

Rethinking language assessment: integrating the four skills in task-based assessment – making language tests more meaningful

Johann Fischer
(Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

Structure:

- The Learner as a Social Agent
- Current Approach to Language Assessment
- Impact of the CEFR Companion Volume
- Mediation Scenarios in Language Assessment
- A New Model for Language Assessment?

The Learner as Social Agent

The CEFR Companion Volume (2020):

3 key aspects (relevant in this context):

- the underlying action-oriented approach of the CEFR
- the notion of the learner as a social agent
- the four modes of communication

The Action-Oriented Approach:

Council of Europe (2020: 28):

“The CEFR’s action-oriented approach represents a shift away from syllabuses based on a linear progression through language structures, or a pre-determined set of notions and functions, towards syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions. This promotes a “proficiency” perspective guided by “can do” descriptors rather than a “deficiency” perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired. The idea is to design curricula and courses based on real-world communicative needs, organised around real-life tasks and accompanied by “can do” descriptors that communicate aims to learners. Fundamentally, the CEFR is a tool to assist the planning of curricula, courses and examinations by working backwards from what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language.”

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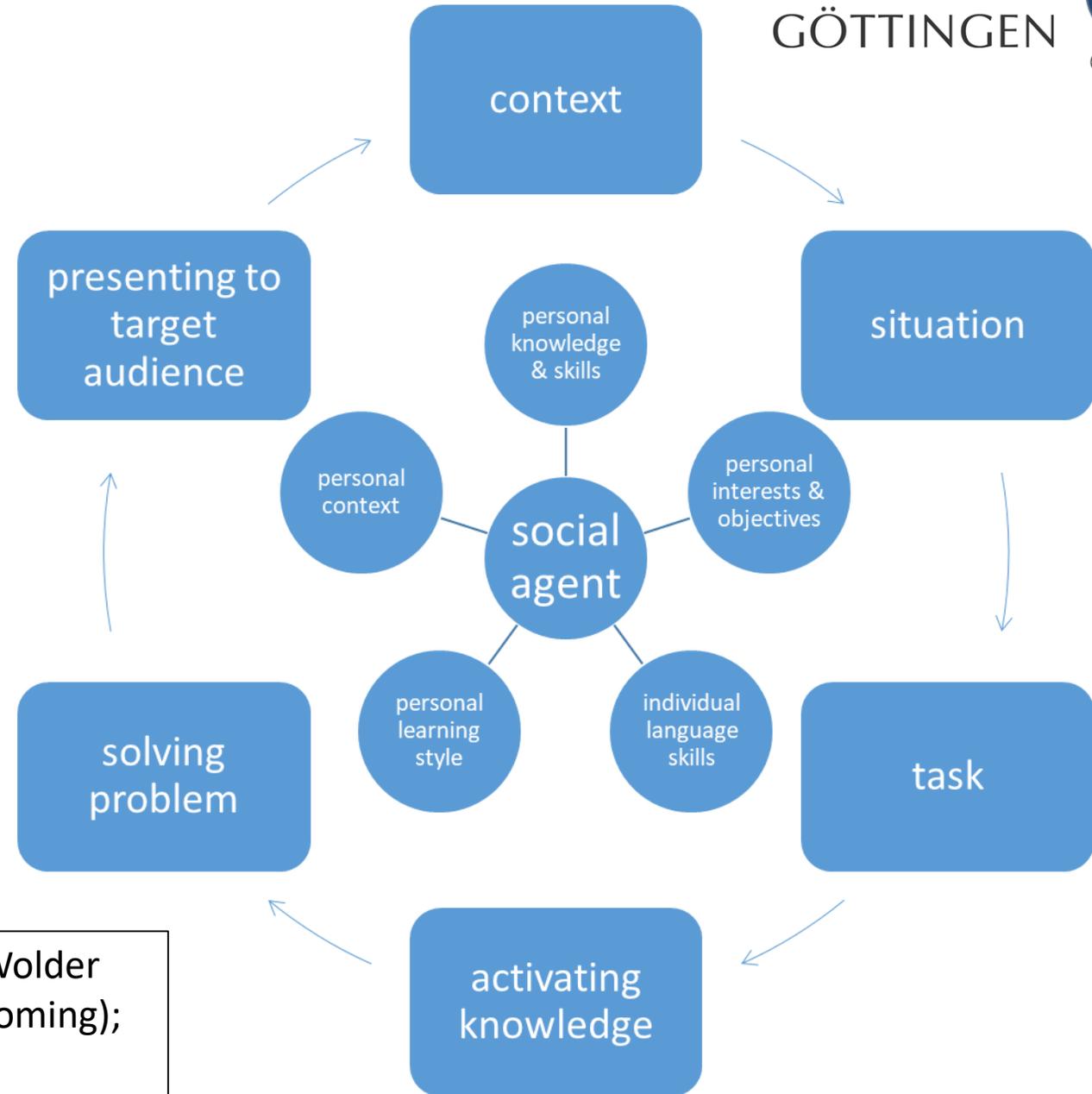
The Learner as a Social Agent:

