Pathways through assessing, learning and teaching in the CEFR

Enrica Piccardo, Marie Berchoud, Tiziana Cignatta,
Olivier Mentz and Malgorzata Pamula

European Centre for Modern Languages

Council of Europe Publishing

Table of contents

This publication is the result of a project of the European Centre for Modern Languages entitled "Encouraging the culture of evaluation among professionals" (ECEP).

Further information and materials relating to this publication can be found on the accompanying CD-Rom and on the website, http://ecep.ecml.at.

Acknowledgements

Foreword

What is this guide? What is this kit?

The present guide and the accompanying kit have been designed to support professionals at all levels to get acquainted with the philosophy of assessment, learning and teaching in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These two documents show language teachers in what way the CEFR can function as a tool that is flexible, efficient and rich in ideas.

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 summarising 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 CEFR 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. In the first part we consider what a reflective attitude involves. Teachers who base their assessment on the CEFR need to be able to analyse and discuss their approaches to organising 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 in order to appreciate language learning as integral to a plurilingual approach. Adopting a reflective attitude and connecting languages with "life skills" call for 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. A special emphasis is given to the complexity of the evaluation process as well as to the complementarity of different types of assessment. 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 collectively.

In fact, there is a third target group, namely that of learners who would benefit from the project in the long run.

Others who may want to use the guide and the accompanying kit include:

1. administrators of programmes for language education or in which language and cultural diversity are prominent issues;

2. educators in schools or higher education with minority, migrant, or sojourning/traveller populations learning majority languages;

3. language educators outside of Europe wanting to better understand and apply the principles of the CEFR, for instance those working in the field of language(s) of schooling both at school or at university;

4. testing or psychometric experts wanting to understand aspects of educational assessment unique to language teaching and language learning.

5. teacher educators working in the pre-service and in-service education of language teachers;

6. teachers interested in developing their professional competence for language instruction, either individually or collectively.

What do the guide and the kit offer?

In order to support ownership and contextualisation of the CEFR, the guide and its related worksheets in the kit are designed to reflect the general approach to language education in the CEFR. While not attempting to cover all aspects of this document, the guide samples crucial points in the CEFR, making these linkages explicit by citing relevant sections wherever possible. The guide attempts to address those 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 clear and accessible for professionals, both in their pre- and in-service teacher education. The worksheets in the kit serve as a bridge

for teacher educators, and teachers, to reflect on these concepts and to relate them appropriately to pedagogical practices.

Finally, there are synergies between the guide and the kit, on the one hand, and other tools published by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) on the other. Particularly, the guide and the kit complement the tool developed by the team of the ClassRelEx project *Highlights from a manual on relating language examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*, downloadable from the ECML website, http://www.ecml.at.

Users of the guide and of the kit might in addition find it beneficial to refer to the *Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (FREPA)*, also downloadable from the ECML website, http://www.ecml.at.

What is the guide not intended to be?

Like all manuals and guides, this guide has specific aims and does not intend to serve other purposes, even if they are very relevant concerns in language education in general. For example, the guide is not intended to provide guidance for test development. Several good sources are already available 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. This is served by *Relating language examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) – A manual* (2009) specifically developed for this purpose and related materials such as *Further material on maintaining standards across languages, contexts and administrations by exploiting teacher judgment and IRT scaling,* downloadable from the Council of Europe website www.coe.int/lang.

There are also other related materials for assessing samples of production such as:

www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/illustrationse.html;

CefGrid: http://lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/grid;

CefTrain: www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.35.html;

CIEP samples of oral production:
www.ciep.fr/publi_evalcert/dvd-productions-orales-cecrl/index.php.

The guide is not intended to prescribe an "authorised" 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 a vision 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 educator can select, adapt and customise 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 authorised" interpretation of the CEFR, no answer keys are provided for the various questions posed in the worksheets. Their goal is to encourage a reflective attitude among practitioners.

The wealth of worksheets in the kit does not aim to cover all possible aspects of the CEFR. On the contrary, the worksheets included 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 sample scenarios.

The kit is designed for use by teacher educators and pedagogical experts in their work with (future) teachers rather than for the unguided individual work of trainees. 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

Introduction – 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), sociolinguistic 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 competences in all possible contexts.

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) provides a comprehensive description of these competences. 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 "reframed" 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 proceeded to a linear reading which they probably found very difficult to pursue until the end. For example, in theory teachers have become familiar with the levels of competence, 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, competences - and their assessment - 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.

Competences 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 (for example, 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 (for example, 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 that differentiation has become feasible as well as worthwhile. Even so-called weak/less able learners can see their competence valued, recognising that they have in fact several competences even if these are less developed than those of other learners.

Beyond these differences, the CEFR offers the possibility to create anchor points to actively emphasise 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.

The present kit – and to an even greater extent the guide – aims at facilitating to every stakeholder involved in language teching/learning access to the ideas of the CEFR concerning (positive) assessment of learners' language competences.

"But – you may say – is the CEFR not enough without the need for a guide?" Yes, of course, the CEFR remains the main reference but we consider it useful, not only to summarize its main concepts but also to propose some suggestions for teachers to reflect on their assessment practices through a series of worksheets, which propose activities focusing on reflection and contextualization. In this way, we hope that language teaching throughout Europe will be better rooted in the philosophy of the CEFR.

The guide is subdivided into four sections, which all share a common goal: devising the path towards assessment according to the CEFR.

First of all, we try and reflect on what is (or could be) a reflective attitude. It seems crucial that practitioners who aim at assessing in a way consistent with the CEFR are able to permanently question their approaches, their teaching and assessing methods as well as the learners' competences and skills. In order to do this, it is essential to acquire a reflective attitude, which in turn will allow practitioners to educate learners to autonomy.

The second section deals with aspects of plurilingualism in Europe and with what it means in practical terms to live with languages. We believe in the need for understanding the cultural dimension of languages and of being aware that language learning does not occur in isolation, but rather within a plurilingual approach.

Acquiring a reflective attitude and being able to live (with) languages allows practitioners to question methods and strategies. For this reason, a series of considerations is presented on the way "we", as teachers, and "they" as learners could become even more competent.

Finally, the fourth section focuses on what assessment actually is. Implementation of language competence inevitably undergoes some form of assessment. This final section therefore deals with the different elements which constitute and influence assessment.

The assessment capacity is thus characterized by the awareness that assessment is never just the final phase of a process but an intermediate phase or even an initial one.

The four sections are followed by a conclusion which also aims at introducing the worksheets making up the kit.

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 world becomes more complex, increased knowledge is required along with mastery of increasingly diversified competence. These processes force us to question the tools and ways of doing that are most appropriate for education.

Education needs to change, moving from reflection, to develop open-minded attitudes and a more flexible system. 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 it has also to start from the observation of individuals with whom a teacher interacts as well as of their unique and specific mental contexts and their more or less conscious or specific objectives.

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 ask themself questions that will then enable them to put into context and personalise their professional activities, eventually making them more effective. 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 emphasise the non-directive character of the Framework enterprise" (p. 43). Even though one should not feel obliged to follow exactly each section in detail, "in most cases, however, […] [the authors of the CEFR] 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.).

Even if the overall structure of Chapter 4 is presented as a checklist 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, classifying the situations in which the language is used according to four main domains of social life (personal, public, professional and educational), and arriving at the users/learners' mental context, through which the situational context is filtered and adapted.

Far from being exhaustive, the list of situational categories classified accorded to these domains (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 emphasises 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. Languages between individual 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 emphasises 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 situational context, but "this context is highly organised independently of the individual" (4.1.4, pp. 50–51). For this reason, individual perception of this context is very important. Such perception relates in turn

to the mental context 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: acquiring competences in another language and in 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 plurilingual competence and intercultural awareness. Language learning thereby fosters the development of a complex and broad personality.

Of course, languages can also be used for playful purposes or creativity, as well as for dreaming and for pleasure. The CEFR emphasises explicitly these particular ways of using language, which are also fundamentally important from a pedagogical point of view (cf. CECR, 4.3.4 and 4.3.5, pp. 55–56). However, languages are mostly acquired for communication purposes, which represent the CEFR's second main focus, social purposes.

The social dimension of a language emphasises the central position of interaction and communicative activities themselves. This is illustrated on page 99 (diagram 3).

