Effects of Active Listening, Reformulation, and Imitation on Mediator Success: Preliminary Results

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Abstract
An experiment with 212 students (100 men, 112 women; M age = 18.3 years, SD = 0.9) was carried out to compare the effect of four techniques used by mediators on the number of agreements contracted by negotiators. Under experimental conditions, mediators were asked either to rephrase (reformulate) negotiators’ words or to imitate them or to show active listening behavior, or finally, to use a free technique. More agreements were reached in the active listening condition than in both free and rephrase conditions. Furthermore, mediators in the active listening condition were perceived, by the negotiators, as more efficient than mediators using other techniques, although there was no significant difference observed between the active listening and imitation conditions.

Keywords
mediation, active listening, imitation, reformulation, negotiation

Introduction
The use of mediation to resolve conflicts is becoming increasingly common all over the world (Bobot, 2011; Ury, Brett, Goldberg, & Mancy, 2008). The main
The purpose of mediation is to help opposing parties either to find an agreement in a voluntary way or to overcome their differences of opinions (Carnevale, 1986; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Touzard, 1977; Zubeck, Pruitt, Pierce, McGilicuddy, & Syna, 1992). Having no power to impose a solution, it is not an easy task for a mediator considering the strategic interests or the economic constraints that are at stake in a conflict (see Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992 for a review). However, in recent years, researchers have been able to show that the outcome of mediation can also be influenced by subtle factors like the mediator’s psychological state and interactive ability. Emotional intelligence (EI) was defined by Bellucci, Venkatraman, Muecke, Stranieri and Abawajy (2012) as “the ability to recognize and manage one’s own emotion and those of others,” (p. 6) and seems to be particularly pertinent here. Boland and Ross (2010) found that emotional intelligence shown by mediators can affect agreements mutually accepted by the parties in a conflict. Other variables can also affect the outcome of a conflict. For example, positive interactions or ensuing emotional states, such as trust, can have a considerable influence on the results of the negotiation (Barry, Fulmer, & Goates, 2006; Davidson, McElwee, & Hannan, 2004; Le Flanchec & Rojot, 2009; McGinn, 2006; Poitras, 2009). Basing his judgment on a survey of employees who were helped by experienced mediators, Poitras (2009) reaffirms the importance of a mediator gaining the confidence of the parties involved. He also suggests that this trust is mainly based on five factors: the lack of complacency toward the opposing party, the demonstration of good experience in mediation, the relevant explanations given for the mediation process, the ability to show “consideration” toward the parties involved, and finally the “sympathy” expressed toward the parties from the very first contact. These marks of attention, which make it possible to generate a climate of trust, have also been observed in negotiation processes (cf. Nadler & Liviatan, 2006), and in research devoted to the tactics used by professional mediators (cf. Carnevale & Pegnetter, 1985; Kressel & Pruitt, 1985; Lim & Carnevale, 1990; McLaughlin, Carnevale, & Lim, 1991). Thus it is reported that through “reflective” tactics (the goal of which is to create a basis for further mediation), professional mediators can try to gain the confidence of the different parties. For example, they develop a relationship with each party and, especially when the mediators were not trusted, “they attempted to speak the bargainers’ language” (Carnevale & Pegnetter, 1985, p. 77). At this point, many questions arise. As mediation can lose its legitimacy by showing complacency or excessive approval toward one of the parties, one must ask what exactly is the meaning of speaking “the same language” (p. 77) of the parties. Does it refer to the reformulation of what the parties say? Or does it involve repeating or imitating, like a chameleon, reusing exactly the same words? Knowing how early interactions are crucial for the outcome of a conflict (Poitras, 2009; Swaab, Maddux, & Sinaceur, 2011), it seems appropriate to clarify what this phrase means, and to test the effects of these behaviors on the predispositions of the different parties to come to an agreement.
Reformulation, imitation, and active listening