The CEFR (and the CEFR Companion Volume) consider the learners as social agents:

“[...] the CEFR broadens the perspective of language education in a number of ways, not least by its vision of the user/learner as a social agent co-constructing meaning in interaction, and by the notions of mediation and plurilingual/ pluricultural competences.” (Council of Europe 2020: 22)

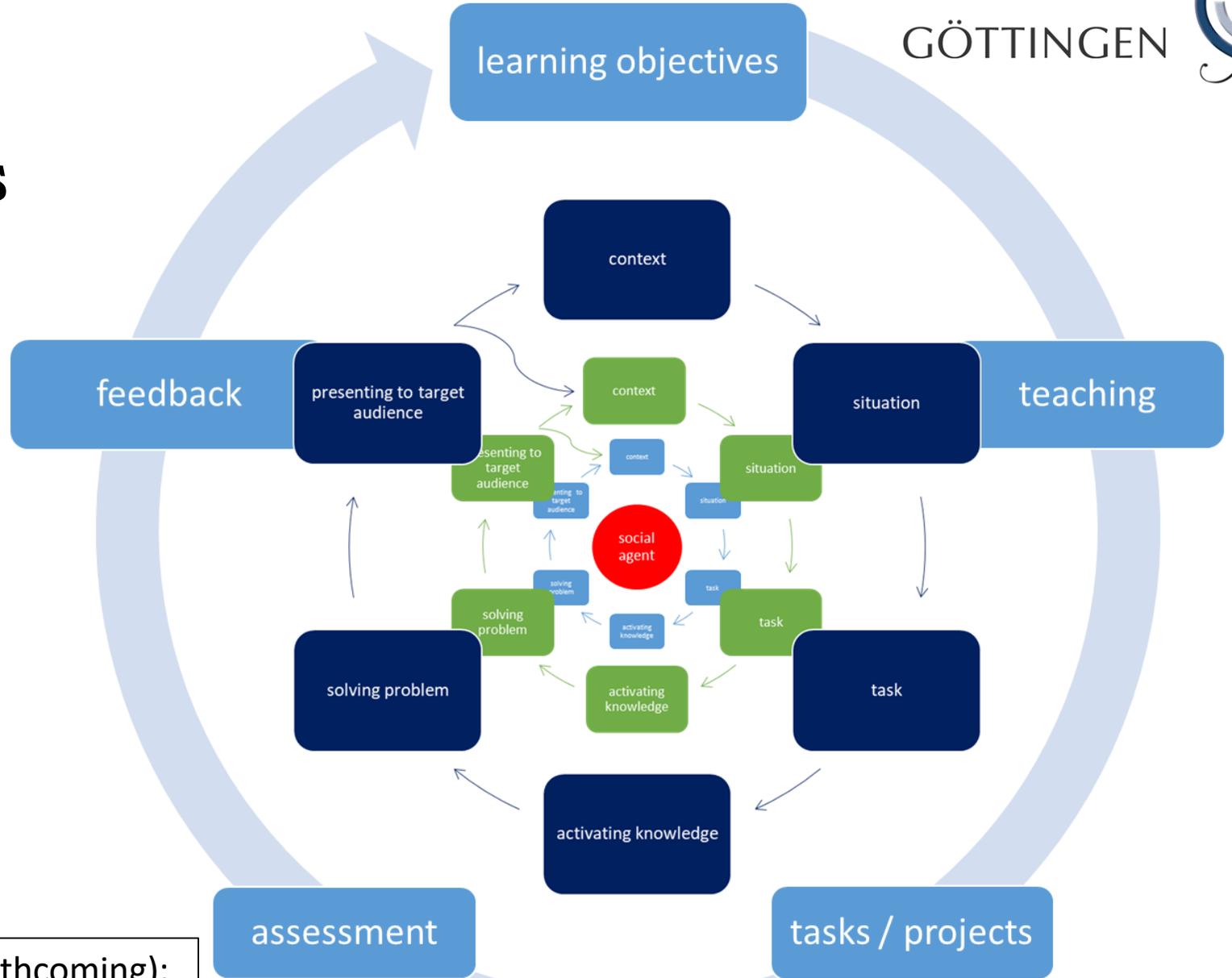
“In addition to promoting the teaching and learning of languages as a means of communication, the CEFR brings a new, empowering vision of the learner. The CEFR presents the language user/learner as a “social agent”, acting in the social world and exerting agency in the learning process. This implies a real paradigm shift in both course planning and teaching by promoting learner engagement and autonomy.” (Council of Europe 2020: 28)

