

# **What is the CEFR?**

## - From Chapter 1 -

Lecture 1

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# What is the CEFR? (1)

- The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of
  - language syllabuses
  - curriculum guidelines
  - examinations
  - textbooks, etc. across Europe.
- It describes in a comprehensive way **what language learners have to learn to do** in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.
- The description also covers the **cultural context** in which language is set.
- The Framework also defines **levels of proficiency** which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.

# What is the CEFR? (2)

- The Common European Framework is intended to **overcome the barriers to communication among professionals** working in the field of modern languages arising from the different educational systems in Europe.
- It provides the means for:
  - **educational administrators**
  - **course designers**
  - **teachers**
  - **teacher trainers**
  - **examining bodies**, etc.,

to reflect on their current practice, with a view to situating and co-ordinating their efforts and to ensuring that they meet the real needs of the learners for whom they are responsible.

# What is the CEFR? (3)

- By providing a common basis for the explicit description of **objectives, content and methods**, the Framework will enhance the transparency of **courses, syllabuses and qualifications**, thus promoting international co-operation in the field of modern languages.
- The provision of objective criteria for describing language proficiency will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and accordingly will aid European mobility.

# What is the CEFR? (4)

- The **taxonomic nature** of the Framework inevitably means trying to handle the great complexity of human language by breaking language competence down into separate components.
- This confronts us with psychological and pedagogical problems of some depth.
  - Communication calls upon the whole human being.
  - The competences separated and classified below interact in complex ways in the development of each unique human personality.
  - As a **social agent**, each individual forms relationships with a widening cluster of overlapping social groups, which together define identity.
  - In an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture.
- It must be left to teachers and the learners themselves to reintegrate the many parts into a **healthily developing whole**.

# What is the CEFR? (4)

- The Framework includes the description of ‘**partial**’ qualifications, appropriate when only a more restricted knowledge of a language is required (e.g. for understanding rather than speaking), or when a limited amount of time is available for the learning of a third or fourth language and more useful results can perhaps be attained by aiming at, say, recognition rather than recall skills. Giving formal recognition to such abilities will help to promote plurilingualism through the learning of a wider variety of European languages.

# What is 'plurilingualism'?

- In recent years, the concept of plurilingualism has grown in importance in the Council of Europe's approach to language learning. **Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism**, which is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society.
- Multilingualism may be attained by simply diversifying the languages on offer in a particular school or educational system, or by encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language, or reducing the dominant position of English in international communication.

# Plurilingualism (2)

- Beyond this, the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather **builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.**



# Plurilingualism (3)

- In different situations, a person can **call flexibly upon different parts of this competence** to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor.
- For instance, partners may switch from one language or dialect to another, exploiting the ability of each to express themselves in one language and to understand the other; or a person may call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, written or even spoken, in a previously ‘unknown’ language, recognising words from a common international store in a new guise.

# Plurilingualism (4)

- From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to **develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place**. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence.

# Plurilingualism (5)

- Furthermore, once it is recognised that language learning is a lifelong task, the **development of a young person's motivation, skill and confidence** in facing new language experience out of school comes to be of central importance. The responsibilities of educational authorities, qualifying examining bodies and teachers cannot simply be confined to the attainment of a given level of proficiency in a particular language at a particular moment in time, important though that undoubtedly is.

# Why is the CEFR needed?

1. A further intensification of language learning and teaching in member countries is necessary in the interests of **greater mobility**, more effective **international communication** combined with **respect for identity and cultural diversity**, **better access to information**, **more intensive personal interaction**, **improved working relations** and **a deeper mutual understanding**.
2. To achieve these aims **language learning** is necessarily a life-long task to be promoted and facilitated throughout educational systems, from pre-school through to adult education.
3. It is desirable to develop a Common European Framework of reference for language learning at all levels, in order to:
  - promote and facilitate **co-operation among educational institutions** in different countries;
  - provide a **sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications**;

# What criteria must the CEFR meet?

- In order to fulfil its functions, such a Common European Framework must be
  - comprehensive
  - transparent
  - coherent.

# What criteria must the CEFR meet? (2)

- By ‘comprehensive’ is meant that the Common European Framework should attempt to specify as **full a range of language knowledge, skills and use** as possible (without of course attempting to forecast a priori all possible uses of language in all situations – an impossible task), and that **all users should be able to describe their objectives, etc., by reference to it.**
- CEF should differentiate the various dimensions in which language proficiency is described, and provide a series of **reference points (levels or steps)** by which **progress in learning can be calibrated.** It should be borne in mind that the development of communicative proficiency involves other dimensions than the strictly linguistic (e.g. sociocultural awareness, imaginative experience, affective relations, learning to learn, etc.).

# What criteria must the CEFR meet? (3)

- By 'transparent' is meant that information must be clearly formulated and explicit, available and readily comprehensible to users.

# What criteria must the CEFR meet? (4)

- By 'coherent' is meant that the description is free from internal contradictions. With regard to educational systems, coherence requires that there is a harmonious relation among their components:
  - the identification of **needs**;
  - the determination of **objectives**;
  - the definition of **content**;
  - the selection or creation of **material**;
  - the establishment of **teaching/learning programmes**;
  - the teaching and learning **methods** employed;
  - **evaluation, testing** and **assessment**.



# What criteria must the CEFR meet? (5)

- The construction of a comprehensive, transparent and coherent framework for language learning and teaching does not imply the imposition of one single uniform system.
- On the contrary, the framework should be **open** and **flexible**, so that it can be applied, with such adaptations as prove necessary, to particular situations. CEF should be:
  - **multi-purpose**: usable for the full variety of purposes involved in the planning and provision of facilities for language learning
  - **flexible**: adaptable for use in different circumstances
  - **open**: capable of further extension and refinement
  - **dynamic**: in continuous evolution in response to experience in its use
  - **user-friendly**: presented in a form readily understandable and usable by those to whom it is addressed
  - **non-dogmatic**: not irrevocably and exclusively attached to any one of a number of competing linguistic or educational theories or practices.