Linking Examinations to the CEFR: Implications for English-Language Assessments

Craig Davies
Project Developer
CLIQ, Kaplan International Colleges
A claim that a qualification is linked to the CEFR can only be taken seriously if evidence exists that claims based on specifications (content standards) and standard setting (performance standards) are corroborated through validation.' (Manual: p13/14)

‘... and robust procedures have been put in place to maintain that claim.’
But why bother?

Fundamentally the CEFR, the Manual, the Further Material, the Reference Levels, the descriptor banks and the illustrative samples are all reference tools to be critically consulted, not things to be “applied.” The boxes at the end of each CEFR chapter invite users to reflect on their current practice and the way in which it relates to what is presented in the CEFR. The authors of many of the case studies published in Martyniuk (2010) on relating tests to the CEFR state that the process of undertaking the project led them into such a process of reflection and reform. It is such a process that the CEFR was designed to stimulate.

(North, 2010: 72)
Tentative Validation

- ‘overly prescriptive ways (against the intentions of the authors)’
- ‘one-off standard setting events are not sufficient evidence of alignment’
- a linking claim would need to be built up over time through the adoption of various practices and procedures
- we are currently awaiting additional evidence and all alignment claims are at best ‘tentative’ (Milanovic, 2009)
- a more prescriptive Manual ‘would be to the detriment of language testing and the users of the results’
- ‘more thorough treatment of ways of maintaining an exam- CEFR linkage in subsequent versions of the Manual’ (Khalifa et al, 2009)
Prescription or Comparable Description?

- How can alignment be meaningful and promote comparable benchmarks with no consensus on what competence means?
- How can spurious alignment claims be revealed?
- How can the users of results benefit from models open to a wide variety of interpretation?
- How can we move forward if we don’t prescribe to be more definite?
## Comprehensive Alignment

### The Common European Framework of Reference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Common European Framework of Reference</th>
<th>Programme Levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>B  Independent User</td>
<td>B2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>B1+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1</td>
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<tr>
<td>A  Basic User</td>
<td>A2+</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A2</td>
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<td>A1+</td>
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<td>A1</td>
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Maintenance of the Linking Claim

- **Marking Descriptors**
  - Identify assessment criteria to grade against (CEFR/EAQUALS/ALTE)
  - English Vocabulary Profile
  - British Council Core Inventory
  - Develop CEFR-informed grade descriptors
  - Pilot, analyse quant & qual feedback- revise
## Informed Grade Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Descriptor</th>
<th>Informing CEFR Scale/Excerpt</th>
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| **Language Range (B2)** | **General Linguistic Range (B2)**  
 Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints and develop arguments without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so. |
| - Uses a **wide variety** of basic, compound and complex sentences.  
 - Has enough vocabulary to talk about themselves **and a wide range of general topics** with some precision.  
 - Some use of **idiomatic vocabulary and/or less common collocations**.  
 - Has enough language to present **effective arguments, evaluate ideas** and hypothesise. | **Vocabulary Range (B2)**  
 Has a good range of vocabulary for areas connected to his field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution. |
| **Vocabulary Range (C1)** | **Vocabulary Range (C1)**  
 Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. |
Maintenance of the Linking Claim

• Examiner Training
  - Familiarisation
  - Standardisation

• Admin & Management Procedures
  - internal moderation
  - awareness of item profiles
  - cut-score consequences
  - double marking, sampling
  - observations
Conclusions

How meaningful is the status of ‘CEFR aligned’?

How definite do we need to be?

Stakeholder confidence in any alignment claim will be strengthened if validation reports from the alignment process are bolstered by ongoing alignment-maintenance practices.

So, let’s not forget that…

The conclusion of any current or future linking process is only the introduction to its defence.
References


Thank you!

Paper available on request from:

craig.davies@kaplan.com