Paraphrasing or rephrasing people’s words, or reformulation, is often used by mediators as one tool in resolving conflicts (Doherty & Guyler, 2008; Leu, 2005; Rosenberg, 2003). Nevertheless, in literature, the notion of reformulation has two aspects. First, it is a particular tool of negotiation, analogous to questioning or adjustment of the suggestions and responses of parties (Bellenger, 2015). In this sense, reformulation could be considered merely paraphrasing to avoid misunderstandings. Although reformulation is an important tool used by mediators, some mediation experts suggest that its repetitive use may destabilize the parties in negotiation because that “risks to annoy the interlocutor, especially if the sentence is repeated entirely” (Chavanis et al., 2014, p.178). But reformulation has a second aspect, “active listening,” inspired by Carl Rogers (1957). According to Rogers, reformulation is a composite of paraphrasing what has just been said (cf. Hill, 2007; Rogers & Kinget, 1962), and providing attention and benevolent consideration to each party. This concerns not only ideas but also emotions and unmentioned facts and feelings (Baumann, 1987; Zohar, 1992). When reformulation is used with active listening, its expressions become more vague, so as not to entirely correspond to a mere paraphrase. Active listening is demonstrated through signals like reformulations, questions, intonations, facial expressions, imitations of word endings, or acts or gestures that suggest the listener perceives unmentioned facts and feelings (Chavanis & Gava, 2014). These notions of reformulation and active listening have often been presented as techniques to make resolutions of conflicts easier (cf. Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1982; Keiser, 2001; Kohlrieser, 2007; Lempereur, 2011; Pekar Lempereur, Salzer, & Colson, 2008; Rosenberg, 2003). However, as far as we know, there has been no research to compare their supposed effects.

Unlike reformulation, verbal imitation (which consists of simply repeating the very same words as one’s interlocutor) has been the subject of many experimental studies. The results emphasize the role of imitation as a facilitator of social relations (Bailenson & Yee, 2005); some refer to imitation as the “social glue” of relationships (Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng & Chartrand, 2003). Chartrand and Bargh (1999) showed that participants perceive more pleasure in an interaction when a mediator imitates instead of interpreting. In the same study, the authors showed that individuals who imitate are perceived by those they imitate as more approachable. This result has been observed repeatedly (Bailenson & Yee, 2005; Bavelas, Black, Lemery & Mullett, 1987; Guéguen & Martin, 2008; Yabar, Johnston, Miles & Peace, 2006). Such individuals—called “chameleons” by Chartrand and Bargh to designate them as persons who imitate or who naturally adopt the expressions or behaviors of others—may have other advantages relevant to the context of mediation research. A message delivered by an imitating individual is perceived as more convincing than a message transmitted by a nonimitating one (Bailenson & Yee, 2005). Verbal imitation encourages imitated individuals to show altruistic behaviors towards the imitators.
(van Baaren, Holland, Van Knippenberg, & Steenaert, 2003) and others (Fischer-Lokou, Martin, Guéguen, & Lamy, 2011; van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, & Van Knippenberg, 2004); even expensive altruistic behaviors can be evoked by imitation (Müller, Maaskant, Van Baaren, & Dijksterhuis, 2012). Research testing the effect of imitation in negotiation and mediation indicated that imitation may facilitate agreements between negotiators, probably because it improves the climate of confidence between and among them (Fischer-Lokou, Guéguen, Lamy, Martin, & Bullock, 2014; Maddux, Mullen, & Galinsky, 2008).

“To speak the same language as the parties,” as Carnevale and Pegnetter (1985, p. 77) reported from professional mediators, can refer from our point of view to three techniques used by them: first of all, merely rephrasing the parties’ words; second, imitating interlocutors repeating their own words; and finally, actively listening, showing an intense and benevolent attention. Imitation has already been the topic of different works proving its usefulness in mediation (and negotiation). However, as far as we know, there has been no research on the effects of reformulation and active listening by a mediator with conflicting parties, nor has any study compared the effectiveness of these three techniques to bring together parties with diverging interests. Such research seems vital to the training and practice of mediation.

