

## **The CEFR: towards a road map for future research and development**

**Report on a seminar sponsored by EALTA and UKALTA and  
organized by the British Council**

**St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, Friday 7 and Saturday 8 February 2020**

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In the two decades since its publication, the CEFR has established itself as an indispensable reference point for all aspects of second and foreign language education – a position that has been reinforced by the publication of the CEFR Companion Volume. Used worldwide by individuals, institutions and policy makers in different contexts, with different aims and with varying degrees of rigour, the CEFR has become *de facto* an open source apparatus that is a great deal more than a collection of documents.

As associations of professionals in language testing and assessment, EALTA and UKALTA recognize the need to explore ways of developing research methodologies and projects of various kinds that can help to extend and further develop the CEFR and its implementation. Accordingly, they decided to organize a seminar to consider the possibility of creating a road map for future engagement with the CEFR, taking account of what has been learnt so far and of new developments in applied linguistics and related disciplines. The organizing team comprised members of EALTA, UKALTA and the British Council: Jamie Dunlea, Neus Figueras, Vincent Folny, David Little, Barry O’Sullivan and Mina Patel.

Hosted by the British Council at St Martin-in-the-Fields on Friday 7 and Saturday 8 February 2020, the seminar attracted 130 language education professionals working in the public and private sectors in 23 countries. On Friday the programme comprised an introduction to the CEFR Companion by Brian North, a panel that reviewed the impact of the CEFR beyond Europe, and a keynote speech by David Little. Saturday’s programme comprised three symposia, on the action-oriented approach, plurilingualism and mediation, and the use of descriptors. Each symposium included three perspectives: curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment.

The report that follows summarizes the presentations and the plenary discussions that followed them.

## **Friday 7 February**

### ***The CEFR Companion Volume project: what has been achieved – Brian North***

The CEFR's pioneering concepts were not fully developed in the 2001 book and have tended to be overlooked in practice. The Companion Volume aims to remedy this situation, operationalizing the concepts with a strong focus on the integration of competences, skills and artefacts in situated, social language use. In this way the Companion Volume broadens the scope of language education, taking account of both conceptual development and bottom-up classroom experimentation over the past twenty years. A conceptualization of mediation more in line with educational theory and mainstream education advocates more agency and creativity in action-oriented classroom tasks, while descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence encourage the inclusion of plurilingualism in curriculum aims. Provision of descriptors specific to signing competences will support the development of CEFR-based curricula for sign languages.

One new scale was added to each of the 2001 sets of scales for reception, production and interaction : *Reading as a leisure activity; Giving information; Using telecommunications*. Furthermore, written interaction was extended by a new section on online interaction. The descriptions for listening and reading (the latter a weak point of the 2001 scales) have been substantially improved, and for all the descriptor scales, the generally acknowledged dearth of descriptors at the top and bottom levels has been addressed. The 2001 seed "Tourist band" has been fully developed into Pre-A1, which is of particular relevance to young learners. In addition, there is a separately available compilation of CEFR-based descriptors for the age groups 7–10 and 11–15; these are juxtaposed with the descriptors of the main document. The "plus levels" have been more systematically fleshed out, and the distinction between "criterion levels" and "plus levels" has been emphasized in the accompanying text. All scales, new and old, now have a rationale printed with them to aid interpretation. The most radical change to the 2001 scales, however, is the complete replacement of the phonology scale, based on a review of research, with a further development of the validation methodology used in the main project.

In the 2020 edition of the Companion Volume, *all* descriptors have been made gender-neutral and modality-inclusive, the latter in order to accommodate sign languages. Overall, the Companion Volume project has provided a clearer definition of the action-oriented approach, clarified the links between mediation and plurilingualism, and suggested a direction of travel, a roadmap, towards an action-based pedagogy of plurilingualism.

