What does the CEFR imply for teaching?

Brian North

The CEFR: True or False?

1. CEFR developed by EU to harmonise levels
2. Levels of CEFR, ALTE, Cambridge are same
3. CEFR B1+/B1.2 & CEFR-J B1.2 are the same
4. Descriptors developed in UK by Cambridge
5. Recommends real-world orientation
6. Sees user/learner as a social agent carrying out tasks – which require some language

CEFR Aims

Provide Common Reference Points
- CEFR levels, illustrative descriptors

Stimulate Reflection
- Consider relevant aspects
- Evaluate current practice: Does it make sense?

The CEFR:

A heuristic
not
an answer
to all problems
Not Harmonisation

“We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do or how to do it. We are raising questions not answering them. It is not the function of the CEF to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ”. (CEFR: ii)

Not a Method

The CEFR’s “action-oriented approach” is:

- not a method
- not the communicative approach
  - does not privilege message communication over development of linguistic competence
  - does not ban use of mother tongue

BUT

- does imply:
  - active, functional as well as linguistic competence

CEFR Aims

- Provide Common Reference Points
  - CEFR levels, illustrative descriptors

- Stimulate Reflection
  - Consider relevant aspects
  - Evaluate current practice: Does it make sense in context?

Common Reference Levels
Common Reference Levels

We simplify to communicate

Descriptors - Informal discussion

**A2+** Can generally identify the topic of discussion around her which is conducted slowly and clearly.
Can discuss what to do in the evening, at the weekend.
Can make and respond to suggestions.
Can agree and disagree with others.

**A2** Can discuss everyday practical issues in a simple way when addressed clearly, slowly and directly.
Can discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet.

Profiling

not

Levelling
My profile for Spanish

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<tr>
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<th>A1-</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A2-</th>
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<th>B2</th>
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The label “A2” is always a convenient summary of a complex profile.

CEFR Aims

Provide Common Reference Points
- CEFR levels, illustrative descriptors

Stimulate Reflection & Reform
- Evaluate current practice: Does it make sense?
- Action-oriented approach

Learner focus

- Learner as social user: needs analysis
- Learner as subject: learner experience as starting point; “teaching unplugged”
- Learner as partner: transparency, consultation
- Creativity: dreams and hopes, literature, creative writing, music
- Steps towards self-direction (European Language Portfolio)
**Joined-up thinking**

- **Planning:**
  - “Sign-posting” with Can Dos
- **Teaching:**
  - Action-oriented approach: language and activity
  - Practice and error
- **Assessment**

**Signposting with Can Do’s**

- learners see why they are learning things
- learners and teachers set priorities
- teachers select appropriate communicative tasks
- learners focus on form during communicative tasks
- learners and teachers to assess progress
- schools to report progress to parents

#### Listening
- Understand everyday conversations and discussions
- Understand a recorded story narrated slowly

#### Speaking
- Ask for & give information about feelings and news
- Talk about likes, dislikes and problems
- Organise an event and solve problems
- Give advice and recommendations
- Talk about possibilities in the future
- Communicate confidently during travelling and sightseeing
- Compare and contrast things, e.g. - where to go and what to do
- Make new friends, have fun and relax on the phone
- Discuss and compare places
- Describe home and activities
- Give detailed directions and instructions
- Describe events or experiences, express feelings and emotions

#### Reading
- Understand descriptions of events and reactions to them (e.g. in personal letters)
- Understand directions and written instructions
- Understand the main points of a story
- Understand letters, notices and source from friends

#### Writing
- Write a short letter (e.g. postcard)
- Write 400 Chinese characters

#### Grammar
- Use different adverbs like just
- Use different expressions: besides, some... others,
- Make questions with do, shall, or must
- Make comparisons (bi and not as good as)

#### Vocabulary
- Personal topics e.g. music, films
- Feelings and emotions
- Professions and work
- Products
- Language for giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing
- Telephone language
- Travel and services vocabulary

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Eurocentres Scale of Proficiency
Our Aims
Weekly Plan
**Course Aims & learner Aims**

**Can do statements**

**Juan’s aims**

**Eloise’s aims**

**Language needed**

**Course Aims & learner Aims**

**Can do statements**

**Juan’s aims**

**Eloise’s aims**

**Language needed**

**Action-oriented Approach**

The user/learner is a social agent who need to develop the **competences** and **strategies** to perform, in the real world, **tasks** involving language.

