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Language Education in Finland with Special Reference to the Reception of CEFR

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Outline

- CEFR
- Proficiency levels in CEFR
- Finnish education system
- National Certificates of Language Proficiency
- Matriculation Examinations and CEFR
- Research, learner corpora and CEFR
- Problems with CEFR

I thank professor Sauli Takala for his permission to use some of his slides.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Why CEFR?

- language education in Europe: Co-operation and co-ordination
- Recognition of skills: Mutual recognition of language qualifications

For what purposes is it intended?

- to design programs and syllabuses for teaching and learning
- to design examinations, materials and courses
- to help teachers and assessors in their work
- to help learners to plan self-directed learning

It is also aimed to be (Kaftandjieva 2004):

- comprehensive
- transparent
- coherent

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CEFR (2001) & its Finnish translation (2004)

*Common European Framework
of Reference for Languages:
Learning, teaching, assessment*



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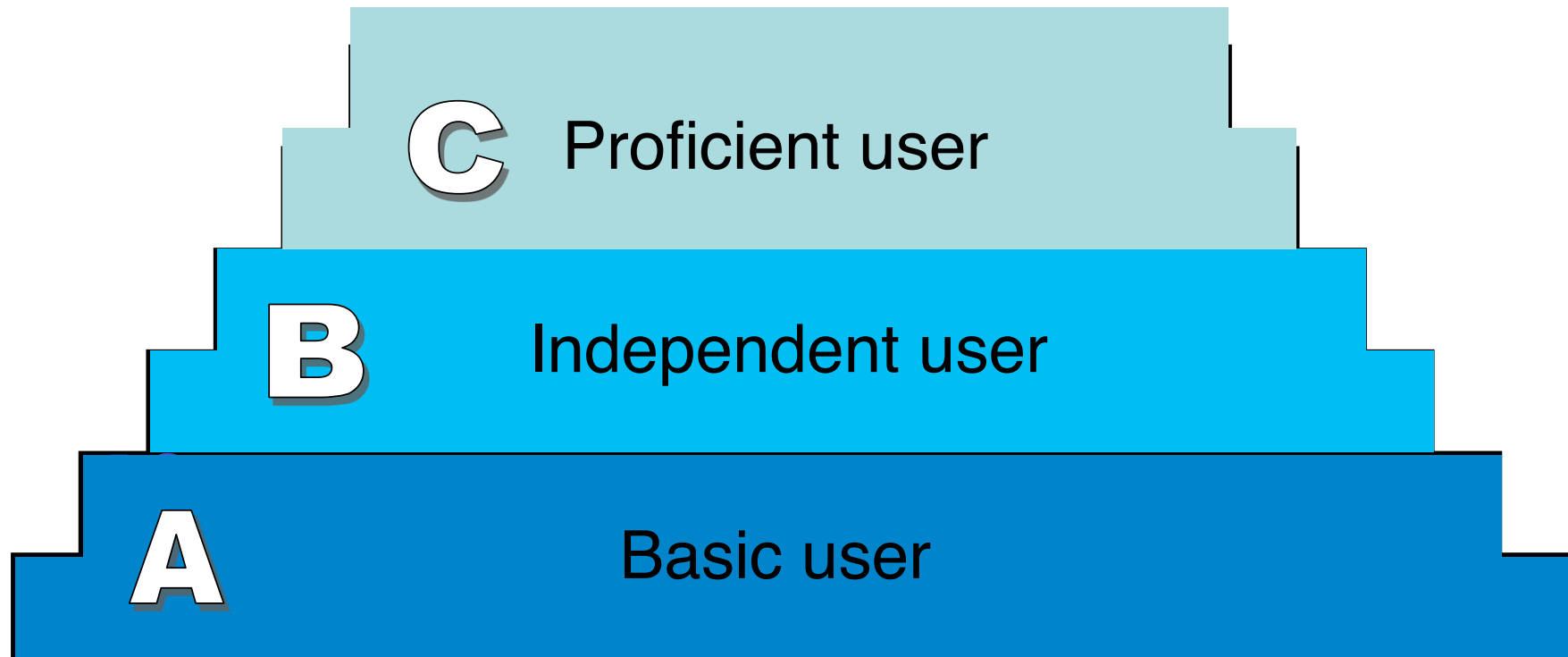
Kielten oppimisen, opettamisen ja arvioinnin
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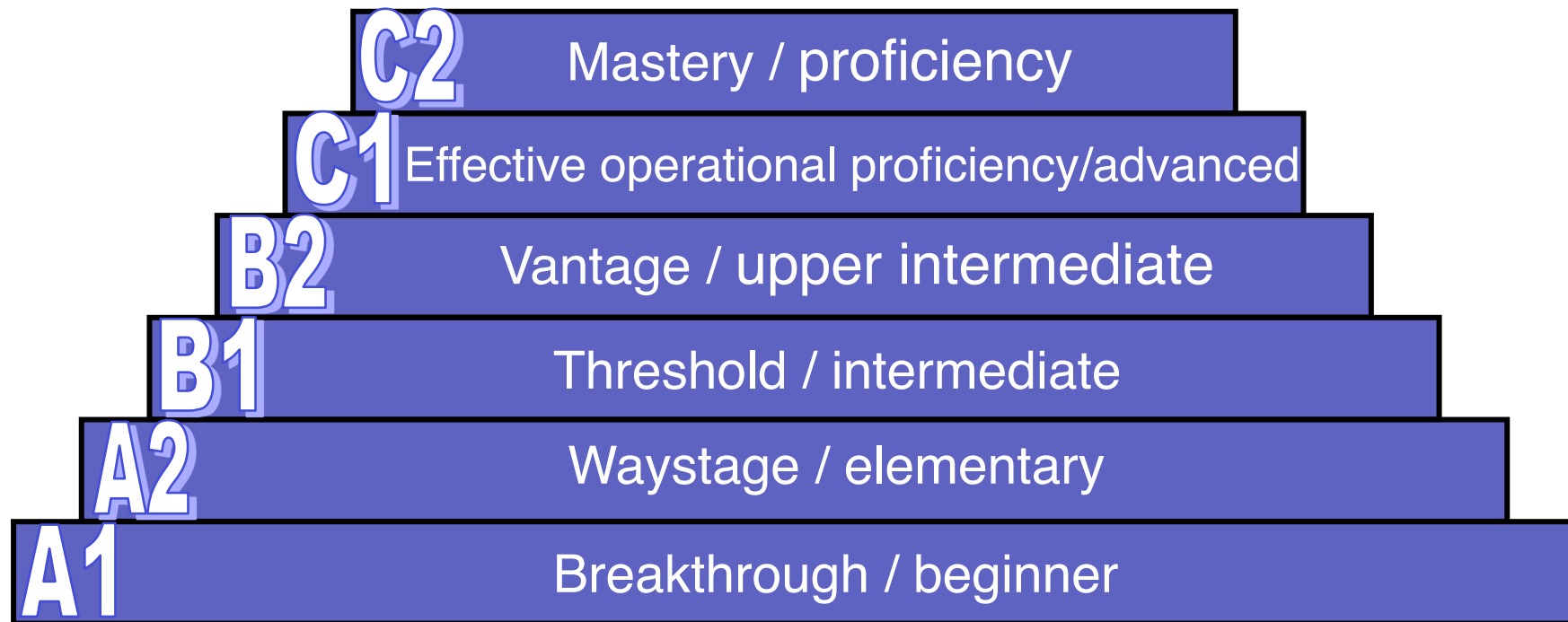
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WSOY

