



**IMT Atlantique**

Bretagne-Pays de la Loire  
École Mines-Télécom



# LANGUAGE TEACHERS & STUDENTS AS INTERCULTURAL MEDIATORS

## EXPLORING ONE OF THE CRACKS THROUGH WHICH THE LIGHT GETS IN

ALISON GOURVES-HAYWARD

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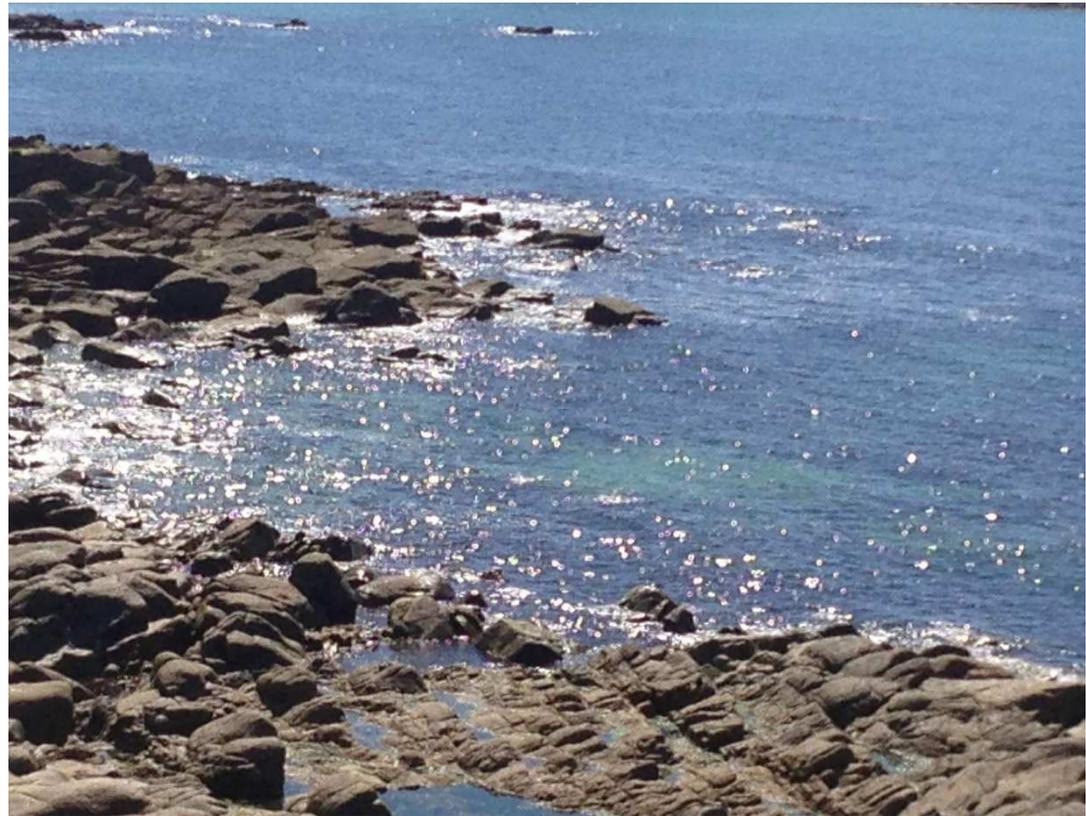