## **Symposium - The CEFR: Learning, teaching, assessment in Europe and beyond**

***ACTFL and CEFR: Relationships, influences and looking forward*** – Meg Malone, ACTFL

The four meetings held between 2010 and 2013 to explore the relationship between the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the CEFR provided a strong basis for collaboration between organizations and individual researchers and resulted in an edited volume and numerous research publications. ACTFL's testing arm, Language Testing International, now offers some tests that can be rated according to either the CEFR or the ACTFL Guidelines. In addition, the revised ACTFL/NCSSFL Can-Do Statements are aligned to the CEFR. The most important impact of the ACTFL/CEFR outreach is international cooperation and understanding. Language experts, test developers and psychometricians from Europe and the US have come to understand each other's systems more thoroughly and have conducted research to crosswalk the two systems. This collaboration encourages us to reflect on ways to increase language assessment literacy in the context of both systems.

***The impact of the CEFR in Japan*** – Masashi Negishi, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

One of the most significant impacts of the CEFR in Japan is the creation of the CEFR-J: A modified version of the original CEFR to support the learning, teaching, and assessment of English in Japan. The fact that some Pre-A1 descriptors developed by the CEFR-J project were fed back into the Companion Volume shows principled localization may be able to contribute back to the original CEFR. The CEFR-J is now used to develop teaching resources for 27 other languages taught at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. In addition, a number of commercial tests used for university entrance have been aligned to the CEFR; CEFR-aligned English proficiency tests are used for a national survey of secondary school students; the use of Can Do descriptors in the Course of Study may well influence authorized textbooks and their use in the classroom; the CEFR is used as a reference point for teaching Japanese to foreign residents and workers; and the CEFR levels are used to indicate the difficulty of NHK English radio programmes. The great advantage of this trend is that it provides a broad and coherent framework for language learning, teaching, and assessment in Japan. However, people tend not to pay due attention to important concepts of the CEFR, such as the "action-oriented approach" or "learners as social agents", and some test providers wish to claim that their tests are aligned to the CEFR without following formal alignment procedures.

***The CEFR in four shapes*** – Barry O'Sullivan

Four shapes summarize the challenges posed by the CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume: a circle indicates their global reach, which leads to great diversity of understanding and reception; two rectangles stand for the two volumes, neither of which is dispensable; and a triangle stands for the CEFR's three interdependent focuses of concern: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. A road map for future research and development must take account of the CEFR's global reach, do full justice to both volumes, and create a balance between the three focuses of concern.

***Questions and issues raised in discussion***

- How can we transfer to other languages the large body of CEFR-related work done in English?
- How can we more effectively disseminate the policies and proposals contained in the Council of Europe's Platform of Resources and documents published by the OECD and the European Commission? Would that result in a common understanding of what principled, quality education entails?
- How can we identify the relevant stakeholders and push for teaching and learning that reflects the action-oriented approach?
- How can we counteract the often negative impact of assessment on teaching and learning?
- Could a publication which combined the 2001 CEFR and the Companion Volume contribute to the above?

### **Keynote presentation**

#### *The CEFR: challenges and some critical perspectives – David Little, Trinity College Dublin*

The impact of the CEFR has been mixed. Its early adoption by language testing agencies led to a substantial body of research, some of which fed back into the development of the Companion Volume. But its impact on curriculum and pedagogy has been much more difficult to discern, and the European Language Portfolio, conceived as a way of mediating the CEFR's ethos and descriptive scheme to language learners, seems to have sunk without trace. As we come to terms with the Companion Volume's extended bank of descriptors and its enlarged concept of mediation within and between languages, we must not lose sight of the human rights basis of Council of Europe language education policy; and we must persuade our colleagues that they still need to read the whole of the 2001 CEFR. Making systematic and effective use of the CEFR and its Companion Volume is the responsibility of member states and language education professionals; hence the decision to hold a seminar to explore the possibility of developing a road map for future research and development.