Reformulation is advocated by many experts to make resolutions of conflicts easier (Fisher et al., 1982; Pekar Lempereur et al., 2008; Rosenberg, 2003). Reformulation corresponds to the goal of “speaking the same language as the parties” (Carnevale & Pegnetter, 1985, p. 77). However, using only paraphrase, reformulation seems to have less potential for obtaining positive agreements than imitation. According to Chavanis et al. (2014), repetitive reformulation is likely to annoy and destabilize the parties. Referring to Kahneman’s (1973) works on cognitive attention, more mental effort may be required to decipher the meaning of a paraphrase than mere repetition of words. Also, reformulation may take more time and cognitive resources from the mediators themselves than does repetition, taking resources from other tasks related to conflict resolution.

The use of active listening as a means of negotiation perhaps has more promise than imitation and reformulation in development of agreements. Active listening is considered by mediation experts as “the basic tool of a mediator” (Chavanis & Gava, 2014, p. 66). Active listening is likely to induce a feeling of trust than reformulation or imitation. Knowing how important trust is in mediation (Poitras, 2009), active listening seems critical to support negotiators in crafting agreements. Finally, comprising a range of techniques, the method of active listening offers many possibilities for mediators to listen and consider as they adapt to new situations. For example, through active listening, the mediator might reformulate or repeat a whole sentence; or, if he judges it useful, he might repeat only the last words.
Thus, active listening may allow mediators to attend actively without perturbing the attention from of various interlocutors.

*Hypothesis 1.* Mediators’ use of reformulation (RT) in its simplest form, paraphrase, may favor more mutual agreements (between pairs of negotiators) than would use of no specific technique (FT or Free Technique).

*Hypothesis 2.* Mediators’ use of imitation (IT) may favor mutual agreements between negotiators more than the technique of reformulation (RT) or Free Technique used (FT).

*Hypothesis 3.* Mediators’ use of active listening (ALT) may favor more mutual agreements between negotiators than reformulation or Free Technique.

*Hypothesis 4.* Mediators’ use of active listening (ALT) may favor more mutual agreements between negotiators than imitation.

*Hypothesis 5.* Vidmar (1971) showed that “the presence of a mediator can improve negotiation effectiveness.” This suggests that negotiators helped by mediators should reach more agreements than when no third party is present.

**Method**

To test the hypotheses, an experiment was performed by asking participants to simulate, in pairs of negotiators, a situation in which a mediator tries to help two opposing parties to agree on a common solution. In the study, a single variable corresponding to the mediator’s behavior was manipulated. In the reformulation condition, when the mediator was asked to reformulate or paraphrase what the negotiators expressed. In the imitation condition, the mediator had to imitate or repeat verbally each negotiator’s words. In the active listening condition, the mediator adopted an attitude of listening and availability when he thought he could use reformulation, imitation of one sentence or one word, questioning or any other verbal or nonverbal sign showing interest. In the free mediation condition, the mediator was free to help the parties as he wished but he was asked to show his presence with a few words at least. A control (no mediation) condition had no mediator involved. The dependent variable was whether an agreement was reached by the parties and the perceptions of the mediator reported by the negotiators.

**Participants**

This experiment involving 295 students was carried out in two stages, in order to test more participants from the same university course. The first part of the
 study was done in 2012 and the second part was done in 2014; the active listening condition was introduced in the second stage. The first stage of the experiment was carried out in 2012 and involved 96 student negotiators. Among them there were 42 men ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.4 \text{ years}, SD = 0.7$) and 54 women ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.2 \text{ years}, SD = 0.7$). Eighteen male students ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.3 \text{ years}, SD = 0.8$) and 18 female students ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.2 \text{ years}, SD = 0.5$) took part in the experiment as mediators. The second stage of the experiment done in 2014 involved 116 student negotiators, of whom 58 were men ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.4 \text{ years}, SD = 0.7$) and 58 were women ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.2 \text{ years}, SD = 0.7$). Also, 22 male students ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.2 \text{ years}, SD = 0.8$) and 21 female students ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.1 \text{ years}, SD = 0.5$) took part in the experiment as mediators. Overall, there were 212 negotiators ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.2 \text{ years}, SD = 0.9$), among whom were 100 men ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.3 \text{ years}, SD = 1.11$) and 112 women ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.2 \text{ years}, SD = 0.7$) and the 79 mediators (40 men, 39 women) mentioned previously.