The Learner as a Social Agent



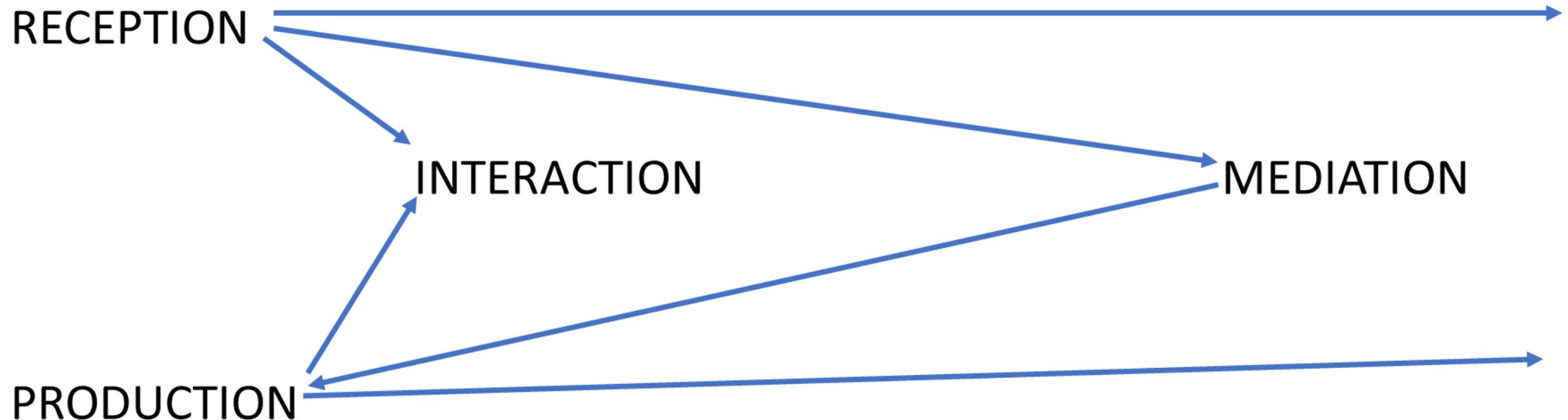
See: Fischer (2021): 252; Fischer / Wolder (2021): 11; Fischer / Wolder (forthcoming); VITbox Project (2020-2022).

