Updating and extending the CEFR Descriptors:

Brian North

Descriptor Development (North 2000)

Intuitive Phase:
- Creating a pool of classified, edited descriptors

Qualitative Phase:
- Analysis of teachers discussing proficiency
- 32 teacher workshops sorting descriptors into categories

Quantitative Phase:
- Teacher assessment of their learners at end year assessment point on descriptor-checklists (circa 300 teachers, 2800 learners)
- Teacher assessment of videos of some of the same learners to further link the data set

Interpretative Phase:
- Setting "cut-points" between the common reference levels

Validity Claim

Developed scientifically:
- comprehensive documentation of existing descriptions
- relation to theory through descriptive scheme
- positive, independent criterion-descriptors
- checking teachers could use categories & descriptors
- data from real, end-of-year assessment
- four educational sectors in a multi-lingual environment
- three foreign languages (English, French, German)
- values replicated in follow-up studies:
  - Basel self-assessment 0.99: ALTE 0.97; DIALANG: 0.92 / 0.96; Pearson 0.97

Communicative Activities

![Diagram of Communicative Activities]

- Overall Language Proficiency
  - Communicative Strategies
  - Communicative Language Competencies
  - Communicative Activities
  - Reception
  - Production
  - Interaction
  - Mediation
  - Spoken
  - Written
  - Understanding a native speaker
  - Informal Discussion
  - Formal Discussion
  - Obtaining Goods and Services
  - Interviewing & being interviewed

Graphical representation of Communicative Activities.
Aspects of Competence

- Overall language Proficiency
  - Communicative Strategies
    - Linguistic
      - Range
      - Control
    - Sociolinguistic
    - Pragmatic
  - Language Competencies
    - Grammatical Accuracy
    - Phonological Control
    - Vocabulary Control
    - Orthographic Control
  - Communicative Activities

Cut-off Range on scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Cut-off</th>
<th>Range on scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>(no descriptors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2+</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1+</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2+</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>-2.21</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>-3.23</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-A1</td>
<td>-4.29</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow up projects - Calibrated

- ALTE ‘Can Dos’ 1991
- Finnish AMMKIA 2009 (?)
- Swiss IEF/Lingualevel 2009
- CEFR-J 2010
- English Profile - C levels 2011
- Pearson GSE 2012-4
Extending the bank

Pearson 2012
100 new descriptors.

20 CEFR anchors show a high level of agreement with the original calibrations

After removing the two outliers correlation is 0.97

Original calibrations (North 2000)

Pearson ratings 2012

Updating and extending the 2001 scales

- Year 2: Extending with 27 new scales (2014–16)
- Consultation: Internal and external (2016–17)

Year 1: Updating the 2001 scales

Adapting validated descriptors:
- Addition of Pre-A1
- Enriching description at C levels
- Filling out the «plus levels»
- One entirely new scale: «Reading for Pleasure»

Authoring team (Eurocentres)
Sounding board of experts
Consultation group

Year 2: Developing new descriptor scales

Formulating & validating descriptors for new areas:
- Mediation
- Online interaction
- Reactions to Literature & art
- Plurilingual & pluricultural competences
Mediation in the CEFR 2001

- Language use is organized into **four modes instead of four skills**.
- “Communication is an integral part of tasks where participants engage in
  - interaction
  - production
  - reception
  - mediation
  or a combination of two or more of these” (CEFR, p.157)

Mediation in the CEFR 2001

“In mediating activities, the language user is not concerned to express his/her own meanings, but simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly, normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. ...” (CEFR Section 4.4.4)

Mediation in the CEFR 2001

“Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediation language activities, (re)processing an existing text, occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies.” (CEFR, Section 2.1.3)

Mediation in the CEFR 2001

= **Conveying received meaning**

- (re)processing an existing text
- acting as an intermediary
- in same language or across languages
Towards a richer ‘model’ of Mediation

any procedure, arrangement or action designed to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness. (Coste & Cavalli, 2015)

The mediator facilitates
- access to knowledge, to the grasping of concepts
- reduction of affective blocks / tensions,
- building bridges towards the new, the other

