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# Intercultural mediation and intercultural pragmatics

## 0.0 Introduction

Intercultural mediation has emerged as a topic of interest in the field of language teaching and learning since the late 1980s (Buttjes & Byram, 1991; Byram, 1988). This work proposed the idea that language learners do not simply need to develop communicative abilities in a language but also needed to be able to mediate between languages and cultures. The idea of intercultural mediation has also been used to understand the work of language teachers (e.g. Zarate, Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier, & Penz, 2004). The idea of mediation has, however, only been applied to intercultural pragmatics more recently (e.g. Liddicoat, 2014; Liddicoat & McConachy, 2019; McConachy, 2018; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). This has been the result of a stronger focus in interculturally oriented language teaching on the culturally embedded nature of linguistic forms and practices (e.g. Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000) and an emerging understanding of pragmatics as an important site for intercultural learning (McConachy, 2019). In this context, Liddicoat (2014, p. 276) argues that pragmatics is especially important for intercultural learning “as it represents a fundamental point of interaction between language and culture”. The research on mediation in intercultural pragmatics to date has largely been shaped by its emergence from interculturally oriented approaches to language teaching and learning, and the research agendas of this field.

## 1.0 Theoretical Foundations

In language education there have been a number of different strands of thinking about mediation. These ways of speaking share a recognition that communication across languages and cultures requires an acknowledgement of the need to understand language in its contexts of use and how communication across languages and cultures influences contextualisation/ However, they have also introduced different ways of speaking and thinking about mediation as a form of action in intercultural communication that have often been used in parallel. As a result, the term has taken on an often unacknowledged polysemy (Piccardo, 2012; Tapia, 2011). The term intercultural mediation as used in the in the field of language education includes three key dimensions of meaning: 1) resolving conflicts or problems, 2) acting as an intermediary, and 3) supporting learning in socially collaborative ways. In many discussions of mediation some or all of these may be present, and the particular dimensions that are included influence understandings of what counts as mediational work. These different views of mediation seem to be quite divergent constructs but each of them takes meaning as a starting point for the mediational process. It is therefore useful to consider how each of these dimensions contributes to an overall understanding of mediation.

The idea that mediation involves problem solving is widespread and is probably the most common understanding of mediation outside the field of education and typically views culture (and language often secondarily) as the cause for intergroup conflict (Rubinfeld & Clément, 2012). This view is thus based on an idea of cultural contact as being largely shaped by problems of miscommunication that result from cultural differences (for critiques of this view see Piller, 2011; Sarangi, 1994). In such situations, the role of the intercultural mediator is to restore communication and re-establish understanding between participants (Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier, Penz, & Zarate, 2004). This means that mediation takes the form of a communicative act in which the mediator works to negotiate meaning between participants when it has been ruptured as the result of culturally different understandings of what has

occurred in communication. This view sees intercultural mediation as a special, and often specialist, form of action within contexts of intercultural communication that needs to be activated only when meaning has broken down between participants. It also positions the intercultural mediator as someone outside the problematic communication itself who works with the meanings of others; that is, it connects with the idea of the mediator as an intermediary. Problems of interpretation do not just reside in problems at the level of language as interpretation is not simply a linguistic act; interpretation also involves the interpretation of speakers on the basis of the meanings they are perceived to communicate and so are influenced by non-linguistic factors such as deep-seated beliefs, values etc., power, and prejudices (Zhu Hua & Kramersch, 2016). Such issues need to be taken into consideration in the act of mediation and have consequences for both the effectiveness of and the possibilities for mediation (Breugnot & Dudreuilh, 2006).

The mediator as intermediary involves adopting a position between people with different languages and cultures in order to operate upon meaning-making and interpretation. In cases of conflict the intermediary stands between two (or more) different ways of understanding that have created conflict and acts as a third party to re-express or re-language the meanings of others. This idea that mediators re-language others' meanings is not restricted to resolving problems of meaning but has also been taken up in understanding the work of translators and interpreters, who are seen as intermediaries who allow meanings created in one language to be communicated to recipients in another (Katan, 1999, 2004; Liddicoat, 2016; Pöchlacker, 2008). This understanding of the mediator as an intermediary positioned between participants in communication is also relevant to the classroom, where teachers can be seen as mediating between the linguistic and cultural worlds of their learners and the societies about which they are learning (Kearney, 2015; Keating Marshall & Bokhorst-Heng, 2018). This idea of the teacher as mediator involves the understanding that the teacher actively develops connections between languages and cultures so that learning can occur (Kohler, 2010, 2015). In this case, what happens in mediation is not the result of a breakdown in meaning but rather involves creating ways for learners to come into contact with other languages and cultures so that meanings may be exchanged.

