

# Pathways through Learning, Teaching, Assessing in the CEFR

## Forword

### What is this Guide? What is this KIT?

The present Guide and the accompanying KIT illustrate to language teachers how the CEFR offers a tool that is flexible, profound, and varied in ideas for language teaching, learning, and assessment. You may ask: “Does the CEFR really need a Guide in order to be understood?” “Is it not self-contained and clear enough?” Certainly the CEFR remains the basic document, but its main principles warrant summarizing for pedagogical purposes of assessment. At the same time, all teachers’ practices for teaching and assessment can benefit from enhancement through reflection and contextualisation. In this way we hope that the philosophy of the Framework will become better integrated into and established within language education in Europe.

The Guide has four parts, which share a common thread: assessing in a manner consistent with the basic approach of the CEFR. First, we consider what a reflective attitude involves. Teachers who base their assessment on the CEFR must be able to analyze and discuss their approaches to organizing courses and activities, their ways of teaching, their assessment methods, as well as their learners’ capacities and competences. Developing a reflective attitude is necessary to foster not only teachers’ own, but also their students’, autonomy. In the second part we deal with aspects of plurilingualism in Europe and what it means to live with languages. The cultural dimensions of languages must be understood to appreciate language learning as integral to a plurilingual approach. Adopting a reflective attitude and connecting languages with life skills require certain methods and strategies. For this reason, in part three we review the ways that teachers, and also learners, can become more competent. Developing language competence inevitably requires assessment. The final chapter of the Guide focuses on the fundamental elements of assessment related to teaching and learning. This focus circles back to ideas of reflection, autonomy, culture, and development of plurilingual abilities. Rather than a final step, assessment is an intermediate, or even initial, step in a continuous process of teaching and learning. The final part of the Guide introduces the Kit as a set of worksheets with activities for teacher development that apply, enact, and extend the key concepts highlighted in the Guide and the CEFR.

### Who and what are the Guide and the KIT for?

The Guide and the accompanying KIT address two main target audiences.

- 1) Teacher educators working in the pre-service and in-service education of language teachers;

- 2) Teachers interested in developing their professional competence for language instruction, either individually or collegially.

Others who may want to use the Guide and the accompanying KIT include:

- 3) Administrators of programs for language education or in which language and cultural diversity are prominent issues;
- 4) Educators in schools or higher education with minority, migrant, or sojourning populations learning majority languages;
- 5) Language educators outside of Europe wanting to understand better or apply the principles of the CEFR; or
- 6) Testing or psychometric experts wanting to understand aspects of educational assessment unique to language teaching and language learning.

## **What informs the Guide and the KIT?**

The Guide and its related worksheets in the Kit are designed to reflect the general approach to language education in the *Common European Framework of the Reference for Languages* (2001). While not attempting to cover all aspects of the CEFR, the Guide samples relevant points in the CEFR, making these linkages explicit by citing relevant sections of the CEFR wherever possible. The Guide attempts to address fundamental concepts in the CEFR that may not be readily transparent and that especially warrant “unpacking” for educational practices. The Guide makes links between the CEFR and educational practices in a way that is approachable and accessible for teachers, both in initial and continuing development. The worksheets in the Kit serve as a bridge for teachers to access these concepts and to relate them appropriately to pedagogical practices.

## **What is the Guide not intended to be?**

Like all manuals and guides, this Guide has specific purposes and does not intend to serve other purposes, even if they may be very relevant concerns in language education in general. The Guide is not intended to provide guidance for test development: There already are several good sources for this, including the recent *Manual for Language Test Development and Examining for Use with the CEFR* (2010) Nor is the present Guide intended to assist in relating tests, examinations, or other formal assessments to the CEFR levels. There is a *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language* (2009) specifically developed for this purpose (and related materials; [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/manuell\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/manuell_en.asp)) and exemplar materials/sources developed to provide training in assessing language samples in terms of the CEFR levels: CefGrid, <http://lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/grid>, CefTrain: <http://www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.35.html>, CIEP Samples of oral production [www.ciep.fr/publi\\_evalcert/dvd-productions-orales-ccerl/index.php](http://www.ciep.fr/publi_evalcert/dvd-productions-orales-ccerl/index.php)

The Guide is not intended to prescribe an “authorized” approach to using the CEFR for assessment in language education. Its aim is to foster a reflective approach among teachers, offering ideas and materials to promote such an orientation and pedagogical practices.

## **What is the KIT not intended to be?**

The KIT is not intended to be a prescriptive tool for teacher development courses related to the CEFR. Instead, the KIT provides a flexible series of resources that every teacher developer can select, adapt and customize for specific goals and target groups, the overarching aim being to help practitioners reflect on the CEFR and its underlying philosophy. Because it is not prescriptive nor does the KIT aim to foster a single “officially authorized” interpretation of the CEFR, no answer keys are provided for the numerous questions posed in the various worksheets. Their goal is to encourage a reflective attitude among practitioners.

The wealth of worksheets in the KIT do not aim to cover all possible aspects of the CEFR. Rather the range of worksheets provide different perspectives and ways to investigate key concepts and to explore their possible implications. No single way of dealing with these concepts is envisaged. Suggestions, however, are provided through examples scenarios.

The KIT does not address teachers directly, but rather the KIT is designed for use by teacher developers and pedagogical experts. Nevertheless, teachers wishing to use the KIT as a self-development tool may find its formal organization straightforward to explore: Type A worksheets are more theoretically oriented. Type B worksheets are more practically oriented. Both contain links to the supporting Guide as well as indications of possible connections between other, different worksheets.

## **Part 1. A Guide**

### **0 Setting the context**

Learners of a (foreign) language need to achieve the following competence to be able to communicate actively and efficiently:

- general competence like declarative knowledge (*savoir*), skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), awareness (*savoir-être*), and abilities to learn (*savoir-apprendre*);

- communicative language competence like linguistic competence (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic, orthoepic), socio-linguistic competence (varieties of languages, register differences, etc.), pragmatic competence (discourse competence, functional competence, etc.);
- the capacity to implement these two dimensions of competence; and
- the capacity to use strategies to apply and adapt these competence in all possible contexts.

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) provides a comprehensive description of these competence. However, it is not limited to giving an overview of communicative competence; it subdivides global categories into their components and suggests definitions of levels of competence in different domains. In this way, the CEFR also proposes a fundamental approach to promoting learners' competence and capacities.

The CEFR is a European initiative that provides a common descriptive scheme for a variety of purposes in a transparent manner. The CEFR constitutes an important tool. It outlines levels of competence that a learner is able to achieve, distinguishing diverse aspects of language structures and processes so as to foster a dramatic renewal of language education.

However, the interested reader of the CEFR will equally note its limitations. The CEFR is, as its name suggests, a framework. Reality may present various different aspects, and the demands of educational administration do not necessarily adhere to the framework. Challenges appear at several levels:

- creators of programmes have to take into consideration the new approach inherent in the CEFR, which means that new programmes declaring themselves to be based on the CEFR should put a premium on promoting learners' competence in socio-academic contexts;
- teachers need to accept that a new paradigm is being established in language learning; that is, –the most important factor today is no longer how many words or grammatical structures learners might learn during their school career, but – on the contrary – that learners are able to effectively communicate at certain levels of proficiency; and
- this should lead teachers to understand that their teaching as well as their assessment methods need to adapt to the new paradigm.

Most (foreign) language learning programmes in Europe today are based on the approach espoused by the CEFR. The Framework has "re-framed" teaching, at least in an administrative sense. On the other hand, the implementation of new programmes in schools involves much slower and more challenging processes. Despite generally positive attitudes to the basic ideas of the CEFR and the new programmes, teachers sometimes come up against specific educational realities (such as certain social environments or parents' and students' expectations) and so may feel obliged to "prepare students for final exams". Even if the CEFR and the new programmes already have been "on the market" for a while, assessment formats may not have really changed, forcing teachers to prepare learners for demands that often do not correspond to the main principles of the CEFR. Indeed, it is a major challenge to align goals, instruction and assessment and testing. Nevertheless optimal results can only be expected if there is such alignment and coherence among the components of education.

Furthermore, some teachers do not know the CEFR itself. And some of those who are familiar with it have made linear interpretations which are difficult to pursue to their ultimate conclusions. For example, teachers may have taken the levels of competence into consideration, but, due to the factors above as well as to the complexity of the CEFR itself (although it is supposed to be comprehensible to everybody), issues relating to assessment are seldom taken fully into consideration, neither during the preparation of tests nor during classroom assessments of learners' competence.

To really understand the CEFR it is necessary to make a series of comparisons and parallels between one chapter and another to be able to connect the different parts and link ideas. Such efforts cannot be expected of all teachers considering all the other tasks they have to carry out. Furthermore, competence and their assessment possibilities are not easily outlined or targeted. These challenges arise because plurilingual and pluricultural competence develop in a different rhythm according to individuals, school objectives, and the number of languages (already) learned.

Competence can develop in different ways:

- learners often become more effective in one of the learned languages than in the others;
- a profile of competence may vary between the languages (e.g., excellent oral linguistic competences in two languages, but written competences at the same level only in one of them); and
- a pluricultural profile can differ from a plurilingual profile (e.g., good linguistic competence with just an average knowledge of the culture of the community or communities of reference).

These differences and variations are normal. However, up to now, few educational systems seemed to see the need nor did they provide the opportunities to value the diversification of linguistic

competences. It is only through the CEFR that value has been accorded to differentiation and become feasible as well as worthwhile. Even so-called weak learners can see their competence valued, recognizing that they have in fact several competence even if these are less developed than those of other learners.

Despite these differences the CEFR offers the possibility to create anchor points to actively emphasize one dimension more than another. Learners may be heading towards careers that need more linguistic competence in one domain than in another. Therefore it is possible, for example, to reinforce written linguistic competence and to (partly) neglect oral aspects when a learner is considering a career mainly based on written communication. With these issues in mind, the CEFR offers various approaches to assessment processes—not in the sense of teaching to exams, but rather of teaching and learning to relevant competences. Assessment is conceptualized not as a final or separate phase after teaching and learning; rather, assessment is integral and constantly related to teaching and learning themselves.

Throughout the Guide, references appear to specific worksheets, indicating possible points of entry into the Kit. Depending on local contexts and target groups, different scenarios for professional development can be envisaged. Several suggestions are presented as scenarios attached to this Guide.

## **I. Reflexivity: an attitude leading to autonomy**

Preparing teachers for their professional lives through reflection and analysis of their professional practices is currently a hot topic in education. As the present world becomes more complex increased knowledge is required along with mastery of increasingly diversified competence. These processes force us to question the tools and skills that are most appropriate for education. Education needs to change, incorporating reflection, open-minded attitudes and flexible systems. Teachers, being central to learning processes, have to change their practices according to changing needs. Professional development has to start from the analytical observation of one's teaching skills, the context in which a teacher operates, and the restrictions it imposes, but also from the observation of individuals with whom a teacher interacts as well as learners' unique and specific mental contexts along with aims which are sometimes unclear and vague.