The CEFR's *action-oriented approach* to the description of language use and language proficiency implies pedagogical approaches that

1. assign a central and obligatory role to target language use that is
  - a. spontaneous and interactive, arising from the immediate concerns of the classroom, and
  - b. authentic, corresponding to the needs, interests and motivations of the learners;
2. treat learners as individuals and social agents, bearing in mind that
  - a. individual language learning is in part driven by interaction and framed by the collaboration that is essential to any effective learning community
  - b. the interaction/mediation that characterizes classroom talk should be genuinely dialogic, allowing learners their full share of discourse initiatives;
3. foster the development of learners' monitoring skills by engaging them in recursive reflection on the goals, processes and outcomes of their learning.

The Council of Europe's *plurilingual approach* to language education aims to develop "a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of languages contributes, and in which languages interrelate and interact" (CEFR 1.3). Understood in this way, plurilingualism challenges us to reconceptualize the goals and methods of language education. Its development in formal educational contexts is likely to depend on pedagogies that are informed by the CEFR's action-oriented approach and make use of all the linguistic resources available to the learners. The CEFR links its plurilingual approach sometimes to *pluriculturalism* and sometimes to *interculturalism*. Pluriculturalism means membership of two or more cultures, which entails identification with two or more sets of values, beliefs and practices and the acquisition of whatever competences are necessary for autonomous participation in the cultures concerned. Pluriculturalism may or may not be associated with plurilingualism; it is not easily achieved in contexts of formal learning, especially at a distance from relevant speech communities. Interculturalism means being open to cultural otherness and empathetic towards others, reflecting critically on cultural similarities and differences. It is a defining goal of language education programmes that are shaped by the Council of Europe's core values.

The CEFR is an instrument of *constructive alignment*; that is, it enables us to "constructively align" curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment. Each "can do" statement can be used simultaneously to specify a learning outcome, provide a learning focus and imply an assessment task; and the ELP's goal-setting and self-assessment checklists of "I can" descriptors are designed to draw learners into this dynamic. The CEFR's action-oriented approach implies that learners "construct" their proficiency by performing communicative tasks and monitoring task performance and the progress of their learning; interaction and mediation (in the enlarged sense of the Companion Volume) play an essential role. Collections of descriptors can be used to specify a target repertoire, imply a teaching/learning dynamic, and yield "I can" checklists for each phase of the course in question. Use of the CEFR as an instrument of constructive alignment may well be a precondition for successful implementation of the action-oriented and plurilingual approaches.

### ***Questions and issues raised in discussion***

- How can we promote sustained engagement with the CEFR and the Companion Volume? Will the publication of the Companion Volume revive interest in the CEFR? How can we encourage responsible use of the two documents?
- How can textbooks be improved? Would it be possible to develop a manual for aligning materials to the CEFR levels? Should the Manual for Relating Examinations become a manual for general constructive alignment?
- What is quality education? The Court of Human rights repeatedly insists that everyone is entitled to quality education, which for members of minorities entails social inclusion. The approach to teaching language(s) needs to be comprehensive.
- The concept of multiple literacies needs to be addressed in curriculum development.
- We need to be ambitious without losing touch with reality, which is many-faceted and infinitely diverse. It is important to identify who to reach and where to start. Perhaps a start could be made with initial teacher training?

- Can information technologies contribute to a new life for the much underused ELP?

## **Saturday 8 February**

### **Symposium 1 – The action-oriented approach in the CEFR and the Companion Volume: a change of paradigm?**

The three speakers were asked to address the following questions:

*Does the CV represent a change of paradigm as regards our understanding of the action-oriented approach? Does it make aspects of the CEFR’s descriptive scheme that were already present in the 2001 version more explicit? Or does it add completely new dimensions, especially in relation to mediation? Either way, how can the new content presented in the CV be reflected in curricula? Can it contribute to a stronger implementation of the action-oriented approach in the classroom? And what does it imply for test development?*