The Learner as a Social Agent

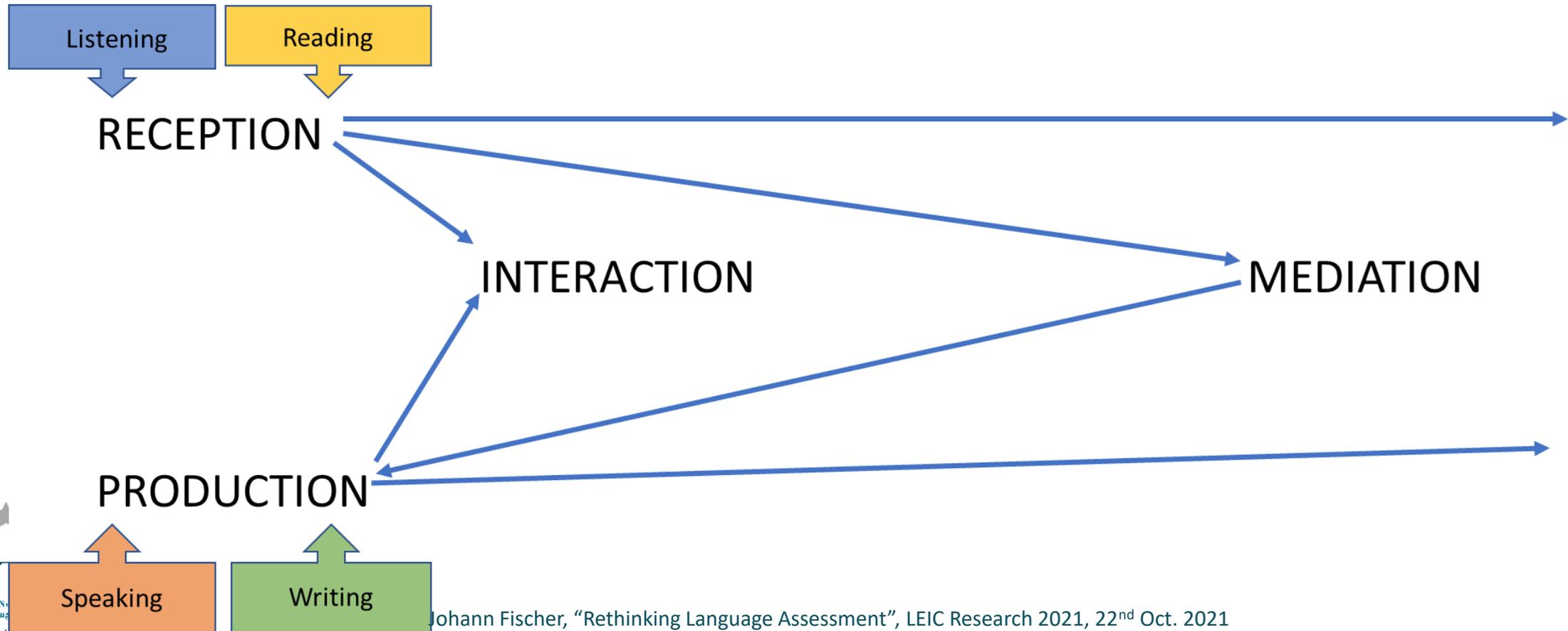


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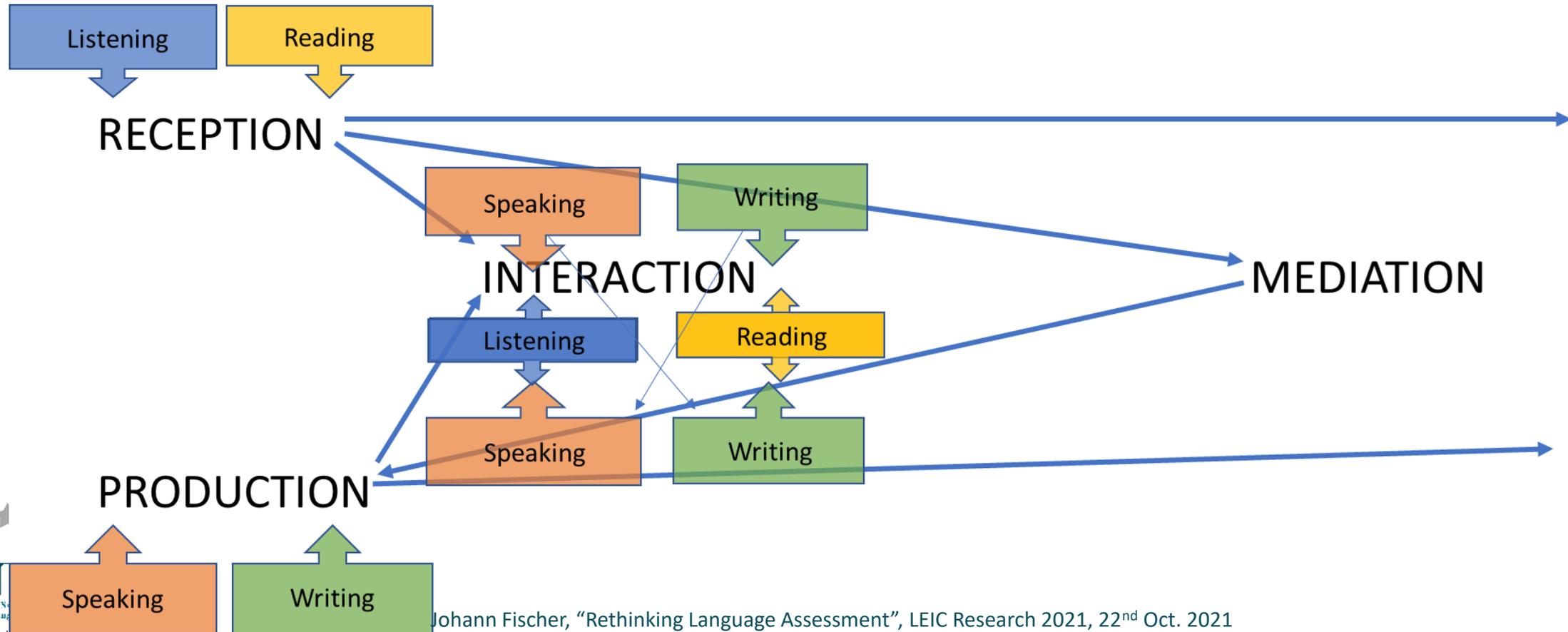
The Four Modes of Communication