USER	↔	discourse	↔	Interlocutor
USER	→	Text 1.	→	interlocutor
USER	←	Text 2.	←	interlocutor
USER	→	Text 3.	→	interlocutor
USER	←	Text 4.	←	interlocutor
etc.				
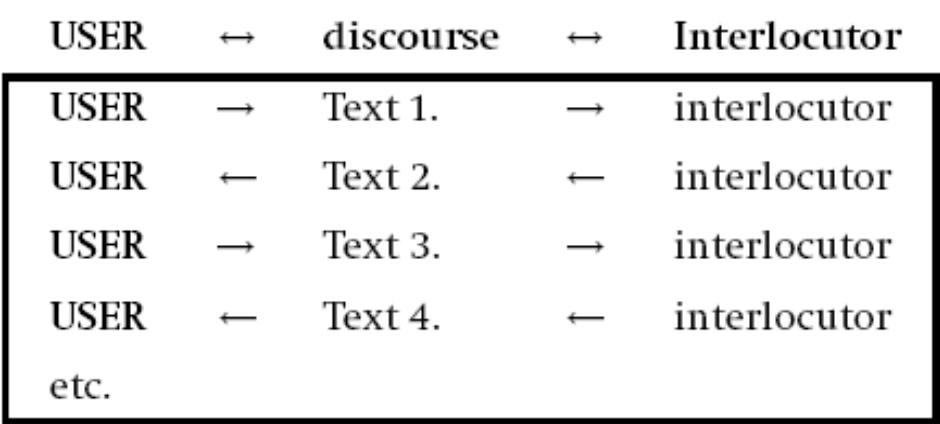
In example 3, one can notice how the exchange – and the amount of text that it produces – structures the conversation throughout the interaction. Language being above all a form of communication, the importance of exchanges between people is crucial. The "communication gap" necessary for the establishment 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 calls for the learner's previous knowledge and competences as well as personal resources; the second presents an exchange and mutual sharing process.

Amid this dual construction of learning, the role of strategies 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, 2.1.5, 4 and 6). Research has shown that learners who get good results possess efficient learning strategies and, moreover, know how to use strategies successfully to accomplish diverse tasks. Strategies and knowledge awareness are also crucial to learners becoming autonomous. They are useful both for education and life-long learning. These two concepts (autonomy and life-long learning) are the political basis of education in Europe, according to which learners are supposed to be flexible, able to operate with unknown factors and to improve over the course of a lifetime. These skills are also coherent with the demand of the present market, where business considers that qualifications alone are no longer enough.

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).

Once they have recognized the effectiveness of strategic learning, language teachers must be able to implement it. The CEFR (4.4) offers a series of strategies adapted to different types of communication situations. These strategies are categorised 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 a more 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 an act of communication.

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 learners 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 authors of the CEFR suggest emphasising the processes of communication and learning as a goal to be achieved. The framework also emphasises 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 reflective 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 contrary, for the learning process to be realised throughout one's lifetime, 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 competences, dynamic development

The aim of Chapter 4 and 5 of the CEFR is that of providing "a fairly detailed scheme of categories for the description of language use and the language user" (p. 41). The whole set of different categories and their interconnection is usually referred to as the "descriptive scheme" of the CEFR. It is quite a flexible scheme as it is composed of a basic scheme which in turn can be further broken down into subschemes specific to different categories and subcategories.

In order to facilitate access to this type of schematization, we have provided in appendix a visual representation of the basic scheme and of some possible subschemes. They are possible examples of schematizing categories and subcategories.

Chapters 4 and 5 of the CEFR detail the skills as well as the capacities and necessary strategies to realise these competences. 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 imbalanced and developing competence. The latter, in particular, is discussed with regard 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 as a phenomenon that is perfectly normal. They are part of a process, i.e. the construction of a broader plurilingual competence which inevitably has a highly changing nature (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 to mentioning the distinction between these two terms and by proposing that they be used in an interchangeable manner (6.2.1), there being no other generic term. With the same logic, it is important to emphasise the CEFR's position with 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 made by native speakers and just reveal a lack of consistency between performance and competence (CEFR, p.155). 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.

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 (CEFR, p. 155).

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 professionalised 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 coexistence and social agents 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 for the situation (common levels of reference, CEFR, pp. 26–29, and Chapter IV of this guide).

Let us 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 coexist. 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 course of a life, which involves constantly relating them to each other so as to build up a plurilingual repertoire, capacity or competence.

Moreover, citizens' speech is integral to democratic life in the taking of decisions or actions to maintain, facilitate, or improve co-operative relations such as trading, manufacturing, producing, assisting, co-operating, 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 lifelong 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 has been conceived with reference to the constitution of the European community which has developed over the last 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 realised 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 as social agents, capable of assuming social roles and carrying 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 competences 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 competences 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 competences 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 agents, 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. As its name indicates, the CEFR aims at being a reference tool and not at all a prescriptive work.

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, for example, 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 which 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, 4.1.2, p. 46). 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. This allows a flexible movement from the communicative to the action-oriented without excluding any individual journey, resonating with the idea of personal appropriation of the CEFR by its users.

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. Finally let's reiterate the idea that this process is directly linked to that of "language biography" and of portfolio, both from the teachers' and from the learners' side.

3.   Teaching and learning activities: a conceptualisation 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 a 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 to change? First, by observing one's practices, describing them, and analysing 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 global simulations, nowadays well-known, 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 is central in the CEFR. An entire chapter is devoted to the topic (Chapter 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, p. 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 make 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 competences 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; Chapter III of this guide addresses the concept of tasks in more detail).

In sum, for teachers and learners alike, the CEFR synthesises 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 watertight compartments. This results in new forms of development (which have already been introduced in several contexts) 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 Chapter 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, in the processes of teaching and learning, activities involving mediation may be required on top of those involving interaction as will be discussed in the following section.

4.   Developing and mastering language competences

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 if memorisation and individual exercises are not excluded. 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, 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 competences that already exist in other languages (language 1, 2, 3 …) and also to acquire new competences (see Chapter IV of this guide). These competences, abilities and achievements, which can be observed in concrete situations, involve a diverse array of ways of being, expertise and know how, 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 communicative activities. To these we need to add interaction, mirroring social reality, through verbal interactions (for example, conversation, debate, talk) and written modes (for example, letters, e-mails, 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 communicative 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 the basis of a text. Written exercises may concern planning and drafting a report, essay or creative text. The series of descriptors provided

for these activities exemplify them through tasks to be carried out in class (CEFR, from p. 57, summary table, pp. 98–99; see also Chapters I and IV of this guide).

"Coping with the demands of using finite resources" presupposes the acceptance and even validation of partial competences, 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; Chapter 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, co-operating, 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 (for example, strategies of avoidance, reformulation or questioning). Other strategies are more specific. Therefore, the strategies concerning oral interaction also encompass the co-management of a con-versation'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 Chapter 4 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 communicative language 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 of written activities:

- 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 – more or less justified - 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, pp. 10 and 93).

A related issue concerns genre and text type, which are also defined with 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 prescriptive 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 teachers 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 us consider what the CEFR means by "competences".

Communicative competence includes many competences which people acquire throughout their lives. The CEFR emphasises 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 – which needs to be valued – and progressive achievements contribute to the aim of "becoming more competent".

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 · socio-cultural knowledge · intercultural awareness	· practical skills · intercultural skills		· language and communi-cation 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

Table 1. Schematic organisation of competences according to the CEFR

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*), existential competence (*savoir-être*) and ability to learn (*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 cannot 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 characterised 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 various 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 organise and use materials for autonomous and self-directed learning in order to become increasingly independent in their language learning. Finally, heuristic skills include

language users' abilities to take advantage of new experiences and to be proactive 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, as well as their use, differ for various languages and cultures, and depend 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 realisations 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 by producing and recognising 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 inter-lexical relations. Vocabulary includes not only single words – which may have several distinct meanings (polysemy) – but also their combinations in fixed frames and phrasal idioms. This differentiation underlined by the CEFR proposes a 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 extent of vocabulary knowledge and mastery 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>B1) and on most general topics (B2>C2) for matters connected to their field(s).

Sociolinguistic appropriateness often includes the word "awareness": language users 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. 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 competence is 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 macro functions and micro functions. 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 micro functions 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 organisational 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). As we said, actions in the various domains of everyday life – personal, public, educational or occupational – compose what the CEFR calls task (cf. *supra*, section II, 3). 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 accomplishing a task engage in one or more language activities, in reception, production, 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 are not directly linked to real-life. 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, preparation should be relatively easy, in the second, teachers can foresee and suggest specific sub-tasks for students. Moving from the preparation phase of a task to its accomplishment in context, learners' competences need to be taken into consideration. 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 PowerPoint 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, together with previous activation of learners' competences, 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?