#### ***Mediation: a view from ELF-flexible multilingualism*** – Constant Leung, King’s College London

According to the Companion Volume, “A person who engages in mediation activity needs to have a well-developed emotional intelligence, or an openness to develop it, in order to have sufficient empathy for the viewpoints and emotional states of other participants in the communicative situation. . . . Particularly with regard to cross-lingual mediation, users should remember that this inevitably also involves social and cultural competence as well as plurilingual competence” (p. 106, emphasis added). This prompts the question: What is the construct? Do the levels index repertoires of cultural and topical knowledge as well as the underlying language and communication proficiencies? If emotional intelligence is involved, arguably the same speaker volition would undergird mediation efforts at all proficiency levels. As regards curricula, the Companion Volume opens up spaces for plurilingual classroom communication and promotes multilingualism in education; but the descriptors provide only partial capture of plurilingual mediation as an example of multilingual moments in English-language communication shows. Plurilingual mediation and emotional intelligence need to take account of situated language practices and participant sensibility, and in any assessment we need to find a way of allowing local stakeholders to have a say.

#### ***The action-oriented approach in the CEFR and the CV: a change of paradigm(s)?*** – John de Jong, Language Testing Services

The Companion Volume of itself does not represent a change of paradigm: both the action-oriented approach and the concept of plurilingualism are present in the 2001 CEFR, though their implications “have yet to be worked out and translated into action” (CEFR 1.3, p. 5). The Companion Volume nevertheless makes some elements of the CEFR’s descriptive scheme more explicit, providing a necessary elaboration of notions that are clearly signalled in the CEFR. This is especially true of mediation, and the question arises: will the enlarged concept

of mediation impact on assessment? Modern language testing already incorporates mediation in many of its tasks; attempts to devise more thoroughgoing assessment of mediation should take account of Preacher and Hayes (2008).<sup>1</sup> The European Language Portfolio was designed in part to “make it possible for learners to document their progress towards plurilingual competence” (CEFR 2.4, p. 20). Tests for translators and interpreters demand proficiency in more than one language, but they mostly address language pairs. There doesn’t seem to be a demand from score users for plurilingual language tests.

***The action-oriented approach in the CEFR and the CV: a case study from Spain – Mark Levy, British Council (Spain)***

When the Companion Volume was published, mediation was added as a separate communication skill to exams offered by the Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas (EOIs; Official Schools of Languages). This change also affected the school sector because in some autonomous regions the EOIs are responsible for assessing the proficiency of secondary students in bilingual programmes. It seems, however, to have made no significant impact on secondary school or EOI classrooms beyond the inclusion of a number of activities designed to prepare students for the new exams. There is also no evidence that teachers have adopted the action-oriented approach commended by the Companion Volume. This is hardly surprising. An informal survey of a small group of teachers, trainers, examiners and materials writers, some in the ELT sector and others in the state sector, showed that while there is some familiarity with the CEFR, especially amongst materials writers and examiners, very few had enough knowledge to, for example, chart a learning path from B1 to B2, barely anyone had heard of mediation in this context or seen the mediation scales, only the materials writers had seen the Companion Volume, and no one had heard of the action-oriented approach. There is clearly a huge information gap between assessment specialists who understand and use the CEFR and the Companion Volume and teachers in the classroom. Until this gap is bridged, any talk of a paradigm shift is premature, though the reality of mainstreamed bilingual education in Spain offers real possibilities for the action-oriented approach if teachers can be engaged

***Questions and issues raised in discussion***

- There is a need to clarify terminology and achieve a common understanding at all levels. Descriptor scales need to be looked at transversally.
- In the mediation scales, is it a mistake to assume that emotional intelligence is a given and stable? However this question is answered, emotional intelligence is not something to be measured.
- Geopolitical changes make a paradigm shift in language education both necessary and desirable.
- Educational change takes time, perhaps as long as a generation. We are currently experiencing the beginning of the paradigm shift envisaged in the 2001 CEFR.
- The difficulty of operationalizing mediation in an exam arises from the fact that exams focus on the individual whereas mediation is a social activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Contemporary Approaches to Assessing Mediation in Communication Research. In A. F. Hayes, M. D. Slater, & L. B. Snyder (Eds.), *The Sage Sourcebook of Advanced Data Analysis Methods for Communication Research* (pp. 13-54). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