Reflecting on the construction of professional skills is also required by new orientations and policies for pedagogy in which learners are at the centre of the learning-teaching process. This important dynamic for change is especially distinct in the teaching of languages for a variety of

reasons: Languages are an increasingly prevalent subject, new priorities are established for efficient communication, classroom management focuses on tasks, teaching and learning strategies, attention is now on the learner, and teaching is focused on comprehension. Moreover, scientific inquiry in neurology, psychology and pedagogy are progressing and influencing language teaching.

## **1. Restrictions and liberties: choices that teachers face**

Teachers have the delicate task of guiding students throughout their courses. To do so, teachers have to pose questions that will then enable them to put into context, personalise, and make appropriate their professional activities. To support and guide teachers in this essential task certain question boxes are provided, starting from Chapter 4 of the CEFR, which contains such guidelines “phrased as invitation rather than as an instruction in order to emphasize the non-directive character of the Framework enterprise” (p.43). But one should not feel obliged to follow exactly each section in detail. The CEFR assumes that “in most cases, however, we expect that the Framework user will reflect on the question posed in each box and take a decision one way or another. If the decision taken is of significance, it can be formulated using the categories and the examples supplied, supplemented as may be found necessary for the purpose in hand” (ibid.). The overall structure of Chapter 4 is presented as a check-list to ensure that teachers and other CEFR users can find answers or guidance easily. Teachers are stimulated to reflect and take decisions regarding what is proposed to students: “This process can never be reduced simply to choosing from a pre-determined menu. That level of decision must, and should, be in the hands of the practitioners concerned, calling on their judgement and creativity” (p. 44).

## **2. From general cases to specific contexts**

The complexity of language and teaching/learning processes requires starting from a clear and rational basis so that various approaches and decisions can be lucid. For a teacher to be able to guide learners through their courses, and for students to become aware of their learning, it is necessary to introduce a descriptive phase. At that stage teachers and students acquire the means to locate approaches relevant to their contexts. The reflective teacher stays open to learners’ needs and knows how to select topics that will be interesting and suited to students’ linguistic competence, their cognitive capacities and their educational aims. These should be in accordance with the curriculum or programme.

In the CEFR the descriptive phase starts off from the most general level and becomes more specific. This progress involves starting from a situational context and identifying the situations in which language is needed according to four main areas of social life (personal, public, professional, and

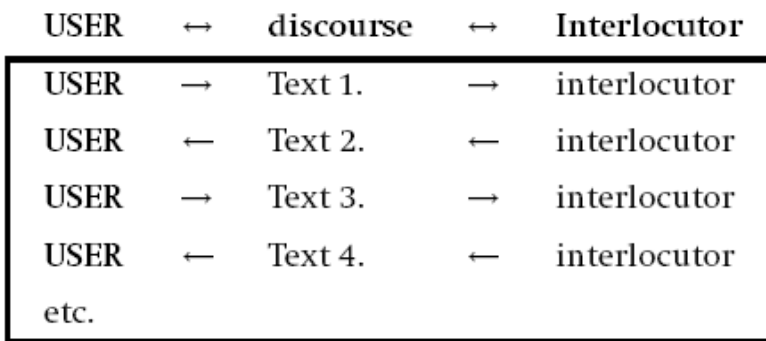
educational), thereby helping students to appreciate and adapt to the main features of the situational context. Far from being exhaustive, the list of situational categories classified accorded to these areas (cf. CEFR, table 5, p. 48) gives a first important reference point to students as well as teachers for activating their pedagogical choices. Moreover, to avoid the static effects of description and enumeration, the CEFR emphasizes the primary role of the conditions in which language competence are established and different tasks accomplished (cf. CEFR, 4.1.3, pp. 46-47). Awareness and recognition of the restrictions associated with these conditions provide basic elements to support the informed teacher in the analysis of the situations and of the educational course itself and in decisions to be taken.

### 3. Language's personal and social dimensions

The title of Chapter 4 speaks for itself: "Language use and the language user/learner". This dual perspective on learning and using the language emphasizes the individual and the social in combination. Before presenting in detail communicative activities and their related strategies (in 4.4), the CEFR stipulates their dual nature. Language is acquired by an individual within a situation in a context, but "this context is highly organised independently of the individual" (4.1.4 pp. 50-51). For this reason, individual perceptions are very important. Perceptions relate to the mindset of the individual, involving, for example, intentions, expectations, needs, motivations, or moods, but also memory, individual knowledge, imagination, and a range of cognitive and emotional processes.

People learn a language through a series of filters and mental procedures. The CEFR insists on this basic fact: Learning another language and the knowledge of another culture is not made to the detriment – or even independently – of a student's own language. It is not about two separate languages and cultures. On the contrary, each language modifies the other (or several others) and this contributes to developing **competence** and **intercultural awareness**. Language learning thereby justifies the development of a complex and broad personality. Of course, languages can also be used for entertainment or creativity, as well as for dreaming and for pleasure. The CEFR emphasizes explicitly these particular ways of using language, which are also fundamentally important from a pedagogical point of view. However, languages are mostly acquired for communication purposes, which represent the CEFR's second main focus, social purposes. The social dimension of a language emphasizes the central position of interaction and communicative activities themselves. This is illustrated on page 99 (scheme 3.).





In example 3, one can notice how the exchange – and the amount of text that it produces – structures the conversation throughout the interaction. Language being above all a form of communication, the importance of exchanges between people is crucial. The “communication gap” necessary for the establishment of a real exchange presumes a joint intersubjective state or shared mental context between two people interacting (p.51). During an exchange, two people conversing experience various types of constraints or choices (for example one of them may want to extend the conversation whereas the other could be in a hurry or would prefer to be brief), influencing greatly the communication exchange process. The student, on whom the CEFR focuses, thus stands in between two dimensions, the individual, on the one hand, and the social, on the other. The former focuses on a more personal construction that requires the learner’s personal knowledge and skill; the second simply presents an exchange and mutual sharing process. Amid this duality, strategic roles become essential.

#### 4. The learner and strategies

The CEFR attaches considerable importance to learning strategies. Strategies feature in several passages and skill evaluation charts (CEFR, Chapter 2.1.5, 4, 6). Research has shown that learners who get good results know how to use efficient learning strategies on top of being able to use the appropriate strategies in order to successfully accomplish diverse tasks. These same strategies and knowledge awareness are useful for life-long learning and are also crucial to learners becoming autonomous. These are two fundamental concepts of the educational policy in Europe, which aims at fostering flexibility in learners, who should know how to operate with unknown factors as well as how to progress and improve themselves over the lifespan. These two concepts are also coherent with the demands of the present job’s market where good qualifications alone are no longer sufficient.

There are numerous definitions of strategies. The CEFR offers this description: “Strategies are a means the language user exploits to mobilise and balance her or his resources, to activate skills and procedures, in order to fulfil the demands of communication in context and successfully complete the task in question in the most comprehensive or most economical way feasible” (p. 57). Recognizing the efficiency of learning strategies, language teachers must put them into practice. The CEFR (ch. 4.4) offers a series of strategies adapted to different types of communication situations. These strategies are categorized as four major types: *Pre-planning*, *Execution*, *Monitoring and Repair Action*. These may entail, for example, the use of paraphrasing, altering messages, and the use of gestures. A person can alternatively try to accomplish a task in a limited way or else figure out a way to succeed in an ambitious manner. The first approach involves an *avoidance strategy*, whereas the second involves an *achievement strategy*. Teaching these strategies should be explicit and contextualised in the activities during a language course.

It is also important that, as the CEFR suggests (6. 1. 4. 1 e), teachers involve all students in reflecting on these strategies during their activities. Students should know how to use them consciously to make communication easier and more efficient. Certain strategies enable learners to confront difficulties that may appear during a conversation. Learning a language requires the use of different types of learning strategies. Learners have to know how to plan and organise their own learning because that is a major determinant of achievement. For effective planning one needs to know how to define possible objectives and determine an itinerary to carry them out. Learners have to know how to put into practice and control their own learning as well as how to deal with problems that arise.

Often, students do not know which strategies correspond to certain tasks and to their learning profiles. Teachers should therefore show and teach students how and when to use them. A carefully employed strategy can facilitate and ease the learning process and motivate students. Adopting this conscious approach:

- stimulates learner in their learning and becoming aware of certain strategies,
- pushes students to analyse the communication process and thus to adapt strategies to actual situations, and
- encourages the transfer of strategies to other contexts.

The editors of the CEFR suggest emphasizing the processes of communication and learning as a goal to be achieved. The Framework also emphasizes that these strategies be modified according to the tasks and functions of language being used (CEFR, 6. 1. 3. 1). Strategies can compensate for breakdowns or deficiencies in verbal communication. Plurilingual and pluricultural experiences are also highly recommended to develop mutual understanding. The thoughtful teacher has to know how to use these strategies and experiences while teaching in order to stimulate language learning.

But the student also has an active role to play in this process. It is the learner who has to develop the skills and strategies to succeed. Unfortunately, many students limit their capacities, constraining themselves, content only to accomplish the activities proposed by teachers and the textbooks. On the other hand, for the learning process to be realized throughout one's life time, the student needs to understand the implications of what that means and has to learn how to become autonomous (CEFR, 6. 3. 5). Once the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that enable a competent speaker to have a conversation are integrated along with adaptive strategies, it is crucial to question ourselves about students' ways of learning and, subsequently, about how to guide that progression efficiently.

## **5. Partial competence, dynamic development**

Chapters 4 and 5 detail the skills as well as the capacities and necessary strategies to realise these competence. We now focus on the different options and issues that all acquisition processes, and so all development, require. The CEFR insists on flexible notions in respect to unbalanced and changing competence. The latter, in particular, is discussed in regards to plurilingual and pluricultural dimensions (6. 1. 3. 1). For this reason the CEFR introduces the notions of "profile" (6. 1. 3. 1) and "partial competence" (6. 1. 3. 4). These two notions demonstrate that a great variety of combinations naturally exist between the mastery of certain languages or of specific skills in one language. Therefore unequal competence between languages and cultures may appear a phenomenon that is perfectly normal. These differences inevitably appear in the process of developing ever-increasing multilingual skills, which can have a highly differentiated character (6. 1. 3. 1).

Central to the CEFR is a hierarchical taxonomic order. As students learn they also gain linguistic and communicative awareness, along with enhanced metacognitive states, which create an enabling dynamic toward ever-increasing competence. Just as there are partial skills that combine in various dynamic ways, there are also partial or temporary objectives (6. 1. 4.2 ) that are complementary and differ in their typologies. The definition, and consequent combinations, of different objectives is not a mere stylistic exercise. It illustrates the possible diversity of learning aims and the variety to be found in the provision of teaching. Obviously, a great many types of provision, in and out of school, cover several of these objectives at the same time: "Pursuing a specifically designated objective also means [...] that the achievement of the stated objective will lead to other results which were not specifically aimed at or which were not the main concern "(p. 138). It is evident from that perspective that the CEFR does not consider it useful to distinguish between learning and acquisition but rather limits itself in mentioning the distinction between these two terms and by proposing that they be used in an interchangeable manner (6. 2. 1), there being no more generic term. With the same logic, it is important to emphasize the CEFR's position in respect to errors.