Language Proficiency Levels in CEFR: Broader Level Distinction



Language Proficiency Levels in CEFR

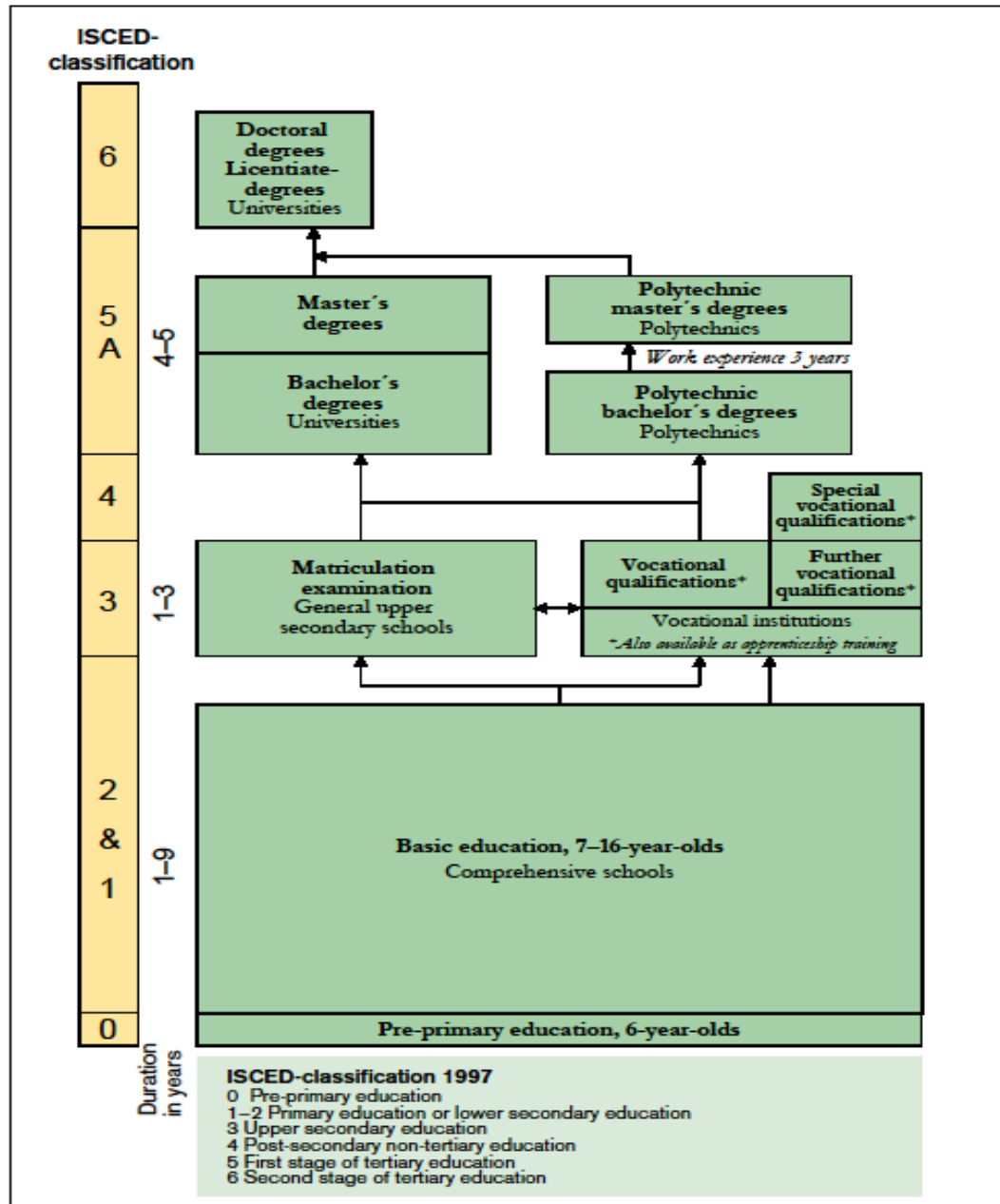


Learning hours per level

Proficient user	C2	Mastery	c. 3000 h	Cambridge ESOL c. 1000-1200 h
	C1	Advanced	c. 1500 h	c. 700-800 h
Independent user	B2	Vantage	c. 750 h	c. 500–600 h
	B1	Threshold	c. 375-400 h	c. 350-400 h
Basic user	A2	Waystage	c. 180-200 h	c. 180-200 h
	A1	Breakthrough	c. 90 h	c. 90 h

(Tarnanen 2008)

THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM



PhD

Masters

Bachelor

Upper
Secondary /3

Vocational
education

Basic education , 9 yrs

Kindergarten

Takala, S. 2010

A rough time estimate (in hours) based on CEFR in learning English (Takala 2010)

- In the Finnish context (L1 And L2 not related):
- Getting from A1 (age 9/10) to the average of B1 (age 15/16) takes about 300 lessons and perhaps 100 hours of homework -> 400 hours.
- Getting from the average of B1 to the average of B2 (at 18/19) takes about 250 lessons and probably some 200-250 hours of homework -> 450 – 500 lessons/hours
- A1 -> B2: 800 – 900 hours