# INTRODUCTION: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES



= Finis Terrae

Finistère



=Head/Tip of the Earth

Pen Ar Bed



Photo: Céline Castel

# PLAN

**1/ Third places & spaces – cracks through which the light gets in**

**2) Definitions of Intercultural mediation in the literature**

**3) Language teachers as intercultural mediators**

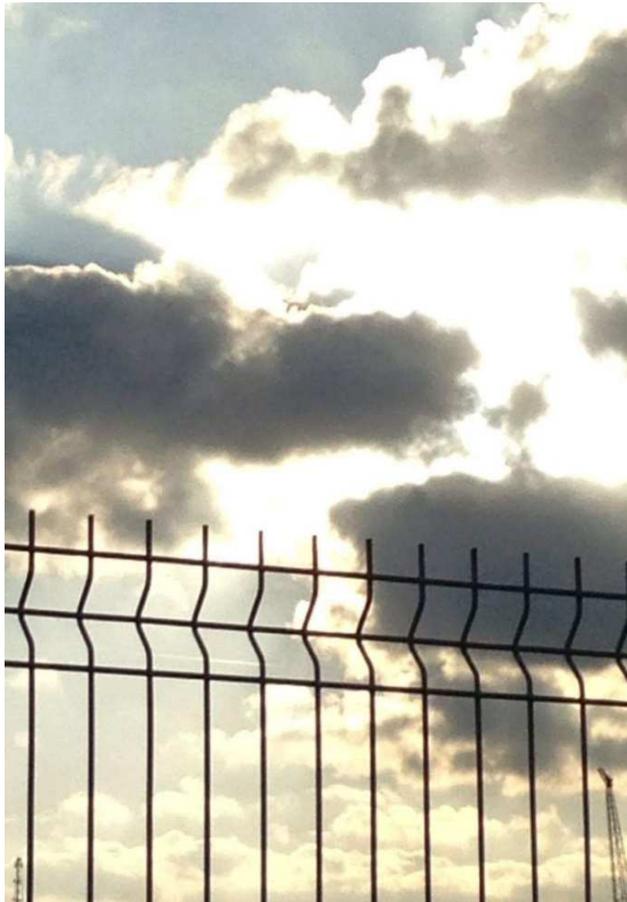
**4/ 2018 study of mediators at IMT Atlantique, Brest campus**

**5/ Examples from practice**

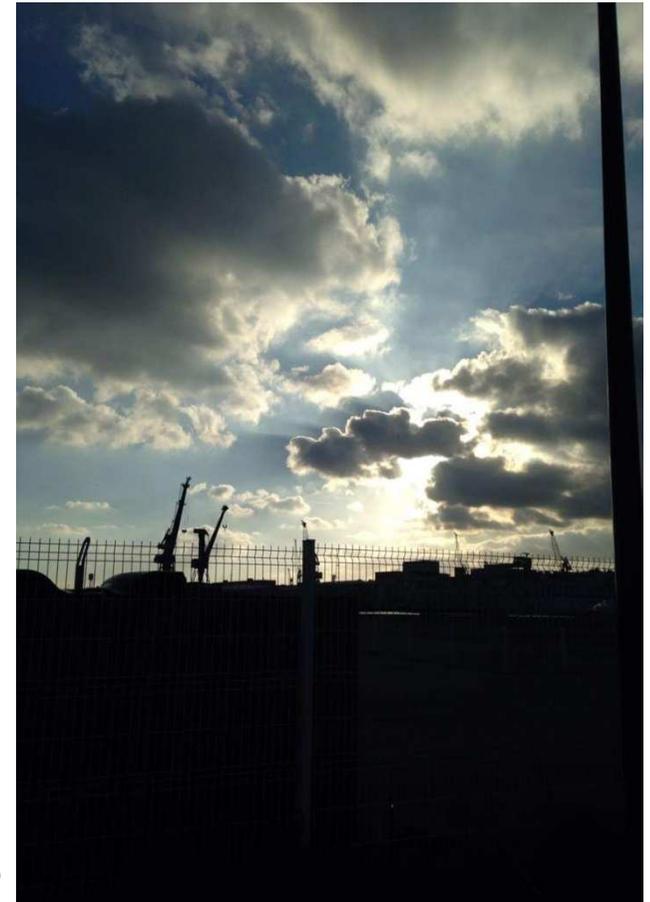


# 1) 3RD PLACES & SPACES: CRACKS THROUGH WHICH THE LIGHT GETS IN

Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in (Leonard Cohen 1992)



liminality  
interstices  
3<sup>rd</sup> space  
3<sup>rd</sup> place  
no-man's land  
lost in translation  
bridges  
faultlines  
boundaries  
go-betweens  
intermediaries  
intercultural mediators



## 1) 3RD PLACES & SPACES: CRACKS THROUGH WHICH THE LIGHT GETS IN

“ This approach involves dialogue. Through dialogue and the search for each other's understanding, each person tries to see the world through the other's eyes without losing sight of him or herself. The goal is not a balance of opposites, or a moderate pluralism of opinions but a paradoxical, irreducible confrontation that may change one in the process.” (Kramsch 1993:231)