## **6. Error is neither a “mistake”...nor a sin**

The CEFR shows that errors are part of the process of acquiring a language and that teachers have to undertake specific pedagogical procedures to reduce their number. Teachers have to develop reflexive attitudes with their students to help them develop their language skills. The Framework reflects the nature and sources of errors, which can be multiple (CEFR, 6. 5. 1) and differentiate them clearly from mistakes which are also done by native speakers and just reveal lack in consistency between performance and competence (CEFR, 6.5). Of course, these can be evidence of failure in learning or of inefficiency in teaching, but they can also indicate the learner’s willingness to communicate and to take risks (CEFR p. 154). The CEFR also recommends ways for teachers to respond when their students produce inaccurate language. Profound reflection is recommended on the procedures to take. Certainly students’ errors should be corrected but in such a way that does not interfere with communication. Teachers should encourage students and provide clear feedback and correct models. By observing students’ performance teachers can prepare and plan subsequent lessons that focus on recurrent errors, and their underlying mechanisms, as well as explanations that encourage reflection on development and evaluation. Evaluations that focus solely on errors should definitely be avoided.

## **7. Teaching – a profession that requires learning**

How should teachers and others address the evolving nature of teaching and language learning? The Framework stresses the idea of ‘partnerships for learning’, referring to the network of people engaged in the language teaching profession at different levels, understood as a forum of many specialists working with teachers and learners at different phases of learning. (CEFR p.140) The notion of the reflective practitioner is a foundation of the CEFR because reflexivity is one of the key competences. However, developing reflective pedagogical practices requires some guidance. Despite its non-directive orientation to teaching methods, the CEFR (6. 4) dedicates significant attention to enumerating options for pedagogy. These are often presented as questions and lists. These can contribute greatly to help all educators in adopting a professionalized approach throughout their lives.

## **II. Living (with) languages**

Teaching and learning languages are no longer considered merely as an educational preliminary, an objective under certain circumstances, or a cultural pastime, but rather they are enduring practices deeply rooted within social life. Viewed from the perspective of both students and teachers, this state of affairs has multiple causes and implications worth examining afterwards carefully.

## **1. Social co-existence and its determinants in plurilingual contexts**

One of the founding principles of the CEFR is the promotion of the value of plurilingualism, its practice in daily life and, in particular, the modes of learning it entails. Indeed, with a view to increasing mobility and the growing number of linguistic exchanges carried out in person or via different media, it is of great importance for everyone to be able to communicate in several languages, even if they are not all mastered perfectly (cf. *infra*, partial or dissociated skills, and plurilingual or pluricultural skills). This principle does not require the lowering of standards in the learning and teaching of languages, but simply involves taking into account the social reality we all experience. It by no means suggests that we cannot improve our knowledge of a given language, our skills and know-how as well as our existential competence, or ways of being which are adequate to the situation (common levels of reference, CEFR, pp. 26-29 and chapter IV of this Guide).

Let's begin by defining terms. **Plurilingualism** is an individual's ability to use "a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact." According to the type of communication required in a variety of situations, the individual can "call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor" (CEFR, p. 4).

**Multilingualism** refers more to the condition of a social group in which more than two languages co-exist. From its outset, the CEFR promotes a plurilingual approach, that is, a seamless approach to the acquisition or learning of a number of languages throughout the lifespan, which involves constantly relating them to each other so as to build up a plurilingual repertoire, capacity, or competence.

Moreover, a citizens' speech is integral to democratic life in the taking of decisions or actions to maintain, facilitate, or improve cooperative relations such as trading, manufacturing, producing, assisting, cooperating, inquiring, creating, selling, purchasing, and so forth. Languages are directly linked to social practices within, but also beyond the classroom. It is important to underline that nowadays the classroom constitutes an independent social space, a learning space of relationships

and human activities. Languages are also integral to life-long learning, and so successive learning phases can take a wide variety of forms according to individual experience: alternating methods and styles of learning as a complement to study or working practice, in person or as a distance learner, with partial guidance or independently, and so on.

For example, young people today, whatever their level of study or societal circumstances, may have to study in several languages and in different countries, or at least be comfortable in two to three languages in their field of study and later in work, because those languages form part of the current and future realities of professional and social life. The same applies to adults. These states are relevant to the European Language Portfolio (ELP), in which individuals can document their progressive achievements of proficiency in specific languages and cultures (CEFR, pp. 88 and 174), a process that continues throughout life and not merely during “schooling”.

This Framework is conceived in reference to the constitution of the European community which has developed over fifty years and continues to spread. Its aims have remained consistent: to promote peace, to protect the democracy of social life by recognising the resources that each language and culture has to offer, and to provide for the development of all countries and their citizens through shared policies and projects. The CEFR is thus the instrument of a language and education policy (CEFR, pp. 1-6).

Modes of language learning are realized through activities rather than being confined to verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. So language learning does not merely involve focusing on individual language learners and their unique qualities, but also on peer groups to which individuals belong, composed of diverse individuals taking part in learning processes under pedagogical guidance. Learners should also be considered in terms of their capacities to assume social roles and carry out tasks in contexts that may involve several languages. Pedagogical approaches that involve communication must therefore be oriented towards performing actions or activities in diverse situations with meaningful outcomes, requiring knowledge, skills and know-how and adequate interpersonal skills as may be required throughout an individual’s personal and social life.

We thus refer to skills as meaning “the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions “(CEFR, p. 9) in diverse situations. Some of the skills referred to are general in nature (notably, the skill of learning itself now features among them) while others more directly involve communication or language (CEFR, pp. 11-13). This definition provides a framework for an evolving notion among its users, language teachers, who are free to tap into all students’ potential and to appreciate and foster the development of their skills and abilities in practice in real situations, either individually or collectively.

In this way, learners and teachers alike gain new perspectives, acknowledging the wealth of their specific professional activities, throughout their social and professional lives. Teachers and learners are also considered as social actors, and social and professional life is conceived as a continuum. This view contrasts with rigid distinctions previously made between school (and university) life, working life, and retirement. It is worth noting that social life begins well before entry into professional life and continues long after it. It is for this reason that the CEFR refers to using languages, rather than simply speaking them. Individuals speak but also do or act. From the learner's perspective, people learn while simultaneously engaging in various activities (CEFR, p. 44).

## **2. Recognising the fundamental role of language teachers: a reversal of perspectives and the end of prescriptive pedagogy**

This recognition begins as a reformulation of classroom practices: these are no longer seen as vehicles for pedagogical methods set out in the form of teaching programmes and official mandates within education systems, but rather as a collection of learning and teaching activities appropriate to the situations in which learners and teacher(s) engage. Therefore, adopting the CEFR does not mean that teachers lose their pedagogic freedom; on the contrary, it means making the most of their work and professional competences while contextualising their teaching abilities. The CEFR represents a set of best practices: their diversity derives from the freedom accorded to teachers and their abilities to assess learners' needs. Relevant classroom practices vary in their efficacy and effectiveness, not by their nature, but according to the setting in terms of time, place, participants, inherent cultural values, and situations.

This stance is particularly evident in the CEFR (cf. chapter IV, pp. 43-44), which invites teachers to make use of their own experiences and working practices to inform their decisions in organising and implementing teaching, learning, and evaluation. Teachers are invited to question themselves about life and work in a systematic and collaborative manner regarding:

- the domains and situations for using the language(s) with the learners they are teaching,
- human relationships in the group (what are the risks of misunderstanding, which attitudes can be adopted, increased, allowed, explained?),
- the tasks proposed,
- the themes to be developed in the class.
- the learners' original cultures and target cultures,
- the competences to be developed and the ways to do so,

- ... according to the current and prospective needs of users-learners.

The concept of learners' needs has been widely accepted ever since language teaching became learner-centred (see, e.g., the Council of Europe's publications between 1970 and 1980). But its complexity has become increasingly clear: It is crucial to distinguish what people may expressly or implicitly request from that they may actually need. An array of subjective and objective needs can emerge, rendering the concept broad and seemingly unlimited. The CEFR narrows this focus to potentially required linguistic usages in certain situations, in certain types of relationships, and in certain fields. Subjective aspects are also taken into account, framed as a "mental context", when referring to individuals and as "state of mind, needs, desires drives, motivations, interests, intentions, expectations, thoughts, reflections, conditions and constraints" when speaking collectively. Practical limitations derive from the situation and its context with reference to the tasks to be carried out with and through language activities themselves. (CEFR, p. 50)

The opening pages of the CEFR make reference to "daily life situations" (p. 3), whether in a foreign country or in one's own, and specify (p. 9 ) that "the context refers to the various events and parameters (physical and otherwise) of the situation, which are unique to the individual but also defined by external factors marked by communication acts". By moving from a learner's needs towards a more general standard, teachers will note the importance the CEFR invests in an adaptive notion of "context". The CEFR thus distinguishes the realm of individual life experience, that is, "the mental context of user-learners" (4.1.4., pp. 50-51) from a more general, social context, without going so far as separating the two realms.

"Context" thus emerges as intimately linked to "situation", occasionally leading to references to "external context". The CEFR sets out certain useful criteria to help understand and describe a situation: place and time, institutions and bodies to be accounted for, the actors involved and their social roles, objects, events, operations effected and relevant texts (cf. CEFR, p. 46, item 4.1.2). This set of definitions is fairly flexible, with the clear aim of allowing all users and particularly teachers to appropriate it, whatever their previous training and cultural reference points.

Rather than being subjected to an eclectic array or confirmed set of teaching and learning methods, teachers are compelled to focus on themselves and their own practices: what they have learned, what they have done for a long time, what they have tried, what they have changed, what "works" well, less well, or poorly. This process of reflection serves to inform their working practices, and can be shared with other teachers who, in turn, carry out similar practices. Clearly, teachers are prompted to draw on their own experiences and resources, as well as their personal lives: This is one of the benefits of the teaching profession, with its high degree of autonomy, but it also represents a challenge if professional life spills over excessively and too often into private life. Thus the last, but by no means least, component of this reflective process ought to be, for the teacher,



learning to perpetually balance the emotional, intellectual and affective domains of experience. This professional learning process opens up new outlets for creativity and restores teachers' intellectual and creative roles while reinforcing their abilities to accompany learners under their guidance (while also enhancing their abilities to learn, since it is possible to teach one language while learning another) and furnishing a renewed Socratic self-knowledge. In this way, new benefits emerge through considering classroom activities in new ways that evolve as necessary.

### **3. Teaching and learning activities: A conceptualization of freedom through practical adaptation**

This view of the teaching profession can be invigorating but also requires commitment and openness to change. Moreover, teachers must reflect on their reasons for change and their ways of doing so. Why change? Obviously, the world is changing. So too must professional development involve renewing oneself in uniquely individual ways (or withdrawal from the interactions needed for renewal) as well as infra-national or institutional modes (or risk losing sight of broader perspective on cultures, education, languages, and institutions). The work of teachers is not solitary or isolated, but rather involves sharing, not only with students, but also with colleagues, near and far.

