

WORKSHEET A

Title Language biography	
Goals To raise awareness of the importance of language biography	
Keywords Learner, learning process, autonomy, plurilingualism, plurilingual competence	
Ref to the Guide II.2	Ref to the CEFR 8.4.2.
Task († † †)	
Step 1	
What is for you a language biography? Share opinions with your colleagues and note down key ideas.	
Step 2	
Starting from the excerpt below and the result of your group discussion come to a shared definition of language biography.	
<p>It follows, therefore, that the recognition and assessment of knowledge and skills should be such as to take account of the circumstances and experiences through which these competences and skills are developed. The development of a <i>European Language Portfolio (ELP)</i> enabling an individual to record and present different aspects of his or her language biography represents a step in this direction. It is designed to include not only any officially awarded recognition obtained in the course of learning a particular language but also a record of more informal experiences involving contacts with languages and other cultures.</p> <p>However, in order to stress the relationship between the school curriculum and the out-of-school curriculum, when language learning is assessed on the completion of secondary education, it would be valuable to try to provide formal recognition for plurilingual and pluricultural competence as such, perhaps by specifying an exit profile which can accommodate varying combinations rather than using as a basis a single predetermined level in a given language, or languages, as the case may be.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CEFR, 8.4.2, p.175</p>	
Step 3	
Now discuss the following questions in the group and make notes of key points:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why “language biography” is specifically mentioned in the CEFR?• What are possible uses of a language biography?• What role can a language biography play in the process of language learning?• What are possible links between language biography and the notion of plurilingualism and plurilingual competence?	
Step 4	
In order to reflect on linguistic biographies (already known or still to discover), look for texts or audio/video samples in which you can find elements of linguistic biography.	

Here is an example of Elias Canetti's biography (the Nobel prize in Literature 1981, and a great European polyglot from childhood), which might be used as a trigger.

It would be interesting to ask questions and respond about language use and language learning. Thus, why would the author become a writer in German, when German is not his mother tongue? Or, which are the relations between informal learning and school learning? Or still, how many languages has the future writer been exposed to? And how?

-Elias Canetti was born in 1905 in Bulgaria, in Ruse; his babysitter was Romanian and she sang him lullabies in that language; his parents, who had met in Vienna, spoke German between them, but they spoke Ladino (the language spoken by Mediterranean Sephardic communities, derived from Spanish) with their children.

-In 1911, the family emigrated in Manchester (United Kingdom) and the six-year-old boy started school in English.

-In 1913, after his father's death, the family moved to Switzerland for the summer, when Elias learned German; then they settled down in Vienna (Austria), with school in German.

-In 1917, Elias continued his school life in Zürich, returning to Vienna in 1924 to do his university studies (Doctorate in Chemistry).

-In 1931, permanently settled in Vienna, he finished his first novel. In what language? In German.

-In 1938 Elias, married, left Vienna for Paris, and then London. He has, obviously, already learnt French...

Step 5

Prepare a summary of the key ideas discovered in the previous steps:

- various expositions to a language
- various forms of learning a language
- the relations among languages (language families, culture families, the learner's role, family circle, ...)
- the role of social life in learning and the development of new competences
- other.