All participants negotiated with adversaries of the same sex and that the experiment was presented to them as an introduction to negotiation, which was easily justifiable with respect to their studies. This experiment was approved by the ethical committee of the university (CRPCC-LESTIC EA 1285).

Measures

A folder using a theme from previous negotiating experiments (Fischer-Lokou & Guéguen, 2004) was distributed to each participant. This folder presented the positions of two management teams from a fictitious water-bottling factory involved in a purchasing decision for plastic materials for bottling mineral water. One team favored using polyvinyl chloride (PVC) which is inexpensive but whose disposal is highly polluting and the other proposed abandoning PVC and using polyethylene terephthalate (PET) which is less polluting but more expensive. Supplementary information provided to negotiators included a company balance sheet and a mission statement to allow defense of each position as the correct strategic choice. Students were told that they could not choose a compromise, for example, for equivalent of bottles to be both PVC and PET in the same year. A different choice could be made from one year to another.

A printed form for reporting the outcome of the negotiations and a questionnaire of five items were distributed to each participant. The questions were answered on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree), with neutral midpoint 5. The questions were: “Do you think the mediator has demonstrated listening?” “Do you think the mediator was friendly?” “Do you think the mediator fostered a climate of trust?” “Do you think the mediator was efficient?” and “Do you think the mediator helped you to better control the negotiation?” Concerning the results of the negotiation, each pair of negotiators had to confirm a mutual agreement on the questionnaires and
both questionnaires were given to experimenters. An agreement was counted if it was confirmed by both negotiators of a pair.

**Procedure**

Half of the randomly selected negotiators were designated as pro-PVC and told to prepare arguments to defend this position. The remaining negotiators were designated as pro-PET and were given the same instructions. While the negotiators examined the information, the mediators were given four types of instructions and told that strict adherence to these guidelines would be essential to the success of this first round of mediation. The first instruction was common to all conditions and directed the mediators to invite each negotiator to present his or her point of view. Thereafter, the instructions differed for each mediation condition. In the reformulation condition, the mediator was invited to rephrase each negotiator’s words four times. For example, if the negotiator said, “He isn’t listening to my suggestions,” a reformulation could be, “He doesn’t pay enough attention to what you suggest.” It was clearly explained to the mediators that they had to reformulate ideas twice during the five minutes of the negotiation. Then they had to do so twice again in the five minutes following the resumption of the negotiation. Only when reformulation had occurred four times were the mediators allowed to give suggestions when they deemed it was appropriate. In the imitation condition, the mediator was asked to imitate verbally (word for word) a few words of each negotiator, four times. For instance, if a negotiator said, “He isn’t listening to my suggestions,” the mediator should say, “He isn’t listening to your suggestions.” In the active listening condition, the mediator was asked to show an attitude of total availability and benevolent listening toward each negotiator. Verbal and nonverbal active listening behaviors were to be used at least four times. The mediator could show availability using reformulation and/or imitation as well as nonverbal behaviors such as leaning toward the negotiators or eye contact. Mediators were told they could also question the negotiators and show visual and verbal signs of interest. The main point was to communicate attentive listening as well as an attitude of availability. In free mediation condition, the mediator was asked to be present as he wished in order to help the parties, whether using verbal behaviors or not. So as to give the same amount of time in the four conditions, the mediators in the free mediation condition were told to help the parties choosing the method they found suitable, but they were to use some technique with each negotiator at least four times. It was suggested that they use phrases like, “Yes,” “Well,” “I note,” “So that’s what you think,” or any other sentences they might find appropriate. A control group with no mediator was also tested.

When the two first rounds of negotiation were fulfilled, the mediators were asked to make a suggestion to the parties in the negotiation. In all four
conditions, the suggestion was identical. It invited the negotiators to accept an agreement for the coming two years, involving the conservation of PVC for packing bottles with a capacity greater than one liter, and to agree immediately to the investments necessary for the use of PET for bottles less than or equal to one liter. This was only a proposal, not an obligation as in arbitration. More details about the rest of the conditions are explained subsequently.