The idea of the teacher as mediator brings into prominence the third understanding of mediation within the literature on language learning. That is, intercultural mediation in language learning involves more than creating a link between the learners' languages and cultures and those of a linguistic and cultural other, and also involves promoting learning from this engagement. This view of mediation draws strongly on Vygotsky's (1934/2005, 1986) sociocultural educational theory. In Vygotsky's view, learning is enacted in a societal and cultural context. He sees the acquisition of knowledge as an internalisation of social activities in a process of development from what is known to what is unknown that takes place at the point of rupture between what a learner can currently do and what they cannot yet do unaided (the Zone of Proximal Development). In teaching and learning, more knowledgeable others assist learners to engage with, comprehend and act upon new knowledge using symbolic tools such as language, which Vygotsky calls 'intermediaries' (посредники). Intercultural mediation can thus be conceptualised as a process through which learners are supported in learning to make and interpret meanings in languages and cultural contexts that are new for them, and in mediating languages and cultures, teachers and learners are constantly building upon connections between the familiar and the new to understand, create, and develop new ways of meaning making and interpretation (Kohler, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Intercultural mediation can thus be seen as fundamentally concerned with processes of interpretation and the ways that these are affected by the languages and cultures involved

(Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In intercultural contact, interpretation is complex as there can be multiple interpretations present in communication that result from different understandings and interpretative possibilities that exist in each language in its cultural contextualisation. However, mediation is not simply an interpretative process that seeks to identify these multiple possible meanings but also requires the mediator to work to bring diverse interpretations into relationship for participants in communication. This is a reflective process in which mediators construct the meaningfulness and consequentiality of talk for themselves and for others (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). Thus the mediator is required not just to understand meanings but to be aware of and to reflect on the process of meaning making itself (see Kramsch, 2006; 2011 on symbolic competence). Mediation also involves an intervention into the processes of meaning making and interpretation in which the multiplicity of identified meanings serves as a way of enabling communication across languages and cultures. Intercultural mediation can therefore be understood as a process that involves the ability to understand, through a process of reflection on meanings, the multiple possible interpretations, and to use this this understanding to facilitate communication across languages and cultural contexts.

### *1.1 Mediation and intercultural pragmatics*

As an activity that is concerned with processes of interpretation and their consequences for communication, intercultural mediation is important for understanding how language users engage with intercultural pragmatics, where meaning making and interpretation are central to (Kecskes, 2013). In the case of intercultural communication, multiple languages and cultures are present in the interaction providing diverse resources for interpreting pragmatic meanings that are present in communication; that is plurality is a central feature of processes of interpretation. Plurality of interpretation is of course present in any communicative context (see Gadamer, 2011; Ricoeur, 1965); however, in intercultural contexts differences between the languages and enculturations of speakers/hearers introduce further complexities into the interpretative process and thus into the processes involved in mediation. As meaning in pragmatics is located in contexts of use, and cultures constitute a part of this context, meaning making and interpretation across languages and cultures does not lie just in identify a diversity of meanings but also in identifying the diversity of contexts that are relevant for participants (Kecskes, 2016, 2019). Moreover, interpretation is not simply about identifying the particular meanings involved in the production of particular utterances or discourses, but also has an ethical dimension that accompanies acts of interpretation of social behaviours that involves “judgements (both conscious and unconscious) as to whether the act was conducted in an appropriate way or not, which is essentially a judgement of the individual as a social being” (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016, p. 16). Such judgments are based on they plurality of normative standards and associated moral orders that participants bring to the interaction. In interpreting meanings in intercultural contexts there is thus a need to take into consideration interpretative processes and resources that may be quite divergent and lead to quite different evaluations of participants in communication, and how these divergences are consequential for developing shared understanding.