We need to consider conditions and constraints while accomplishing a task that involves 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 sub-tasks 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 more the learners need to act, justify their actions and interact with interlocutors 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.

Co-operation among interlocutors is an important factor for interaction, production, and comprehension activities as well. On the one hand, co-operation 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, co-operation refers to small-group settings in classroom, where learners can help each other. Co-operative 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 where there are often 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 for 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 can be taken into account at the time of evaluating the task. Learners can also 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 interculturally 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[1]

Assessment is an integral part of language teaching and learning, not merely a final step in the process nor just a judgment 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 checklists in continuous assessment as well as informal observations by a teacher, only to mention some examples and without any value judgment nor prioritizing.

---

1 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 CEFR, 9.1, p. 177).

Assessment purposes	Course or programme scope and expectations	Perspective on students' abilities	Assessment methods
Diagnosis and planning	· Curriculum · Resources · Learning · Communication opportunities	· Needs analysis (initial and cyclic) · Self-assessments · Goals for learning	· Communication tasks · Surveys · Personal aims · Diagnosis of special needs
Achievement and feedback Formal certification	· Taught ⇩ · Studied or practised ⇩ · Achieved · External, normative standards · Official recognition	*Short-term performance* · Activities · Tasks · Records · Observations · Tests *Long-term performance* · Accumulative, summative records · Tests · Institutional requirements	*Pedagogical activities* · Tasks · Assignments · Exercises · Observations · Responses (oral and written) · Tests *Reflective tools* · Logs · Records · Portfolios · Self-assessment *Programme completion* · Grades · Exams or tests · Passport

Assessments should provide evidence of desired:

· competences
· performances
· achievements
· consequences

While acknowledging:

· cultural differences
· individual differences
· available capacities, resources and opportunities

In ways that are:

· valid (content and purpose is specified, and proved to be fulfilled without irrelevant factors or unintended negative consequences)
· reliable (consistent, comparable, equitable, and fair)
· feasible (manageable, comprehensible, and relevant)

Table 2. Synoptic description of assessment

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 us 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. Data collected during a performance or a text allow testers to draw conclusions, make evaluations, take decisions. 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. The 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. Even more important is the precision of that classification with 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 (for example, B1/B1+/B2) it is important to specify the criteria chosen and the procedures implemented to reach a certain judgment.

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", that is, practicality. Not only do examiners have to cope with time constraints, but it is also objectively impossible for them to deal with too many categories and criteria at the same time, especially when these categories are very different from each other.[2]

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, using external examiners can be helpful in targeting the object of assessment and in improving consistency in some situations but may prove to be totally unfeasible in numerous other 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 recognising 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 tasks and tests aiming at assessing communicative competence.

A fundamental distinction for everyday effective use of the CEFR is between descriptors of communicative activities (Chapter 4) and descriptors of competences (Chapter 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 rather at determining competences which can be generalized.

---

2   Despite its detailed and thorough treatment in the CEFR, assessment is a complex and specialised 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 examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) – A manual*, www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/manuel1_EN.asp. This book is an essential tool for those wishing to deepen their knowledge of technical aspects of assessment.

This distinction is crucial as it 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.

Organising these descriptors into the form of checklists or grids allows, as may be appropriate, a focus on levels, either by grouping into the same checklist descriptors at a given level or by selecting on a grid specific categories at different levels. For instance, 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 judgment. In contrast, description on the same grid at different levels (B1/B1+/B2), referring to given categories (for example, informal discussion, conversation, exchange of information, etc., see CEFR scales, Chapter 4), would make possible a more detailed judgment 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 the assessment criteria of a performance. Competence descriptors can foster in this way the transformation of personal and subjective impressions into well-grounded judgments, thus facilitating the definition of a reference framework shared by a panel of judges.

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

- level scales, often combining different descriptors in the same paragraph (see CEFR, Chapter 5);

- checklists, classifying suitable descriptors in a category according to level; and

- grids, grouping parallel scales for a given number of categories (Table 3 of the CEFR gives an example as do Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 5.8 of the manual on 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 scores (+). It also permits organisation of a scale focused on a norm of success in the test itself and consequently definition of 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, two nearby levels on the scale could also be considered for use (see figure 7 of the CEFR, 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 suitable scales of descriptors.

4.   Plurality of types of assessment

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 underlying 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 have been organised by classifying them into pairs, divided into a table of two columns (CEFR, Table 7, p. 183). Doing so does not represent a judgment 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 CEFR represents a resource for various types of assessment. It is also important to emphasise 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 a continuum.

5.   Distinguishing competence and action

The first pair, the distinction between the assessment of achievement and the assessment of proficiency (CEFR, 9.3.1, pp. 183–184), follows from the fundamental difference, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, between competence and performance. Proficiency assessment can be equated to performance assessment (see CEFR, 9.3.7, p. 187) – that is, assessment of competence put to use. The learners' performance 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. It appears from an external view, whereas relevant knowledge remains internal.

The CEFR emphasises 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*) provided by Chapter 6 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 one between using assessment to classify learners either in relation to one another – and, if necessary, in relation to a norm and a precise moment in time – or to judge learners according to their own abilities, regardless of their peers, with 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 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-off points" (CEFR, p. 184) that mark distinctions between levels of proficiency i.e. the ways test objectives have been achieved, and this allows – where necessary – the attribution of a grade.

In a similar way, in a mastery criterion-referencing approach (CEFR, 9.3.3, pp. 184–185) 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 judgment of language competence and, moreover, the assessment of this competence. The problem of objectivity is addressed by two assessment pairs. The CEFR (9.3.8, pp. 188–189) 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 judgments (on this specific point see also the manual *Relating language examinations to the CEFR*, cited in note 2).

Along the same lines is the distinction between holistic and analytic assessment (CEFR, 9.3.11, p. 190). The former involves a synthetic global judgment 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. As

previously said, 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 and is judged according to categories expressed on a grid. The former assesses different tasks in a more global way.

8.   Assessing: actors, modalities, reasons

The CEFR distinguishes between formative and summative assessment (CEFR, 9.3.5, p. 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, it tries to reply to the question "Why?".

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 metalanguage 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. 191–192). 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 with 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 guide 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 (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences). With 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, focusing on the quality of learners' performances 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 promotes an approach that values competences of learners as well as teachers. This idea of valuing competences in turn is grounded on what a learner has already acquired in different areas of knowledge. On this basis, the CEFR defines a series of criteria and descriptors that best account for the competences 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 with regard to particular curriculum situations (CEFR, 8.2 and 8.3). These concerns are directly aligned with the notion and practices of assessment, which for the CEFR go well beyond schooling. (CEFR, 8.4).

Three principles appear fundamental:

▪ plurilingual and pluricultural competences, which completely decompartmentalize language learning;

▪ diversification of curricula, adapted not only to needs and objectives but also functioning according to the specific linguistic constellation 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 possibility of modulating learning processes.

Through these principles, the CEFR introduces crucial notions such as the relation between neighbouring languages, the necessarily partial knowledge of languages, and the concept of individual profiles – essential also to the European Language Portfolio – as well as modularity seen as a fundamental working method.

The CEFR, in developing these pathways for reflexivity, provides a tool for all stakeholders concerned with language learning/teaching at different levels. The basis for reflexivity is, indeed, the notion of plurilingualism. According to this notion, language learning is not just restricted to acquiring each language separately, but rather is influenced by prior knowledge, sociocultural contexts, as well as the number of languages previously acquired, and this no matter what languages are involved. Languages and cultures are not things that one learns independently through memorisation or mental processes separated from one another. They 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 people 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" to the idea that language learning involves developing a linguistic repertoire in which all language competences have their proper place. This paradigm shift requires changes in assessment practices as well.

The conventions of teaching practices or formal exams may not correspond neatly to this philosophy. It remains therefore to be seen how these concepts can be reasonably transposed into ordinary practices that establish equilibrium between the demands of institutions and the aims of the CEFR. The vision presented by the CEFR appears quite reassuring for teachers: they are in fact encouraged to 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 development wherein reflection and pedagogical practices form a constant synergy.