Proficiency Level Labels in the Finnish Core Curriculum

A1: Limited communication in the most **familiar situations**

- A1.1 First stage of elementary proficiency
- A1.2 Developing elementary proficiency
- A1.3 Functional elementary proficiency

A2: Basic needs for **immediate social interaction** and brief narration

- A2.1: First stage of basic proficiency
- A2.1 Developing basic proficiency

B1: Dealing with language use situations **in everyday life**

- B1.1: Functional basic proficiency
- B1.2: Fluent basic proficiency

B2: Managing regular interaction **with 'native' speakers**

- B2.1: First stage of independent proficiency
- B2.2: Functional independent proficiency

C1: Managing in a variety of **demanding language use situations**

- C1.1: First stage of fluent proficiency

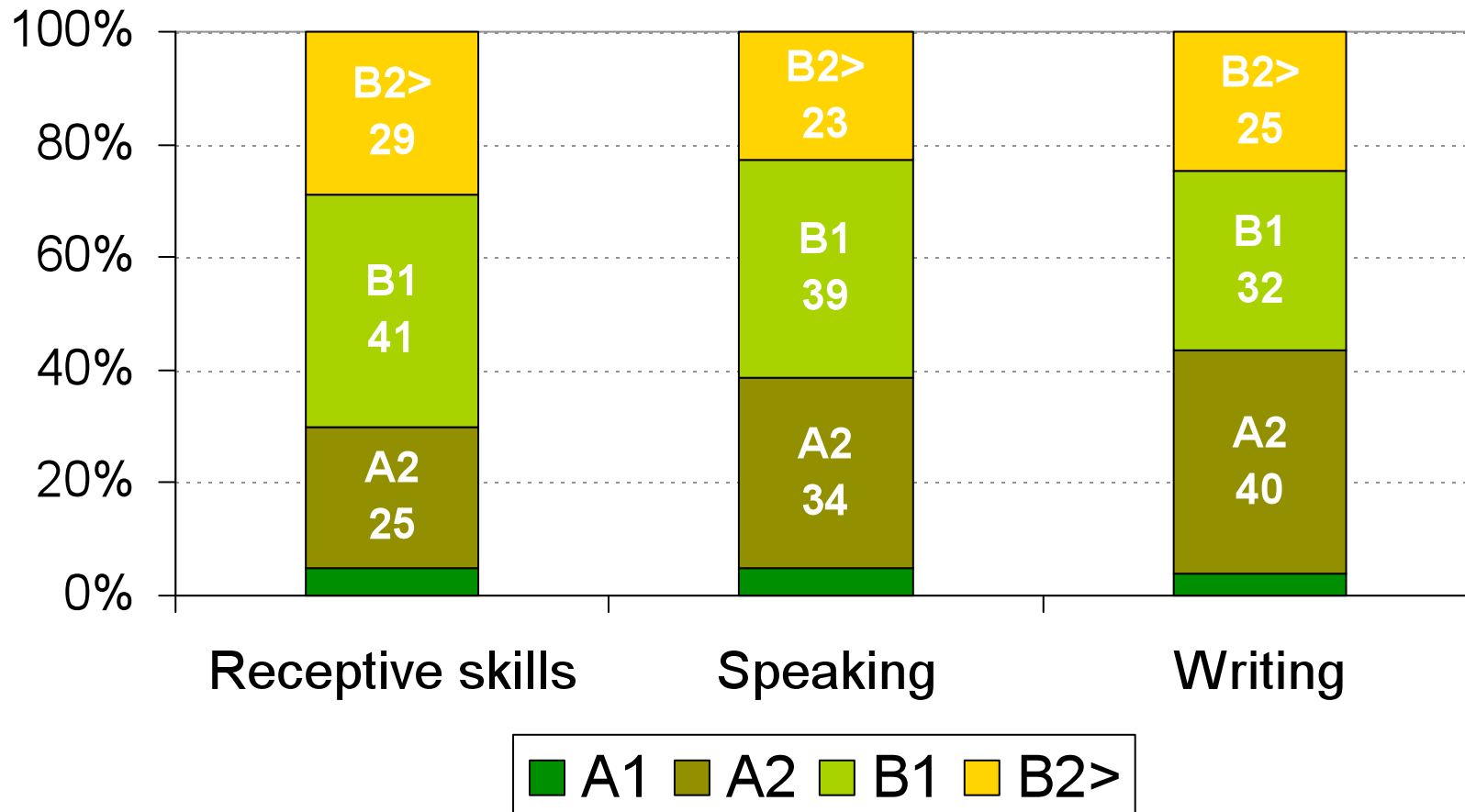
(Takala, S. 2010)