The idea that interpretations are plural means that mediation is not predicated on identifying correct meanings (c.f. Schleiermacher, 1977), as multiple meanings need to be seen as potentially present and potentially valid (Gadamer, 2011; Ricoeur, 1965). Gadamer and Ricoeur argue that interpretations are personal and meaning results from the perspectives and resources that interpreters bring to the act of interpreting. For Gadamer, interpretation is only possible because of individuals’ ability to draw on their experiences and lifeworlds to anticipate the meanings of others (fore-understanding, *Vorverstehen*). In any act of interpretation, the experiences and lifeworlds of interpreters differ, although the extent of the differences will

depend on previous histories of shared experience, which can create forms of common ground on which interpretations may be made; that is, participants in communication may be able to call on what Kecskes and Zhang (2009, p. 347) call core common ground: “common knowledge that belongs to a certain speech community as a result of prior interaction and experience”. However, even where experiences are closely shared, interpretations remain individual and shared understanding requires individual interpretations to be brought into relationship. Gadamer speaks of this as a fusion of horizons (*Fusion von Horizonten*) – the horizons reflected in the interpreter’s initial presuppositions and the horizon of the other with whom the interpreter engages. This fusion is achieved through dialogue between different interpretations. This is similar to Kecskes and Zhang (2009, p. 347) idea of emergent common ground: “knowledge created in the course of communication”. For Gadamer (2011), the process of establishing shared meaning does not equate with identifying a single correct meaning but rather the connecting of personal meanings with an acknowledgement of differences that may result in new interpretations that may be added to participants’ original starting points. This idea that there is no single correct interpretation is important for understanding intercultural mediation as it recognises that the meanings of all participants have validity. Mediation does not therefore involve privileging one set of meanings over another but rather aims to expose multiple possible meanings in order to highlight the motivations behind, and the implications of each (Ricoeur, 1965).

Recognition and bringing into relationship of multiple interpretations requires decentring as a core element of the interpretative and reflective process of mediation. Zarate (1993) sees decentring as a fundamentally interpretative involving a process of re-reading experience that allows the interpreter to see new connections and relationships that are both different and potentially more insightful. It involves the ability to step outside one’s existing culturally constructed frameworks of interpretation and bring new, external perspective’s to the interpretative process (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Kohler, 2012). Decentring involves distancing oneself from the usual interpretations of meaning in context, that is from one’s previous experiences of interpretation of a particular message and taking up, as far as possible, those of one’s interlocutor. It involves seeing meaning from the perspective of the other, without making judgments on it as a possible interpretation, but using it to reflect on one’s own initial assumptions about meaning. The intercultural mediator needs to be able to develop interpretations both from inside and from outside the languages and cultures at play in a particular situation. It is thus a capacity to understand multiple perspectives, to search for and keep present multiple possible interpretations and to be aware of multiple possibilities for creating and interpreting meaning.

## **2.0 Empirical studies**

To date there has been little research that has focused specifically on mediation in relation to intercultural pragmatics. In much of the research to date the focus has been placed on mediation itself and this has incidentally included a focus on pragmatics. With this limitation in mind, however, it is possible to identify three main focuses of research on mediation in intercultural pragmatics: the role and nature of metapragmatic awareness in intercultural mediation, mediation as both an other-directed and self-directed activity, and mediation in language teaching and learning.

### ***2.1 Metapragmatic awareness in intercultural mediation***

A small body of research has shown that metapragmatic awareness plays a central role in intercultural mediation as processes of interpretation require that mediators to understand