Appendix

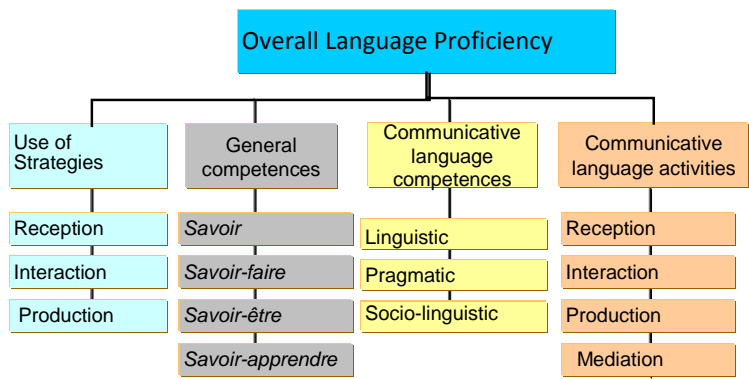## Illustration of the descriptive scheme of the CEFR

Table 3: CEFR descriptive scheme

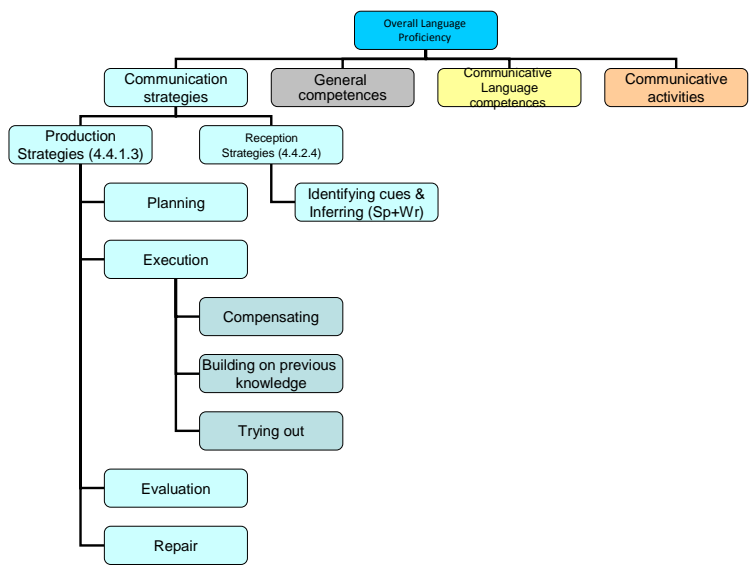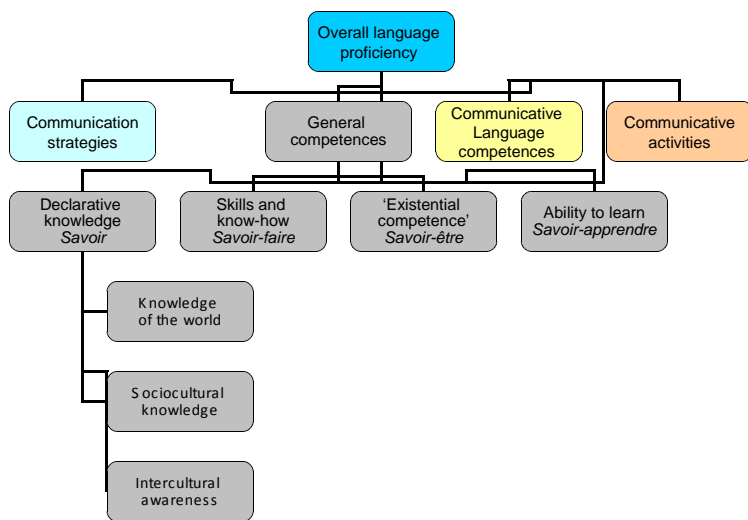Each category can be further broken down into subcategories and further specified.
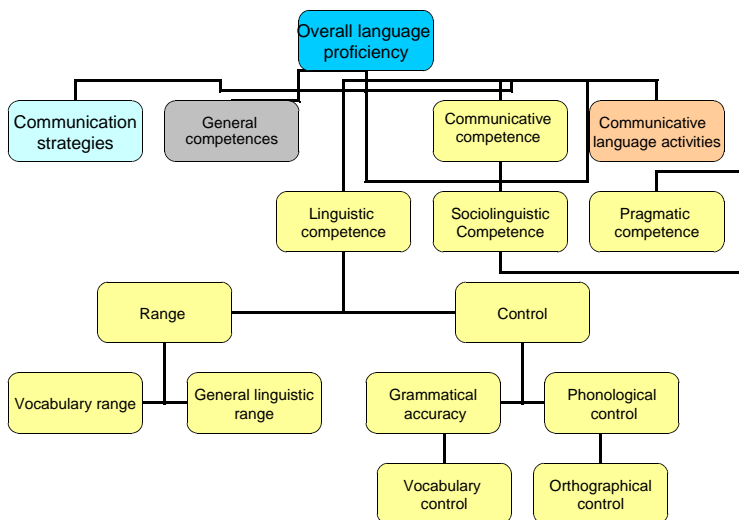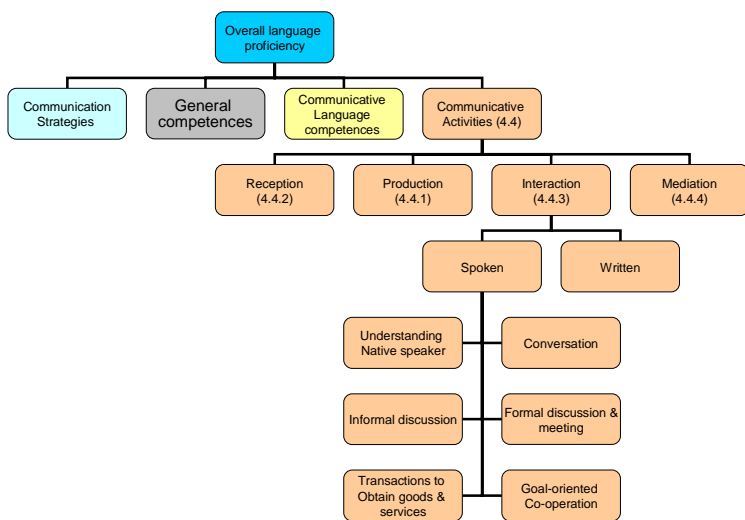

Table 3.1

Table 3.2

Table 3.3

Table 3.4

List of resources on the CD-Rom

	Type of worksheet	Type of worksheet	Introduction / conclusion	Chapter1: Reflexivity	Chaptzer 2: Living (with) languages	Chapter 3: Becoming more competent	Chapter 4: Assessment
Key concepts and paradigm	A		X				
Communicative and action-oriented approach	A	B	X				
Methodological spectrum	A	B	X	X			
Situation and situational context	A	B		X	X		
Professional competences and development	A	B	X	X			
Personal theory of teaching	A	B		X	X		
Learners' needs and learning objectives	A	B		X			
General competences	A	B		X		X	
Reflection on types of competences	A	B				X	
Plurilingual profiles and partial competences	A	B			X		
Pragmatic competence	A	B				X	
Sociolinguistic competence	A	B				X	
Sociocultural competence	A	B				X	
Lexical and semantic competence	A	B				X	
Communicative language competence	A	B				X	
Plurilingual (and pluricultural) competence	A	B		X	X		
Plurilingualism vs multilingualism	A	B			X		
Role of previous knowledge and experiences in learning	A	B			X	X	
Curriculum and curricular scenarios	A				X	X	

Branching approach	A	B		X			
Construction of teachers' professional competences	A	B		X			
Successful teachers and successful learners	A	B		X			
Critical thinking and relation to norms	A	B			X		
Individual/social dimensions in learning	A	B		X	X		
Reflexivity and autonomy in the professional practice	A	B		X	X		
The users/learners and their strategies	A	B		X			
Learning to learn	A	B		X			
Language biography	A	B		X	X		
CEFR and ELP	A	B	X				
Existential competence (savoir-être) and the user's/learner's mental context	A	B				X	
Home and target cultures	A	B			X		
Domains: the context of language use	A	B			X	X	
Literature and aestetic uses of the language	A	B			X		
Reception and production	A	B			X	X	
Interaction	A	B			X	X	
Mediation	A	B			X	X	
Intercultural awareness	B	A			X	X	
Tasks	A	B				X	
Intercultural tasks	A	B				X	
Successful task completion	A	B				X	
Constraints	A	B			X	X	
Level scales, checklists, grids	A	B					X
Fundamental principles of assessment	A	B					X
Descriptors of communicative activities and competences	A	B				X	X