The experiment took place as an exercise entitled “Introduction to the practice of negotiation.” It was introduced in the following way: “As you know, you will take part in an introduction to negotiation. A negotiator file or a mediator file will be given to you at random and according to that, you will have to go to the right room where instructions will be communicated to you.” Overall, the experiment involved four phases:

*First phase.* A file containing the financial situation of a mineral water–bottling company, as well as the arguments for use of either PET or PVC bottles, and other information related to the subject of the conflict was randomly distributed to each participant, who was given 10 minutes to study the file. Each participant was then given the name of his opponent and the number of the negotiation room.

*Second phase.* Launch of the debate followed by the intervention of a mediator. The mediator intervened exactly 10 minutes after the start of the debate. Mediators were asked to remain seated at the table of negotiations even after having given their suggestions and to continue helping the parties to come to agreement.

*Third phase.* Ten minutes after the intervention of the third party, the experimenters distributed the record of agreement and the questionnaire to the participants.

*Fourth phase.* The debates were stopped 20 minutes after the mediator’s intervention and the participants still had 5 minutes to complete their various documents. In the condition without a mediator, the debate was ended 30 minutes after its launch. Finally, the real purpose of the study was disclosed to negotiators and mediators at the end of the experiment and they were thanked for participating in the study.

To test the ability of the students to use the mediation techniques assigned to them, an additional sample of 114 students (49 men, 65 women) belonging to the same population as the experimental participants ($\mu_{\text{age}} = 18.7$ years, $SD = 0.5$), were asked to imitate or reformulate orally and individually a sentence consisting of 11 words (“The interests of the company should be considered first and foremost”) as spoken by the experimenter. All of the students were able to imitate verbally, and 98% of the students had the capacity to reformulate without distorting the meaning of the sentence. However, the time taken by the two groups to perform their task properly
differed significantly ($M = 3.5$ seconds for imitating, and $17.7$ s for reformulating), $t(112) = 7.25$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.35$.

**Analyses**

A chi-square test was used to assess the differences in rate of successful agreements reached between the mediation methods. Analyses of variance (ANOVA) were also conducted to assess the differences in mediators’ scores on the five parameters rated by the participants (negotiators) in the four mediation conditions. When an effect of condition was found, it was followed by pair-wise comparisons.

**Results**

No significant differences were found for gender, so the data were aggregated. The number of agreements reached by the negotiators is presented in Table 1. When all four conditions were compared, a significant difference between the mediation conditions was found in the number of agreements reached by the pairs of negotiators, $\chi^2 (4, N = 106) = 10.07$, $p = .03$, $\varphi = 0.30$.

Results indicated that the imitation condition differed from the free mediation condition, $\chi^2 (1, N = 38) = 5.06$, $p = .02$, $\varphi = 0.36$, with imitation negotiators achieving more agreements. No significant differences were found between the imitation and the reformulation conditions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 43) = 2.79$, NS, which

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reformulation condition (21 pairs)</th>
<th>Imitation condition (22 pairs)</th>
<th>Active listening condition (20 pairs)</th>
<th>Free mediation condition (16 pairs)</th>
<th>Control (No mediator) (27 pairs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of agreements (%)</td>
<td>9 (42.9)</td>
<td>15 (68.2)</td>
<td>15 (75.0)</td>
<td>5 (31.3)</td>
<td>13 (48.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratings by negotiators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated listening*</td>
<td>7.48 (1.50)</td>
<td>7.64 (1.44)</td>
<td>7.55 (1.21)</td>
<td>5.56 (2.63)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostered trust</td>
<td>5.95 (2.09)</td>
<td>6.18 (2.04)</td>
<td>6.88 (1.58)</td>
<td>5.56 (2.72)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was friendly</td>
<td>7.38 (1.72)</td>
<td>7.45 (1.57)</td>
<td>7.68 (1.34)</td>
<td>6.97 (2.20)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped control</td>
<td>5.67 (2.28)</td>
<td>5.66 (2.56)</td>
<td>6.55 (2.21)</td>
<td>5.34 (2.58)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was effective*</td>
<td>5.26 (2.45)</td>
<td>6.07 (2.35)</td>
<td>7.30 (1.58)</td>
<td>5.00 (2.57)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Ratings are on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree), with neutral midpoint 5; standard deviations are presented within parentheses.  
*p < .001.
does not support Hypothesis 2. Negotiators in the active listening condition had more agreements than those under free mediation condition, $\chi^2 (1, N = 36) = 6.89, p = .009, \varphi = 0.43$, and those under reformulation mediation, $\chi^2 (1, N = 41) = 4.36, p = .03, \varphi = 0.32$, which supports Hypothesis 3. Active listening mediation did not have significantly more or less agreements than the control condition with no mediators, $\chi^2 (1, N = 47) = 3.44, \text{NS}$, nor did it differ from the imitation mediation condition, $\chi^2 (1, N = 42) = 0.23, \text{NS}$, so Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