speakers' meaning in context. That is, mediators need to be able to draw on metapragmatic awareness in order to enact mediation as an interpretative act (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). McConachy and Liddicoat argue that, for understanding intercultural mediation, metapragmatic awareness does not only involve recognising what linguistic action is being performed (c.f. Verscheuren, 2000), especially as different actions may be present for different participants, but also involves understanding the contextual constraints on linguistic resources in achieving meaning in context and how this relates to judgements of pragmatic appropriateness (see also Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Safont Jordá, 2003). They also argue that metapragmatic awareness involves individuals' reflexive awareness of the cultural assumptions and concepts through which norms of interpretation are constituted and their ability to bring existing assumptions about interpretations and their consequences into awareness (see also Li & Gao, 2017; McConachy, 2019). Moreover, meta-pragmatic awareness in intercultural mediation is necessarily intercultural and needs to include some awareness of the conceptual and interpretative frameworks of multiple languages and cultures as the play out in the act of interpretation for participants in the communication (Liddicoat & McConachy, 2019; McConachy, 2013, 2019; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). Meta-pragmatic awareness for intercultural mediation thus involves a heightened awareness of the culturally contexted nature of meaning making and interpretation, within and across languages and cultures, in which language is both the focus of, and a resource for, enacting intercultural mediation.

The ways that metapragmatic awareness is deployed in intercultural mediation can be seen Extract 1, in which Ana, a Chilean exchange student, and her Australian interlocutors are involved in a class discussion of a critical incident between a mother and her son in which different cultural understandings of the practice of thanking had caused a problem in communication. The interaction begins when Cara expresses her lack of understanding of the mother's interpretation of the act of thanking.

*Extract 1*

1. Cara: So I don't get why- why she is- why she got upset you know. Her son was just being being nice.
2. Ana: Where I come from, I don't say "thankyou" if my mother cooked dinner for us. It would not sound good to her. It's like she does something unusual. My mother always cooks dinner. If I say thank you, she might be sad.
3. Beth: You mean she- if you said thankyou she wouldn't like it.
4. Ana: Yeah. She think I was saying she was bad mother.
5. Cara: But you're just being nice.
6. Ana: It's nice here. I think you thank people for more things. You tell people you like what they do. You thank for everything not just special things.
7. Cara: Like saying thanks to the bus driver.
8. Ana: We don't do that. They just drive a bus. They're supposed to do that. It's not they're doing you favour.
9. Beth: It's their job.
10. Ana: Yeah. We don't thank for doing job. That's not special. If they just do what they're supposed to.
11. Beth: What if they're especially nice.
12. Ana: If they do something good. Something not usual. You would say thank you. Not just for the driving. For something else.
13. Beth: So if I thank my mother when she cooks dinner that is like I say she did something unusual.
14. Cara: Like she doesn't cook for you. She did it specially this time.

15. Ana: Or I am guest not part of family. She does it special because I am guest. She's not my mother.
16. Beth: So what do I do? Do I say I like what she cooked?
17. Ana: I think if I say "dinner is nice" she says "isn't it always?". We say is nice, when is special, when is different. If she make my favourite, I say that.
18. Beth: So how do I say that I like- what's the same as thankyou in Australia?
19. Ana: We don't say something. We eat food, we are together, we talk. My mother likes that. We don't eat in five minutes and go away.
20. Cara: Oh (0.3) so it's more what you do not what you say.
21. Ana: Yeah. We don't say something. We show it another way.

Here, Ana responds to Cara's interpretative problem by expressing her own understanding, which in this case corresponds to that of the mother in the critical incident. In the ensuing discussion, she attempts to bring her interlocutors to share her understanding of the act of thanking, and she begins this by explaining her own perspective to them. Beth responds by reformulating this in her own words, showing that she is coming to see the act from Ana's perspective, but Cara continues to have difficulties with this, remaining within her initial interpretative frame. Ana then moves to a more decentred perspective bringing in her understanding of an Australian interpretation of the act (line 6), and in so doing she provides a point of connection for Cara that she continues to develop in her ongoing attempts to construct shared understanding. She contrasts her interlocutors' interpretations with her own and the interaction proceeds by negotiating between these perspectives and working towards the consequentiality of these differences for ways of using language.

Ana, as an intercultural mediator, is deploying her awareness of the pragmatic possibilities in two linguistic and cultural contexts that are familiar to her in order to bring about a fusion of horizons between herself and her interlocutors. She uses devices such as explanation, exemplification, and contrast to construct a basis for developing a shared understanding that allows the communication to proceed and new ways of understanding to be constructed, at least to some extent. In speaking, she holds at least two possible interpretations in play and acknowledges the validity of each in context (for example by the contrast between 'here' (the Australian context of her interlocutors) and 'we' (her personal Chilean context), and at the same time establishes connections between each.