“This “third place” cannot be defined by the teacher, but each individual learner will need to find their own “third place”, where learners are positioned “at the intersection of multiple social roles and individual choices”. (Kramsch, 1993: 257)

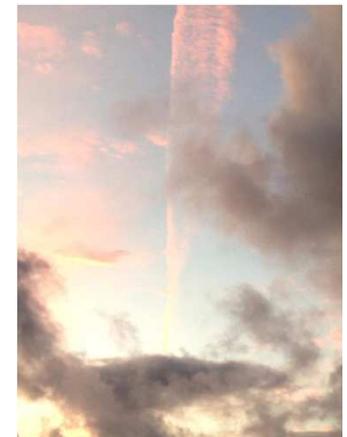


## 1) 3RD PLACES & SPACES: CRACKS THROUGH WHICH THE LIGHT GETS IN

This non-essentialist view of culture includes the Hegelian notion of a dialectic between the singular individual, cultural socialization and universal human traits (Porcher & Abdallah-Preteceille 1998)

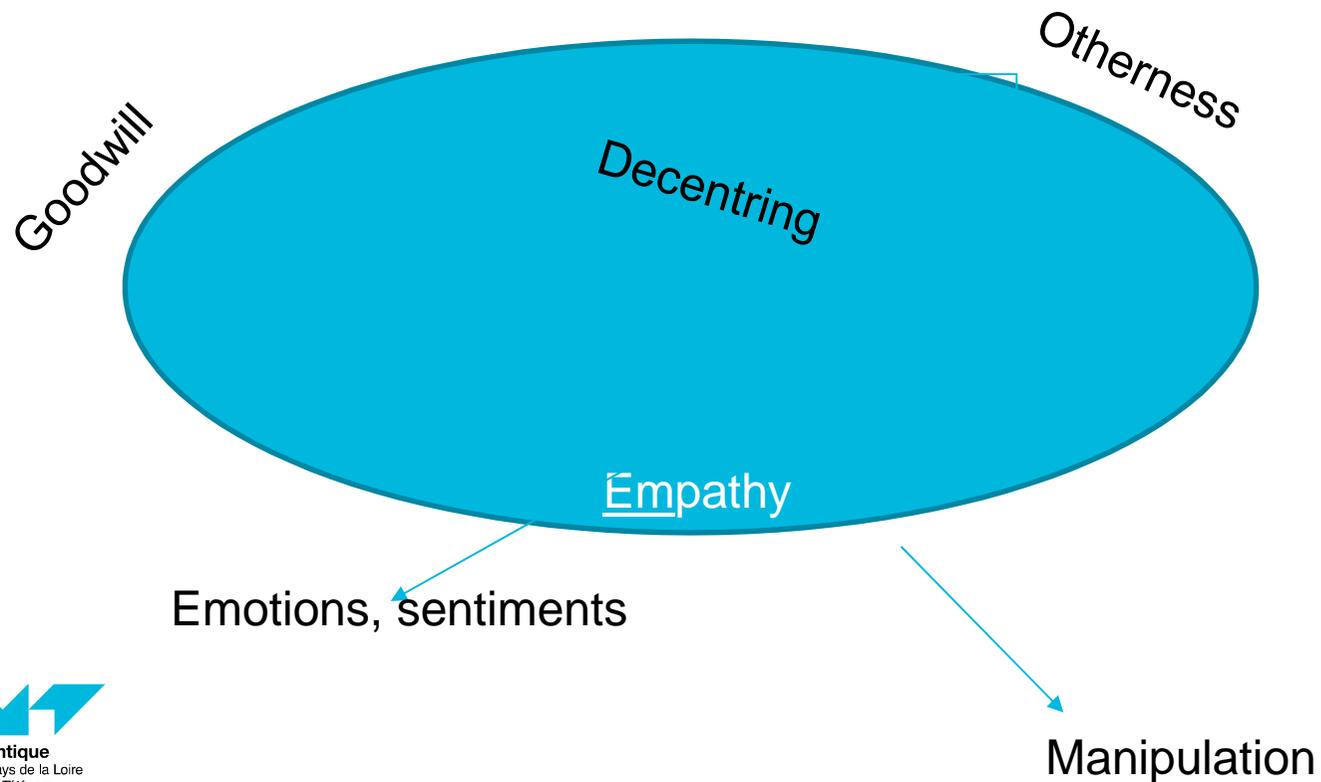
« Hegel created the concept of universal-singular to embody the dialectic between a universal and a particular, so that the first is entirely present in the second, the latter embodying the universal »  
L Porcher, Le français langue étrangère, p68, Hachette, 1995