The analysis of the results concerning the other conditions did not support Hypotheses 1 and 5. No significant differences were found between the reformulation and free mediation conditions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 37) = 0.52, \text{NS}$. No group with mediation obtained higher rates of agreement than those who had no help (control). This was clearly the case between reformulation and control conditions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 48) = 0.13, \text{NS}$, and between free mediation and control conditions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 43) = 0.27, \text{NS}$. Also, no significant difference was found between the agreement rates in imitation and control conditions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 49) = .15, \text{NS}$, or between the active listening and control conditions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 47) = 3.44, \text{NS}$.

The negotiators’ ratings of the mediators are presented in Table 1. ANOVA revealed a significant difference between conditions in the mediators’ scores for listening, $F(3,154) = 11.36, p < .001, d = 0.94$. A pair-wise comparison (with Bonferroni’s correction) revealed that mediators in the imitation condition had a higher mean score on listening than those in the free mediation condition, $t(74) = 4.36, p < .001, d = 0.98$. The mean listening score was also higher in the reformulation than the free mediation condition, $t(72) = 3.91, p < .001, d = 0.89$, and in the active listening condition than in the free mediation condition, $t(70) = 4.21, p < .001, d = 0.97$. An ANOVA taking sex into account did not show a significant effect of sex on ratings of listening, $F(7,150) = 0.77, \text{NS}$.

The main effect of condition on ratings of the climate of trust was not significant, $F(3,154) = 2.46, \text{NS}$. Similarly, there was no significant main effect of condition for ratings of friendliness of the mediator, $F(3,154) = .96, \text{NS}$. There were no significant differences in mean ratings between conditions on perceived control of the negotiation, $F(3,154) = 2.40, \text{NS}$. For perceived efficiency of the mediation, there was a significant main effect of condition, $F(3,154) = 7.31, p < .001, d = 0.76$. Mediators in the active listening condition were rated as being more efficient than those in the reformulation condition, $t(80) = 4.44, p < .001, d = 0.98$, and free mediation condition, $t(70) = 4.65, p < .03, d = 1.07$, but not those in the imitation condition, $t(82) = 2.78, \text{NS}$ (with Bonferroni’s correction). There was a significant interaction of mediator’s sex and mediation condition (cf. Table 2) on the mean efficiency rating, $F(3,150) = 5.93, p < .002, d = 0.68$: male mediators in the active listening condition were perceived to be more efficient compared with the mediators under all other conditions.
The results show that behavior adopted by a mediator can have varied effects on the result of a negotiation. Adopting a behavior similar to active listening seemed to assist negotiators to come to agreements at a higher rate. This success was not apparent with reformulation or freely chosen mediation behaviors. “To speak the same language as the parties,” as Carnevale et al. (1985) reported about a selection of reflexive and mediators tactics (in a public sector disputes), was not enough to increase ratings of confidence; however, mediators were perceived as listening to the negotiators. Indeed, reformulating, imitating, and active listening conveyed that mediators were listening better than did freely chosen mediation techniques. Yet, the strict reformulation of others’ words is not a good way to facilitate coming to an agreement.

