



Building Rapport in an Oral Mediation Task: An Analysis of Upper-Intermediate Learners' Use of Small Talk and Other Positive Politeness Language Formulae

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the individual responses of 20 upper-intermediate learners to an oral mediation task. Particularly, it focuses on the initial and closing linguistic resources and strategies that are displayed in each participant's production in order to address the needs of the recipient included in the task description. With this aim, some categories of analysis are created. These categories have been designed following the descriptors of the *Companion Volume of the CEFRL* as well as previous literature and studies on small talk's functionalities. Therefore, to analyse the initiation of the conversation the categories of using greetings, empathy and compassion linguistic markers and readiness to help formulae are explored. On the other hand, to inquire into the ending of the sustained-monologue, comprehension checking formulae, empathetic markers used as well as concluding and summarizing formulae have been studied. The results show that there is a lack of attention to the task's description and, thus, to the recipient's needs. Furthermore, additional training is needed in concluding formulae, including unimportant talk.

Keywords: Building rapport; Mediation; Oral task; Sustained-monologue; Small talk.

El andamiaje conversacional en una tarea oral de mediación: Un análisis del uso del habla de contacto y otras fórmulas lingüísticas de cortesía positiva

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza las respuestas de 20 estudiantes de nivel intermedio alto a una tarea de mediación oral. Se fija en los recursos y estrategias lingüísticas que cada producción presenta al inicio y al final para establecer o concluir un contacto comunicativo cordial, así como para atender a las necesidades del interlocutor, siguiendo el enunciado de la tarea. Para ello, se crean una serie de categorías de análisis. Estas se basan tanto en lo propuesto en los descriptores del *Volumen Complementario del MCERL* como en otros estudios relativos al habla de contacto y sus funciones. Así pues, al analizar los mecanismos lingüísticos iniciales, se han estudiado: los saludos, las expresiones para mostrar empatía y otras expresiones para mostrar disposición a ayudar o colaborar. Por otro lado, para indagar en la finalización del monólogo sostenido, se ha prestado atención a las expresiones para comprobar la comprensión, para mostrar empatía y a otras expresiones para resumir los puntos principales. Los resultados muestran que existe una falta de atención hacia el enunciado y, con ello, a las necesidades del receptor. Asimismo, se considera preciso una mayor formación en estructuras y fórmulas lingüísticas que sirvan para concluir un monólogo.

Palabras clave: Andamiaje conversacional; Mediación; Tarea oral; Monólogo sostenido; Cordialidad; Habla de contacto.



1. Introduction

Over the last five years, mediation tasks have gained presence in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes of different levels as well as in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The use of the *Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL)* of 2020, and subsequently, the updates in the language teaching policies in some European countries such as Spain have contributed to shaping the teaching practices in relation with linguistic mediation. In this context, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) consolidates its importance since it enables the learners to face real-life communicative situations in the same way as mediation does. Besides, other approaches, not purely linguistic, such as Service Learning have been incorporated to the foreign language classes and are frequently combined with TBLT.

According to the *Companion Volume of the CEFRL*, linguistic mediation tasks can take diverse forms and be based on different sources. As in authentic communication in our highly technological and digital society, communicative practices are sometimes involving purely written or oral documents, whereas other times messages are transmitted using a variety of modes (i.e. speech, images, music, etc.) and through different means (i.e. instant messages, e-mails, video conferences, etc.). As the forms of communication are more technologically advanced, they also present a wider variety of modes of transmission and several intermedial possibilities. For instance, working remotely in professional contexts have opened doors to new forms of communication and have consolidated the use of others such as the instant message. These instant messages may transmit meaning in different modes such as images, voice recordings, text messages or sometimes a combination of them, so they can reach the requirements of a specific speaker or an audience.

Particularly, voice recordings sent through instant messages, understood as a type of sustained-monologue, can meet different objectives: describe an experience, provide information or present a case or a problem (Council of Europe, 2020). In voice recordings, the dialogue does not happen explicitly, but there is dialogicity due to the necessity to attract the recipient's attention or fulfill his or her needs. In other words, the characteristic of interaction and dialogic communication are observable even if there is not always turn-taking or an immediate response (Pascual Olivé, 2010). Therefore, the sustained-monologues displayed in some online interactions may serve both for information conveyance (task-related talk) and relationship-building (i.e. small talk) (Babel et al., 2021).