How change? First by observing one's practices, describing them, and analyzing them. Then by observing others' practices and reading about pedagogical innovations and inquiry in publications and internet sites. Teachers can also observe and discuss each others' teaching practices to further renew their perspectives on teaching and motivating students. As a matter of principle "it is not the function of the Framework to promote one particular methodology, but instead to present options" (CEFR, p. 142).

On this subject, it is worth considering project-based teaching, a well-established form of educational practice with enduring and fruitful potential. This pedagogical approach ranges from projects such as well-known global simulations to those that forge links between classrooms and the outside world. For example, a newspaper writing project carried out within a class may be published on the Web as or as an online blog. The enduring success of these practices speaks highly of the teachers who have invested in and continue to devote their time to such projects. The social and interpersonal aspects of these projects in terms of learning and teaching is particularly clear: An action-based approach to teaching can be implemented in the form of (pre-)professional communication, through classroom games, or creative or poetic language activities articulated through mini-tasks or more complex projects. (CEFR, pp. 55)

The notion of task-based work is central in the CEFR. An entire chapter is devoted to the topic (Ch. 7, pp. 157-167). Task-based pedagogy, too, is presented in a flexible manner, since "tasks are a

feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains” (CEFR, p. 157). Task-based teaching and learning concerns “any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved “ (CEFR, p. 10). The term “task” refers precisely to concrete experiences rather than the more general concept of activity” (see CEFR, pp. 57 onwards). In this sense, the anthropological and cultural aspects of tasks and activities – in particular their relations to groups and their uses of language – are not addressed: Each user of the CEFR, is expected to adopt the Framework and makes it their own by adding their knowledge and experience so as to interpret the nature of the tasks at hand and how to effectively work through them in the present context and situation: “Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competence in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome” (CEFR, p. 157 Ch. III of this Guide addresses the concept of tasks in more detail).

In sum, for teachers and learners alike, the CEFR synthesizes useful teaching and learning practices oriented towards plurilingual practices and the development of plurilingual competence, linking languages and their components together rather than separating them into discretely. This results in various forms of development (which have already been touched upon in some depth here) for both initial teacher education as well as continuing professional development, in addition to the development of learners themselves, whether of school age or older. Languages taught or learned are no longer divided into fields of language, literature, and culture. Instead, an all-encompassing language repertoire is presented for learners as well as teachers, conceived as four major domains: educational, public, occupational, and personal (CEFR, p. 14)

The CEFR presents these ‘sectors’ or “key domains” in a list, which should be considered non-exhaustive, as “the number of possible domains is indeterminate; [...] in many situations more than one domain may be involved [...]; on the other hand, the personal domain individualises or personalises actions in the other domains” (CEFR, pp 44-45). On the concept of domain, see also Ch. I of this Guide)

Teachers are free to choose, as are learners, the appropriate ways to proceed. These choices may be more subtle when learners have highly different native cultures and languages from their teachers. In such cases, activities involving mediation, intervention, or interaction may be required in the processes of teaching and learning, as will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4. Developing and mastering language skills**

Learning languages results from a commitment on the part of learners, made in conjunction with their peers and teachers, and not merely as exercises in imitation or memorising phrases, lists, or dialogues. This view follows from socio-constructivist psychology: Learning or appropriation does not merely occur on an individual basis, even during memorisation and individual exercises. Hierarchical teacher-pupil relations have to be relaxed in order to allow for communal exchange and achievement.

The teacher nonetheless functions as a “human resource” while teaching from a learner-centred perspective. A teacher must continuously and formatively evaluate the processes of learning process, notably by having learners carry out self-evaluations, for example using Portfolio tools, and teachers may also periodically evaluate the progress of each learner.

The aim of the learning process is to develop competence in other languages (language 1, 2, 3...) and also to acquire new competences (see chap. IV of this Guide). These competences, abilities and achievements develop in concrete situations and involve a diverse array of social skills, expertise, and modes of communication, hence the need to leave their implementation in the hands of the teacher. For instance, in oral communication, gestures, facial expressions, body language, but also the volume of the voice, or even onomatopoeia, may take on different meanings depending on place, culture, or age. It is thus part of the teacher's role to take these issues into account and ensure that learners have the necessary understanding to conduct themselves, act, and speak appropriately (CEFR, pp. 87-89).

Various forms of learning emerge through activities involving language production, comprehension, interaction, or mediation. Written and oral production and comprehension are the four best-known language-based modes of communication. These necessarily involve interaction, mirroring social reality, through verbal interactions (e.g., conversation, debate, talk) and written modes (e.g., letters, mail, forms). Mediation, too, is inherent in social life both at home and abroad, though it has seldom featured in classroom activities until recently. The idea is to “act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly” In written form mediation may entail summarising and reformulating, while its verbal forms can include giving explanations and interpreting for people who speak different languages. It also occasionally involves “coping with the demands of using finite resources” (CEFR, p.87).

In oral exercises, examples of language-based communication activities include not only listening (hearing, understanding) in a variety of situations, but also producing (speaking) a continuously delivered talk, making spontaneous comments in interactions, or exchanging on a text. Written exercises may concern planning and drafting a report, essay or creative text... The descriptive guides for these activities divide them into focused activities to be carried out in class (CEFR, from p. 57, summary table pp. 98-99). See also Ch. I and IV of this Guide).

“Coping with the demands of using finite resources” presupposes the acceptance and even validation of partial competence, that is, an imperfect mastery of the language at a given moment, which leaves scope for improvement and is part of plurilingual competence. (CEFR, pp. 133-134, see Ch. I of this Guide). It also relies on teachers’ facilitation of communication processes and learners’ appropriation of various strategies according to their objectives, since “coping” already entails the implementation of strategies to interpret a situation, evaluating, adapting, cooperating, and ensuring mutual comprehension.

A strategy entails analysing the steps required to successfully complete a task. As was observed in Chapter I of this Guide, the CEFR opts for a holistic view of strategies that allow a task to be successfully carried out as fully and economically as possible – according to its specific objective. Professionals in the field of teaching and learning will, of course, be aware that these means will depend on individuals, groups, situations and indeed cultures.

Certain strategies aimed at comprehension and production may be applicable to a number of activities--not only those ensuring the implementation of the exact task at hand, but also, should the occasion arise, those that could serve to make up for deficiencies by seeking out alternative paths (e.g., strategies of avoidance, reformulation, or questioning). Other strategies are more specific. Therefore the strategies concerning oral interaction also encompass the co-management of a conversation's development, thus requiring the use of listening skills. Strategies for verbal comprehension do not merely concern listening to and understanding the message, but also interpreting and evaluating the situation, its determinants and even its implicit workings. In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the CEFR, evaluation scales ranging from A1 to C2 attempt to mark out proficiency levels for production, comprehension, interaction, and mediation (CEFR, pp. 57-87 and Chapters I and IV of this Guide).

Among language-based communication activities, there is clearly a place for written as well as oral work in all four categories of production, comprehension, interaction, and mediation.

Here are a few examples:

- Written production: form filling, articles, reports, notes, creative writing, letters;
- Written comprehension: reading directions, interpreting information, following instructions, learning, entertainment;
- Written interaction: correspondence, online forums, negotiations;
- Written mediation: translation, summaries, reformulations.

These various activities are set out in categories here for the purposes of description, but in both the classroom and real life they form a continuum and may overlap at times.

All of us live within continua ranging from classroom to real life (the classroom representing a place and time belonging to social life), so oral and written practices are interconnected. It follows that conceptions of texts, genres, and text types should be broad and flexible. They must also be considered in relation to the varied supports currently available, such as “live voice” communication, telephone, radio, television, audio supports, printed and handwritten materials (CEFR, p. 94). What is a text? The CEFR’s broad definition of the term may invite criticism because it is not scientific in nature, but rather operational, conceived functionally from the perspective of learners’ activities: “any sequence or discourse (spoken and/or written) [...] which users/learners receive, produce or exchange” (CEFR p. 10 and p.93).

A related issue concerns genre and text type, which are also defined in respect to choices made to facilitate actions. These actions are inventive and adaptive constructions freely designed by the speaker or writer according to an evaluation of the situation, which, in turn, justifies the choices made and even what is omitted from communication. Thus a book can simultaneously represent a learning support and written text or indeed a text read aloud (in the case of CD books or those accessed online). Similarly, the range of genres and text types observed is so bewilderingly vast that it can only be thought of as a continuum of linguistic activities in which learners are engaged as social entities. For example, a school manual may simultaneously belong to the descriptive genre as well as constituting a specific text type. In such cases it would be both futile to expect theoretical stances in the CEFR regarding the meaning of text, genre or text type; this task is left in the hands of researchers and teachers in the context of their professional practices. (CEFR, pp. 93-95)

In sum, living (with) languages represents a new horizon in the learning and teaching of languages. It provides a source for renewal of teaching and learning practices, representing opportunities for teacher to seize upon. To do so presupposes initial and continuing professional development, tailored to the individual and situation.

### **III. Becoming more competent**

Taking a reflexive attitude can promote formal and informal learning, foster progress in a specific language, and facilitate transfer from one language to another one as well as the adoption of effective strategies. For the CEFR, users of a language become increasingly competent, though not starting from scratch. Let’s consider what the CEFR means by “competence”. Communicative competence includes many competences which people acquire throughout their lives. The CEFR

emphasizes that learners in a (school) learning situation already draw upon a number of competences, which belong to their cultural background and experience. Such competences can be more or less closely related to language or linguistic competence. Learners' prior knowledge and progressive achievements contribute to the aim of "becoming more competent".

Table 1. Schematic organization of competences according to the CEFR

general competences				communicative language competences		
declarative knowledge	skills and know-how	existential competence	ability to learn	linguistic competences	sociolinguistic competence	pragmatic competences
knowledge of the world sociocultural knowledge intercultural awareness	practical skills intercultural skills		language and communication awareness general phonetic awareness and skills study skill heuristic skills	lexical competence grammatical competence semantic competence phonological competence orthographic competence orthoepic competence	social relations politeness conventions expressions of folk wisdom register differences dialect and accent	discourse competence functional competence

### 1. General competences from an intercultural perspective

Learners already possess *general competences*, which increase at school, including: *declarative knowledge (savoir)*, *skills and know-how (savoir-faire)*, *awareness (savoir-être)* and *aptitudes (savoir apprendre)*. Declarative knowledge includes learners' "knowledge of the world" (CEFR p. 101), which embraces: knowledge of people, locations, and characteristics of the country or countries in which the target language is spoken. Knowledge of a society and a country can't be acquired by users without developing *sociocultural knowledge* as well as *intercultural awareness*. The former consists of the knowledge of "features distinctively characteristic of a particular European society" (CEFR p.102), which may relate to everyday life, living conditions, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs and attitudes, body language, social conventions, and ritual behaviour. Certain features may be "traditional"--for instance, institutions, history, or politics--but there are also features that are seldom obvious, such as social conventions. When hosting visitors from abroad, there are many social conventions such as punctuality, expectations for gifts, length of stay, or leave-taking that constitute appropriate interpersonal relationships. Behavioural and conversational conventions are also integral as are taboos, ritual behaviour, religious observances

and rites, festivities, and celebrations. In addition, non-verbal communication and body language are important.