Rephrasing is not sufficient for effective mediation, and could even be counter-productive if used excessively (Chavanis et al., 2014). According to the pretest, rephrasing a sentence requires more time than imitating it. Reformulation of ideas expressed by the negotiators demands effort by the mediator and the negotiators. A professional mediator would be able to rephrase more easily than a student who has no experience, but, even for professionals, excessive rephrasing may cause as much annoyance as imitating. According to some professionals

Table 2. Mean ratings (standard deviations) by negotiators according to sex and mediation condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Reformulation condition (26 M, 16 F)</th>
<th>Imitation condition (16 M, 28 F)</th>
<th>Active listening condition (22 M, 18 F)</th>
<th>Free Mediation Condition (16 M, 16 F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated listening*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7.12 (1.75)</td>
<td>7.38 (1.20)</td>
<td>7.55 (1.22)</td>
<td>5.75 (2.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8.06 (0.68)</td>
<td>7.79 (1.57)</td>
<td>7.56 (1.24)</td>
<td>5.37 (3.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostered trust</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.65 (2.29)</td>
<td>6.00 (1.89)</td>
<td>6.82 (1.86)</td>
<td>6.44 (1.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6.44 (1.67)</td>
<td>6.29 (2.15)</td>
<td>6.94 (1.21)</td>
<td>4.69 (3.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was friendly</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7.15 (1.93)</td>
<td>7.31 (2.15)</td>
<td>8.09 (0.92)</td>
<td>6.25 (2.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7.75 (1.29)</td>
<td>7.54 (1.17)</td>
<td>7.17 (1.61)</td>
<td>7.69 (2.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped control</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.92 (2.01)</td>
<td>4.19 (2.34)</td>
<td>6.45 (1.71)</td>
<td>5.63 (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6.88 (2.21)</td>
<td>6.50 (2.31)</td>
<td>6.67 (2.76)</td>
<td>5.06 (3.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was effective*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.19 (2.24)</td>
<td>5.38 (2.65)</td>
<td>7.73 (1.24)</td>
<td>5.19 (2.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7.00 (1.67)</td>
<td>6.46 (2.11)</td>
<td>6.78 (1.83)</td>
<td>4.81 (2.73)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M = males, F = females; ratings were made on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree), with neutral midpoint 5; means are presented with standard deviations within parentheses.

*Differences among conditions at p < .001.

Discussion

The results show that behavior adopted by a mediator can have varied effects on the result of a negotiation. Adopting a behavior similar to active listening seemed to assist negotiators to come to agreements at a higher rate. This success was not apparent with reformulation or freely chosen mediation behaviors. “To speak the same language as the parties,” as Carnevale et al. (1985) reported about a selection of reflexive and mediators tactics (in a public sector disputes), was not enough to increase ratings of confidence; however, mediators were perceived as listening to the negotiators. Indeed, reformulating, imitating, and active listening conveyed that mediators were listening better than did freely chosen mediation techniques. Yet, the strict reformulation of others’ words is not a good way to facilitate coming to an agreement.
and experts in mediation, excessive reformulation “can lead to the risk of bothering” negotiators (Chavanis & Gava, 2014, p. 178), possibly due to the necessity of making sure the reformulation corresponds to their original statements. This may inhibit efficient searching for and acceptance of a common solution.

The imitation technique not only opens a channel of communication for parties to fulfill their need to be listened to (as does reformulation), but it also is an easier way for mediators and was associated here with coming to an agreement in a limited time. The imitation condition had more agreements than a more conventional free mediation. Thus its influence perfectly corresponds to Maddux et al. (2008) or Swaab et al. (2011) who showed that imitation could be strategically and efficiently used between negotiators. Yet, contrary to current results, imitation was not more efficient than reformulation in facilitating agreements. One explanation could be that just imitating is not sufficient for mediation—other techniques and behaviors must be used in conjunction.

Possibly as a consequence of the greater range of techniques, active listening was one of the better mediation conditions. Among the strategies tested in this study, it seemed to facilitate agreement on diverging interests best. Active listening was perceived by the negotiators to be more efficient than free mediation or reformulation, especially in groups with male mediators. Referring to D. M. Kolb (2009) or D. Kolb and McGinn (2009), male mediators using active listening may have been perceived as more dissimilar to the male stereotype than female mediators were dissimilar to the female stereotype. Male mediators did not try to impose themselves upon negotiators and so were not perceived as “dominating.” Further research is necessary to investigate this significant sex difference, only observed in one interaction in this study.