## *2.2 Mediation for others and mediation for self*

As has been discussed above, mediation is usually conceptualised as involving taking up an intermediary position. This framing of mediation sees the mediator as a third person intervening in communication in order to do something that those present in the communication could not otherwise do. It also constructs mediation as something that is done for others by a person with more knowledge, experience, etc. than those who experience problems in communication. However, in understanding mediation in the context of intercultural and interlinguistic communication, it is important to consider the nature of this intermediary position further. The notion of the mediator as a third person is problematic for understanding processes of interpretation in intercultural communication as it implies that mediation applies only to contexts there is a third person able to intervene. However, in intercultural communication, participants often experience situations in which interpretations differ and need to be resolved without access to a third person who can mediate. In such situations, if mediators are thought of as third persons, what happens in such contexts could not be considered mediation. However, in such contexts, the interpretive and reflective processes discussed above occur, and this means it is possible to consider mediation as something that

can occur without an intermediary person (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2014). In such contexts, while it is not possible to think of the mediator as an intermediary between persons, nor is it useful to think of them as mediators between ‘cultures’ as this would simply serve to reify cultures, it is more useful to think of mediators as intermediaries between meanings. In Extract 1 above, this is the case. Ana takes on an intermediary position between the interpretations she holds and those of her interlocutors. In so doing, she is not simply working with the meanings of others but is mediating her own meanings seeking to develop a fusion of horizons for those present in the communication through a reflective process that makes diverse meanings explicit for others. Intercultural mediation is thus not simply a special form of communication but can be seen to be implicated in any form of communication where a diversity of interpretations is present and there is a need for participants to work towards shared understanding.

In Extract 1, Ana’s mediational work is being undertaken as a way of bringing about understanding for others in the act of communication; however, as intercultural communication typically involves learners of one of the languages used in the interpretive process, there are also contexts in which learners position themselves as intermediaries between their own interpretations and interpretive problems they have experienced to make sense of new possibilities for interpreting language in context (Liddicoat, 2014). Extract 2 provides an example of this.

#### *Extract 2*

1. James: On one of my visits to Japan, I was in a restaurant at Tokyo station and there was this uh older guy at one of the tables an’ he really shocked me.
2. Researcher: What did he do?
3. James: Well um it was a restaurant, right? And he was at a table and they were eating and he just turns around and calls out to the waitress “*nama:::*” ((draught beer)), just like that. And I was just like shocked. He didn’t even look at her, just called out.
4. Researcher: hmm.
5. James: And I like thought that that’s so rude. Um, I mean, you always think of Japanese people as super polite. But he just said “*nama:::*” and he got his beer. And like you know I didn’t think they would do that.
6. Researcher: So why did you think it was rude?
7. James: Well um you know, it’s not the way we would do it here. You can’t just say that. You have to ask and say please and stuff. So, it wasn’t my way. But it wasn’t like what we learn in class either. It’s always “oh you’ve got to be so polite” and “Japanese people are all polite” and stuff. And we spend so much time learning polite stuff.
8. Researcher: mhm
9. James: It was um sorta like the first time I’d seen it. But you know after a while, you seen it happen and you think they’re not all like what we learn in class. There’s other stuff, like a whole range of things people do.
10. Researcher: So how do you understand what he did?
11. James: Well uh it’s like it all depends who’s there. I guess, um like it’s because he’s a man and old and that and she was just a young girl. So I thought it was a bit sexist, you know, when it happened. And that’s something you get in Japan.
12. Researcher: mhm.
13. James: And I’ve seen other times, that people sometimes are polite to waiters and people in shops. They just say what they want or point or something and



that's all. And the waiters and shop people are all like so super polite. Um, it's like in Japanese they say something like *kyaku-sama*, *kami-sama* ((the customer [is a] god)). You know, the customer is like a god. So if you're a god, I guess you don't have to be polite. But for me it's a bit shocking, you know.