Linguistic mediation
Cultural mediation
Textual mediation
Social mediation
Mediation through media

Relational
Cognitive
Cognitive across languages and cultures

Relational

Cognitive

Plurilingual & Pluricultural

across languages and cultures

Relational

Cognitive

Online

across media

across worlds

Literature

Categories

- Relational Mediation
- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning
  - Conveying received meaning
- Mediation Strategies
Categories

- Relational Mediation
- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning
  - Conveying received meaning
- Mediation Strategies
  +
  - Online interaction
- Reactions to literature & art
- Plurilingual & pluricultural competences

Categories

- Relational Mediation (5 scales)
- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning (2 scales)
  - Conveying received meaning (9 scales)
- Mediation Strategies (5 scales)
  +
  - Online interaction (2 scales)
  - Reactions to literature & art (2 scales)
- Plurilingual & pluricultural (2 scales)

Categories

- Relational Mediation (5)
  - Establishing a positive atmosphere
  - Creating pluricultural space
  - Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers
  - Managing plenary and group interaction
  - Resolving delicate situations and disputes

Categories

- Cognitive Mediation (2)
  - Constructing meaning
  - Collaborating to construct meaning
  - Generating conceptual talk
Categories

- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning
    - Collaborating to construct meaning
    - Generating conceptual talk
  - Relational Mediation
    - Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers
    - Managing plenary and group interaction

Categories

- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning
    - Collaborating to construct meaning
    - Generating conceptual talk

Categories

- Cognitive Mediation
  - Conveying received meaning
    - Relaying specific information – sp+wr
    - Explaining data (e.g. in graphs, diagrams, charts etc.) – sp + wr
    - Processing text – sp + wr
    - Interpreting – sp only
    - Translation – wr only
    - Spoken translation of written text (Sight translation)

Categories

- Mediation Strategies
  - Linking to previous knowledge
  - Amplifying text
  - Streamlining text
  - Breaking down complicated information
  - Visually representing information
  - Adjusting language
Categories

- Relational Mediation
- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning
  - Conveying received meaning
- Mediation Strategies
  - Online interaction
  - Reactions to literature & art
  - Plurilingual & pluricultural competences

Categories

- Online interaction
  - Online conversation and discussion
  - Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration

Categories

- Reactions to literature & art
  - Expressing a personal response to literature and art
  - Analysis and criticism of literature and art

Categories

- Plurilingual & pluricultural competences
  - Exploiting pluricultural repertoire
  - Plurilingual comprehension
  - Exploiting plurilingual repertoire
Categories

- Relational Mediation (5 scales)
- Cognitive Mediation
  - Constructing meaning (2 scales)
  - Conveying received meaning (9 scales)
- Mediation Strategies (5 scales)
- Online interaction (2 scales)
- Reactions to literature & art (2 scales)
- Plurilingual & pluricultural (2 scales)

Descriptors

Total =
- 27 descriptor scales
- Circa 400 descriptors

Validation

**Intuitive:**
Collect, classify, edit, discuss, redraft

**Qualitative:** (Phase 1)
assigning to categories
- evaluating
- suggesting reformulations (shortening)

**Quantitative** (Rasch scaling)
- assigning to levels (Phase 2)
- Yes/No responses (Phase 3)

**Intuitive:**
Team of 8

**Qualitative:** (Phase 1)
990 informants in 140 institutes

**Quantitative** (Rasch scaling)
- Phase 2: 1294 informants in 189 institutes
- Phase 3: 3503 usable responses
Validation: Linked data matrix

- Descriptors appear on 2–4 (usually 3) different questionnaires (Phases 1, 2 & 3)
- Responses linked into one data set
- Selected CEFR descriptors appear as “anchor items” in each phase
- Questionnaires distributed evenly, according to profiles of institutes

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- assigning to levels (Phase 2)
- Yes/No responses (Phase 3)

Category + Quality

Descriptor 230

Can, in a training situation, spontaneously and flexibly suggest an appropriate task to help participants reflect on their existing knowledge and competences in relation to the content.
Descriptor 232

Can spontaneously pose a series of questions to encourage people to think about their prior knowledge of an abstract issue and to help them establish a link to what is going to be explained.
Phase 2: Assigning CEFR level

At what CEFR level do you think a person can do what is defined in the descriptor?