In contrast, it should be acknowledged that online monologues may suppress the face-to-face receptive part of the conversation. Thus, this suspension of turn-taking might mean that speakers tend to employ adapted or alternative strategies to address the recipient. Nonetheless, opening and ending formulae play a very similar role than in monologues addressing a particular recipient in real-life conversations, so that "speakers must develop and borrow strategies to compensate for the missing interlocutor" (Frobenius, 2011, p. 814).

If these premises are extrapolated to the foreign language classes and, in particular, to the oral mediation tasks with a service component (i.e. migration services, vulnerable recipient, etc.), it can be confirmed that learners should not only be capable of completing a given task in terms of content requirements, but they must also pay attention to the task description. In this way, they will be able to appropriately build rapport through the use of different linguistic mechanisms such as small talk when initiating and ending their talk. The recipient and his or her needs should be considered in order to transmit the information in the most

favorable way. Therefore, this article analyses the performance of 20 upper-intermediate learners in an oral mediation task. It specifically focuses on the mechanisms aimed at building rapport that the participants use in order to start and finish their sustained monologues.

1.1. Previous studies

Early approaches to mediation pointed out that the new forms and means of communication would require a more sensitive as well as comprehensive language use in professional and non-professional fields (Cassany, 1996; De Arriba García & Cantero Serena, 2004; Trovato, 2013). More recently, Sánchez Cuadrado (2022) underscores that mediation will be one of the core elements of language teaching in the coming years. Within its multifaceted nature, attention is paid to the different capabilities of the speakers and to the diverse contexts where communication takes place. Among them, the speakers' abilities to understand the most relevant information in a message as well as their skills to transmit it to a recipient who presents specific needs are essential. This linguistic activity implies that the speaker should create the most favorable conditions for communication in diverse professional, personal or educational communicative encounters (Council of Europe, 2020).

The *Companion Volume of the CEFRL* (Council of Europe, 2020) underlines that a speaker who is involved in a mediation task should have "a well-developed emotional intelligence, or an openness to develop it, in order to have sufficient empathy for the viewpoints and emotional states of other participants in the communicative situation" (p. 91). Mediating is also connected with the social and cultural process of creating a safe space for communication and cooperation which defuses any tensions that may arise.

In this regard, the scale "Facilitating a pluricultural space" includes some descriptors for intermediate (B1) and upper-intermediate (B2) levels which are in connection with not merely linguistic attitudes, even if they are mostly achieved through language use. The B1 learner should be able to "support communication across cultures by initiating a conversation, showing interest and empathy by asking and answering simple questions, and expressing agreement and understanding" and to "act in a supportive manner in intercultural encounters, recognising the feelings and different worldviews of other members of the group" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 115). As for the B2 level is concerned, the speaker should be able to "establish a relationship with members of other cultures, showing interest and empathy through questioning, expressions of agreement and identification of emotional and practical needs" (p. 115).

Pragmatic competence's considerations need to be added to these descriptors. This competence is understood in the European document as the language use in the (co-) construction of meaning. It involves language users and learners in the principles of language use according to the organization of the message or its function. Aspects such as initiating, maintaining and ending a conversation are of great interest in its development. In professional contexts or in delicate situations, the initiation and ending of a conversation are frequently showing the ability of the speaker to establish and manage interpersonal relationships with the recipient and, thus, his or her capacity to create a positive and collaborative environment.

Building rapport is essential in work-related and in intercultural communicative situations. According to Holmes (2000), small talk "warms people up socially, oils the interpersonal wheels, and gets talk started on a positive note, before getting down to real business talk" (p. 34). Marra (2013) considers that in people-oriented

talk in workplaces, the presence of small talk as well as the use of humour serve as initiation rites and have beneficial effects on interpersonal relationships, particularly when problematic requests appear or with the objective of facilitating first time encounters. Similarly, in other professional contexts, which may provide intercultural personal services (i.e. nursing contexts), small talk is used to establish rapport or to engage in social conversation. The speaker who acts as a mediator should show his concern for the recipient's needs and communicate the message with empathy as well as with confidence (Bosher, 2013; Origlia Ikhilor et al., 2019). Irishkanova et al. (2004) underscore that empathy is the principal basis for our ability to care about other people. Furthermore, they point out that its importance is not in question as a part of intercultural mediation.