Active listening was associated with a higher rate of agreements than reformulation and free mediation techniques. Contrary to hypotheses, the rate of agreements did not differ from the imitation condition. Considering the effects of active listening, if a calm and attentive attitude and benevolence, either verbal or nonverbal, is compared with imitation, active listening may stimulate but be less disturbing to negotiators in their discussion. Perhaps this is why active listening was rated as more efficient than reformulating or free mediation, which are quite different from imitation. Perceptions of climate of trust, friendliness, and control of negotiations did not differ among conditions. Rephrasing (or even imitation) shows an attitude of attention and consideration that may encourage negotiators to get along and thus improve efficiency in mediation. Suggesting that this is the most appropriate and the least disturbing mediation technique does not contradict the idea that an efficient mediator does not get involved in the task to solve a problem with the negotiators.

Mediators in the active listening condition (and other conditions as well) apparently failed to encourage negotiators to come to agreement within the allotted time frame, as compared to the control groups with no mediator. This odd result may have two explanations. First, the nature of the negotiation
did not correspond perfectly to the strategies imposed on the mediators. Touzard (1967, 1977) showed that mediators are more efficient in negotiations of an “ideological” nature when the instructions imply strong “collective values,” so they can concentrate their strategies on the relational elements of the conflict. In more technical negotiations, mediators who obtain best outcomes or agreements are those who impose order or provide leadership in the task. The nature of the negotiation in the current experiment could be considered neither ideological nor technical. The negotiators had to agree on water-conditioning materials while considering the cost for the company even if the main argumentation of one of the parties was based on the choice of material for the protection of the environment. The mediators’ strategies (namely reformulation, imitation, or active listening) were exclusively focused on the relational aspect of the negotiation. Considering this, less time was likely devoted to investment in the structuring of the negotiation, which might have limited cohesion and urgency. Another explanation is based on the idea that the planning of a mediation process in the laboratory does not replicate the genuine needs in the mediation of an ideological or professional nature. As is the case in most experimental studies on mediation, mediators’ interventions in groups of negotiators are often imposed by the experimental design and the negotiators’ real needs and wishes for this intervention are not evaluated.

Many authors have examined real conflicts (Rubin & Brown, 1975; Zartman, 1985), in which mediation is more efficient when negotiators need it or when they have to justify a compromise without losing face (Pruitt & Johnson, 1970). Facing limitations of studies of this type, generalization of the results must be cautious. Although the negotiators’ real need for help or intervention was not evaluated, the time imposed on the negotiators could be a point for discussion. In real-life situations, due dates are often imposed (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986), but negotiation time may be hours or even in years (Zartman, 1985) and not minutes as in the current study. The fact that mediators gave just one suggestion and did not move from the negotiation table could have caused some problems. Several authors report that suggestions may come from negotiators themselves (Bellenger, 2015; Chavanis & Gava, 2014; Pekar Lempereur et al., 2008) then and be delivered by a third party (the mediator). In comparison, the experimental situation was simplistic, with mediators giving a suggestion the negotiators were free to accept or reject, perhaps slowing progress toward an agreement (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). The simulation of a mediator part by untrained students was probably not perfectly accurate, especially compared to professionals’ mediation of real-life situations. Further research on active listening as a technique of mediation should further control the nature of the conflict and evaluate the negotiators’ perceived need for mediation.

In further research, other aspects of mediation must be taken into account: the negotiators’ perceptions of mediation, the difficulties felt by the mediator, and the measurement of psychological variables such as empathy expressed by mediators.
In addition, only one outcome was measured in the current study: the number of agreements the pairs of negotiators reached. It would be desirable to take into account the nature of these agreements. It is of interest whether the agreements were more in compliance with the suggestions of the mediators using various techniques or if the negotiators incorporate new or original solutions. Second, the need to empathize has been reported by specialists in mediation. The expression of empathy by the mediator could increase the effect of the active listening technique used by a mediator, so empathy should be measured objectively if possible.

Beyond the limitations mentioned earlier, this study has indicated that all the mediation strategies (according to Lim et al., 1990) did not have the same effects. Between the four behavioral strategies tested, choosing a nondisturbing technique combined with benevolent listening seemed most likely to facilitate agreements.

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