Knowledge of intercultural features and the capacity to relate them to one's own world and the world of the target community produce *intercultural awareness*, which is essential for developing European citizenship. Intercultural awareness includes the capacity of reconsidering one's own culture and to be open-minded towards foreign cultures. The CEFR stresses that sociocultural awareness is not necessarily included in learners' previous experiences or, if it exists, it may be influenced by stereotypes. Learning at school is therefore very important for developing appropriate intercultural knowledge. Relevant skills and knowledge include "intercultural skills and know how", such as "cultural sensitivity" (CEFR p. 104) and the ability to identify a variety of strategies in a particular situation. These intercultural skills and know-how call upon learners' capacities to build upon contacts with a foreign culture to fulfil the role of intercultural intermediary between the home and the target culture, thereby overcoming stereotyped relationships and possible conflict situations.

Linguistic or intercultural misunderstanding can relate, for instance, to politeness conventions and register. Although solutions for linguistic errors or mistakes may easily be found, intercultural misunderstandings may give rise to negative attitudes toward other people, which are much more difficult to overcome. Learners therefore require appropriate knowledge as well as skills and know-how to deal with intercultural situations in the *real* world. Indeed, learning and teaching activities often focus more on the acquisition of linguistic competence than on learners' intercultural competence.

Each learner has a personal identity characterized by attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles, and personality types. A taciturn, shy and introverted learner will act in a different way towards other people than a loquacious, enterprising and extroverted one. The development of one's personal identity is an important goal. Awareness and aptitudes for learning underpin the construction of an "intercultural personality" (CEFR p. 106) that takes into account different personality types.

"Ability to learn" means the aptitude to observe new experiences and to incorporate them into one's own knowledge of the world, modifying it if necessary. The ability to learn includes two components: *language and communication awareness* as well as *general phonetic skills*, on the one hand, and *study skills* and *heuristic skills* on the other (CEFR pp. 106-107). Sensitivity to language as a communication tool involves learners' capacity to consider new experiences in the target language as an enrichment. These can enhance learners' motivation as well. In a similar way, phonetic skills can help people to master their processes of language learning. Study skills underlie learners' ability to organize and use materials for autonomous and self-directed learning in order to

become increasingly independent in their language learning. Finally, heuristic skills include people's abilities to solve problems strategically and come to terms with new experiences that play a leading role in their own (inter)cultural learning.

## **2. Communicative language competence from an action-oriented perspective**

For communication to take place, people must put their general competences into practice. Communicative language competence, including *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *pragmatic competences*, allow communication to occur (CEFR p. 108). Linguistic competence in turn includes "lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological and orthographic competence[s]" (CEFR p. 109). Lexical competence overlaps with sociolinguistic competence.

The knowledge of certain fixed expressions, such as greetings like "Good morning!", consists of the knowledge and ability to use lexical elements, and these "linguistic markers" such as greetings and sentential formulae (CEFR p. 110) are in fact also "markers of social relations" (CEFR p. 118). Such expressions and relations differ for various languages and cultures, depending on many factors, such as status, closeness of relation, or register of discourse. Communication involves fundamentally sociolinguistic dimensions above and beyond purely linguistic elements.

Awareness of the relationships between the knowledge of a language as a whole and its social realizations can foster learners' intercultural awareness', which, as observed above, is an essential competence among general ones. The choice of address forms such as "My Lord, Your Grace" (CEFR p. 119) and the use of "O.K. Let's get going" (CEFR p. 120) involve not only lexical knowledge, but also the knowledge of the variety of languages, of different contexts, and of the users' relative status. Among linguistic competences, grammatical competence involves "the ability to understand and express meaning and recognizing well-formed phrases and sentences" (CEFR p. 113). Sentences are not to be learnt by heart and repeated by learners, but on the contrary are tools for increasingly independent communication. Learners' grammatical accuracy increases as they gain the ability to control their own communicative production. If an A2 learner still systematically makes basic mistakes, a B2 learner makes occasional "slips" or unsystematic errors and minor flaws may still occur in sentence structure as well (CEFR p. 114).

Semantic competence is related to lexical competence, particularly concerning the relation of words to general context and interlexical relations. Lexical elements include not only single words – which may have several distinct meanings (polysemy) – but also their combinations in fixed frames and phrasal idioms. The CEFR proposes a classification of contextualised lexical and grammatical learning, starting from fixed expressions and collocations, such as "to put up with" and "to make a



speech” (CEFR p. 111). A person’s range of vocabulary knowledge is evaluated through appropriate scales, which underlie the importance of people having a (good) range of vocabulary to express themselves on most topics pertinent to their everyday life (A1>A2) and on most general topics (B2>C2) for matters connected to their field(s).

Sociolinguistic appropriateness often includes the word “awareness”: People not only have to be aware of politeness forms and differences between the customs, values and beliefs prevalent in their own community and those of the target community, but they must also be able to produce them in a communicatively appropriate way (B1). Looking for signs of the most significant differences between the two communities (B1), people are able to choose the register which is appropriate to the situation and can express themselves appropriately (B2).

Pragmatic competences are made up of “discourse competence”, “functional competence” and “design competence” (CEFR p. 123). The first competence includes, among others, the ability to manage discourse in terms of coherence and cohesion, logical ordering, style, and register. The coherent use of register involves linguistic competence (knowledge of the right utterance) as well as sociolinguistic competence (learners’ ability to choose the right address form according to the relative status) and pragmatic competence.

Functional competence is concerned with communication complexity in terms of macrofunctions and microfunctions. Among the first group are categories such as description, demonstration, and argumentation; among the second are imparting and seeking factual information or communication repair. These competences focus on the functional use of spoken discourse and written texts. Learners’ abilities for “expressing and finding out attitudes” and of “socialising” (CEFR p. 126) — which are microfunctions of functional competence – relate directly to sociolinguistic competence. Design competence refers to sequenced messages “according to international and transactional schemata” (CEFR p. 123). Learners’ abilities to use these schemata and structured sequences of actions such as question/answer or acceptance/non-acceptance allow them to take part in complex interaction situations, according to their purposes. These rather technical dimensions, along with social and organizational dimensions, combine to contribute to communicative acts. Communicative language competence involves a network of complex and articulated competences whose threads consist of general competence and communicative language competences, which are interdependent.

### **3. Tasks: a means for communicating**

Learners' competences are used to "carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome" (CEFR p. 157). Actions in the various domains of everyday life – personal, public, educational or occupational – compose what the CEFR calls *task*. Tasks can involve linguistic skills to a greater or lesser extent, for instance taking part in a discussion or writing an e-mail, on the one hand, or painting, repairing or assembling something on the other. Tasks can involve other skills as well, such as following a series of instructions in order to assemble an apparatus.

Communication also requires that people engage in one or more language activities, in comprehending, producing, interaction, and mediation. This is the case – in the personal domain – of reading a report (written reception) and consequently discussing it with colleagues (oral interaction). Tasks can be divided into three categories: first of all *pre-communicative pedagogic tasks*, which are based on exercises focusing specifically on decontextualised practice of language forms; then *communicative pedagogic tasks*, where learners use the target language to simulate meaningful communication, even if these tasks do not directly involve real-life tasks. Finally, there are *real life, target or rehearsal tasks*, which satisfy users' needs outside classroom situations (CEFR pp. 157-158).

New Education Technologies, and particularly the Internet, allow learners to accomplish real life tasks, such as booking a museum ticket or a hotel room. A task may be simple or complex and, according to its degree of difficulty, teachers can prepare for it in different ways. In the first instance, performance should be relatively easy, but later teachers can foresee and suggest specific subtasks for students. To accomplish a task, learners' competences need to be considered. Task performance involves not only general competence, but also communicative language competence, including their different components. Cognitive and affective factors need to be taken into account as well. According to the CEFR, a task leads to a specific outcome.

For example, if a (school) learning situation aims at carrying out a tour itinerary, the specific outcome for learners could be a folder or a tourist brochure or a power point presentation. However, not only the specific outcome, but also the process, which leads to the final result, is important for communication in the language classroom: This involves a step by step organisation, learners' activation of strategies and competences, consideration of the setting and social forms, as well as materials and supports.

Task familiarity depends also on activation of learners' competences, which can affect the successful performance of the task. Learners' self-esteem, involvement, motivation, states, and attitudes towards a task are all affective factors which play a role in task performance. Task difficulty is directly related to learners' competences and individual characteristics. Teachers must therefore take into account all these factors to establish the level of task difficulty, which can be

adjusted upwards or downwards. Successful task performance also depends on learners' general and communicative strategies.

#### **4. Task conditions and constraints: a challenge to communication?**

There are certain conditions and constraints on tasks that involve *interaction* and *production* activities. These include such elements as: support, timing, goals, predictability, physical conditions, and participants. It is important to consider relevant information, first of all about participants and task content. Visual aids as well as adequate instructions can reduce task difficulty. Activation of prior knowledge through the carrying out of subtasks in a preparatory phase, to which language assistance is provided, can be important too. Learners' communicative competence and their declarative knowledge (*savoir*) are other important elements in successful task performance.

For all these reasons, teachers should be aware of the complexity of the factors involved when they propose a task for their students. Thus teachers "risk" more when they suggest a more communicative and difficult task. This is the case, for instance, when asking students to produce a narrative with many characters instead of a text where only one character or an object must be described. The ability to negotiate is another important factor to take into account: Task difficulty also depends on the amount of negotiation required. The greater the amount of interaction and motivation required to achieve the task goals, the more demanding the task will be. A more difficult task can nonetheless be motivating for learners, stimulating them to become involved and make extra efforts. Teachers must therefore be aware that task difficulty in a communication context is related not only to "measurable" factors, such as time or physical conditions (CEFR p. 162), or even competence, but also to more "subjective" elements, such as students' interest and participation.

For task conditions and constraints concerning *oral and written reception*, elements to consider are task supports, text characteristics, and type of response expected. A well organised preparatory phase can reduce the difficulty of comprehension activities, too. Cooperation among interlocutors is an important factor for interaction, production, and comprehension activities as well. On the one hand, cooperation can be considered as a user's sympathetic attitude towards interlocutors. For example, a person may facilitate comprehension by speaking slowly and clarifying the context of communication. On the other hand, cooperation refers to small-group settings in classroom, where learners can help each other. Cooperative work can allow students to perform a task more easily or successfully than individual work.

In choosing a text for a reception activity, many factors need to be considered, such as linguistic complexity, which can affect content comprehension. Familiarity with the genre, topic, or situation can facilitate learners' comprehension. Sociocultural competences are in this respect especially important. Textual coherence and cohesion as well as clear organisation will aid learners' comprehension. The length of a text needs to be considered too as well as its information density. The physical or material layout of a text can either prompt or prevent comprehension or understanding, particularly in the case of spoken texts if there are noises or other kinds of interference. The level of learners' motivation to understand a text is not to be neglected either. If the text suits their interests and is adequate to their competence levels, task performance should be more successful. Teachers should not underestimate the importance of presenting to their students different tasks that involve multiple steps and various language activities (oral or written reception, oral or written production and interaction); carrying out such tasks may especially interest learners and increase their involvement.