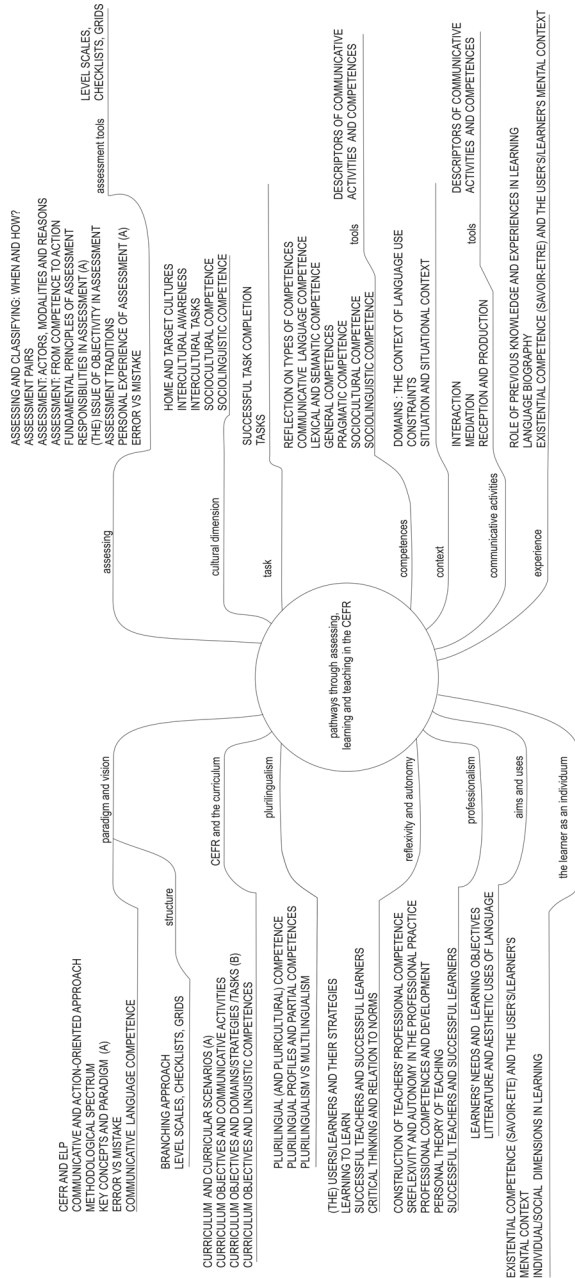|							
Assessment traditions	A	B			X		X
Curriculum objectives and linguistic competences	A	B	X	X	X	X	
Curriculum objectives and communicative activities	A	B	X	X	X	X	
Curriculum objectives and domains/strategies/tasks		B	X	X	X	X	
Responsibilities in assessment	A						X
Assessment pairs	A	B					X
Error vs mistake	A	B		X			X
Personal experience of assessment	A			X			
The issue of objectivity in assessment	A	B		X	X	X	X
Assessing and classifying: when and how?	A	B					X
Assessment: from competence to action	A	B					X
Assessment: actors, modalities and reasons	A	B					X

Alphabetical index of the worksheets on the CD-Rom

- ASSESSING AND CLASSIFYING: WHEN AND HOW?
- ASSESSMENT PAIRS
- ASSESSMENT TRADITIONS
- ASSESSMENT: ACTORS, MODALITIES AND REASONS
- ASSESSMENT: FROM COMPETENCE TO ACTION
- BRANCHING APPROACH
- CEFR AND ELP
- COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE COMPETENCE
- COMMUNICATIVE AND ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH
- CONSTRAINTS
- CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES
- CRITICAL THINKING AND RELATION TO NORMS
- CURRICULUM AND CURRICULAR SCENARIOS (A)
- CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES
- CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES AND DOMAINS/STRATEGIES /TASKS (B)
- CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES AND LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES
- DESCRIPTORS OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES AND COMPETENCES
- DOMAINS : THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE USE
- ERROR VS MISTAKE
- EXISTENTIAL COMPETENCE (SAVOIR-ETRE) AND THE USER'S /LEARNER'S MENTAL CONTEXT
- FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT
- GENERAL COMPETENCES
- HOME AND TARGET CULTURES
- INDIVIDUAL/SOCIAL DIMENSIONS IN LEARNING
- INTERACTION
- INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS
- INTERCULTURAL TASKS

- (THE) ISSUE OF OBJECTIVITY IN ASSESSMENT
- KEY CONCEPTS AND PARADIGM (A)
- LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHY
- LEARNERS' NEEDS AND   LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- LEARNING TO LEARN
- LEVEL SCALES, CHECKLISTS, GRIDS
- LEXICAL AND SEMANTIC COMPETENCE
- LITERATURE AND AESTHETIC USES OF LANGUAGE
- MEDIATION
- METHODOLOGICAL SPECTRUM
- PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ASSESSMENT (A)
- PERSONAL THEORY OF TEACHING
- PLURILINGUAL (AND PLURICULTURAL) COMPETENCE
- PLURILINGUAL PROFILES AND PARTIAL COMPETENCES
- PLURILINGUALISM VS MULTILINGUALISM
- PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE
- PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES AND DEVELOPMENT
- RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION
- REFLECTION ON TYPES OF COMPETENCES
- REFLEXIVITY AND AUTONOMY IN THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
- RESPONSIBILITIES IN ASSESSMENT (A)
- ROLE OF PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES IN LEARNING
- SITUATION AND SITUATIONAL CONTEXT
- SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE
- SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE
- SUCCESSFUL TASK COMPLETION
- SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS AND SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS
- TASKS
- (THE) USERS/LEARNERS AND THEIR STRATEGIES

Mind map index

Central node: pathways through assessing, learning and teaching in the CEFR

assessing
- ASSESSING AND CLASSIFYING: WHEN AND HOW?
- ASSESSMENT PAIRS
- ASSESSMENT: ACTORS, MODALITIES AND REASONS
- ASSESSMENT: FROM COMPETENCE TO ACTION
- FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT
- RESPONSIBILITIES IN ASSESSMENT (A)
- (THE) ISSUE OF OBJECTIVITY IN ASSESSMENT
- ASSESSMENT TRADITIONS
- PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ASSESSMENT (A)
- ERROR VS MISTAKE
  - **assessment tools**
    - LEVEL SCALES, CHECKLISTS, GRIDS

cultural dimension
- HOME AND TARGET CULTURES
- INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS
- INTERCULTURAL TASKS
- SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE
- SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

task
- SUCCESSFUL TASK COMPLETION
- TASKS

competences
- REFLECTION ON TYPES OF COMPETENCES
- COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE COMPETENCE
- LEXICAL AND SEMANTIC COMPETENCE
- GENERAL COMPETENCES
- PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE
- SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE
- SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE
  - **tools**
    - DESCRIPTORS OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES AND COMPETENCES

context
- DOMAINS : THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE USE
- CONSTRAINTS
- SITUATION AND SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

communicative activities
- INTERACTION
- MEDIATION
- RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION
  - **tools**
    - DESCRIPTORS OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES AND COMPETENCES

experience
- ROLE OF PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES IN LEARNING
- LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHY
- EXISTENTIAL COMPETENCE (SAVOIR-ETRE) AND THE USER'S/LEARNER'S MENTAL CONTEXT

paradigm and vision
- CEFR AND ELP
- COMMUNICATIVE AND ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH
- METHODOLOGICAL SPECTRUM
- KEY CONCEPTS AND PARADIGM (A)
- ERROR VS MISTAKE
- COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE COMPETENCE
  - **structure**
    - BRANCHING APPROACH
    - LEVEL SCALES, CHECKLISTS, GRIDS

CEFR and the curriculum
- CURRICULUM AND CURRICULAR SCENARIOS (A)
- CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES
- CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES AND DOMAINS/STRATEGIES /TASKS (B)
- CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES AND LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES

plurilingualism
- PLURILINGUAL (AND PLURICULTURAL) COMPETENCE
- PLURILINGUAL PROFILES AND PARTIAL COMPETENCES
- PLURILINGUALISM VS MULTILINGUALISM

reflexivity and autonomy
- (THE) USERS/LEARNERS AND THEIR STRATEGIES
- LEARNING TO LEARN
- SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS AND SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS
- CRITICAL THINKING AND RELATION TO NORMS

professionalism
- CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE
- SREFLEXIVITY AND AUTONOMY IN THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
- PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES AND DEVELOPMENT
- PERSONAL THEORY OF TEACHING
- SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS AND SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

aims and uses
- LEARNERS' NEEDS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- LITTERATURE AND AESTHETIC USES OF LANGUAGE

the learner as an individuum
- EXISTENTIAL COMPETENCE (SAVOIR-ETE) AND THE USER'S/LEARNER'S
- MENTAL CONTEXT
- INDIVIDUAL/SOCIAL DIMENSIONS IN LEARNING

Examples of scenarios

ECEP – Examples of possible teacher education scenarios

The following examples aim at providing teacher educators with suggestions for organizing professional development activities using the resource *Pathways through assessing, learning and teaching in the CEFR*.