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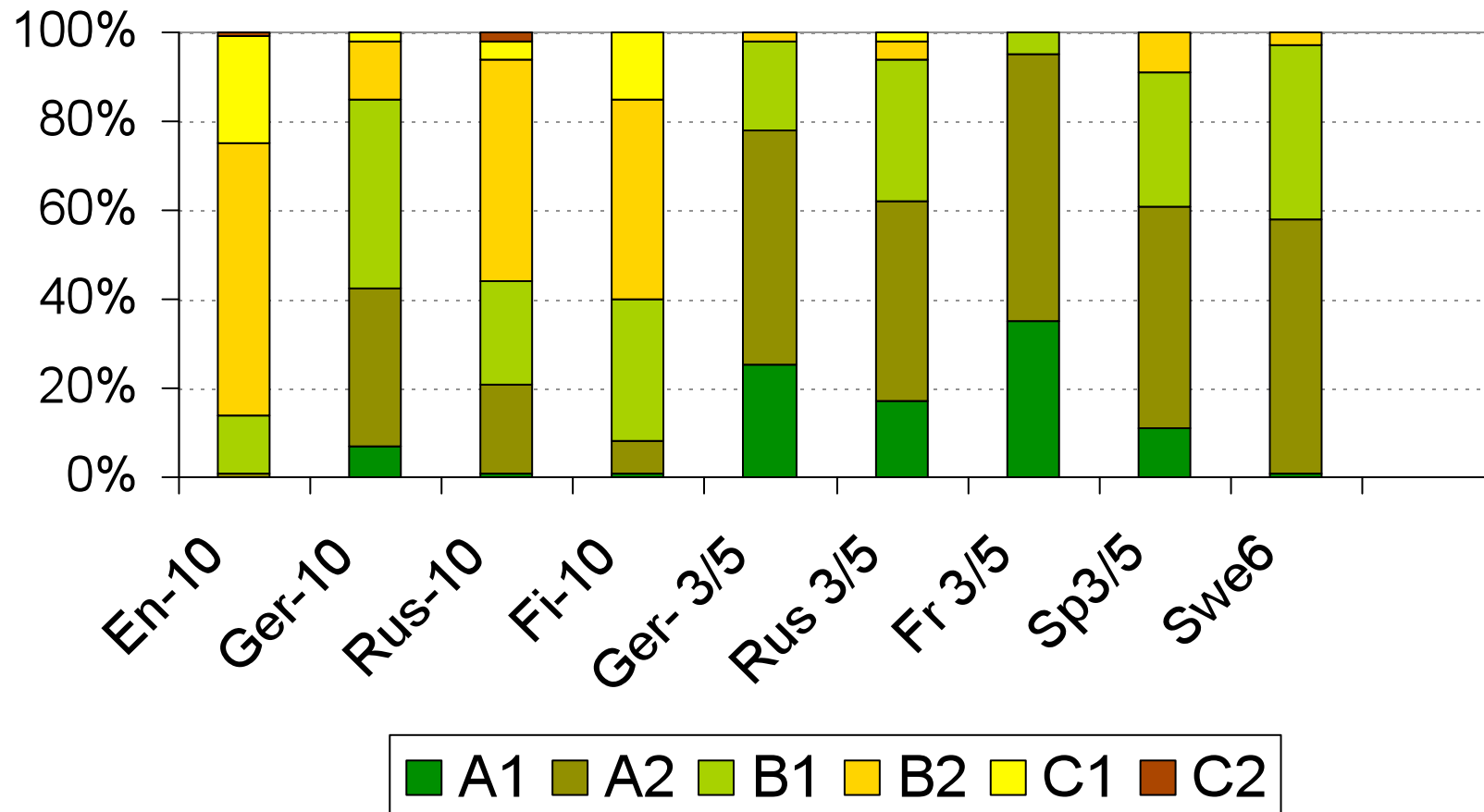
	Grade 6/ targets	Grade 9/ targets	Grade 12/ targets
A- English (starts usually in grade 3)	LC – A1.3 S – A1.2 RC – A1.3 W – A1.2	LC – B1.1 S – A2.2 RC – B1.1 W - A2.2	LC – B2.1 S – B2.1 RC – B2.1 W – B2.1
B1- Swedish (starts in grade 7)		LC – A2.1 S – A1.3 RC – A2.1 W – A1.3	LC - B1.2 S – B1.1 RC – B1.2 W – B1.1
B2/3- language, starts in Grade 8/10			LC – A2.2 S – A2.1 – A2.2 RC – A2.2 – B1.1 W – A2-1 – A2.2