**General competences (incl. Intercultural)**

Communicative language competences:

- Pragmatic
- Linguistic
- Socio-linguistic

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**Joined-up thinking**

- **Planning:**
  - “Sign-posting” with Can Dos

**Teaching:**

- Action-oriented approach: language and activity
- Practice and error

**Assessment**
Action-oriented Approach

- Language learning is not an intellectual pursuit to train minds.
- Language is not an abstract thing learnt because one day you may use it.
- Language is a **practical skill** to communicate with others. Learning by doing.
- **Purposeful action** in the language is therefore central. = **TASKS**

Tasks

A **task** is defined as any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary in order to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved.

This definition would cover a wide range of actions such as moving a wardrobe, writing a book, obtaining certain conditions in the negotiation of a contract, playing a game of cards, ordering a meal in a restaurant, translating a foreign language text or preparing a class newspaper through group work. (CEFR p.10)

Tasks

- **Tasks** in the classroom are central
- but the tasks must have a relevant context
- tasks are usually collaborative, with other learners
- And, in carrying out the task, the learners must have a goal (not just a language goal)
  = there must be an **outcome**

Tasks

- A task is not a mechanical prompt to generate speech.
- A task is not an exercise.

Groups often produce something, e.g:
  - a brochure for tourists, a blog entry,
  - a list of suggestions to improve something,

Groups often plan something, e.g:
  - a restaurant design & menu,
  - an outing
  - a party
Tasks & Groupwork – in Japan?

- How much would traditional expectations of teachers and students need to change?
- Is that feasible?
- Is that desirable?
- How could it be achieved anyway?
- How could the “innovation gap” be overcome, between:
  - what new teachers are taught to do in college?
  - the reality of practice in the schools?

Tasks - summary

- Goal (purposefulness)
- Meaning (not mechanical)
- Interactive (collaborating)
- Cognitive processes (framing, structuring)
- Outcome (report; evaluation)

Tasks - types

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<th>Real World</th>
<th>Pedagogic</th>
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<td>Focus on meaning</td>
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Tasks - examples

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<td>Focus on meaning</td>
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Tasks - examples

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Real World</th>
<th>Pedagogic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on form (e.g. past tense)</td>
<td>Focus on meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays (lower sec – first lesson after holiday)</td>
<td>Story of a marriage (adult)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English Conversation: HOLIDAYS

Here are possible answers to the questions about your summer holiday:

Where did you spend your holiday?
- abroad at home
- to_______

Who did you go with?
- with my parents / my family
- my best friend
- my__________

How did you travel?
- I/we travelled _________
- by car / train / coach / plane / ship

Where did you stay?
- We stayed _________
- in a hotel / youth hostel / campground

What did you do?
- I went _________
- swimming / jogging / hiking / cycling / _________
- to the disco / to the beach
- I sunbathed on the beach
- I learned to _________
- sailing / diving / windsurfing
- I played _________
- tennis / football / beach volleyball with _________
- I visited _________
- Greek ruins / a museum / an interesting old town
- I met _________
- a nice boy/girl from _________

What was the weather like?
- very good, the sun was always shining
- terrible, it was raining all the time

Did you enjoy the holiday?
- Yes, very much, especially _________
- Not so much, because _________
- I liked the place, because _________
- But _________

Mini Presentation: MY SUMMER HOLIDAYS

Now tell the story of your holiday to the class. Use the questions from the last activity as a guideline (Where? Who with? How? etc.).

When telling a little story about something you experienced, you often use these words or expressions to structure your story:

- At the beginning of the holiday ...
- In the first few days .........
- In the first week .........
- In the second week .........
- And then .........
- Later .........
- At the end of the holiday ...
- In the morning .........
- In the afternoon .........
- In the evening .........

Example: In the morning I went to the disco.

Achtung: Die Wortstellung nach diesen Ausdrücken ist nicht gleich wie im Deutschen

Example: In the evenings ich ging in die Disco.

At the end of your little presentation you should ask if the other_Stages of the holiday was a good experience for you and if you would recommend the place or the holiday to others.

The Story of a Marriage:

Groups of 4, each group with a photo of a man and woman.

Collaboration Phase (planning)

Each group has to construct the love story which led up to Janet and John's marriage. They should then decide how things changed after marriage, describing the character defects and bad habits of each partner which would eventually lead to their divorce. Each group should provide as much detail as possible.