- I am a person with my inherited cultural capital (known or unknown) but I am also the singular individual who organises and manages this cultural capital.
- I communicate with the Other while recognising his or her singularity and cultural capital => **decentring**



# 1) 3RD PLACES & SPACES: CRACKS THROUGH WHICH THE LIGHT GETS IN

**Decentring** implies preserving one's singular identity while acting with empathy



## 2) DEFINITIONS OF (INTERCULTURAL) MEDIATION IN THE LITERATURE: COUNCIL OF EUROPE PUBLICATIONS

sociocultural

cultural

linguistic

intercultural

relational

cognitive

## 2) DEFINITIONS OF (INTERCULTURAL) MEDIATION IN THE LITERATURE: CEFRL, 2001

Plurilingual & pluricultural

action-oriented

intercultural personality

Interest in & openness to otherness

COMMUNICATIONAL  
COMPETENCE

translation  
interpretation  
reformulation  
transformation  
clarification

Sociocultural/Intercultural  
competences

social agent

cultural intermediary

dealing effectively  
with intercultural  
misunderstandings  
& conflict

## 2) DEFINITIONS OF (INTERCULTURAL) MEDIATION IN THE LITERATURE: CEFRL, 2001

Presented as a **neutral space**:

In *mediating activities*, the language user is not **concerned to express his/her own meanings\***, but **simply to act as an intermediary** between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. Examples of mediating activities include spoken interpretation and written translation as well as summarising and paraphrasing texts in the same language, when the language of the original text is not understandable to the intended recipient .

(P.87)

**\*In FRENCH: “sa pensée”**

## 2) DEFINITIONS OF (INTERCULTURAL) MEDIATION IN THE LITERATURE: CEFRL, COMPANION VOLUME 2018

Plurilingual & pluricultural competences/repertoire

action-oriented

cultural / intercultural mediator

deal with otherness  
empathy  
openness

MEDIATING A TEXT/CONCEPT/  
COMMUNICATION  
co-constructing meaning  
collaborating  
building bridges  
creating/facilitating pluricultural space

Intercultural encounter/exchange

social agent

intermediary

deal effectively with misunderstandings & conflict

## 2) DEFINITIONS OF (INTERCULTURAL) MEDIATION IN THE LITERATURE: CEFRL, COMPANION VOLUME 2018

In mediation, the user/learner acts as a **social agent** who creates bridges and helps to **construct or convey meaning**, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another (**cross-linguistic mediation**). The focus is on the role of language in processes like **creating the space** and conditions for **communicating** and/or **learning, collaborating** to construct new meaning, **encouraging others** to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional

P. 103

**Mediation** The approach taken to mediation is broader than that presented in the CEFR book. In addition to a focus on activities to mediate a text, scales are provided for mediating concepts and for mediating communication, giving a total of 19 scales for mediation activities. Mediation strategies (5 scales) are concerned with strategies employed during the mediation process, rather than in preparation for it. P. 50

## 2) DEFINITIONS OF (INTERCULTURAL) MEDIATION IN THE LITERATURE: ZARATE ET AL, 2004

Plurilingual & pluricultural context/exchanges/practices /Europe

action-oriented

cultural /  
intercultural  
mediator

openness to  
otherness  
empathy  
decentring

ENSURING SHARED  
UNDERSTANDINGS OF  
CULTURAL  
PHENOMENA  
understand explain  
comment interpret  
negotiate  
encourage discovery of  
similarities  
acceptance of difference  
counter stereotypes &  
xenophobia

Intercultural  
competences/awareness/  
communication

social agent

intermediary

handle  
misunderstandings  
clashes & conflict

### 3) LANGUAGE TEACHERS AS INTERCULTURAL MEDIATORS

- Language teachers identified as well placed & well qualified to be intercultural mediators seen as:

« **professional mediators** with a capacity and responsibility to help learners to **understand others** and **otherness** as a basis for the acquisition of cultural and communicative competence (Crozet & Liddicoat 1999)

- Or:

« the **quintessential go-between** among people with various languages and of different culture, generations and genders .... someone who has acquired the ability to interact with 'others', be they native or non-native speakers, present or past writers; someone who has learned to **accept other perspectives and perceptions** of the world, to **mediate between different perspectives** and to be conscious of their evaluation of difference » (Kramersch 2004:44)

### 3) LANGUAGE TEACHERS AS INTERCULTURAL MEDIATORS

- Kohler (2015) reminds us of the complexity and difficulties involved in this process
- She concludes her action research study of 3 teachers of Indonesian in South Australia by advocating an expanded view of mediation in language teaching, beyond the view of language teachers as « intermediaries » to one of « contributors to and shapers of meaning » ( Scarino 2001)

« Mediation is not a matter of translation skills, teaching strategies or scaffolding alone; it is also an embodied process that draws upon a teacher's orientation towards his/her own language and culture (and their relationship) and overall stance towards language teaching and learning » (Kohler 2015: 193)

## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST

**Context: Merger between Telecommunications engineering school & Mining engineering school; different cultures; uncertainty; organisational difficulties; reduction in emphasis on developing language & intercultural skills; our interest in different forms of mediation – linguistic, cultural, intercultural, pedagogical, terminological, legal (two international conferences: GLAT 2016 & 2018).**

**Aim: The aim of this study was to examine and compare the representations of different forms of mediation held by key players in terms of contact with the international students, who represent around 50% of the student population.**



## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST

Participants:

MALE FEMALE 30 – 61 yrs	NATIONALITY	POSITION
10 women	8 French 1 Welsh 1 Swedish	3 Programme coordinators 3 Language lecturers 2 Science lecturers 1 Librarian 1 Admin assistant
6 men	5 French 1 Syrian	1 Vice -Dean of Studies 1 Head of Dept 1 Programme coordinator 1 Language lecturer 2 Science lecturers

## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST

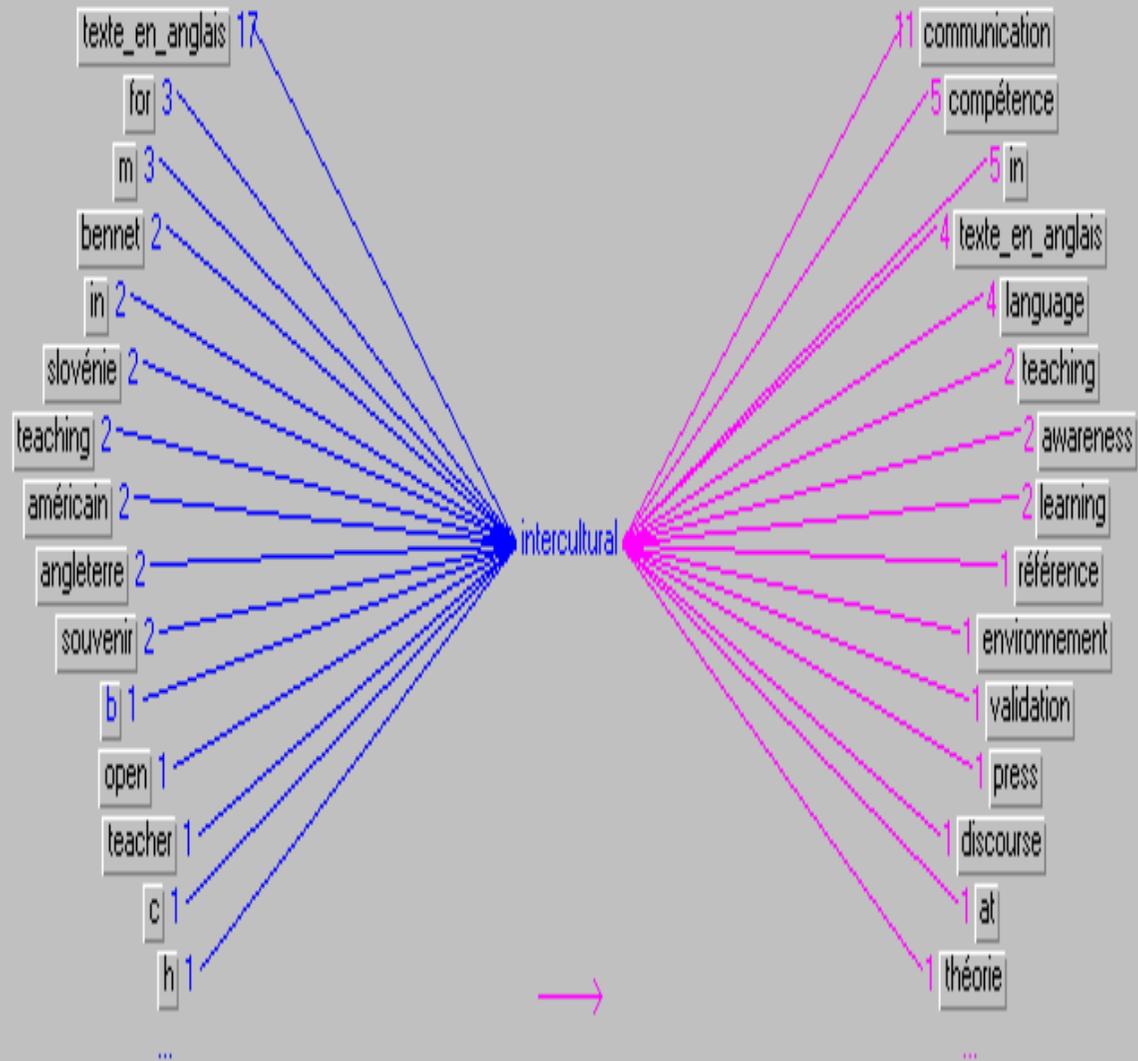
The TROPES software provides a semantic analysis from lexical segments based on a database of French dictionaries