14. Researcher: mm. So how do you sort this out for yourself?

15. James: Well in the restaurant I started saying like '*onegaishimasu*' for everything. Cos I hadn't ordered yet. Like I was trying to show I wasn't like that guy. So not "*nama*". I don't want people to think I speak like that to them. "*nama onegaishimasu*". Heh, heh I used to just say "*kudasai*" cos in class they said it was the word for please. But I wanted to be um politer than that to sorta show, I'm not like that. Now it's "*onegaishimasu*", just cos of that guy who said "*nama*" and not you know wanting to be that person.

In this example, James is relating his process of interpreting talk in which he was not a participant, but which created an interpretative dissonance for him when he overheard it. The communication itself does not seem to have been problematic for those engaged in it but rather presents a question for him that results from his own previous history of interpreting the politeness of utterances. In seeking to understand both the interpretative practices of the language he is using and those of his previous experiences, he reflects on the meaning making potential of talk and develops an account that locates himself and his identity within processes of language use; that is, he recognises the consequentiality of his interpretations for his future communication (see Liddicoat & McConachy, 2019). He is decentring from his initial interpretative position and attempting to bring new interpretive possibilities into relationship with his initial understanding.

In discussing forms of mediation in which there is no external mediator, Liddicoat (2014) argues that intercultural mediation can be approached by considering not just the enactor of the mediation but also its recipient, represented by a distinction between "mediation for self" and "mediation for others". This distinction recognises that in intercultural communication, and in language learning, it is not always a more knowing other that undertakes mediational work but rather mediation is a process that is available to any participant in communication to facilitate understanding. Mediation for self may at first seem incongruous, especially when a mediator is seen as an intermediary, but ultimately it would appear to be central to any form of intercultural mediation, as all attempts to bring interpretations together are based on the mediator's interpretations. Such interpretations are not inevitably pre-existing constructs but rather need to be developed in situ in acts of communication. Mediation is thus "first and foremost an interpretive activity engaged in by individuals for their own understanding" (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016, p. 15). It is only once third-person mediators have formed their own understanding that they can express meanings to others and bring disparate interpretations into relation.

### *2.3. Mediating intercultural pragmatics in language education*

In language learning contexts mediation is not always done with the primary purpose of facilitating communication but can also focus on learning to communicate and discover aspects of the ways that context influences, supports or constrains interpretation (Kohler, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In Extract 3, the teacher is dealing with non-literal meaning.

*Extract 3 (Source: Kohler, 2015)*

1. Tammy: That's pathetic because there's nothing in my street.
2. Teacher: Well, you can say that. You just said to me earlier that your neighbours get up early and feed their horses. So, you can say something like that. You can say 'jalan saya sangat sepi' (My street is very quiet).
3. Toby: How do you say 'dead'?
4. Teacher: Just say 'lebih sepi' (quieter), 'it's very quiet'.
5. Toby: But there's nothing.
6. Teacher: Well, then you can say 'tidak ada orang di jalan saya'. There are no people in my street.
7. Toby: Or 'dead'!
8. Teacher: Toby, the thing is Indonesians wouldn't say a 'dead' street. They'd just say it's either quiet or...
9. Toby: I'm not Indonesian.
10. Teacher: No, but we're doing Indonesian and you've got to think in Indonesian when you're writing.

The discussion here is prompted by a request for a translation equivalent for a metaphoric use of the word English word 'dead'. Instead of providing a direct translation, the teacher produces a less metaphoric version to capture the meaning. The student, however, does not accept the non-figurative version provided by the teacher as he does not believe that 'quieter' captures the meaning he wishes to express (line 5). The teacher then produces another formulation to capture the idea he expresses. In the discussion, the student is working from his first-language conceptual system and the figurative meaning that he wishes to convey, while the teacher presents reformulations of his meanings from within the perspective of Indonesian. This mediational approach has, however, proved unsuccessful as it has not addressed the underlying problem of meaning-making involved, that non-literal meanings involve culturally specific conceptual properties (Kecskes, 2013). To resolve the problem, the teacher begins to signal the differences in cultural perspectives that frame the use of non-literal language. The student initially interprets her comment as an identity position rather than as a feature of language use and rejects the identity position (line 9). The teacher then articulates more explicitly the idea that language use involves conceptually different systems and understandings of language in context. In this extract the teacher uses two distinct mediational strategies (see Kohler, 2015) to establish connections between the students and the language they are learning. The first strategy is to operate at the level of the code, providing examples of how ideas can be transferred between languages. The second is to move towards a more contextualised way of understanding language use to draw attention to aspects of literal and non-literal language as cultural practices. In doing this, she acknowledges the existing interpretations of the student, but also challenges them as an interpretational frame for understanding communication across languages and cultures.