A specific challenge for reception concerns the type of response required, which can be non-verbal, if learners are asked to make a simple action, such as ticking a box, or verbal or written and involve aural as well as written reception. To give a response, the learner must select and implement a number of strategies related, for example, to selective or detailed comprehension. Teachers' reflections about the complexity of factors involved in task performance can demand a deep knowledge of the elements that make the performance itself easier. A task can be made more or less demanding, for instance by varying the length of a text, its density, or the amount of time allowed for its realisation and the type of response. These elements may all influence learners' degree of success while performing the task. Teachers' individual perceptions of task difficulty should be taken into account at the time of evaluating the task. Learners can be asked to evaluate for themselves the task outcomes and the communicative competence required.

## **5. Intercultural awareness: a competence in the future tense**

What about intercultural awareness in relation to tasks? Among cognitive factors, the CEFR underlines the importance of a pertinent sociocultural knowledge, which includes the knowledge of life skills, issues concerning national identity, the target language and culture, as well as intercultural awareness. These elements, together with learners' attitudes, and their will to act as mediators between cultures, play an important role in performing *intercultural tasks*. These features are linked to project-based pedagogy, which proposes an action-oriented approach aimed at intercultural tasks. School exchanges, for example, give learners the opportunity to accomplish

target tasks, to make contact with others and alternative perspectives, to play the role of mediator, and to develop an intercultural oriented personality. The image of a learner from the action-oriented and intercultural perspective is therefore of a person who is able to effectively manage communicative situations both in well-known and in new contexts with sensitivity and openness. Increasingly, this is the portrait of today and tomorrow's language learners, who are competent in as well as aware of intercultural perspectives. Such people are open to the language and cultural changes that the continuous evolution of life and work require.

#### IV. Assessment<sup>1</sup>

Assessment is an integral part of language teaching and learning, not merely a final step in the process nor just a judgement about an activity accomplished. Issues integral to assessment are numerous and complex, but the CEFR uses the term "assessment" to refer to the **implementation of language competence**, thereby focusing on learner performance and its analysis. This focus contrasts with the more global term, "evaluation". Assessment refers only to analyses about the level of learners' proficiency evident in their performance, whereas evaluation can also refer, for instance, to the quality of a course, the effectiveness of teaching, or the appropriateness of pedagogical materials. All types of language tests are a form of assessment, but tests are not the only possible means for assessment. Assessing also implies informal checking or verification, which can be done in various ways, one of which is testing. All assessments involve collecting data for the purposes of making effective decisions, ranging from tests to check-lists in continuous assessment as well as informal observations by a teacher.

#### Table 2. Synoptic description of assessment

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<sup>1</sup> Following the CEFR we use the term "assessment" to refer specifically to evaluation related to proficiency and learning among language students. In contrast to assessment, the term "evaluation" has a broader meaning, going beyond language proficiency to include aspects such as analyses of the effectiveness of teaching methods and materials or learner or teacher satisfaction which will not be dealt in this Guide (see Ch. 9.1. p.177 CEFR).

<u>Assessment Purposes</u>	<u>Course or Program Scope and Expectations</u>	<u>Perspective on Students' Abilities</u>	<u>Assessment Methods</u>
Diagnosis and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Learning opportunities</li> <li>• Communication opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs analysis (initial and cyclic)</li> <li>• Self-Assessments</li> <li>• Goals for learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication tasks</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Personal aims</li> <li>• Diagnosis of special needs</li> </ul>
Achievement and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taught   ∨ Studied or practiced   ∨ Achieved</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short-term Performance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities</li> <li>• Tasks</li> <li>• Records</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Tests</li> </ul>	<p><i>Pedagogical Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tasks</li> <li>• Assignments</li> <li>• Exercises</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Responses (oral and written)</li> <li>• Tests</li> </ul>
Formal Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External, normative standards</li> <li>• Official recognition</li> </ul>	<p><i>Long-term Performance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accumulative, summative records</li> <li>• Tests</li> <li>• Institutional requirements</li> </ul>	<p><i>Reflective Tools</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logs</li> <li>• Records</li> <li>• Portfolios</li> <li>• Self-assessment</li> </ul> <p><i>Program Completion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grades</li> <li>• Exams or Tests</li> <li>• Passport</li> </ul>
<p>Assessments should provide evidence of desired</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competences</li> <li>• performances</li> <li>• achievements</li> <li>• consequences</li> </ul> <p>While acknowledging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural differences</li> <li>• individual differences</li> <li>• available capacities, resources, and opportunities</li> </ul> <p>In ways that are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• valid (content and purpose is specified, and proved to be fulfilled without irrelevant factors or unintended negative consequences)</li> <li>• reliable (consistent, comparable, equitable, and fair)</li> <li>• feasible (manageable, comprehensible, and relevant)</li> </ul>			

## 1. Assessment: use and implications

It is evident from the scheme above that when talking about assessment both teachers and learners need to be aware of the complex network of implications both of the concept and of its practice in different contexts and for different purposes. Let's start by considering the three main concepts integral to assessment: **validity**, **reliability**, and **feasibility**. An assessment is **valid** to the extent that it actually does what it claims to do, providing evidence for a precise account of a student's

competence. Recent views of validity focus on the validity of decisions, conclusions, or consequences. Assessments produce certain results, such as grades, passing or failing, or the attainment of a certain CEFR level. Validity depends on targeting precisely the object of assessment and not confusing it with irrelevant factors. The concept of validity needs to be finely tuned as it implies acceptance and recognition. An idea of “face-validity” refers to the subjective impression – by teachers, students, or others – of the degree to which a test is representative of what it is meant to evaluate. This concept is linked to objectivity and to the idea of quality standards. Oral and written benchmarks therefore play an important role. It is also important to consider content validity: if an aspect of language or competence is taught or studied, it needs to be assessed.

**Reliability** refers to consistency across situations, opportunities, and people. A person should be classified in the same way when taking the same test twice. Also important is the precision of that classification in reference to a norm. Similarly, agreement between assessors is an aspect of reliability. Whatever the classification decision, be it dividing learners into “masters” and “non-masters” or rating them on a scale (e.g., B1/B1+/B2) it is important to specify the criteria chosen and the procedures implemented to reach a certain judgement.

Two questions are fundamental to correlating assessments reliably: “What is assessed?” and “How is the performance assessed?” The CEFR is based on these two assumptions. They can therefore be used to specify the content of assessments and to produce criteria to establish if a learning goal has been achieved or not. Consequently, these assumptions can help to answer a third question: “How can we compare?”. Indeed, clarifying the first two issues enables comparison between exams and qualification systems.

Assessment involves several factors related to contexts, cultures, and assessment traditions. Choosing among different types of assessment requires carefully selecting procedures consistent with the assessment goal in its appropriate context. The CEFR proposes a series of 26 types of assessment organised in 13 pairs, which are at once distinct and complementary.

The third key concept in assessment is **feasibility**, i.e., practicality. Not only do formal exams as well as informal classroom assessments involve time constraints, but they also entail an enormous range of different operational conditions, each of which can be objectively manipulated<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Despite its detailed and thorough treatment in the CEFR, assessment is a complex and specialized endeavour, particularly when relating language certificates and qualifications to the CEFR. The emblematic question endures: “How can I know that my level B1 is your level B1?”. To help professionals from different countries address such questions a manual has been published by the Council of Europe, *Relating language exams to the CEFR*. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/manuel1\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/manuel1_EN.asp). This book is an essential tool for those who wish to deepen their knowledge of technical aspects of assessment.

These three concepts are inextricably linked not only because they are complementary but also because tensions may appear between them and some decisions practitioners need to take. Teachers have the responsibility of considering both pedagogical reasons and external conditions in order to take decisions which might require applying restrictions if necessary. Certain tensions may in fact occur, for example, between validity, reliability, and feasibility. For instance, adding external examiners can be helpful in targeting the object of assessment and in improving consistency but which may prove to be totally unfeasible in numerous situations.

Responsibility for assessment is not limited to teachers. Students share this responsibility if they are to formulate their own assessment criteria or at least discuss them. This process of shared responsibility contributes usefully to the empowerment of both students and teachers, not to mention to the transparency of the whole assessment process.

## **2. Many descriptors: for what?**

The CEFR aims to be as comprehensive as possible while recognizing that assessments necessarily have to be selective and require certain supports. For this reason, examples are helpful. The considerable quantity of descriptors in the CEFR permits it to be used as a resource for assessment in the sense that the descriptors can help practitioners elaborate and specify assessments of communicative competence.

A fundamental distinction for everyday effective use of the CEFR is between descriptors of communicative activities (Ch. 4) and descriptors of competences (Ch. 5). This distinction makes it possible to differentiate between assessments of performance and of competence. Descriptors of the former type foster an action-oriented approach, allowing direct assessment of everyday life tasks, be they teacher-directed assessments or self-assessments. Descriptors of the latter type focus on a specific performance but aim instead at determining general competence.

This distinction defines the possible uses of the two categories of descriptors. Teachers can use the **descriptors of communicative activities** to conceive and elaborate tests, to report and justify results (particularly when the aim is to provide overall results of a performance rather than a competence profile), as well as for self-assessments or teacher-directed assessments. Organizing these descriptors into the form of check-lists or grids allows, as may be appropriate, a focus on



levels, either by grouping into the same check-list descriptors at a given level or by selecting on a grid specific categories at different levels.

In the case of “giving and asking personal information” during the communicative activity of oral interaction, certain descriptors can define the ways of accomplishing that function at different proficiency levels (B1/B1+/B2), leading to a synthetic judgement. In contrast, description on the same grid at different levels (B1/B1+/B2), referring to given categories (e.g., informal discussion, conversation, exchange of information, etc., see CEFR scales Ch. 4), would make possible a more detailed judgement in the form of a profile. To be even more precise, the descriptors can be subdivided by detailing specific sub-elements. This has the advantage of adapting flexibly to performances and progressively accumulating once different performances are accomplished.

Descriptors of specific competences for self-assessment or teacher-directed assessment should be carefully expressed in a positive and specific manner. They can also be used as a starting point for elaborating assessment criteria of a performance. Competence descriptors can foster in this way the transformation of personal and subjective impressions into well-grounded judgements, thus facilitating the definition of a reference framework shared by a panel of judges.

To use descriptors operationally as assessment criteria, they can be considered pragmatically in three different ways:

**level scales**, often combining different descriptors in the same paragraph (See CEFR Ch. 5),

**check-lists**, classifying suitable descriptors in a category according to level, and

**grids**, grouping parallel scales for a given number of categories (The table 3 of the CEFR gives an example as do Tables 4.3, 4.4, 5.8 of the manual *Relating exams to the CEFR*). Grids provide a format for defining a diagnostic profile.

### 3. The question of scoring or marking

The second type of descriptors, referring to competences, is mostly used during written or oral tests. For this reason, they confront the **problem of providing credits, scores, and marks**.