TROPES allows us check the intuitions derived from discourse analysis by highlighting:

- 1) the frequency of the utterances
- 2) the lexical, semantic and logical connections between different utterances presented in graph form

Here we have the example of the word « **intercultural mediation** » connected with **negotiation**, language teaching, awareness, openness etc.

## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST



## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST

**Some results (Sablé & Gourvès-Hayward, 2018):**

**Communication** as a semantic field in all 16 interviews

Association of **mediation** with **conflict resolution** and **negotiation** (the latter referred to 19 times in one interview; 16 times in many others)

Importance of **reformulation**, **translation** or **adaptation** of written and verbal communication (CEFRL 2001; 2018; Zarate et al 2004)

Identification of use of different **mediational tools** (Vygotsky 1978)

**Mediators** providing **bridges** or **buffers** between different interlocutors

Ethical **communication**, **empathy**, **decentring** and **acceptance** of **otherness**, deemed essential to this process

## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST

### ☺ Unexpected results:

Formal or informal role of mediator attributed to language lecturers by 50% of the non-linguists: translation, adaptation & explicitation of rubrics, exams and lectures, language & intercultural support & training, conflict resolution

“The capacity to “translate or make explicit the obvious, what is hidden behind the words” seen as an “added value” (Programme coordinator) provided by the Language department, as they are “not in that area” (Science lecturer) or “simply incapable of doing this” (Programme coordinator)

Summed up by the Language department’s administrative assistant:

[...] I have the impression that everyone in the department mediates at different times of the day & to different degrees, that’s why I love working here- the Heads of languages between the students, the teachers, each other, the Head of Department between everyone, the students between students, the teachers between teachers; it is more or less effective depending on the person....

☹ Although, for some, these actions are not noticed or recognised by the Directors & for the Head of Department. interviewed, they do not exist!