In Extract 3, the teacher uses explanations as a way of mediating between the students' context and that of the language they are learning. In so doing she presents herself as mediating from a position of knowing and her mediation consists of presenting her knowledge to her learners. Mediation can however be done in other ways, as Extract 4 shows.

*Extract 4 (Source: Kohler, 2015)*

1. Teacher: What about the use of the language? How can you determine today if you were to explain to a tourist or a student going over there... just from the short experience we've had yesterday and a little bit today what would he or she need to know to recognise the severity of a sign?

2. Jaxson: I would say just to get a rough image like a nice sign or something that would be the least severe would have words like *Selamat datang* (Welcome) or *terima kasih* (thank you) (which are nicer words but something more severe would have words like *jangan* (don't) or *dilarang* (It's forbidden). Yeah, harsher words.
3. Teacher: What about the use of the subject pronoun like *kamu* (you), *Anda* (formal you), *kami* (exclusive we), *kita* (inclusive we)? Um, anyone...now this is broad...but just from what you've seen...
4. Jaxson: Maybe signs that use *Anda*, *kamu* are more detailed, might be addressing you personally and would probably mean that they might be nice signs of course this is very general...Something might be the most severe probably would just say, 'Don't do this' and address you specifically yes but there's exceptions...
5. Teacher: Perhaps government type messages. Messages that promote certain behaviour that perhaps are not as seen here in public. What about signs like *Apakah bapak sudah pakai kondom hari ini?* (Have you [men] worn a condom today?) Now have you ever seen a sign like that out in the open, say going down King William Street? Have you ever seen a sign like that? No, I haven't either because I'm sure a lot of brakes would go on! Um. *Apakah bapak sudah pakai kondom hari ini* or *Apakah ibu sudah pakai obat hari ini?* (Have you [women] taken your pill today?) Have you taken the pill? Because it could go both ways couldn't it? But that leads us to another discussion, doesn't it? That's a different sign isn't it? Generally what could it fit under?
6. Jaxson: I reckon it could be *diumumkan* (announced) but it's also saying it's not telling you...it's recommended. It's implying it.
7. Teacher: Yeah. Excellent. That's true. It's a bit like that *Mari kita* (let us)...Going back to that *Apakah bapak*...it doesn't say *Pakailah kondom* (Wear a condom)... maybe there are signs like that around but I haven't found them as yet but if I'm ever back in Indonesia I'll certainly be doing research on this.
8. Jaxson: It would be a very aggressive sign! I wouldn't like a sign shouting at me, telling me to wear a condom. Like the whole Uncle Sam thing...
9. Teacher: Actually that's a very good analogy. That's a very good analogy. It gives you an idea of what people think; what they prioritise. So, let's come up with some ideas, some observations of the signs we've looked at. So, what does the language tell us about the culture and I use this very, very carefully because when you talk about a culture it's never one and I don't think so anyway because as you know Indonesia is an archipelago and it's made up of many, many...and relatively recently it's become a united country so it's made up of many cultures.

In this extract, the focus is not on a communication problem; the message of the sign has been understood, but rather models a reflective process of interpretation (see Kohler, 2015). The teacher directs students' attention to a feature of linguistic politeness by using questions to generate their own reflection on processes of interpretation. In response to the teacher's question at line 1, Jaxson produces some alternative ways of formulating requests/orders, and evaluates the emotional resonance these have (*nicer, severe, harsher*). In working through the text in this extract, the teacher is making explicit a process for working reflectively on interpretations and for connecting the new language with previous interpretative experiences by drawing on students' existing language repertoires. In this extract, the teacher is not presenting interpretations as given but as discoverable (*let's come up with some ideas*), and as

personal; Jaxson considers how he would be affected by particular wordings of a message. As Jaxson works through his process of interpretation, the teacher models connections between what is new in his thinking about the language he is encountering and what is already known from his previous experiences of the language (e.g. lines 3 and 7). She also encourages him to link his experience of the text he is encountering with his previous encounters with similar texts (line 5) as part of the interpretative process.