Webb & Barrett (2014) highlight that rapport is operationalised in different ways. It is defined as the creation of mutual trust and harmony which seeks a personal connection and an enjoyable interaction (Grempler & Gwinner, 2000; Png Wong et al., 2022). Similarly, Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2005) considers that rapport tries to create a relative harmony and smoothness of relations between people. The conditions to have a relaxed and friendly communicative atmosphere are frequently created by the presence of small talk. In addition, Placencia & García (2008) consider that small talk is generally a positive talk whose main objective is the initiation or maintenance of good relationships. Furthermore, the authors underline its importance in intercultural encounters.

According to McCarthy (2010) the notion of small talk as superfluous, not frequently in connection with the transactional exigencies, encompasses a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena, "including phatic exchanges, relational language, and various types of insertion sequence" (p. 33). Small talk is frequently more abundant in the initiation of a conversation, serving sometimes as a ritual among speakers (Marra, 2013). It is needed sometimes to end a conversation and make sure that the information was understood, an agreement was closed or there were not misunderstandings in the communication process.

Some studies carried out in the area of health and migration services suggest that the professionals, in their role of intercultural interpreters, need to show "willingness to understand" the other person's needs and circumstances. They should be also able to empathise with a stressful or distressing situation (Origlia Ikhilor et al., 2019). In other studies, which have addressed the use of institutional speech (Valero Garcés, 2002, 2005), several intercultural and communicative barriers have been found, mainly in health services and among Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) professionals. Valero Garcés (2005) underscores that the people who work in intercultural social services need more linguistic resources in order to provide emotional support to their users.

On the other hand, Valero Garcés (2008) explores the communication between doctors and patients and concludes that small talk is interwoven with informative and transactional talk. Furthermore, she argues that this type of talk fulfills a great variety of functions, being its main objective to diminish tensions, add informality, reduce asymmetries and avoid silence. In this article, the greetings at the beginning of the conversation together with the mechanisms to finish the conversation are addressed.

Similarly, the study of Hong-Joo (2020), in which the beginning and ending rituals in doctor and patient conversations are explored, concludes that phatic communication has a crucial role in the interaction in delicate situations. It can also have an impact on meaning and be of great importance in building good relationships for future communicative encounters. These ideas coincide with the study of Holmes (2000). Thus, the positive po-

liteness in conversations might be a mode of social action or the beginning of it.

Besides, some studies in the area of ESP have suggested that the training in basic rapport building mechanisms is needed. In this regard, the study of Planken (2005) outlines that learners need extra practice in routine communication such as greetings, and enquiries after well-being. The communicative situations, which were explored in her research, were mostly dealt inadequately, and, thus, can make future negotiators fail in their task.

In the light of these studies, we can say that showing empathy and compassion, as well as readiness to help would be expected in the situation that has been designed for the learners. It is also assumed that there will be other expressions that will serve to break the ice or to avoid the silence. Furthermore, it is expected that learners are able to appropriately close their interactive monologues.

2. Data collection and method

This article focuses on 20 upper-intermediate learners' oral productions. The examples were collected in the Academic Year 2022-2023. Learners had a limited training on mediation strategies – 2 sessions of 2 hours – in which they were informed about the importance of reformulating the original message or of showing empathy, openness and being able to identify a possible lack of understanding.

The participants are enrolled in the bachelor's degree of International Studies, and one of the competences to be developed in the subject "English for International Studies II", where the study was conducted, is to be able to communicate effectively across cultures. Furthermore, they are expected to develop oral and written mediation strategies in English, so that they can negotiate and solve international misunderstandings, conflicts or tensions in communication. All the participants have at least a B1 level of English. In all cases Spanish is the first language. Regarding their gender, four of them are males and sixteen are females. They are aged between 20 and 23 years.

As for the procedure in this study, the productions were recorded and transcribed using the Speech-To-Text tool Amberscript¹ (2023). After that, the initiation of the voice message in each of them was studied using as an initial criterion the presence or absence of small talk to build rapport at the beginning and at the end of the learners' productions. Then, some categories of analysis were created *ad hoc*. These include the greeting formulae, the empathy and compassion linguistic mechanisms, the readiness to help formulae as well as other language to break the ice or add emphasis, details, etc. Finally, the linguistic mechanisms that are used to end the monologue were explored. In this case, attention was paid to the formulae they use to check comprehension, to summarize the main points or to empathise with the recipient. Additionally, the category of "Nothing" was added for those monologues in which no language mechanisms were used to finish the talk.