Material to be used by the teacher developer: The *Guide*, the *CEFR* and the worksheets mentioned below taken from the *Kit*.

➔ **Scenario 1 – Interrogating the nature of the teaching and learning process**

Objective: to familiarize teachers with reflective practices according to the philosophy of the CEFR

- What is teaching? Worksheets *"Construction of teachers' professional competences"*

- How do teachers see their job? Worksheets *"Personal theory of teaching"*

- How to favour the learning process? Worksheets *"Learning to learn"*, worksheets *"Successful teachers and successful learners"*

➔ **Scenario 2 – Developing a reflexive and critical attitude towards own learning and teaching experience**

Objective: to help teachers to position themselves professionally and to critically reconsider their initial educational culture

- Reflecting on own language learning experience: Worksheets *"Language biography"*

- Reflecting on own consideration of/relationship within another language/ culture: Worksheets *"Critical thinking and relation to norms"*

- How to construct own professionalism? Worksheets *"Reflexivity and autonomy in the professional practice"*

➔ **Scenario 3 – Interrogating evaluation, its nature, aims and implications**

Option A (introductory level)

Objective: to help teachers familiarize themselves with assessment according to the CEFR starting from their own experience

- Reflecting about assessment in a contextualized way: Worksheet *"Personal experience of assessment* (A)*"*, worksheets *"Assessment traditions"*

- Reflecting about assessment in general terms: the why and the how: Worksheets *"Fundamental principles of assessment"*, worksheets *"Level scales, checklists, grids"*

- Better understanding objectives and goals of assessment: Worksheets *"Descriptors of communicative activities and competences"*

- Studying stakes of assessment: Worksheet *"Responsibility in assessmen*t" (possibly also *"Assessment pairs"*)

Option B (advanced level)

Objective: to help teachers understand the multidimensional approach of assessment according to the CEFR

- Studying complexity of assessment in the CEFR: Worksheets "*Assessment pairs*"

- Going deeper in the study of assessment: Worksheets *"The issue of objectivity in assessment"*, worksheets *"Assessment: from competence to action"*, worksheets *"Assessment: actors modalities and reasons"*, worksheets *"Assessing and classifying: when and how?"*

Curriculum objectives and domains and strategies. Report of an experience and suggestion for a possible use

Anna Czura, PhD
Institute of English Studies; University of Wrocław

The group of trainees consisted of about 30 students participating in a Masters Programme in the Institute of English Studies. Participation in the Didactics course was one of requirements necessary to obtain teaching qualifications entitling them to work as secondary school teachers. The aim of the meetings was to familiarise the students with the proposals put forward in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as well as to present the implementation of these ideas in the Polish educational context.

In 2009 a new core curriculum was introduced in Polish schools. The curriculum is not directly based on the CEFR but contains numerous references to this European document. It is therefore important to present new ideas, such as mediation, domains, curricular scenarios or 'learning to learn', in a wider European perspective. The worksheets applied helped to progress from explaining the theoretical aspects to their practical implementation within the curriculum, syllabi, course books and various assessment tools.

Curriculum objectives and domains and strategies (worksheet B)

MATERIALS: Worksheet B	table 5 (unit4, the CEFR)
ELT course books Syllabi 4 large sheets of paper	

Having discussed the idea of domains in language education (on the basis of Task 1 in *Worksheet A: Domains: the context of use of the language*), the trainees were asked to identify how different domains are incorporated in the syllabi and course books used in their educational context. For this purpose, *Worksheet B: Curriculum objectives and domains and strategies* was applied. As the course aimed at qualifying secondary school teachers, the trainees focused on the age group they wished to teach in the future. They were asked to think about their expectations, interests, plans for the future as well as educational and professional needs.

At the beginning of the meeting, to revise the knowledge about domains, each group of trainees was given a large sheet of paper with the name of a different category (i.e. personal, public, occupational and educational) and then asked to imagine how these domains can be presented and practised in ELT course books for secondary school level. The names of specific tasks were placed on the sheets in the form of a mind-map. The outcomes were collected and retained until later.

Before the meeting, the students had been asked to select different syllabi available for the target group – either prepared by other teachers or publishers. Then, in pairs, they focused on the parts of syllabi devoted to learning objectives pertaining to different aspects of language learning. Following the suggestions in *Worksheet B*, trainees identified the variety of domains specified in the learning objectives and evaluated their relevance to the learners' present and future needs. In this step they consulted table 5, unit 4 from the CEFR which provided different situations and aspects characteristic of each domain. To conclude this part of the task, trainees held a plenary to compare their evaluation of different syllabi.

In the next step, the trainees were asked to review a number of secondary school ELT course books and identify whether the application of domains complies with learning objectives specified in the syllabus. Moreover, they were supposed to find examples of different activities that aimed at developing language learners' competence in different domains. Table 5, unit 4 from the CEFR proved useful here as it provided numerous examples of specific locations, persons, operations or texts describing external contexts of language use.

In the final stage, the trainees compared the outcomes of the mind-maps prepared at the beginning of the session with the actual realisation of the domains in the course books and discussed to what extent the syllabi and course books prepare the learners to communicate successfully in diverse contexts.

Professional Development and Reflexivity (worksheet B)

Report of an experience and suggestion for a possible use

Jane Jones, PhD
Head of MFL Teacher Education, King's College, London

This topic is a very good one to do with teachers with experience as it requires revisiting one's assumptions about teaching. Having looked at the 'Methodological choices for language teaching' worksheet A, and identified teacher roles and responsibilities fairly briefly, I did this worksheet B with a Masters class in the University setting. It also suited the mixed cultural contexts that included Spanish, French, Israeli, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Japanese and English, as well as their multiple experiences in terms of length of teaching experience and type of teaching, ranging from young children to adult learners.

I gave out the worksheets a week in advance to enable the teachers to begin thinking and in order to plan to share their reflections and action plans. They already had the guide and had some familiarity with it. Prior to the session, the teachers had done the reading and had worked with a colleague to discuss points in common and of difference. They came to the session with their notes. It is perhaps more fruitful when the learning time is not spent passively reading or making notes but involves sharing, discussing, questioning and peer assessing.

They wrote up key words and phrases from their own research and put pictures on posters that they put on the wall and presented. An example was as follows:

Maria

Common

Plan for communicative activities, use newspaper articles as well as text books, have good rapport with the students

Differences

I look more to promote speaking opportunities. My lessons are noisier but my students are less afraid to talk. I spend a lot of time with the weaker students.

Why the difference?

Our personalities and also I am less organised and can't stand students getting bored so I make changes without planning when necessary.

What can I learn and do?

Students benefit from knowing what to expect so I should be more structured. I plan to include more feedback and seize opportunities to push their learning. I need to enable the weaker students to help themselves more. I plan to teach them more strategies.

What: My everyday lessons, how to make them interesting, what to do the same or the following day.

Where: By the beach near my home.

When: Everyday when I jog before going to school. Weekends.

How: I plan what to do in the very short term and question how my lessons went almost daily.

Lucie

Common points

Both use interactive white boards, and lesson plans of starter, main course and plenary, and extensive feedback

Differences

My colleague (in the USA) uses the text book more, does not do much repetition, does more group work and expects more independent work and research from the learners.

Why the difference?

The colleague's learners already know the language quite well so need less teacher direction. He is able to take risks and try new things. The class is very small and they learn like sponges. I am much more restricted.

What can I learn and do?

I want to find ways to develop more independent learning by mapping out activities that will enable students to be confident and I will use more formative assessment to build that confidence.