- How should we assess effectiveness in communication? Can it be standardized? Is it scalable?
- Many of the concepts in the CEFR and the Companion Volume can help teaching/learning and classroom assessment but are not necessarily useful in standardized tests.
- Can we expect the current orientation of PISA surveys to have an impact on how CEFR concepts are understood?

## **Symposium 2 – Plurilingualism, plurilingual education and mediation**

The three speakers were asked to address the following questions:

*What kind of curricula are implied by the plurilingual and pluricultural/intercultural approach? What kinds of classroom practice are apt to develop plurilingual repertoires, and how should they deal with “culture”? And what are the implications of the plurilingual and pluricultural/intercultural approach for assessment?*

### ***Mediation as an essential element of curricula for plurilingual education – Bessie***

*Dendrinou, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens*

The Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (IFLC) was adopted in 2016 as the national foreign languages curriculum for compulsory education in Greece. It is a data-driven curriculum informed by a multilingual database containing detailed descriptions of the elements that define linguistic/communicative competences in the foreign languages currently offered in state schools in Greece (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Turkish). The database is used to specify benchmarks of language proficiency and to furnish comparable descriptions of scaled communicative performance across languages. The end-product differs from mainstream language curricula, even those aligned to the CEFR, because its content is documented with *empirical* language data. The IFLC database contains the reference level descriptors (common across languages) and language functions, grammatical features, lexical features and text types for each language at each CEFR level. One source of data informing the IFLC database is the Language Learner Profile Project (LLPP), which draws on analysis of the corpora derived from the KPG multilingual examination suite (for more information on the LLPP, go to [www.rcel.enl.uoa.gr](http://www.rcel.enl.uoa.gr)). KPG examination scripts are coded with sets of lexical, semantic and grammatical features, and automatically acquired frame semantic structures are used to capture lexical, semantic and grammatical features. The LLPP differs from similar projects in other languages because it includes systematic links between discrete types of competences while also attempting to make descriptions of competences comparable across languages. The research model created for the design of a multilingual curriculum provides a context for relating languages to one another, attending to learners’ plurilingual and intercultural competences, teaching learners to develop cross-lingual mediation skills, and encouraging language teachers to work together on projects involving two or more languages. The IFLC contains mediation descriptors for teaching and testing across languages. Cross-lingual mediation activities across

the curriculum usually involve Greek as the language of schooling and one of the foreign languages of the curriculum, but two or more foreign languages and students' home languages may also be used.

***Plurilingual education in practice: the example of an Irish primary school for girls –***

*Déirdre Kirwan, formerly principal of Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown*

Eighty per cent of Scoil Bhríde's 320 pupils come from immigrant families; between them they have more than 50 home languages; and most of them have little or no English when they start school at the age of 4½. Educational inclusion is at best partial if the languages pupils bring with them are excluded from the life of the school, so Scoil Bhríde encourages immigrant pupils to use their home languages inside as well as outside the classroom. Home languages are used in reciprocal communication between pupils who have the same or closely related home languages, for non-reciprocal purposes of display ("this is what we say in my language"), and as a source of intuitive linguistic knowledge that is shared with the rest of the class. The school's approach produces unusually high levels of language awareness; minority-language pupils develop native-like proficiency in English and literacy in their home language; all pupils show an unusually positive attitude to learning Irish (the proficiency they achieve puts Scoil Bhríde in the top 12% of primary schools); and from an early age they undertake ambitious autonomous learning initiatives. Including home languages in the life of the school promotes pupil well-being, self-esteem and social cohesion. In the standardized tests that pupils take each year from the age of 6½+ to 11½+ the school performs consistently above the national average.