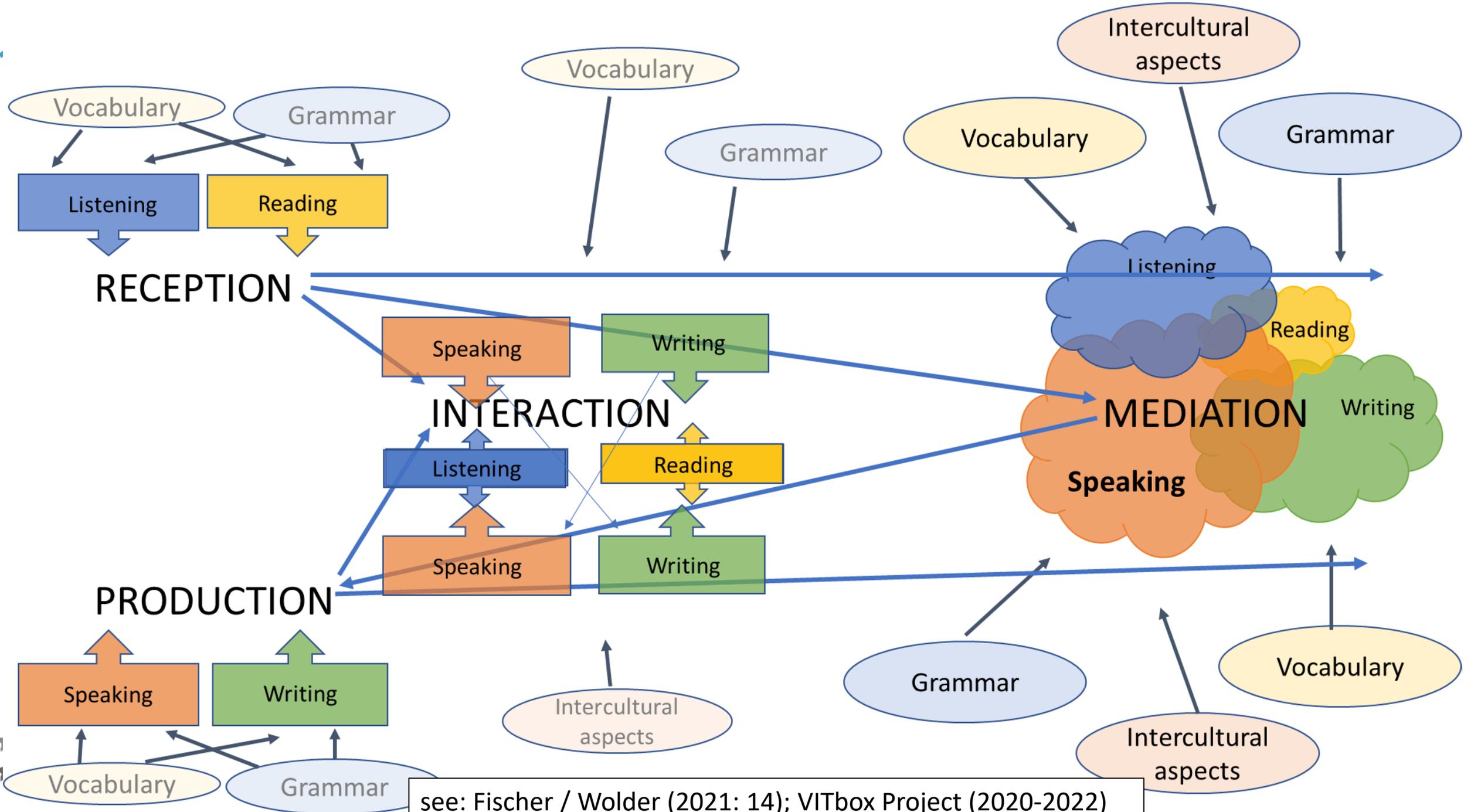


The Four Modes of Communication and the four skills



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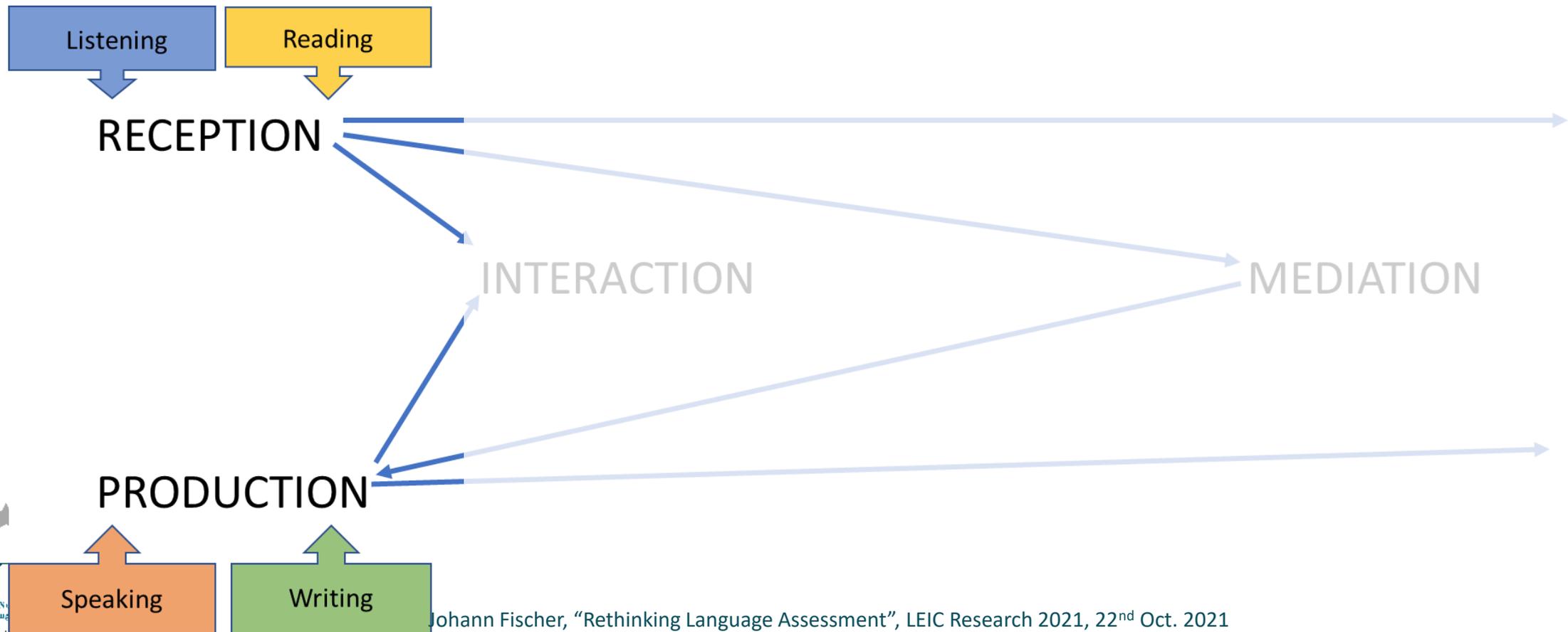


Current Approach to Language Assessment

Current Approach to Language Assessment:

- assessing the four skills
- one by one
- receptive skills: discrete item tests
- productive skills: realistic situations of communication with elements of interaction and mediation

Our current approach to assessment



Current Approach to Language Assessment:

- Spanish A2 (2009)
- English B2 (2018)

Impact of the CEFR Companion Volume

Impact of the CEFR Companion Volume:

- the test-taker as a social agent?
- authenticity of tasks to assess receptive skills?
- complexity of interaction and mediation tasks?
- purpose of the tasks? (meaningful?, relevant?)
- reflecting language proficiency?

Impact of the CEFR Companion Volume – paradigm shift:

- monothematic exam
- focussing on mediation skills
- addressing all four language skills
- no separate parts on listening comprehension and reading comprehension