In both of these extracts, learning is being constructed as an interpretative process of making sense of meanings encountered in and across languages (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2016). The focus of the mediation here is to enable students to become aware of the processes of communication and how language forms and cultural contextualisation influence how communication happens. The focus of the mediation is thus placed in these learning situations on understanding the processes of interpretation and the diversity of potential meanings that exist within talk.

### **3.0 Current Issues**

Research on mediation in intercultural pragmatics is an emerging area of research and to date there is little work that currently focuses on this. The issues confronting research on mediation and intercultural pragmatics result largely from the fact that this area of work has emerged from studies of language learning rather than studies of intercultural pragmatics specifically.

Most of the data sets on which current analyses have been based have not been collected specifically for investigating mediation and/or intercultural pragmatics. Most of this data has been collected in contexts of projects that focus on language teaching and learning from an intercultural perspective. The data sets include both classroom data in the form of recordings of language classes and introspective data in the form of retrospective interviews about learning experiences. The interest in mediation as a focus of research in interlanguage pragmatics has largely emerged because mediational work has been found to be both present and important for understanding what is happening in classroom contexts. Classroom data has obviously been important in understanding mediation in the teaching and learning process, but it has also provided insights into how language learners are engaged in working with multiple interpretations in order to establish shared understanding. Self-report data has been significant in understanding how individuals construct their own interpretations and has been important in developing understanding of mediation for self, which has to date relied on retrospective accounts of processes of mediation in experiences of coming to understand new meaning-making practices.

What is lacking in the data base for understanding mediation in intercultural pragmatics to date is examples of mediation ‘in the wild’ (Hutchins, 1995; Wagner, 2015). While data such as that presented in Extract 1 shows examples of mediation that has not been undertaken specifically for processes of learning, it has nonetheless been prompted by tasks given by a teacher for educational purposes. To date, all research that has presented examples of intercultural mediation as a communicational rather than specifically pedagogical practice has been based on data collected in educational contexts. This research has either used data in which mediation has been made salient by the particular tasks that students are engaged in during learning, or has involved data in which experiences in the wild are being elicited in an educational context that has focused on language learning. This means that this work has focused on contexts where the educational goals and tasks in which people are engaged prompt mediation as a communicative activity and there is little evidence for the ways that mediation is enacted outside such contexts. This does not invalidate the insights gained but means that there is a

need to expand the range of contexts that are researched to investigate how these practices are enacted in other contexts.

The use of introspective data also raises a similar issue for understanding mediation for intercultural pragmatics. This data is important for understanding speakers' internal interpretative processes, but to date there is no research that links these internal processes to actual communicative practices. This means that there is evidence that mediation for self is important in engaging with multiple interpretations of new experiences of language use and the ways that metapragmatic awareness is constructed, but there is at present no research that links these internal processes to real-world language practices. This is particularly the case because the data sets used for this research have not been designed with links between introspective data and performance data.

#### 4.0 Future Directions for Research

The future directions for research on mediation and intercultural pragmatics stem from the issues raised in the previous section. Research to date has revealed that mediation is important in intercultural pragmatics, but there is a need for further research that develops accounts of the mediation practices of participants in intercultural communication. This requires research that moves beyond contexts of language learning to investigate practices of language use. This research will need to use data drawn from naturalistic interactions in order to understand the practice used, but also will need to be supplemented by introspective data that reveals the interpretative processes that underlie the practices. One possibility for such studies may be the use of stimulated recall methods (Dempsey, 2010; Lyle, 2003). This is not to say that further research on language learning is not needed, however, as to date there has been little investigation of intercultural pragmatics, as opposed to interlanguage pragmatics, in language education (McConachy, 2019), and there is much more to know about the mediational processes involved in coming to understand and interpret meanings across languages and cultures, and on the development of such practices by learners.

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