***Plurilingualism, plurilingual education, mediation: some thoughts about constructs and tasks for assessment – Peter Lenz, University of Fribourg and HEP Fribourg***

Mediation involves different channels, different languages and a host of different types of activities; it is thus not a construct. The existence of mediation scales does not mean that it is obligatory to test mediation, but we can and should produce assessments of mediation skills consisting of mediation activities. In doing so, we should focus on communicative proficiency with regard to tasks set in defined real-life domains. All participants in a mediation process are equally important; none of them can be ignored. The mediator facilitates understanding, provides encouragement and establishes common ground. These features are often more important than "faster–higher–stronger" or "complex–accurate–fluent", which prompts the question: Is assessment of communication necessarily the same thing as assessment of language. The Occupational English Tests subtest of speaking, for example, which assesses the oral communication skills of healthcare professionals, provides an example. The test tasks are role-play interactions between caregivers and patients/relatives of patients, and the rating scheme comprises five clinical criteria (*Relationship building, Understanding and incorporating the patient's perspective, Providing structure, Information gathering, Information giving*) and four linguistic criteria (*Intelligibility, Fluency, Appropriateness of language, Resources of grammar and expression*). A second example concerns the assessment of future Elementary School teachers' oral teaching skills in a foreign language class. The CEFR level required for the teaching degree is C1; pupils are mostly below A1. The task is to communicate a story from a

children's book to the class and to activate the pupils. This involves a variety of mediation activities from at least three mediation scales – *Processing text in speech*, *Managing interaction*, *Encouraging conceptual talk* – performed at different CEFR levels. In this case the progression criteria of the scales do not appear very useful; context-specific criteria are needed that reward language appropriate to the target group. This suggests that we should resist hypnosis by scales and levels and focus on the actual training and assessment needs of real people. The action-oriented approach and the extended descriptive scheme are extremely helpful, but we should use them responsibly and with self-confidence.

### ***Questions and issues raised in discussion***

- Are we “constructing” the meaning of mediation? Will it become a construct? Should it?
- Is there a danger of “reducing” mediation when engaging in task specification?
- Does the Companion Volume neglect lower level learners?
- There is a need to adopt whole-school approaches to plurilingual education, taking full account of context and available resources.

### **Symposium 3 – Descriptors in curriculum, classroom and assessment**

The three speakers were asked to address the following questions:

*Which descriptors can be incorporated in curricula, classroom practice and assessment? How? Why? Will they facilitate the localization of language programmes and assessment? How can or should objectives and outcomes be communicated so that they support rather than constrain comparability, avoiding a return to “Is my B1 the same as your B1?”*

#### ***Commonality vs. localization in curricula*** – Elaine Boyd, Institute of Education, University College London

Before considering how curricula might be developed with some degree of alignment across language communities with differing needs and a variety of educational policies, it's useful to consider how the CEFR has been used prior to the publication of the Companion Volume. Arguably, mapping to the CEFR often involves retrofitting, which can lead to messy alignments across communities. There has been a strong focus on using the descriptors to develop test constructs, especially as the language teaching community has become more literate in assessment principles. This focus is understandable, and arguably a useful driver for desired competences, but not ideal as it can limit broader and deeper learning. Publishers can drive curricula, sometimes informed by the testing ambitions or needs of the market, and again this is often a rather clumsy retrofit to the broad CEFR levels. In looking forward, the number of new descriptors is potentially overwhelming but of course allows much more flexibility for localisation of domains. There are likely to be two challenges for curriculum developers: how to choose a manageable set of descriptors and/or how to prioritize; and how we, as a whole community, agree on the evidence needed for any alignment. In terms of localization, should we be investigating the notion that less is more? Flexibility does not need to limit learning;

indeed, it can promote deeper learning. At the same time, we need to take on board the contemporary focus on autonomous learning and self-regulation because how students learn is shifting, but not what they learn. In terms of alignment, the route may be to come up to the highest level in the CEFR and ask for evidence that shows alignment of the broadest communicative skills, much as universities ask for generic cognitive skills to show alignment of credit bearing courses.