Once a level of competence is defined it requires specification if it corresponds to a certain result on a test or other form of assessment. For example, in a performance test aiming at level B1, learners’

results may be at different levels between B1 and B2, even if the latter level is never achieved. The branching organisation of the levels of the CEFR, like the metaphor of a scale which defines a growing series of competence levels, provides the possibility of introducing fine-tuning systems like, for example, plus or minus scores. It also permits organization of a scale focused on a norm of success in the test itself and consequently to define a threshold of achievement. For instance, in a case where 3 represents the expected threshold of achievement, 1 would correspond to a weak result and 5 to an excellent result. In these two extreme cases, representing two nearby levels on the scale (see the scheme on p. 41 for a notable example of this).

The question of **norms** is particularly important for language assessments that take place in different cultural and institutional contexts as well as for defining the objectives of exams. Implementing a norm-based approach – and the consequent assessments – is not easy. It may require time for a consensus to appear through the analysis of evidence from a sample of tests and through the exchange of opinions supported by adaptation of scales of descriptors.

#### **4. Plurality of assessments?**

As previously observed, moving from the first type of descriptors (performance) to the second type (competence) implies moving towards a more abstract and objective level, from description of what can be observed through performance to what such performance implies at the level of skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*) and beyond in terms of declarative knowledge (*savoir*) as well as existential competence (*savoir-être*). Above and beyond this fundamental distinction, the CEFR lists several other types of assessment without claiming to be exhaustive. The different parameters can be organized by classifying them into pairs, divided into a table of two columns (Table 7, p.183). Doing so does not represent a judgement of value but rather aims at fostering awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of the different types as well of their being complementary. Detailed explanations of each distinction aim at making their characteristics explicit, demonstrating how the CEF represents a resource for various types of assessment. It is also important to emphasize that the organisation of different types of assessment in two columns is not to represent a dichotomy or opposition but rather as a way of establishing the two ends of continua.

#### **5. Distinguishing competence and action**

The distinction between the assessment of achievement and the assessment of proficiency (CEFR 9.3.1., pp. 183-84) follows from the fundamental difference, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, between competence and performance. Proficiency assessment can be done through performance assessment (See CEFR 9.3.7, p.187) – that is, analyses of competences put to use. The achievements that learners make necessarily relies on certain knowledge, at a certain level, and on the achievement of specific goals, all in relation to what has been taught and studied over a certain period of time.

Proficiency involves the application of knowledge to real world tasks. Performance appears from an external view, whereas relevant knowledge remains internal. The CEFR emphasizes that the differences between these two types of assessment should be small in the case of a communicative assessment relying on language tasks based on a given programme. Such tasks give learners the opportunity to display what they can actually do with the language and at what level they are. Scales of examples of descriptors refer to the assessment of skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), whereas supports for assessing declarative knowledge (*savoir*) appear in the form of lists of notions, which can - in turn - help to construct a course.

This fundamental distinction can also be found, in a different form, in two other distinctions: between direct and indirect assessments (CEFR 9.3.6., p.186) and between assessments of performance and of knowledge (CEFR 9.3.7., p.187). The distinction between direct and indirect assessment usually functions according to the type of communicative activity concerned. Only production activities and interaction can be assessed directly whereas receptive activities such as reading or listening can only be assessed indirectly. Oral interaction, despite having a receptive component, can be assessed directly thanks to the immediate feedback provided by an interlocutor during an exchange. The CEFR indicates the interview as an example of a format for a direct test and the cloze as an example of an indirect test. These types of tests also help us understand specific features of assessing performance in comparison to assessing knowledge. The former always requires the learner to provide a sample of oral speech or written language. The latter must be done by deducing underlying knowledge from observable performances or responses.

## **6. Assessment: a question of timing?**

A further distinction made in the CEFR is the between using assessment to classify learners either in relation to one another – and, if necessary, in relation to a norm and a precise spot in time – or to judge learners according to their own abilities, regardless of their peers, in respect to a developmental process over a period of time. Norm-referencing (CEFR 9.3.2., p. 184) places a learner in relation to a norm, for instance in a placement test, in relation to other learners. Criterion-

referencing maps in detail the particular abilities of a learner in relation to specific criteria. Organising these criteria on a grid allows, horizontally, definition of the domains covered by an assessment and, vertically, the “cut points” (CEFR, p. 184) that mark distinctions between levels of proficiency. In a similar way, in a mastery criterion-referencing approach (CEFR 9.3.3., pp.184-85) learners are divided according to a standard which discriminates between those who can and cannot successfully perform to the criterion. In a continuum criterion-referencing approach, given criteria are used to judge the level at which competences are acquired, permitting consequently the monitoring of students’ learning. In relation to the timing of assessments there is a distinction between fixed point assessment (CEFR 9.3.4., pp. 185-86), where all that matters is what a learner is able to do at a particular moment, and continuous assessment, where different points in time within a course are considered.

## 7. The issue of objectivity in assessment

Objectivity is a major issue for every professional dealing with assessment. Overall, the CEFR provides concepts and resources to facilitate objective judgement of language competence and, moreover, the assessment of this competence. The problem of objectivity is addressed in two ways. The CEFR (9.3.8. pp.188-89) questions the common opinion that assessment through an examiner’s judgment is subjective in contrast to the perceived objectivity of tests using multiple-choice items. Objectivity and subjectivity are far more complex than this simple contrast, so the CEFR suggests that we talk instead about **objectively-scored** tests (p. 188). On this point particularly, the CEFR lists a series of measures which could contribute to reducing subjectivity in the assessment of learners’ performance.

This aspect can also be found in another distinction, between “impression and guided judgement” (CEFR 9.3.10, p.189), which distinguish between applying criteria or referring to a norm. Training examiners to reach consensus on samples of student performance can provide considerable “objectivity” to their judgements (on this specific point see also the manual *Relating Language Exams to the CEFR*). Along the same lines is the distinction between holistic and analytic assessment (CEFR 9.3.11., p. 190). The former involves a synthetic global judgement reached by considering several aspects about a student’s performance intuitively. The latter is done by considering separately a certain number of criteria about the performance. The number of criteria to consider needs to be fairly low in order for assessment to be feasible. Also relevant is the distinction between “series assessment” and “category assessment” (CEFR 9.3.12., p. 191). The latter is linked to analytic assessment as a performance is judged according to categories expressed on a grid. The former assesses different tasks in a more global way.

## **8. Assessing: why? by whom? how?**

The CEFR distinguishes between formative and summative assessment (CEFR 9.3.5., pp. 186). Summative assessment usually refers to a student's attainment at the end of a course, as indicated by a grade or a rank. Formative assessment involves the ongoing, informal processes of assessment related to teaching and learning. This distinction raises questions not just of the order, "What do we assess?" and "How do we assess?", but more importantly, questions about the goals and purposes of assessment. Within the process of learning, formative assessment involves gathering information and providing feedback for learners and teachers alike. Such feedback is effective to the extent that those receiving it are able to make use of it, particularly being able to understand it, to take it into account, and to profit from it. To do so, people need to develop a meta-language about assessment, which may require specific training and development of awareness, which may in turn increase their motivation. As already stated, these forms of assessment are at either ends of a continuum and are complementary.

The step from formative assessment to self-assessment is short. It is not coincidental that the CEFR puts "Assessment by others and self-assessment" as the final set of pairs among the different types of assessment (CEFR 9.3.13., pp. 191-92). From a perspective of effectiveness, self-assessment plays a considerable role. To do self-assessment, learners need to have suitable tools at their disposal. The assumption that rating on a scale and rating on a checklist (CEFR, 9.3.9., p. 189) are complementary is fully justified as shown in Chapter 3 of the CEFR and in other respects in the ELP (European Language Portfolio).

## **9. Three tables and a branching approach**

To address the complexity inherent in assessment, as presented in Chapter 9, descriptors should be formulated in an appropriate way. Specifically, they should fulfil four major criteria, two of which are linked to problems of description, and two to problems of measurement. In terms of description, descriptors should be sufficiently independent of context to allow generalisation and comparison of results. But at the same time, they should be easy to relate appropriately to different contexts. They should also be firmly anchored in references to theories but also sufficiently user-friendly for practitioners to use them appropriately. In terms of measurement, the levels of a rating scale should be fixed objectively in reference to a measurement theory and with explicit criteria. The number of levels should be determined according to what people can reasonably and reliably distinguish while also providing a certain freedom for interpretation and consideration of specific needs and situations.

Rigorous work involving the systematic combination of intuitive, qualitative, and quantitative methods has produced a bank of samples of descriptors on which the levels of reference have been built. The selected battery of descriptors represents a flexible and coherent framework that can be organised in various manners according to different goals and contexts. The organisation into six levels, involving higher or lower degrees of the general levels, constitutes a tree-shaped structure, whose branches can be adapted according to the needs of institutions, selected tasks, learning contexts, and learners' characteristics. Considering the inevitable subjectivity in defining the borders between different levels, the branching system allows for a desirable level of subtlety. The selection and organisation of descriptors can be larger or smaller, global, simplified or narrow, detailed and pedagogical.

A global scale as in Table 1 of Chapter 3 (CEFR, p. 24) may be suitable as an overview for non-specialists. If the aim is, instead, to guiding the learning process toward self-assessment, a more detailed grid as in Table 2 of Chapter 3 (CEFR, pp. 26-27) may represent a good starting point. Alternatively, if the aim is to assess certain aspects of communicative competence on the basis of a student's performance, a useful example may be the grid in Table 3 of Chapter 3 (CEFR, pp. 28-29) referring to oral communication.

To create assessment grids for particular objectives, descriptors are presented in the form of scales organised around the three meta-categories of the descriptive scheme (see Chapters 4 and 5): communicative activities (comprehension, interaction and production), strategies, and communicative language competence. In respect to content, levels have an internal coherence based on specific characteristics which represent fixed points of reference. These points of reference involve analysis of the functions, notions, grammar and vocabulary necessary for task accomplishment, making it possible to develop or adapt contextualised and customised scales and assessment grids.

Functional distinctions between different scales need to be kept in mind while using them. The CEFR distinguishes between the functions of three types of scales:

- a. user-oriented scales, defining what learners can do and therefore report about their typical behaviours;
- b. assessor-oriented scales, focussing on the quality of learners' performance and useful for guiding assessment; and
- c. construct-oriented scales, with the function of guiding the construction and content of formal assessments such as tests that focus on what learners can do.

Such scales are undoubtedly most efficient when they specify **what** learners can do and **how** they can do it. The level of complexity may be lower in the case of learner-oriented scales and higher in the case of teacher-oriented scales, the teacher playing the role of assessor in constructing assessments.

## V. Conclusion

The key concepts described in the present Guide constitute a conceptual map of the CEFR intended to prompt teachers to orient themselves to the complexity of learning particular to languages. Ultimately, the philosophy of the CEFR is to promote the competence of learners as well as teachers. However, the conventions of teaching practices or formal exams may not correspond neatly to this philosophy. The aims of the CEFR are based on approaches to learning that are well established in various domains of scholarship. On this basis, the CEFR defines a series of criteria and descriptors that best account for the competence involved in learning a language.