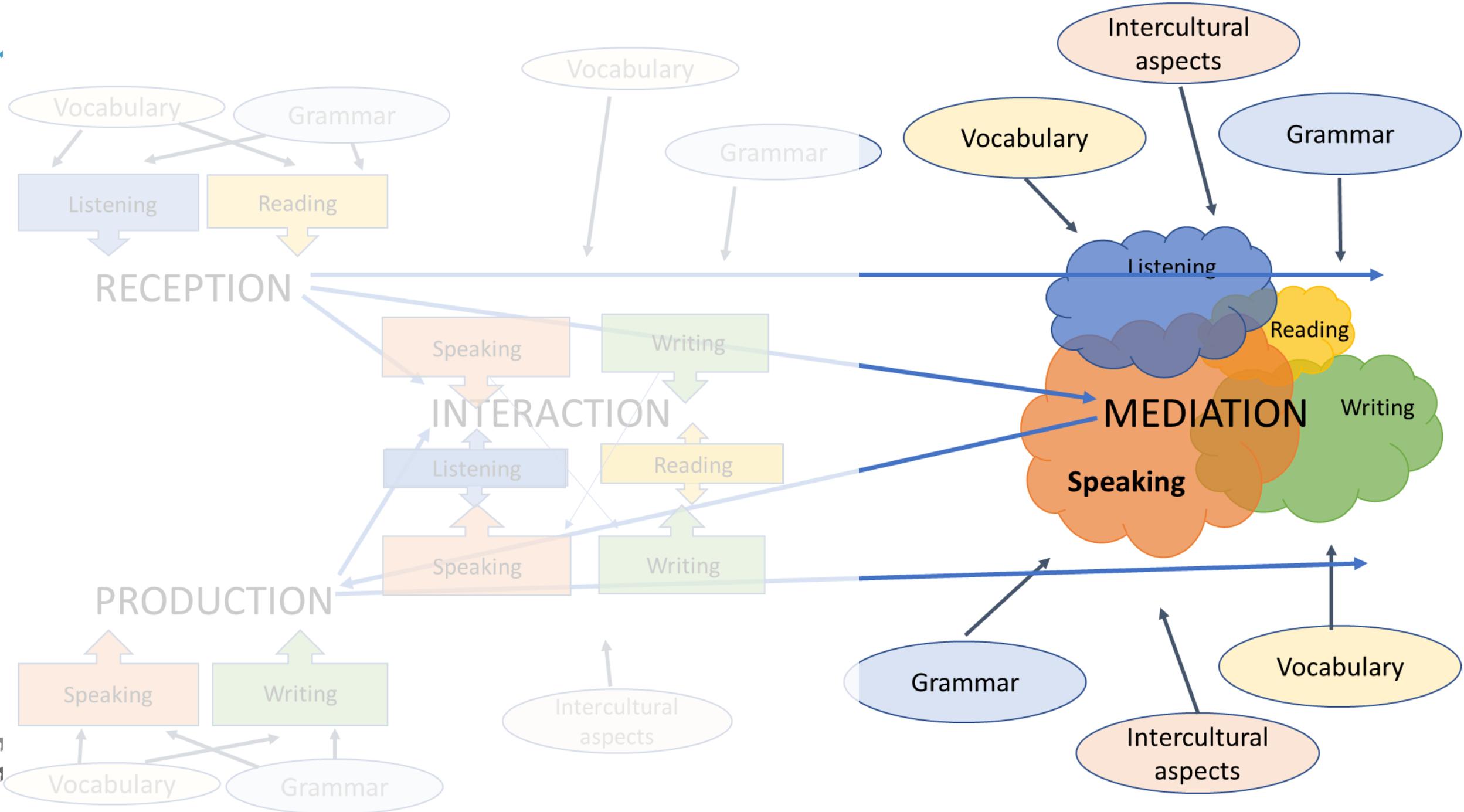
Impact of the CEFR Companion Volume – paradigm shift:

- the test-taker at the centre of the activity
- acting as a social agent
- working on relevant and meaningful tasks
- constructive alignment

Mediation Scenarios in Language Assessment

Impact of the CEFR Companion Volume – paradigm shift: Mediation Scenarios

- the test-taker at the centre of the activity
- acting as a social agent
- completing a task, relevant and meaningful to them
- input texts are “sources of inspiration”
- outputs aim at a clearly defined audience with a specific aim in mind



Mediation Scenarios in Language Assessment:

- context
- situation
- role(s) of test-taker(s) and target audience
- tasks: overall task and build-up tasks
- expected outcomes and outputs

A New Model for Language Assessment?

A New Model for Language Assessment?:

- develop scenario
- provide resources for research (input texts in written and oral / audiovisual format)
- analyse test-takers' performance in mediating the information (i.e. receptive skills and productive skills)

A New Model for Language Assessment?:

mediation requires:

- understanding of source texts
- mapping information with personal knowledge
- developing knowledge and concepts – in cooperation with partners (co-construction of knowledge)
- presenting outcomes to a specific target audience (with a clear objective in mind)

A New Model for Language Assessment?:

mediation skills can be assessed:

- in an integrated test format
- aspects taken from source texts inform about receptive skills (in a meaningful way)
- processing of information provides information about productive skills

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step 1: Introduction to scenario

Step 2: Case analysis

Step 1a: video input

Step 1b: reading input

Step 1c: case study work

Step 3: writing task: writing proposal

Step 4: speaking task: presenting and discussing proposal

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step I: Introduction to scenario

Supply chain issues in the UK affected by lorry driver shortages in the context of Brexit

Lorry driver shortages in the UK have had an impact on supply chains, leading to shortages in goods, delays in delivery, empty shelves and closed filling stations.