***Refining the vertical axis of the CEFR for classroom purposes – Armin Berger, University of Vienna***

The CEFR has a horizontal as well as a vertical axis. The former refers to communicative activities, strategies and competences that learners engage in, whereas the latter refers to progress in these three dimensions. The CEFR's common reference levels and illustrative descriptors are a useful source for the definition of learning objectives and levels of attainment. However, if practitioners want to target, measure and report even small gains in learning, they need to extend, adapt and subdivide the descriptors at the broad levels to meet the needs of the local context. This applies particularly to the C levels. Although the new descriptors in the Companion Volume are a considerable improvement on the 2001 CEFR, further subdivisions of the C levels are needed in many contexts. To date, research has tended to focus on what is criterial at different CEFR levels; less attention has been paid to progression within the levels. A project carried out at the University of Vienna has sought to refine the vertical axis at the C levels, where progress tends to be slower and less obvious than at the lower levels. One of the outcomes of the project is a finer, empirically-based differentiation for academic speaking at C1 and C2 in the form of five local reference points: *Effective operational*, *Full operational*, *General academic*, *Advanced academic*, *Full academic*. These characterize vertical progression in a way that is more precise than the level specifications in the CEFR but not so specific that they lose their referential nature. The local reference points were developed by submitting the descriptors to keyword analysis. Instruments of this kind can help to localize language learning, teaching and assessment while at the same time ensuring comparability. Future projects that focus on other language activities could further enhance our understanding of the CEFR.

***The CEFR: a road map for future research and development – an assessment perspective – Elif Kantarcioglu, Bilkent University***

The CEFR's contribution to the field of assessment has increased considerably with the publication of the Companion Volume. In particular, the mediation descriptors, which focus on more than just language skills, make assessment in academic contexts more meaningful. They allow us to define test specifications more fully, capture more detailed expectations in marking schemes, and provide more satisfactory learner profiles. They also bring challenges: Which mediation scales should we refer to? And are we dealing with mediation or integrated skills (which are included in all mediation descriptors)? The complexity of the mediation skills described in the Companion Volume poses new challenges for standard-setting practices. Further research and development should include the revision of the manual for linking tests to the

CEFR: the specification forms need to be revised, it might be possible to include an integrated skills section, and overlaps across scales should be addressed (e.g. *Writing reports and essays* and *Processing text*). Also, the Content Analysis Grids should be recast according to modes of communication rather than the four skills; rhetorical features could be expanded to accommodate mediation; and it might be possible to design a grid for mediation tasks. We also need construct validation of mediation tasks and calibrated samples for mediation tasks, grammar and vocabulary tasks, and speaking.

### ***Questions and issues raised in discussion***

- Descriptors should be adapted rather than adopted.
- Curricula and syllabi are much smaller than we think but not nearly deep enough. A B1 curriculum doesn't need to include every part of B1.
- All CEFR-related initiatives should be documented.
- How should learner needs be included in language education policy?
- How can we help students to understand the CEFR descriptors? They sometimes have their own view of concepts like "reasonable grammatical accuracy" and may want to use descriptors in a different way from ourselves. Constructive alignment should involve learners.
- The "triangle" of curriculum, teaching/learning, assessment should always take account of the national and local context.
- Teacher education often uses textbooks that are often based on long-standing/long-established curricula that are not reviewed for potentially changing learner needs when new content is produced, so one task for the future might be to produce a CEFR-based textbook for use with student teachers.
- Over the last 35 years Japan has experience continuous educational reform, but classrooms are still configured as they were decades ago. As a consequence, most learners remain at A1 level.