2.1. The task

In the task, the participants had to observe an extract of a visual contract and explain to a future employee the duties and conditions expressed in it, using a recorded voice message. They had 1

¹ Amberscript is a tool which provides human and software-based transcription services from speech recordings in different languages and formats. The first ten minutes of transcription do not have cost. Data is always stored in Western Europe and if the file is deleted after the transcription, no copy of it is stored in Amberscript's server, which meets privacy and safety conditions.

minute to prepare it and 2 minutes to present it. Particularly, the voice recording would be sent to a future worker from Argelia who wants to know his duties during the probation week and after it. This recipient cannot understand the information provided in the visual contract. Therefore, the most relevant aspects should be identified and transmitted. Furthermore, the participants should put into practice some of the mediation strategies such as being empathic showing willingness to solve the communication issue. According to the task description, the learners should check the comprehension of the transmitted message.

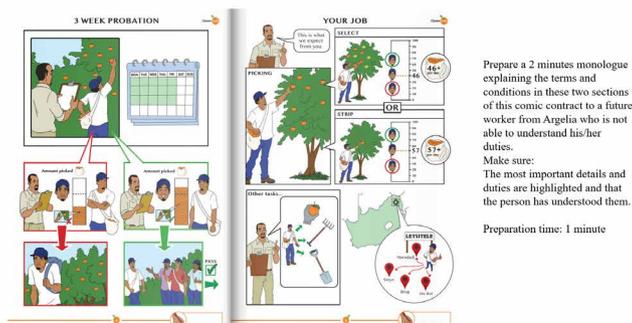


Figure 1. *The Oral Mediation Task*. Source: Extract of *ClemenGold Creative Contracts* (De Rooy, 2016).

Thus, the participants are expected to greet the person, to show understanding of his situation – he is a newcomer who wants to have access to the information. Furthermore, they are encouraged to make sure that the most important details have been understood.

As stated in the *Companion Volume of the CEFR* of 2020, intermediate and upper-intermediate speakers are expected to show their abilities to build successful relationships with members of other cultures, showing interest and empathy through questioning. Moreover, they should identify individual or community emotional and practical needs. These aspects have been considered in order to design the task as well as for the analysis of the responses.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The corpus reveals that in 12 out of 20 productions there are examples of rapport building such as greetings. Regarding the participants' empathic linguistic attitude towards the recipient's needs, some examples of it were observed in 8 of the productions. The participants readiness to help was identified in 15 of the recorded messages, but with different levels of accomplishment. Specifically, it was very clear and explicit in some excerpts such as example (5), and quite unclear and not so specific in others as in example (14). Table 1 summarises the results and provides some examples.

Table 1.

Initiating the message's categories of analysis and examples.
Source: *Own elaboration*

Building rapport mechanisms	Number of participants	Examples
Greeting formula	12 (60%)	(1) Hi, so the job that you are going to do; (2) Hello, so... (3) So, hello
Empathy and compassion	8 (40%)	(12) I realised that you didn't understand this contract; (20) I know what your problem is, don't worry, etc.
Readiness to help	15 (75%)	(22) I am going to try to explain this contract to you, etc.; (23) I am here today in order to explain it to you;
Other expressions to break the ice	3 (15%)	(27) I know that you have just come to the city; (28) So, if you want to work in Spain, for example, as a collector of fruits, etc.; (29) This contract shows images and text, it is like a comic

As the Table shows, the presence of other language expressions used to break the ice or build rapport are only found in 3 out of the 20 productions. In fact, they are not pure examples of unimportant talk, but they are rather acting as openers of the message, adding empathy or paraphrasing the task's description.

Regarding initial greetings, more than half of the participants started their monologue with common monolexical greeting expressions as in examples (1) to (12). These are as follows:

- (1) Hi, so the job that you are going to do... (Participant 5, Male)
- (2) Hello, so... (Participant 6, Female)
- (3) So, hello, before getting hired... (Participant 7, Female)
- (4) Ok, hello, so the job... (Participant 8, Male)
- (5) So, hello, I'm going to explain... (Participant 9, Female)
- (6) Well, hello. I'm going to ... (Participant 11, Female)
- (7) Well, hi. Yeah. I know what your... (Participant 12, Female)
- (8) Hello. I'm going to try... (Participant 14, Female)
- (9) Well, Hello, I think... (Participant 15, Female)
- (10) Hello, I think the conditions... (Participant 16, Female)
- (11) Hello, friend, this visual contract... (Participant 19, Female)
- (12) Hi, I realised that.... (Participant 20, Female)

In the rest of the productions, the voice messages started without any greeting formula. An example being (13) "Ok, so the job consists of" (Participant 3, Female) or (14) "So, well, the main thing..." (Participant 10, Female). The formula "Hi/Hello + Question" (i.e. How are you?) does not appear in any of the messages' openings.