Listening Comprehension, Speaking, Reading Comprehension, Writing

Level in English (%): grade 9 (15-16 years; 7 years of English, Tuokko, 2007)



Distribution of Levels (%) in the Matric Exam (19yrs)



10: 10 years of study; **3/5**: 3-5 years of study; **6** - 6 years of study

YKI test: National Certificates of Language Proficiency for adult immigrant

- National Certificates of Language Proficiency are language proficiency tests intended for adults. They assess language skills in practical situations where adults may generally need to speak, listen, write or read in a foreign language – at home or abroad.
- 9 target languages
- Acquisition of Finnish citizenship requires at least satisfactory oral and written skills in the Finnish or Swedish language. The easiest way to demonstrate such skills is to complete a general language proficiency test to attain the National Certificate of Language Proficiency at intermediate level. This means that you have to have at least a skill level three on one of the following subtest combinations: Speaking (3) and writing (3) OR Listening comprehension (3) and writing (3) OR Reading comprehension (3) and speaking (3)
- **Level 3 = B1 CEFR level**



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European language levels - Self Assessment

Europass

- <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/resources/european-language-levels-cefr>

CEFR and teaching

- Concretize the development of skill
- Diverse teaching and assessment of skills
- Setting realistic aims (as a teacher and as a pupil/student)
- Exploit the criteria in giving feedback, not only numerical but also qualitative
- Sharing the assessment criteria with students
 - self assessment and peer assessment

Learner Corpora and CEFR

- Several learner language corpora on Finnish language use CEFR scales in rating the learner performances, e.g.:
- **The Corpus of Advanced Learner Finnish**
 - The distribution is following: B1: 4%, **B2: 45%**, **C1: 55%**, and C2: 6%)
- **The CEFLING corpus (school pupils)**
 - **A1: 22 %**; **A2: 38 %**; **B1: 35 %**; B2: 6 %
- **The International Corpus of Learner Finnish**
(foreign language data)
 - A1: 1%; A2: 7%; **B1: 43%**; **B2: 36%**, C1: 12%, C2: 2%

Cefling Project / University of Jyväskylä

- Prof. Maisa Martin, funded by the Academy of Finland 2007-2009
- Aims and research questions:
 - How second language proficiency develops from one CEFR level to the next. The aim was to provide a new theoretical model for connecting the CEFR “can do” type proficiency level descriptions with linguistic characteristics of actual language data.
 - What combinations of linguistic features characterize learners’ performance at certain proficiency level?
 - To what extent do adult and young learners who engage in the same communicative tasks, at a given level, perform in the same way linguistically?
- Corpus data: for adults come from the National Certificates test performance corpus and the data for children was collected during the project.