I think a reflective teacher reflects on their practice all the time but they might not realise it! For me this happens when...

Here I am in some of my reflexive moments:

I attend a subject meeting and my colleagues and I share good practice

I surf the internet and MFL for innovative ideas

I plan my lessons (taking into account previous learning)

I observe a colleague teach

I am driving back from work and mentally recapping on the day

I am sleeping!!

The reading is particularly interesting in that it suggests that reflexivity is very active in requiring conscious attention and focused thinking. The group thought it was useful to share practice, something they don't often have the time to do. They learnt small but significant things from each other and saw that they had more choices than they thought in terms of teaching approach. This complements the CEFR sections that emphasize choice and flexibility and learning through collaboration.

Samples of worksheets

Worksheet A: Sociolinguistic competence

WORKSHEET A	
Title	Sociolinguistic Competence
Objective(s)	To become aware of sociocultural norms in order to consider them in the languages learning/teaching process
Keywords	Communicative effectiveness – interaction – sociolinguistic competence – sociocultural competence – action-oriented approach – context
Ref to the guide 0, III.2	**Ref to the CEFR** 2.1.2, 5.2.2

➜**Task A**

Step 1 (♦)
Think about two languages you know and compare them, considering differences in relation to the sociolinguistic dimension. Explain it using keywords or examples.

Sociolinguistic competence	Language	Language ....
address forms		
rules of politeness		
norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups		
linguistic codification of number of fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community		

Step 2 (♦ ♦) / (♦ ♦ ♦)
Discuss how to take into account sociolinguistic competence in the language you teach.

➜Task B

Step 1 (♀ ♀)
Think about experiences both in your life and in your learning path as a language learner (either in your country while in contact with foreign people or when you were abroad), and write a story about one (or two) of these experiences (between 400 and 600 words).
Share your stories with a partner.

➜Task C (♀ ♀)

Interaction plays a central role both in the usage and the learning of a language. It is also connected with sociolinguistic factors, such as register, linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expressions of folk-wisdom, dialect and accent.
Based on your shared experiences, prepare a card with some advice for your learners to take part in effective interaction. Take into consideration the possible cultural differences between the interlocutors.

➜Task D (♀ ♀)

Examine a teaching syllabus or a textbook and observe the importance given to the sociolinguistic factors.

Worksheet B: Sociolinguistic competence

WORKSHEET B	
Title	Sociolinguistic Competence
Objective(s)	To be able to exchange information effectively To reflect on sociolinguistic competence
Keywords	action-oriented approach – politeness – impoliteness – registers

Ref to the guide III. 2, III.3, III.4, III.5	Ref to the CEFR 2.1.2, 5.2.2

➔Task A (∮ ∮)

Starting with the definition of competence given by the CEFR and questions relating to language use, (5.2.2, see also Worksheet A Sociolinguistic competence) suggest some tasks for learners to do.

Questions relating to language use	Suggested activities/ tasks to do
Indicators of social relationships	
Rules of politeness	
Common wise sayings	
Difference in register	
Dialect and accent	

➔Task B (∮ ∮)

Think about the notion of 'interethnic misunderstandings' (CEFR 5.2.2.2 p. 93), in particular regarding politeness by default and impoliteness. How could these translate into concrete attitudes?

Politeness by default	Impoliteness

How can positive politeness, on the other hand, correspond to the principle of cooperation? (see also 5.2.3.1).

➔**Task C (♱ ♱ ♱)**

Read the following definition taken from the CEFR (Difference in register 5.2.2.4 p. 120):

> In early learning (say up to level B1), a relatively neutral register is appropriate, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise. It is this register that native speakers are likely to use towards and expect from foreigners and strangers generally. Acquaintance with more formal or more familiar registers is likely to come over a period of time, perhaps through the reading of different text-types, particularly novels, at first as a receptive competence. Some caution should be exercised in using more formal or more familiar registers, since their inappropriate use may well lead to misinterpretation and ridicule.

Starting from the following questions and from your experiences of learning and teaching, discuss in the group:

▪ Can you imagine 'overarching reasons' that could involve the use of a less neutral register?

▪ Why can reading novels lead to a 'familiarity with more formal and more familiar registers'?

▪ What could 'inappropriate use' of more formal or more familiar registers be?

ECEP

Pathways through assessing, learning and teaching in the CEFR
Parcours d'évaluation, d'apprentissage et d'enseignement à travers le CECR
http://ecep.ecml.at

Worksheet A: Assessment: actors, modalities and reasons

WORKSHEET A	
Title	Assessment: actors, modalities and reasons
Objective(s)	Reflect on the different types of evaluation according to CEFR
Keywords	formative / summative – peer evaluation / self-assessment – evaluation on a scale / on a checklist
Ref to the guide IV. 8	**Ref to the CEFR** 9.3.5, 9.3.9, 9.3.13

➔**Task A (� ♛)**

Step 1 (♛ ♛ ♛)
Elicit a collective reflection through a brainstorming on two fundamental types of evaluation formative vs. summative by drawing two separate spidergrams, one for each type (you may have, in the case of formative assessment: assessing the content of a course, providing feedback to the learner ... in the case of summative assessment: assigning a note ...):

Step 2 (♛ ♛)
Read paragraph 4.8 of the Guide and complete the following table:

Type of assessment	why ?	by whom?	when?	how ?	what is being assessed?
Formative					
Summative					
assessment by others					
self-assessment					
rating on a scale					
rating on a checklist					

→Task B

Step 1 (⸙)
Here is a list of assessment activities that a teacher can make with learners, or invite learners to make. Rate the activities listed below on a continuum going from summative to formative. To do this, place the numbers corresponding to the activities on the line below in what you consider the most appropriate position.

formative _____ summative

1.   The teacher gives the learners a test at the end of the module/course and provides an evaluation grid

2.   The teacher asks the learners to work in pairs to formulate a criteria to assess the test and to apply it in test evaluation;

3.   The teacher marks (numbers or letters) the performance of the learners. The marks are based on explicit criteria: he prepares a scale of points and then attributes the marks;

4.   The teacher provides a set of criteria for the learners to evaluate themselves;

5.   The teacher encourages students to create a grid to evaluate the task that they will perform:
     a. The teacher will use the scale to evaluate the task performed;
     b. The learners will use the scale to assess the task performed;

6.   The teacher writes a brief comment about the performance (e.g. "you are making progress" or "You need to work harder") in order to give the learner a feedback before the final exam;

7.   The teacher gives learners a test in the form of "mock examination" and gives them their test back with remarks and error analysis;

8.   The teacher asks the students to evaluate each other:
     a. during the module using:
        i. criteria developed by the teacher;
        ii. criteria developed by the students.
     b. At the end of the module using:
        i. criteria developed by the teacher;
        ii. criteria developed by the students.

9.   The teacher gives an entry test to get a diagnosis on learners' skills

10.   The teacher talks with a learner about a written production. He comments the qualities and errors of a performance. They discuss length, coherency and language accuracy of the text.

Step 2 (⦙ ⦙)

Compare your classifications and justify your choice. What are the criteria you use to evaluate the formative aspect of an activity?

Example:

- An activity helps learners to appreciate their strengths, recognize their weaknesses

- …………………………………………………………………………………………

- …………………………………………………………………………………………

- …………………………………………………………………………………………

- …………………………………………………………………………………………

Read paragraph 9.3.5 of the CEFR on formative and summative assessment. You may find it useful to complete the list concerning formative assessment.

➔Task C

Step 1 (⦙)

The CEFR indicates that "assessment can achieve correlations to teachers' assessments and tests" (CEFR 9.3.13). In what sense can self-evaluation be complementary?

Considering the activities indicated in the grid below (evaluation by others and self-evaluation), assess their possible advantages by choosing from those indicated in following list.

Things will be clearer if:

- when you chose wide categories like "reinforce motivation", you also add other possible benefits,

- when you chose "enhance learners' awareness", you specify what kind of awareness you are referring to.

If you find other positive points put it in the item "other".