You have recently started a placement with the European Commission's DG Trade and have been invited to analyse the current situation of lorry driver shortages and supply chain problems in the UK, to identify the impact of Brexit on supply chains and to make suggestions on how this situation should be approached in negotiations with the UK.

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step 1: Introduction to scenario

Step 2: Case analysis

Step 1a: video input

Step 1b: re

Step 1c: ca

Step 3: writing

Step 4: speakin

Is Brexit causing food and medicine supply problems in the UK?

BBC News, 15 Sept. 2021

Britain is currently facing a shortage of lorry drivers, resulting in widespread supply chain issues, which have hit a range of sectors including food, drink and medicines.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3Qc4AZ1UXY>

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step 1: Introduction to scenario

Step 2: Case analysis

How serious is the shortage of lorry drivers?

BBC News, 15 Sept. 2021

The government is taking a number of steps to address the shortage of HGV drivers, amid concerns about deliveries of food, fuel and other items in the run-up to Christmas.

It has introduced temporary visas for 5,000 lorry drivers to work in the UK, although only just over 20 of the 300 applications have been approved so far, according to Conservative Party chairman Oliver Dowden.

The shortage of HGV drivers is due to a combination of Covid, Brexit and other factors.

[...]

<https://www.bbc.com/news/57810729>

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step 1: Introduction to scenario

Step 2: Case analysis

Supply chain issues in the UK in the context of Brexit

You have recently started a placement with the European Commission's DG Trade and have been invited to analyse the current situation of lorry driver shortages and its impact on supply chains in the UK, and to identify the role of Brexit in this context.

In order to prepare a report on the current supply chain problems in the UK, please analyse the documents provided and prepare suggestions on how the EU should address the issue in their negotiations with the UK.

At a later stage you will present your findings and suggestions in a meeting with your team and react to questions and critical comments.

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step 1 Writing task (including listening and reading skills):

Step 2 *You have recently started a placement with the European Commission's DG Trade and have been invited to analyse the current situation of supply chain problems in the UK, to identify the impact of Brexit on supply chains and to make suggestions on how to approach this issue in negotiations between the EU and the UK. In a report to the team please present your suggestions on how both the UK and the EU should address the issue. In your report, please also present your findings concerning a) the shortage of lorry drivers, b) the problems with supply chains in general and c) the impact of Brexit on this situation.*

Step 3 *Your suggestions will help to prepare negotiations between the EU and the UK.*

A New Model for Language Assessment:

Step 1: Introduction to scenario

Step 2: Speaking task (including listening and reading skills):

After sending your suggestions to the team you have been invited to present them at a team meeting, clarify certain aspects of your proposal and react to critical questions.

...

Step 3: writing task: writing proposal

Step 4: speaking task: presenting and discussing proposal

A New Model for Language Assessment – How to assess (option I):

Assessing receptive skills explicitly: providing a structured template for the report

- Part 1: Introduction
- Part 2: Summarising oral input – *What impact has Brexit had on supply chains in the UK and what other reasons can be seen behind the supply chains?*
- Part 3: Analysis of written input – *How serious is the shortage of lorry drivers in the UK?*
- Part 4: Writing task – *How should the EU use the information on the current situation in their negotiations with the UK?*
- Part 5: Writing task – Conclusion
- Part 6: Speaking task – *Please present your suggestions to the team at DG Trade, and react to questions and critical comments.*

A New Model for Language Assessment – How to assess (option I):

Assessing receptive skills explicitly:

grading is done e.g. by using an answer key (discrete-item format)

A New Model for Language Assessment – How to assess (option 2):

Assessing receptive skills implicitly: providing an open task

- *In a report please present your suggestions on how the EU should address the issue. In your report, please also present your findings concerning a) the shortage of lorry drivers, b) the problems with supply chains in general and c) the impact of Brexit on this situation.
Your suggestions will help to prepare negotiations between the EU and the UK.*
- *In your report, you should summarise your key findings from the video and the reading text, and present your suggestions to the team.*

A New Model for Language Assessment – How to assess (option 2):

Assessing receptive skills implicitly:

grading is done e.g. using adapted assessment grids / rubrics for writing & speaking which include items referring to receptive skills

A New Model for Language Assessment – the paradigm shift:

- receptive skills:
 - tasks become meaningful and relevant to the test-taker:
there is a purpose in processing the information provided in
the source texts
- productive skills:
 - integrated into scenario
 - focus on objectives

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Thank you very much for your attention!
Ačiū už dėmesį!

Questions? Comments?
Next steps to take?