Pre-A1 A1 A2 A2+ B1 B1+ B2 B2+ C1 C2

Two types of analysis

Classical analysis:
- the mean and median levels rated
- the percentage that rated the intended broader level (50% criterion)

Rasch analysis to link the ratings to the scale underlying CEFR levels:
- Anchoring the steps on the scale.
- Anchoring to calibrated CEFR descriptors
- Doing both of the above simultaneously
- Unanchored analysis, equated

Percentages at each band

Descriptor 3

COLLAB3 expanding

Can build on a partner’s ideas, expanding and deepening them.
Two types of Analysis

- Classical analysis:
  - the mean and median levels rated;
  - the percentage that rated the intended level;
- Rasch analysis to link the ratings to the scale underlying CEFR levels:
  a) Anchoring the steps on the scale.
  b) Anchoring to calibrated CEFR descriptors
  c) Doing both of the above
  d) Equating unanchored analysis

Phase 2 Rasch Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIM</th>
<th>DESCRIPTOR</th>
<th>ANCH SCALE</th>
<th>ANCH ITEMS</th>
<th>ITEMS SCALE</th>
<th>STD DEV</th>
<th>Result</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>COLLAB04reason</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B1</td>
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<td>A2+</td>
<td>B1+</td>
<td>B1+</td>
<td>B1+</td>
<td>B1+</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Validation

**Intuitive:**
Collect, classify, edit, discuss, redraft

**Qualitative:** (Phase 1)
- 990 informants in 140 institutes
  - assigning to categories
  - evaluating
  - suggesting reformulations (shortening)

**Quantitative** (Rasch scaling)
- assigning to levels (Phase 2)
- Yes/No responses (Phase 3)

Phase 3: Yes/No responses

- Main calibration exercise – wide circulation
- English & French
- 192 out of c400 items calibrated in Phase 2
  62 of these included as anchors for Phase 3
  Plus 12 CEFR anchors
  = 74 anchors in 365 items
- Presented again in 23 overlapping questionnaires
Phase 3: Yes/No responses

Could you, or the person concerned, do what is described in the descriptor?

0  Beyond my/his/her capabilities
1  Yes, under favourable circumstances
2  Yes, in normal circumstances
3  Yes, even in difficult circumstances
4  Clearly better than this

Replicating original CEFR descr. research
(Swiss project 1993-6: North & Schneider 1998; North 2000)

Descriptor 3

COLLAB3expanding

Can build on a partner’s ideas, expanding and deepening them.
B2 Descriptors for COLLAB

- Can present his/her ideas in a group and pose questions that invite reactions from other group members’ perspectives.
- Can formulate follow-up questions to a member of a group to clarify an issue that is implicit or poorly articulated.
- Can highlight inconsistencies in thinking, and challenge other’s ideas in the process of trying to reach a consensus.
- Can further develop other people’s ideas and opinions. Can, in collaborative discussion, consider two different sides of an issue and propose a solution or compromise.
- Can summarise the point reached at a particular stage in a discussion and propose next steps.

Follow ups

- Deleting c 30 good descriptors (because of repetition/redundancy)
- Follow up on Plurilingual/pluricultural (using Phase 2 methodology)
- Extending descriptors for Plurilingual/-cultural
- Developing a new Phonology scale
  - Intuitive: Team of 3 + 4 consultants
  - Qualitative: Phase 1: assigning to categories and evaluating
  - Qualitative: Phase 3 + Phase 2 combined

Documentation

- Document with descriptor scales, including the rationale for each new scale
- Report giving academic, CoE and CEFR context, account of development and validation, posing questions for consultative process
- Archive document with all descriptors considered, plus validation history
- Technical report for each validation phase

Extended consultative process

- Meeting June with experts from related Council of Europe projects
- Consultation and piloting until later 2017 (following the CEFR precedent)
- Revision for publication.

The exact form of presentation and publication will be one of the issues considered in the consultation process.
Thank you

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