Exchange Phase (reporting)

Re-group the students so that there is one representative of each of original groups in each new group. The representatives of each of the first groups take it in turns to tell their version of the drama of Janet and John to the rest of the group.

Discussion Phase (evaluating)

Groups discuss their "ideal family". Suggested prompts:
- what age should men/women get married?
- how many children would you like to have?
- conventional families vs. communal living?
- is marriage an out-of-date idea?
Tasks in the teaching sequence

One difference between good & bad teaching = the **connections** between Language+ Activity

**Task-oriented:**
- Controlled Practice
- Fluency Practice
- Task
- Feedback

**Task-based:**
- Pre-Task
- Task Planning
- Task Report
- Language analysis
- Language practice
- (Repeat task)

Tasks & Practice

- Task-orientation does not at all make practice obsolete
- Learning a sport/skill requires controlled practice, plus knowledge; players go jogging, study tactics
- Learning a sport requires realistic experience
- Contextualised practice (a) shifts new things into “stable” competence; (b) enables automaticity

Interlanguage: CEFR (Westoff 2007)

“The scales of the CEFR ... start with emphasis on the lexical repertoire, counterbalanced by decreasing tolerance of deviations of grammatical norms.

At the lower level formal correctness is mainly based on the lexicon. Only from B2 onwards is conscious use of rule knowledge expected and perceived to be helpful.

Fl teaching, however, (...) is perceived as a linear process, in which discrete grammatical issues are presented one after another, and the assumption is made that the next item is introduced only once mastery of the preceding item has occurred.”

Joined-up thinking

- **Planning:**
  - “Sign-posting” with Can Dos

- **Teaching:**
  - Action-oriented approach: language and activity
  - Practice and error
  - **Assessment**
**Interlanguage: Non linear accuracy**

- Around A2 learners use lots of “scripts” for situations – sometimes extremely accurately
- Some problems are unavoidable, and just stay, despite teaching, until much later (Eng –s)
- Around B1 learners are using far more language and making more creative use of resources = more errors (Klein, Fulcher)
- Task complexity (even narrative) reduces capacity for processing = more formulaic, less creative + more errors
- Around B2 learners begin to have spare capacity for self-monitoring – reflected in CEFR descriptors

**Implications**

- Don’t focus on errors; use of new structures, fluency, are more important
- Don’t race through the book. Learners need space, meaning-negotiation for transfer
- Do give fluency practice linking and activity (grammar games, broader tasks)
- Do demand accuracy with what should be “scripts” learnt as a chunk for certain scenarios
- Do encourage a student to focus on their “favourite” mistakes, but don’t expect miracles

**Descriptors for Assessment**

Distinguish between:

- Descriptors of communicative activities: Ch. 4
- Descriptors of aspects of proficiency related to particular competences: Chapter 5

“The former are very suitable for teacher- or self-assessment with regard to real-world tasks. Such teacher- or self-assessments are made on the basis of a detailed picture of the learner’s language ability built up during the course concerned. They are attractive because they can help to focus both learners and teachers on an action-oriented approach.”

(CEFR p 180)
CEFR Scales: Chapter 5

Linguistic Competence
- General Linguistic Range
- Vocabulary Range
- Grammatical Accuracy
- Vocabulary Control
- Phonological Control
- Orthographic Control

Pragmatic Competence
- Flexibility
- Turn Taking
- Thematic Development
- Cohesion and Coherence
- Propositional Precision
- Spoken Fluency

Sociolinguistic Competence
- Sociolinguistic Appropriateness

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CEFR Table 3

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANGE</th>
<th>ACCURACY</th>
<th>FLUENCY</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
<th>COHERENCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>B2</td>
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Selected Criteria (A2)

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<th>FLUENCY</th>
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Selected Criteria at A2

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<tr>
<td>Communicate limited information</td>
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<td>Simple everyday situations</td>
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<td>Uses some simple structures correctly, BUT</td>
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<td>Systematically makes basic mistakes</td>
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<td>Makes himself/herself understood</td>
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<td>Very short utterances, BUT</td>
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<td>Pauses, false starts, and reformulation</td>
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Key Issues on Teacher Assessment

- Use short checklists of ‘Can do’s for continuous assessment
- Use tasks to assess level
- Use criteria to assess performance in the tasks
- Make the criteria transparent with descriptors
- Communicate the criteria to the learners
- Use grammar tests for diagnosis and feedback

Thank you

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