The category of empathy and compassion is observed in 8 interactive monologues (40%). The examples below illustrate the choices of the participants:

- (15) I know the rules of the job can be difficult to understand... (Participant 1, Male)
- (16) I know you are having problems understanding the conditions of this job [...] I have troubles understanding some parts too... (Participant 6, Female)

- (17) even though you don't understand them or you don't know the language... (Participant 14, Female)
- (18) I think the conditions are not clear... (Participant 16, Female)
- (19) this visual contract is difficult... (Participant 19, Female)

As it can be observed, the participants acknowledge the difficulties of the document in order to show empathy as in examples (15), (16), (18) and (19). Furthermore, they refer to possible linguistic barriers in the case of example (17). In other cases, the linguistic formulae is limited to identifying the problem (20) "I know what your problem is" (Participant 12, Female) or (21) "I realized that you don't understand the contract" (Participant 20, Female).

In addition, in 15 out of 20 productions clear examples of showing readiness to help are observed. In fact, the participants' achievement in this category was the highest. Some examples are shown below:

- (22) I am going to try to summarize as easily as I can... (Participant 1, Male)
- (23) I am here today to explain to you... (Participant 2, Female)
- (24) I will try to do my best to explain it to you... (Participant 6, Female)
- (25) so maybe I could help you... (Participant 12, Female)
- (26) I want to help you... (Participant 18, Male)

In general, the learners in this study use very direct expressions: (24) "I will" or (26) "I want". In some cases, they emphasize that they will simplify the transmitted information (22). Furthermore, (25) "help" and (23) "explain" are found in most of the productions to show the recipient that there is a clear willingness to collaborate with him.

Finally, some productions (3 out of 20) include other linguistic mechanisms whose function could be breaking the ice, avoiding silence, adding detail or adding emphasis to the set-up phase of the conversation. One example is (27) "I know that you have just come to the city" (Participant 1, Male), activating his/her imagination and, therefore, trying to show great empathy at the very beginning. In (28) "if you want to work in Spain, for example, as a collector of fruits, etc." (Participant 13, Female), an example of an initial contextualization of the needs of the recipient is also observed. The speaker is now paraphrasing the main problem or the possible origin of the lack of understanding.

There is an additional example which is worth mentioning: (29) "This contract shows images and text, it is like a comic" (Participant 18, Male). In this case, the speaker uses small talk in order to explain the type of document that is about to be described. Explaining the type of document was not explicitly required by the task's description, but it can be useful for a fictional recipient who is not fully understanding the visual contract because of its characteristics or because of a vision problem. Thus, it can be seen as an additional example of positive politeness to initiate the conversation.

As far as linguistic mechanisms used to close the conversation are concerned, the results are not fully consistent with the task's description: "Make sure: The most important details and duties are highlighted, and that the person has understood them". Just 6 out of 20 participants check the comprehension of the transmitted message. Regarding other expressions which are used at the end of the conversation, we can say that in 3 productions, empathetic language is explicitly used: (30) "I hope you will be able to do it" (Participant 16, Female). In addition, just 7 out of the 20 productions contain examples of language which is used to summarize the information (i.e. I think that's all). There is a full absence of

monolexical formulae such as "Bye" or "Goodbye", which could have been expected to conclude a face-to-face conversation.

Table 2.

Ending the message's categories of analysis and examples.
Source: Own elaboration

Closing the explanation	Number of participants	Examples
Checking comprehension	5 (25%)	(34) Do you have any problems to understand that?; (35) If you have any questions, you can ask; Okay?
Empathy	2 (15%)	(36) I know this is a lot of information
Summarizing	6 (30%)	(40) I think this is all...; (41) That's all I think...
Nothing	7 (35%)	

Five participants check the comprehension of the transmitted message using direct questioning as in examples (31) and (34) or indirect questions as in example (35). Thus, the level of politeness is also different. We find very formal questioning such as (32) "Could you tell me if you have any other questions..." (Participant 12, Female), and very informal and less polite questioning formulae such as (33) "Okay?" (Participant 14, Female). The excerpts are shown below:

- (31) Is everything clear or you want me to explain it... (Participant 2, Female)
- (32) Could you tell me if you have any other questions... (Participant 12, Female)
- (33) Okay? (Participant 14, Female)
- (34) Do you have any problems to understand that? (Participant 18, Male)
- (35) If you have any questions, you can ask... (Participant 19, Female)

Regarding other linguistic formulae used to close the talk and show empathy at the end, it can be stated that they are not very frequent. Just 2 out of the 20 productions are examples for this category.