Activities	Benefits
Example: The learner keeps a diary where he evaluates the success of his/her learning strategies.	*B + C (learning strategies) + D + E*
1. The learner keeps a diary where he evaluates the success of his/her learning strategies.	
2. The teacher gives a mark (global evaluation) for a test where grammar, vocabulary, writing and reading were tested.	
3. The learner corrects him/herself a grammar exercise, referring to the answer key provided by the teacher.	
4. The teacher meets the learner to talk about the assessment of his competences in oral interaction and encourage the learner to make a self-assessment.	
5. The teacher invites the learner to reflection upon what he/she learned during the course or the sequence of lessons.	
6. The teacher assesses the written production using a scale of criteria. He explains the critera to the learners.	
7. The learner reworks his/her written production using feedback given by the teacher.	
8. The learner watches a video of his/her oral presentation and evaluates it using criteria provided by the teacher.	
9. The learner reads a text and then answers the question in the questionnaire about the strategies he/she used while performing the reading activity.	
10. The learner selects the examples of production he wants to include in the portfolio to demonstrate the competences achieved.	

Benefits
A) Help the learner to define his/her learning objectives.
B) Promote the involvement of the learner and enhance motivation.
C) Enhance learners' awareness.
D) Promote learners' autonomy.
E) Help the learner to be focused on the learning process (not only on the results)
F) Promotes appropriation of the evaluation criteria by the learner.
G) Allows the teacher to learn about the effectiveness of his teaching.
H) Help the learner to realize the gap between performance and objectives (in terms of level, quality of performance, errors, etc…).
I) Other:

Step 2 (♦ ♦ or ♦ ♦ ♦)
In groups or in pairs share your reflection about "Step 1" and determine the characteristics of activities that bring the biggest benefits for the learner.

➔**Task D** (♦ ♦ ♦)

Read paragraph 9.3.9 of the CEFR and consider both the indicated scales and check-lists from the ELP. Think about the advantages and limitations of scales and checklists in relation to formative / summative and mutual / self-assessment.

Worksheet B: Assessment: actors, modalities and reasons

WORKSHEET B	
Title	Assessment: actors, modalities and reasons
Objective(s)	Raising awareness about different types of assessment according to the CEFR
Keywords	formative/summative assessment – assessment by others / self-assessment – assessment on a scale / on a checklist
Ref to the guide IV. 8	**Ref to the CEFR** 4, 5, 9.3.5, 9.3.9, 9.3.13

➔**Task A (ɨ ɨ ɨ)**

The CEFR gives examples of grids, which can be used for summative or formative assessment, depending on the moment, the aims or the learning context. Below is an excerpt from p. 28, *qualitative aspects of spoken language use*. Read it carefully and underline the passages that help to target assessment (for example "without much conspicuous searching for words", "few noticeably long pauses"). Discuss it with your colleagues.

	Range	Accuracy	Fluency	Interaction	Coherence
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions. There are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.

				familiar ground confirming comprehen- sion, inviting others in, etc.	

You will then work on some teachers' evaluations expressed in the form of a commentary. Although the form is different, the basic principle is the same: key aspects are highlighted in order to guide judgement. The form used can contribute to making the assessment more personal.

➔Task B

Step 1 ( ) or ( )

Narrative evaluations can be used for summative assessment at the end of a course.

a.   Read this text [3] about a student's skills in listening comprehension and oral production and take note of the different elements on which information is given.

> Mayumi was a very good student. She demonstrated very good listening and speaking skills, and she participated well during class discussions. […] On tests of conversations skills, she demonstrated very good use of some phrases and excellent use of strategies she learned in class. She is skilled at getting her conversation partner to speak. On tape journal assignments, Mayumi was able to respond appropriately to a lecture in class, and she generally provided good reasons to support her opinions. She also demonstrated her ability to respond to classmates' opinions. When the topic is interesting to her, Mayumi is particularly effective in communicating her ideas. On the final exam, Mayumi was able to determine the main ideas of a taped lecture and to identify many details. In her final exam conversation, she was able to maintain a conversation with me and offer excellent advice on language learning and living in a new culture. Her pronunciation test shows that her stress, intonation, and fluency have improved since the beginning of the semester. […]

Draw on the CEFR to find more elements the assessment of listening and oral production could focus on.

b.   Make a list of these elements and share it with a colleague.

---

3   Brown H. Douglas (2004), *Language Assessment : Principles and Classroom Practices,* White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

Step 2 (╟)

Write a similar evaluation about one of your students' written production. If you are not teaching at the moment, refer to one of your (former) students. Draw on some scales of descriptors in chapters 4 (such as 4.4.1.2 and 4.4.1.3) and 5 (such as 5.2.1) of the CEFR in order to give as many details as possible.

Step 3 (╟ ╟ ╟)

These evaluations are summative and their purpose is to provide other people with information. However, they could be formative for students if they also aimed at providing information detailed enough to help them improve their learning.
Here is what the CEFR (9.3.5) states about formative assessment:

> Feedback only works if the recipient is in a position
>
> (a) *to notice*, i.e. is attentive, motivated and familiar with the form in which the information is coming,
>
> (b) *to receive*, i.e. is not swamped with information, has a way of recording, organising and personalising it;
>
> (c) *to interpret*, i.e. has sufficient pre-knowledge and awareness to understand the point at issue, and not to take counterproductive action and
>
> (d) *to integrate* the information, i.e. has the time, orientation and relevant resources to reflect on, integrate and so remember the new information. This implies self-direction, which implies training towards self-direction, monitoring one's own learning, and developing ways of acting on feedback.
> Such learner training or awareness raising has been called évaluation formatrice.

In groups, read the evaluations written by each teacher in step 2 and choose one of them. Discuss possible steps to ensure that this type of assessment is transparent and beneficial to the learners. Refer to concrete activities to be conducted with students throughout the learning process.

Example:
Ask learners to determine assessment criteria for a written task: it will raise their awareness, and help them internalise and use them to assess and improve their own production.

➔Task C

Step 1 (╟ ╟ ╟)

In groups, agree on a list of assessment activities that can be used with learners. Insert them in the grid below (one per line). For example:

▪ mark an assignment

▪ comment on a written assignment

- comment on someone's ability to take turns in spoken interaction

- determine the content of a test

- …………………………………………………………………………

- …………………………………………………………………………

- …………………………………………………………………………

Step 2 (♀)

Indicate who carries out these activities most often in your classes, the teacher or the learners? If you are not teaching at the moment, refer to teaching situations you have experienced, either as a learner or a teacher.

You may indicate approximations of percentages (the percentages given are just examples):

Activities	Carried out by …	
	The teacher	**The students (on their own production)**
mark an assignment	100% (always)	0% (never)
comment on a written assignment	80%	20%
comment on someone's ability to ▪ take turns in spoken interaction ▪ determine the content of a test	 50% 60%	 50% 40%

➜Task D (� figures)

Discuss your results (task 2, step 2) with your colleagues. The following questions may help you:

- Who is responsible for most of the activities related to assessment, the teacher or the students? Why?

- Are there any marked differences in your practices? Discuss them and explain your choices and habits.

- As for teacher-conducted activities, could they be shared with students? Would that be beneficial? Why/why not?

➜Task E (� figure) then (� figures)

Think about assessment techniques in your own teaching practice. Do they serve mainly formative or summative purposes? Discuss reasons (You may find the following examples useful):

- Closed questions

- Essays

- Oral discussions

- Portfolios

- Observation

- ……………..

Discuss your answers with your colleagues. Is it possible to use the forms implemented as summative assessment in a more formative way? Make a SWOT (strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats) analysis of the different options.

Pathways through assessing, learning and teaching in the CEFR
Parcours d'évaluation, d'apprentissage et d'enseignement à travers le CECR
http://ecep.ecml.at

Part 2

A kit

All the material is provided on the CD-Rom

Introduction to the kit

This kit includes *Worksheets A* (more conceptual) and *Worksheets B* (more focused on practice and class activities).

The worksheets have been devised to be a flexible tool so every teacher/teacher trainer can decide freely in what order to use them. However, scenarios of usage and reports of experiences are presented in the ECEP guide.

Below the title, each worksheet presents the goals, the keywords and the references both to the guide (sections of the ECEP guide concerned) and to the CEFR (chapter and sections of the CEFR where the main subject of the worksheet is treated).

In the cases where some additional material is required to complete the worksheet, there is the indication: "To complete this worksheet you'll need …"

Each worksheet contains one or more tasks, and each task contains one or more steps too.

Next to each task there is an indication of the working arrangements:

(⋔)   = Individual work

(⋔ ⋔)   = Pair work

(⋔ ⋔ ⋔)   = Group work

Sales agents for publications of the Council of Europe
Agents de vente des publications du Conseil de l'Europe