Adopting an open and non-dogmatic approach, the CEFR offers pathways that favour reflection in defining the specific trajectories of teaching and learning in regards to particular curriculum situations (Chapter 8.2 and 8.3). These concerns shape the framework of the CEFR, allowing its alignment directly with assessment, ideas, and practices (Chapter 8.4).

Three principles appear fundamental:

- plurilingual and pluricultural competences, which define the nature of language learning;
- diversification of curricula, adapted not only to needs and objectives but also functioning according to the specific linguistic characteristics of each learner; and
- openness to all that is involved in education, including the coexistence of school curricula and broader agendas as well as the nature of learning processes.

Through these principles the CEFR introduces notions that carry over to the relations among neighbouring languages, the necessarily partial knowledge of languages, and the concept of individual profiles – essential to the European Language Portfolio – as well as the fundamental basis of modularity in work and communication, be it synchronous or asynchronous.

The CEFR, in developing these pathways for reflexivity, provides a tool for teaching. Reflexivity is, indeed, basic to the notion of plurilingualism. In this respect, learning is not just restricted to language, but learning a language involves prior knowledge, sociocultural contexts, as well as the number of languages previously acquired and all that languages involve. Languages and cultures are not things that one learns independently through memorization or mental processes separated from one another. Many elements combine together to form communicative competence. All knowledge and language experiences contribute to it; languages interrelate with one another as people interact with each other. To participate in communicative acts all people make use of different competences in flexible manners adapted to the situation and other interacting with them.

From this perspective, the goals of learning a language involve a fundamental transformation from a view that considers learning to be restricted to two or three languages in isolation based on the model of an “ideal native speaker”. Instead, language learning involves developing a linguistic repertoire in which all language competences have their proper place. This paradigm change requires changes in assessment practices as well.

It remains to be seen how these concepts can be reasonably transposed into ordinary practices that establish equilibrium between the demands of institutions and the public as well as the aims of the CEFR. The vision presented by the CEFR offers certainty as well as reassurance for teachers who follow its line of reasoning, can progressively adopt the various notions that form its richness, and can function in their working contexts in an appropriately professional culture that invites reflection and efficiency.

From these perspectives, the present Guide has been conceived and presented in direct relation to a Kit for professional and self-development wherein reflection and pedagogical practices form a constant synergy.

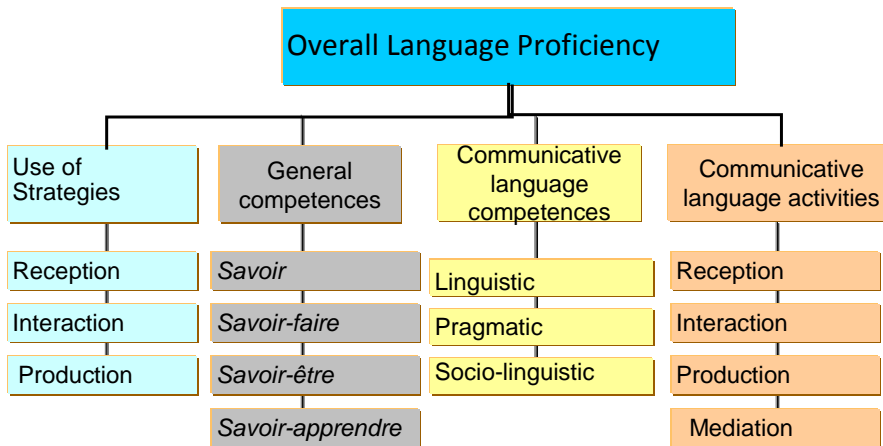


## Appendix

Illustration of the descriptive scheme of the CEFR

Table 3

### CEFR: descriptive scheme



Each category can be further broken down into sub-categories and further specified

Table 3.1

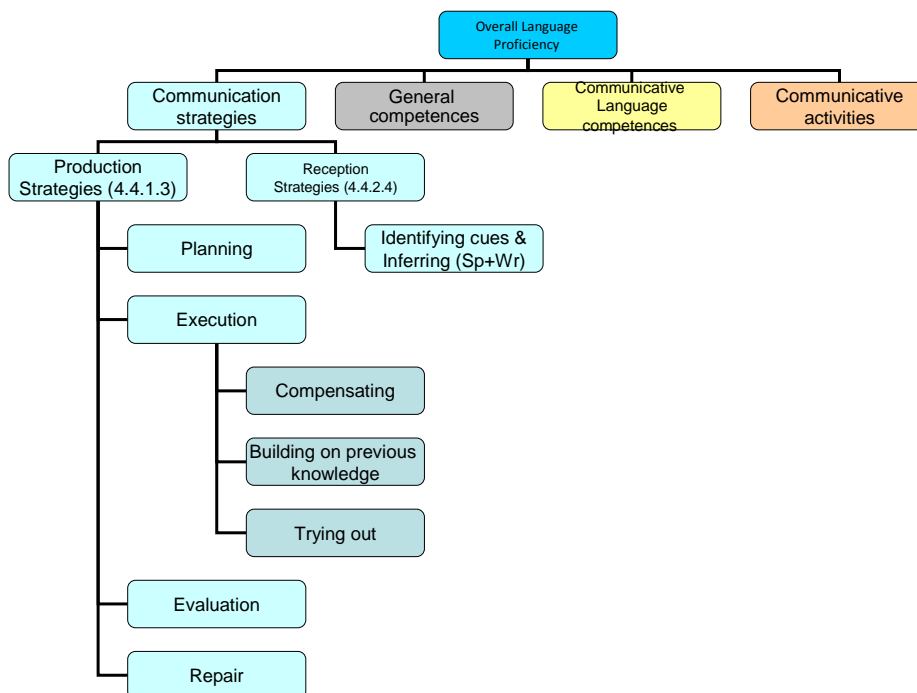


Table 3.2

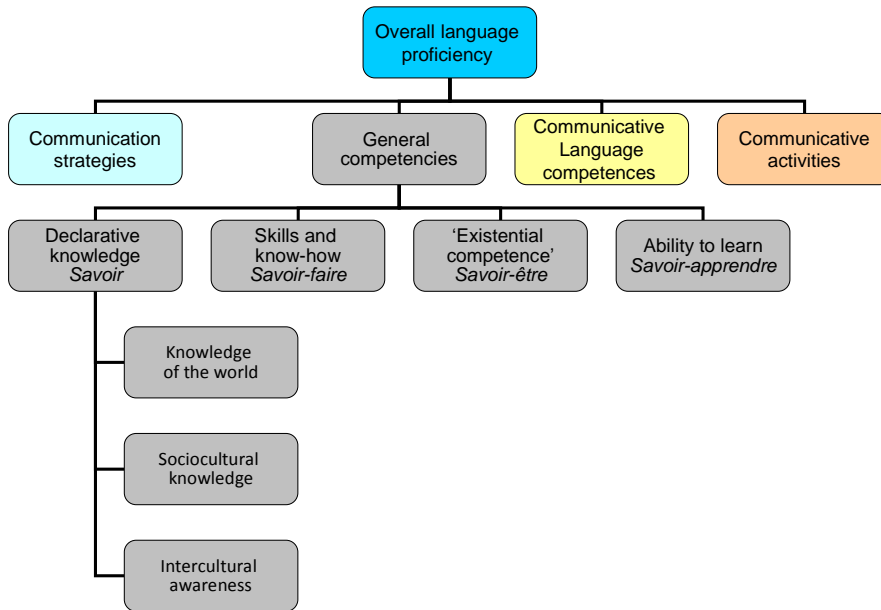


Table 3.3

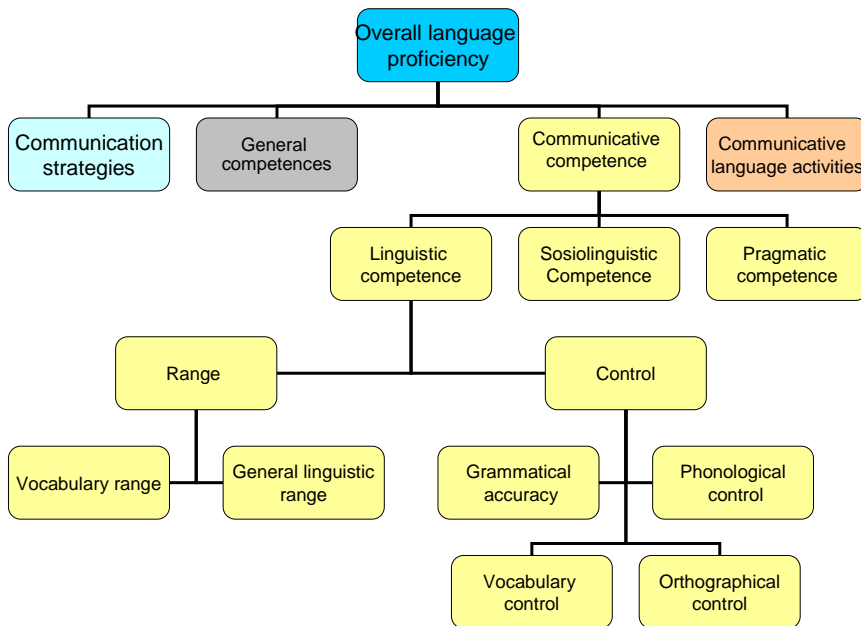
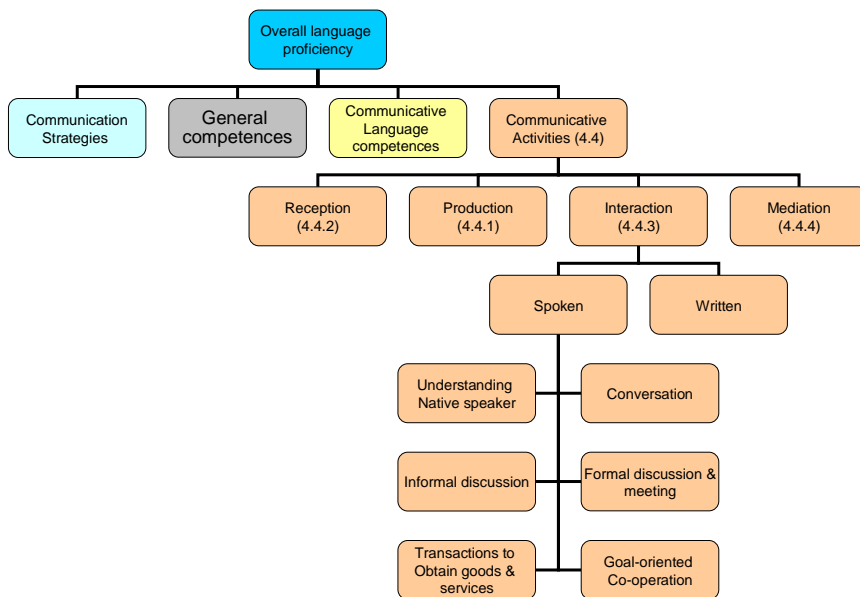


Table 3.4



## Part 2 A Kit

- Samples of worksheets

- Examples of scenarios

- Index of the materials on the CDrom