## 4/ 2018 STUDY OF MEDIATORS AT IMT ATLANTIQUE, BREST

Language lecturers also identified themselves as **facilitators**, **intermediaries** & **mediators**, both outside and inside the classroom

- Linguistic, cultural, intercultural, pedagogical/cognitive mediation
- Use of mediational tools: cooking utensils; shared interactive websites for teachers & students; explanatory documents ..
- Creating links/connections outside the department
- Less emphasis on conflict than other participants – one definition of mediation by a male Spanish teacher:

**The oil in the engine fuelling the cogs of the school -« L'huile dans le moteur alimentant les rouages de l'école » having a social attitude for the well-being of all; « avoir une attitude sociale pour le bien-être de tous ».**

Students also identified as **mediators**: translation into native languages, explaining vocabulary, linguistic exchange, moral support

## **5/ EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

**Regards croisés – Intersecting views:**

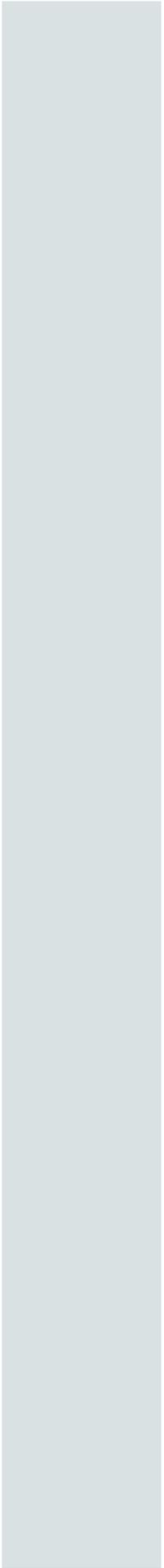
**Exhibition by 3 Breton and 3 Chinese photographers in both countries: example 2 photos taken by Mocrette, a Breton photographer**

**Language & intercultural work with a group of Chinese, French, Polish, Moroccan and Syrian students**

**Team-teaching: English/Intercultural communication & French as foreign language lecturers**

**Plurilingual English, French & native language (s)**

**Objective: linguistic, intercultural, social links**



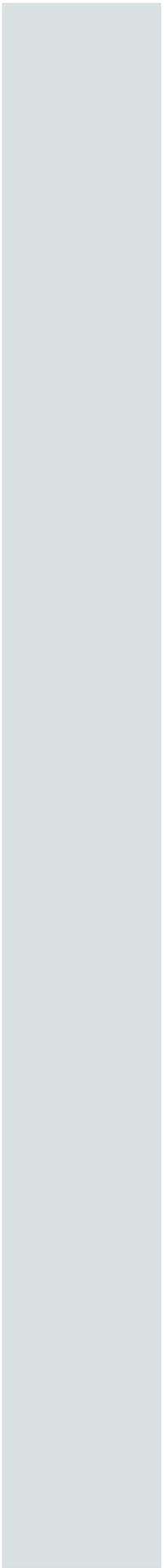
## 5/ EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

### Empathy



“This photograph is a woman, a very old woman. I think she is living alone in her small house and she is getting a huge pleasure from taking care of her cat. She still have too much to give but there is noone to take it. Her warmth and tenderness is the only proof that she is alive. This photo touched my heart and hurted my feelings because I can be someday, somehow in the place of this woman and I am sure that this is an unbearable situation. Thank-you”.

Waafa (Syrie)



## 5/ EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Empathy, decentring, critical cultural awareness



“The photo which I have chosen is about an old woman who is in an old people's home. The woman is looking out of the window and thinking of something. Maybe she is thinking about her children. I think she lives a very simple and lonely life, she is a bit worried and grieved. I have learned that a lot of the aged like living alone in France. This does not mean that they don't want to live with their children. Because they think they should let their children have bigger space to do what they want to do. But in China, the traditional way is that the young people should live with their parents because their parents need to be looked after and this is the best expression of filial piety of the children.”

Xi Rui China

## 5/ EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Covering in a public space ( a huge continuing debate in France !)

Separation of religion and state/ rules applied to outward signs of religion

Conflict between 2 groups of newly arrived students in a class of Moroccans and Tunisians

- Reactions in France
- Muslim women in the class who do not cover



## 5/ EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE



## 5/ EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

- Use of photo as a mediational tool
- After initial shock
- **Decentring**

Built bridges to reestablish communication

Change of perspective

Acceptance of other points of view



## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have explored some of the cracks through which the light gets in

We have focussed on language teachers as intercultural mediators

Identified in the literature & in our study : by some of our colleagues; by the language teachers themselves

We have highlighted the importance of empathy and decentring without losing sight of oneself

Further study:  
intercultural approaches for good  
or for evil - barriers, bridges  
& boundaries in an interconnected world



# CONCLUSION

