Adaptations of CEF descriptors to local contexts

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The Setting

- Deliberately vague formulation of CEFR descriptors; adaptations for local contexts necessary and wanted (2001:7)
- Problem: proliferation of descriptors claimed to be based on the CEFR but without a link (despite CoE suggestions, e.g. Lenz & Schneider 2004)
- Need for a (feasible) validation procedure
CEFR-based Competence Profiles

- **Purpose:** creation of empirically validated adapted descriptors based on the CEFR:
  - Develop a feasible validation procedure for adaptations of CEFR descriptors for specific / local contexts
  - needs analysis / identification of target language use situations on the basis of the CEFR
- **Adapt existing subscales** (on levels A1 to B2) for language use situations (ch. 4 CEFR) to different job-related situations for:
  - Hotel staff
  - Office workers
  - Staff in export sales
Research questions

1. What method is suitable for the adaptation of descriptors or the creation of new descriptors that can at the same time postulate the CEFR as a basis?

2. What language use situations are typical of the three professional fields in question?

3. How can general foreign language teaching and learning in the upper grades in lower secondary school lay the basis for future professional language requirements?
Adaptation of existing subscales of the CEFR/creation of new scales

Validation of scales with professionals (n= 30)

Evaluation of preliminary scales by experts (vocational and language), revision of scales

Validation in workshops with teachers at vocational schools, sorting task (n= 132)

Pair comparison analysis (n= 20) and qualitative comparison of descriptors (n= 33) with teachers

Final revision of scales

Implications for teaching English in grades 9 and 10

step 1

step 2

step 3
Data analysis methods

- Interviews: qualitative data analysis following a five-step procedure
- Workshops: frequency distributions, mean, range, correlation coefficients (Spearman’s Rho, Aiken), Rater Agreement Index, Pattern Matching for scales
- Pair comparison analysis
- Qualitative data analysis for additional comparison of descriptors
Export sales

- Overall oral production
  - Sustained monologue: putting a case
- Overall written production
  - Reports
  - Texts for marketing and sales
- Overall listening production
- Overall reading production
  - Reading correspondence
  - Reading for information

Adaptation of existing subscales of the CEFR/creation of new scales
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Export sales

- Overall spoken interaction
  - Conversation
  - Formal discussion and meetings
  - Goal-oriented co-operation: negotiation and complaints
  - Transactions to obtain goods and services
  - Information exchange

- Overall written interaction
  - Correspondence
  - Notes, messages and forms

- Mediation
Example descriptor (hotel / goal-oriented cooperation: Welcoming and looking after guests):

Kann sich bei der Aufnahme und Betreuung von Gästen verstündigen und dabei einfache Wendungen gebrauchen, um Dinge zu erbitten oder zu geben, einfache Informationen zu erfragen und zu besprechen, was man als Nächstes tun sollte. [Can communicate with guests when welcoming and looking after them, using simple phrases to ask for and to provide things, to get simple information and to discuss what to do next.]
Professionals provided very specific interpretations, with connotations of operations (e.g. discuss / negotiate) with regard to a specific situation.

Example (approximate translation): „In this situation [goal-oriented co-operation, discuss different options] I cannot negotiate with a guest – I can’t afford to convey a bossy impression.“
Validation in workshops with teachers at vocational schools, sorting task (n= 132)
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- Workshops: 196 foreign language teachers at vocational schools
- 132 teachers completed the sorting task
  - Office workers: 40
  - Hotel staff: 47
  - Export sales: 45
### Validation in workshops with teachers at vocational schools, sorting task (n= 132)

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Validation in workshops with teachers at vocational schools, sorting task (n=132)

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Problem: the data yielded misfits; descriptors that the raters assigned a different level to although they were close to the CEFR descriptor.

Validation in workshops with teachers at vocational schools, pair comparison analysis (n= 20)
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- **Tendencies for results:**
  - Teachers commented on vocational aspects (background knowledge vs. language competence) but also on cognitive operations, e.g. „Does ’understand‘ involve more than ’read‘ or does ’read‘ imply ’understand‘?“
  - Data gave more insights into interpretations of users of descriptors and function as a help for the final revision

Final revision of scales
Summary and outlook

- Two-step validation procedure: easy to carry out, several user groups considered, complies with quality assurance for new descriptors (Lenz & Schneider 2004)
- Viewpoints of user groups less familiar with the CEFR considered
- Insights (selection):
  - Interpretations of different user groups diverge
  - Weaknesses of the CEFR (taken over) had an impact on the rater behaviour, especially teachers
- Product: competence profiles; needs analysis reveals a focus on interaction in all three jobs
- First tasks for the lower secondary FL classroom, more to come
Thank you for your attention!

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References