a project. Here the learner is considered to be a social agent.

## Slide 14

This diagram taken from Fasoglio (2023) shows how the role of the learner changes depending on the mode of communication: the learner is a listener respectively a reader when it comes to reception, a speaker or writer when dealing with production, a participant in interaction, and a social agent in mediation.

Furthermore, it lists the success factors, which help when assessing learner performance.

## Slide 15

So when you look at the diagram and how we have integrated the four skills into the concept of mediation, you will see that we don’t have isolated boxes for each of these skills. Communication follows even less a linear approach where a phase of production follows a phase of reception and vice versa, but all four skills are interrelated. We draw upon the resources from listening and reading, we present them in speaking and in writing to the communication partner and develop them further in collaboration.

This diagram does not explain the relationship between different communication partners in a situation of mediation, but it looks at one individual participating in mediation, and shows the skills that a single individual activates in situations of mediation. As far as the relationship of interlocutors involved in mediation is concerned, we refer to the introductory video to this module; this introductory video provides images of situations of communication for the four modes of communication.

## Slide 16

I mentioned earlier that mediation goes beyond interaction. In an article published by Piccardo, North and Goodier in 2019 the authors point out that mediation comprises reception, production and interaction. While interaction involves the joint construction of discourse to facilitate mutual understanding, mediation is not just a means of expression but allows “the construction of new meaning, in the sense of new understanding, new knowledge, new concepts”:

*Mediation was introduced as the fourth mode of communicative language activity in the CEFR from the earliest versions in 1996. Simply stated, whereas production is concerned with self-expression, and interaction involves the joint construction of discourse to reach mutual understanding, mediation introduces an additional element: the construction of new meaning, in the sense of new understanding, new knowledge, new concepts. Mediation usually involves reception and production – and often interaction. However, in mediation, in contrast to production and interaction, language is not just a means of expression; it is primarily a vehicle to access the ‘other,’ the new, the unknown – or to help other people to do so.*

(Piccardo, North and Goodier 2019: 20-21.)

On page 25 the authors say that with mediation “both learners and teachers […] move on from ‘ping-pong’ like interaction to more strategic construction of meaning”.

## Slide 17

Mediation tasks are highly challenging as they require the integration of skills and a higher level of agency; that’s to say that learners are more actively involved in the learning process and take an active role as social agents. All four language skills might be involved at different stages. The four language skills are interrelated and are not following a linear progression but at different moments we draw upon different language skills. We have tried to visualise how these skills are interlinked in the following diagram.

## Slide 18

When it comes to the action-oriented approach, teachers frequently ask about the role of grammar and vocabulary. So in order to complete the picture, we have added other aspects of language that are relevant in teaching, learning and assessment, e.g. grammar and vocabulary.

Apart from the four language skills, and grammar and vocabulary, paralinguistic skills (like body language), pragmatic competence (looking at the appropriate use of language in a given context), intercultural skills as well as other transferable skills, like team-building skills and self-efficiency skills, are required.

With this diagram we would like to present a model which represents not only the four modes of communication and the four linguistic skills, but which integrates grammar and vocabulary skills. Furthermore, it includes pragmatic skills, intercultural skills and transferable skills, which become more relevant in interaction and in mediation. (A comprehensive description of the relevance of transferable skills in the 21st century is available in Ehlers 2020.)

More information on mediation is available in the VITbox module on mediation or from the ECML’s METLA resources – an ECML project entitled “Mediation in teaching, learning and assessment”.

## Slide 19

For each of the four modes of communication paralinguistic skills, pragmatic competence, intercultural aspects and transferable skills need to be addressed; they become increasingly important in interaction and particularly in mediation. Furthermore, the importance of the content should not be neglected either, particularly in vocational and university language teaching.

## Slide 20

As far as language education in vocational training and at university are concerned, interaction and particularly mediation skills are important and need to be addressed in teaching, learning and assessment. Curricula need to prepare learners for their future contexts of interaction in communication at the workplace or in academia. Depending on the context, the focus in mediation will be either on intralinguistic mediation,

where e.g. students have to present research outcomes to different target groups, or on cross-linguistic or interlinguistic mediation when it comes to e.g. dealing with situations in the tourism sector or at international conferences. Teachers therefore need to develop tasks and scenarios simulating real-life situations of interaction and mediation. These need to be relevant, meaningful and challenging for the learner – requiring them to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire.

## Slide 21

If you want to know more, have a look at the following references:

Council of Europe (2020): *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Ehlers, U.-D. (2020): *Future Skills. Lernen der Zukunft – Hochschule der Zukunft*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. Fasoglio, D. & Leunissen, S. (forthcoming). *Taalprofielen 2023*. Enschede:SLO.

Fischer, Johann / Wolder, Nicole (2021): Erfahrungen in der Umsetzung der Inhalte des Begleitbands zum GeR im Hochschulkontext – Ergebnisse eines Projektes des Europarates und Handlungsbedarf für Hochschulsprachenzentren. *Fremdsprachen und Hochschule* 96, 7-27.

Piccardo, E., North, B. & Goodier, T. (2019). Broadening the Scope of Language Education: Mediation, Plurilingualism, and Collaborative Learning: the CEFR Companion Volume. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society, 15*(1). Italian e-Learning Association. [https://www.learntechlib.org/p/207532/.](https://www.learntechlib.org/p/207532/)

*ECML resources:*

METLA – Mediation in teaching, learning and assessment: [www.ecml.at/mediation](http://www.ecml.at/mediation)