### ***Concluding discussion***

The organizers thanked all the speakers and the audience for their contributions and proposed that David Little's final slide should be used to frame the concluding discussion:

## Steps towards a road map for future research and development

### Assessment

- Language testing and assessment professionals and associations are already fully involved

### Alignment of curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment

- Identify examples of established and evolving practice
  - Universities
  - The semi-state and private sectors
  - Deaf Studies / sign language teachers

### Action-oriented and plurilingual approaches

- Identify varieties of implementation
- Research classroom practice

### Engaging the profession

- Establish a network of associations and agencies to
  - share experience
  - encourage CEFR-related activities
  - organize events
  - coordinate publications
  - launch research projects, e.g. to update the Manual
- Promote awareness of the CEFR and its ethos
  - Founded on Council of Europe values
  - Learning before teaching before assessment
- Draw on CEFR-related and other research to clarify and amplify the theoretical underpinning and practical implementation of key concepts

The following issues were raised by the audience:

- We need to look towards the future while looking to the past and not losing sight of the present. In doing so, we need to encourage sustained engagement on the part of all language education professionals.
- We need to identify synergies and commonalities amongst the many documents published by the Council of Europe, other European institutions and the OECD in order to achieve a full understanding of education policies in the twenty-first century, not losing sight of the need to educate plurilingual democratic citizens.
- We need to remember the political dimension in the CEFR, to promote its effective use, and to identify uses that need to be revised, e.g. those that involve migrants and minority languages.
- It may be possible to inform teachers and school principals by creating working groups/task forces, involving teacher organizations and teacher training institutions, and developing and disseminating teacher-friendly documents. We should also not forget other stakeholders.
- If our aim is to educate plurilingual democratic citizens, we might begin by exploring the links between dialogue (democratic competences) and mediation. Another starting point might be to focus on quality education from the perspective of the whole institution, including principals and managers, looking at synergies between descriptors against a background of values (linking values in the CEFR to the bigger picture of Council of Europe values).
- We need to find a way of signalling to colleagues in language teaching and curriculum development the affordances offered by the CEFR. Teaching and assessing the language of schooling goes some way beyond the CEFR; we need to explain this limitation

- The CEFR is a political instrument, so we need to think about uses that are good and uses that are not so good. Do we need satellite studies that focus on different contexts? Progress in the implementation of Council of Europe policies and the use of its tools depends very much on the member states. With the CEFR in mind, it is worth recalling that EAQUALS, ALTE and EALTA have participatory status with the Council of Europe.
- It might be worth organizing an event at which CEFR SIGs could share success stories that would be published in proceedings.
- We should not overlook the usefulness of joint events that reach beyond field-specific groups.

The organizers invited Lynda Taylor and Peter Lenz, presidents of UKALTA and EALTA respectively, to address the participants. They thanked the organizers, the speakers and the audience for their contributions and reaffirmed the commitment of their organizations to future activities relative to the CEFR and the Companion Volume. Lynda Taylor wondered how effective the assessment community is in its efforts to use the CEFR. Do we need to find alternative ways of communicating what we think we understand about the CEFR and its implications? How do we engage in dialogue with other communities? It's not our job to tell them what to do: we need to be better listeners and engage together. She suggested that we should aspire to fulfil the C2 descriptor in the scale for *Overall mediation*, though we might ourselves avoid the use of sarcasm:

*Can mediate effectively and naturally, taking on different roles according to the needs of the people and situation involved, identifying nuances and undercurrents and guiding a sensitive or delicate discussion. Can explain in clear, fluent, well-structured language the way facts and arguments are presented, conveying evaluative aspects and most nuances precisely, and pointing out sociocultural implications (e.g. use of register, understatement, irony and sarcasm).*

Finally, the organizers informed the audience that they would prepare and circulate a report of the seminar that would be used to guide the next steps towards a road map for CEFR-related research and development. In the educational ecosystem that had been described and discussed over the past two days, the field of assessment would play a leading role.

Report compiled by the event organizers. March 2020.