- (36) I know this is a lot of information... (Participant 6, Female)
- (37) I hope you will be able to do it... (Participant 16, Female)

Ending the talk by summarizing the main points or with a concluding expression is observed only in 6 out of the 20 productions. The examples below illustrate this point:

- (38) And these are the main points... (Participant 1, Male)
- (39) And that's basically what you have to do... (Participant 5, Male)
- (40) I think this is all... (Participant 8, Male)
- (41) That's all I think... (Participant 17, Female)

Basically, they use concluding expressions which indicate to the recipient that the monologue is about to finish. In these examples, these expressions appear before the comprehension questions. Finally, there are neither concluding linguistic mechanisms nor a comprehension question at the end in 35% of the productions.

The results have shown that in general terms, the participants are more likely to introduce linguistic formulae that show empathy and compassion or readiness to help at the beginning of the interactive monologue than at the end of it. In general, the linguistic mechanisms to build rapport are frequent or even very frequent at the beginning (Marra, 2013) and not very frequent at the end of the talk in all the categories that have been analysed.

The initial training in mediation, the gender or the personal skills and intercultural experiences of the participants could have had a positive impact on the categories which have obtained the best results: use of greeting formula (60%), showing empathy and compassion (40%), and expressing readiness to help (75%). However, the productions are improvable in these categories. Thus, including similar tasks as well as providing feedback can help candidates to reach better results in the future.

On the other hand, the analysis of linguistic mechanisms used in the messages' concluding section and their attachment to different categories of study does not show very positive results. The participants do not check the comprehension of the transmitted message; in fact, direct or indirect comprehension questions were only found in 5 excerpts (25%). It could mean that apart from requiring more training in this aspect and extra practice, they also need to pay careful attention to the task's description, since this aspect was included in it (Council of Europe, 2020).

Language formulae whose function is showing empathy or compassion is uncommon, and only two examples of this kind were identified in the productions. The best results – even if it is only observable in less than 40% of the productions – were found in terms of language formulae to conclude the talk or to summarize the main points (i.e. And these are the main points).

Having only 35% of the productions with any type of linguistic mechanisms to end the interactive monologue should be taken into consideration. It means that participants need more training if they want to be successful mediators and communicators in the future.

4. Conclusion

In this study, the oral responses of 20 upper-intermediate learners to an oral mediation task have been analysed. In order to study the data some categories regarding the role of the mediator and the function of small talk have been created (Council of Europe, 2020; Boshier, 2013; Spencer-Oatey 2005). After that, the beginning and the ending of each voice message were explored.

The results showed that the participants need more training in mediation strategies as well as gaining awareness of the importance of small talk in order to build rapport in mediation tasks (Planken, 2005). They also need to be aware of the task's description, which sets out the requirements of the recipient. Additional training is needed in concluding formulae, including unimportant talk, so that the participants' interactive monologues conclude appropriately in the light of the literature explored (Council of Europe, 2020; Sánchez Cuadrado, 2022).

The weaknesses that the productions present might be partially due to the situation – a task which requires a fictional interactive monologue. However, the forms and means of communication in our society imply that successful linguistic mediators are sensitive to the audience and its needs when turn-taking is not occurring directly (Frobenius, 2011; Babel et al., 2021).

In the context of the study – a class of International Studies – learners need to be aware of the benefits that they could gain by improving in positive politeness in interactive monologues, and what this could bring to their future communicative intercultural encounters. Small talk understood as the willingness and ability

to understand the other person's needs, circumstances and to empathise with a particular situation (Origlia Ikhilov et al., 2019; Holmes, 2000; Irishkanova et al., 2004) could be much needed in their future professional communication. Therefore, learners in similar settings need training in this regard.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, the findings in this study could be applied to the design of oral mediation tasks rubrics as well as be useful for the provision of feedback. They could also be part of checklists to help learners in similar educational settings to be aware of the task and its requirements.

The main limitation of this study is that the number of participants is not very large. However, their level of English is very similar as well as their field of study and previous training. The results can serve as an initial sample of the linguistic mechanisms and attitudes that learners display in a mediation oral task, as well as a starting point to delve into including "small talk" in the mediation teaching practices in the context of English for Specific Purposes. Variables such as gender, linguistic attitudes as well as previous training in additional languages could be introduced and analysed in future studies.

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