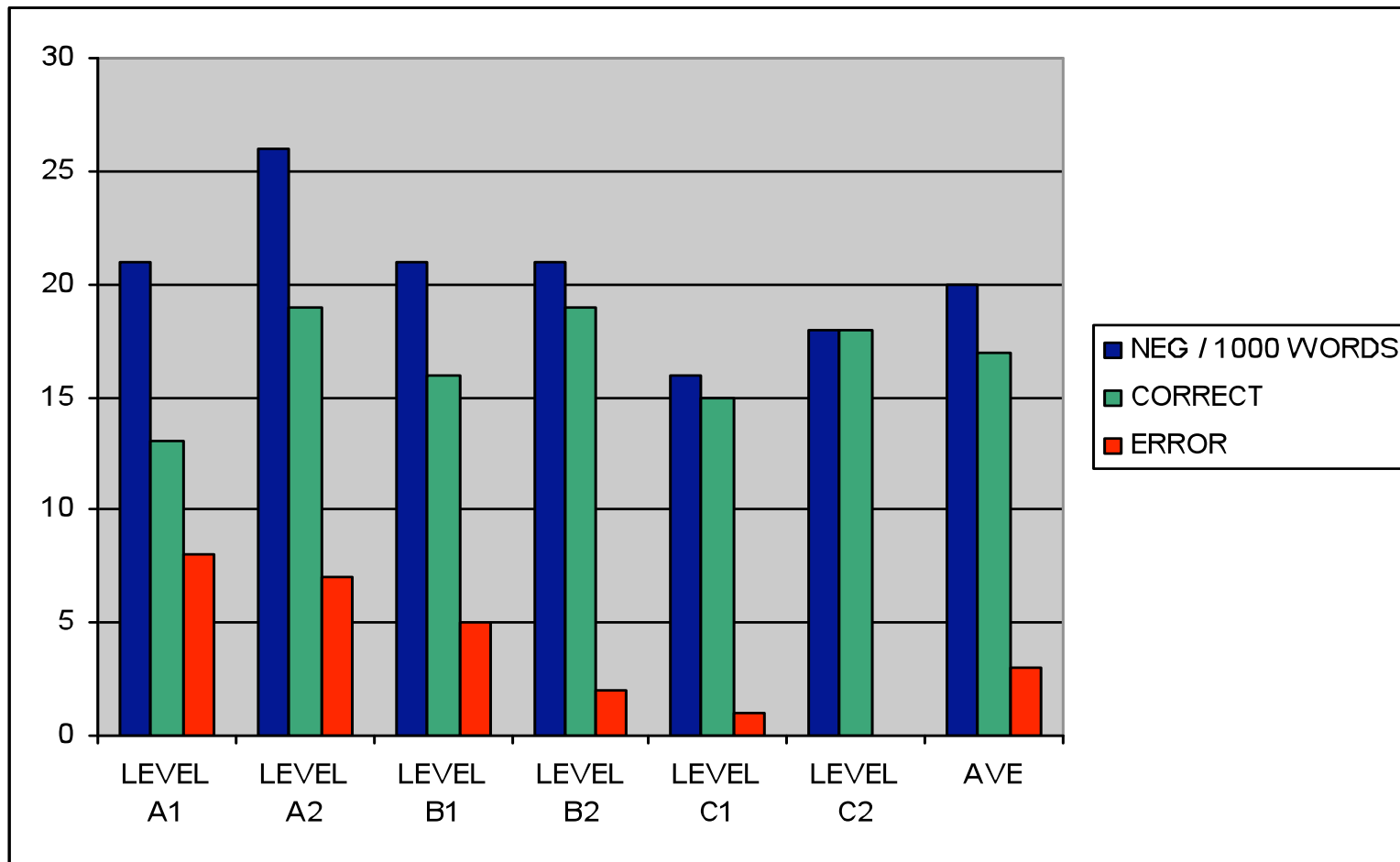
Example: NEGATION IN FINNISH (Martin 2008, EuroSLA)

Negation expressed by an auxiliary verb with an incomplete paradigm:

minä puhu/n	minä e/n puhu
sinä puhu/t	sinä e/t puhu
hän puhu/u	hän ei puhu
me puhu/mme	me e/mme puhu

Past:	minä puhui/n	minä e/n puhunut
Perfect:	minä ole/n puhunut	minä e/n ole puhunut
Pluperfect:	minä oli/n puhunut	minä e/n ollut puhunut

Example: NEGATION IN FINNISH (Martin 2008, EuroSLA)



Challenges with CEFR

North, Brian:

- The definitions of lower levels are more specific and concrete than those of the upper (C1 + C2) levels, native-likeness on the upper level?
- Weak definitions for socio-linguistic competence (pragmatic competence ok) -> need of modification?

Council of Europe (2006):

- Complex, needs a lot of tutoring.
CEFR "requires intensive studying, several years to really adopt the contents and learn how to put it in practice".

ICLFI project

- The same performance (written text) may get different ratings from different assessors (even A2, B1, B2!) -> too broad or vague criteria?

Are the criteria that concern pragmatic skills (function, style, mastering the discourse) enough? What about linguistic skills and how those should be assessed?