The CEFR and testing children’s reading

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The purpose of the research

Identify what young learners ‘can do’, in the context of a national reading test, at relevant levels on the CEFR
The test

- Norwegian National test 2013
- 5th graders (9 – 10 years old)
- English reading
- 50 items
- Test items cover a wide range of difficulty
- Computerized
- Implicitly linked to the CEFR via National curriculum aims: A1-A2
- Population: approx. 50,000 pupils
Read the text. Click on the correct picture.

Kim's grandmother is visiting. She has black glasses and short, grey hair. She's wearing her favourite colour, yellow, today.
Two principal stages

• Standard setting of items to CEFR

• Qualitative analysis of content of items doable at key levels
The purpose of the standard setting

• Decide on cut-off scores for A1/A2 and A2/B1

• Establish a relationship between items, scores and the CEFR
The panel

• 4 Teachers
• 7 NTE (National test of English) test developers
• 3 Norwegian CEFR test developers
• 3 others with diverse CEFR backgrounds

• Total: 17 participants
Training

Preparation over a period of two weeks:

• Take the online test

• 2 rounds of homework – to familiarise with CEFR:
  – Place ‘can dos’ at levels
  – Get feedback
Features of the standard setting procedure

- IRT / OPML
- Cito method modified
- 50 items grouped into 9 clusters according to format
- Panel judge clusters of items
- 4 (3) rounds of judgements for each cut-off
- The minimum competent user
The minimum competent user

For cut-off A1/A2

*The minimal competent A2 user:*

What would a person who has just barely an A2 competence be able to answer correctly, i.e. the weakest acceptable A2 competence?

This is the minimal competent A2 user – or the borderline person – on the border between A1 and A2.
Scores on tasks
Results of the four rounds for standard A1/A2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Round 0</th>
<th>Round 1</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>24.91</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>20.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of standard setting

**Cut-off A1/A2**
- Average test score 20.40 points
- Ability value -0.13
- 27.8 % of the population is below A2

**Cut-off A2/B1**
- Average test score 41.28 points
- Ability value 0.525
- 88.4 % of the population is below B1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A1 or lower</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1 or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of items doable at key levels

Key levels, based on ability values:
- A1 (median)
- A1/A2 (cut off)
- A2 (median)
- A2/B1 cut off)
- Lower B1 (1. quartile)

Doable, based on mastery of the item, defined as:
Probability that two out of three pupils at these key levels would get the item right.

Five key formats studied (of nine), for features distinguishing levels.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A1/A2</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>A2/B1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Click pict.</td>
<td>Very familiar objects-word</td>
<td>Phrases/v. simple sent. match pict.</td>
<td>Definition/descript. - clauses</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Object and/or location indirectly expressed. Sentences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who can say</td>
<td>Direct connections between clauses/sents.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding series of adjacent sentences.</td>
<td>Low B1 Infer from longer text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple ch.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding series of adjac.sents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jen is a primary school librarian. She has red hair and has bought a poppy to wear on her dark jacket to mark Remembrance Day. Click on Jen.
An English map maker is believed to have been the first to start selling this item, in the mid-1700s. Generally the pieces are made of cardboard now, but at first they were made of wood. It contains many small pieces that must be put together to make a complete picture.
<table>
<thead>
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Look at the picture. Click on the correct text.

David loves to visit his grandmother. She always serves him all his favourite foods. Yesterday she had made a chocolate cake for dessert. He ate a big piece of it and it was really delicious!

David got a big surprise when he visited his uncle George last week. His uncle put a big claw on his plate. It had really big claws that looked quite dangerous! David told him that he couldn't eat it all.

David had asked for his favourite meal for his birthday: spaghetti. His mother gave him the biggest serving of his life! The meal was really yummy and he did his best to finish it all!

David's mum put the Sunday roast in front of him and gave him a carving knife and fork. Everyone was waiting for a piece. It looked so delicious that he had to take a bite first!
Look at the picture. Click on the correct text.

This moth has unusually long hind legs. Its front and back wings are divided into several parts. The moth looks a bit like a piece of dried grass.

This butterfly is brown in colour, with a quite detailed yellow pattern on its wings. It needs a lot of sunshine and feeds on nectar from plants.

This butterfly is a powerful flier. Its wings are orange in the center and black around the edges. It lives off the juices of rotting fruits, cadavers and dung.

This is not a real butterfly but was made up by an author. Its wings are blue with a darker trim and its body is black. It played an important role in one of his books.
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A2  Click and drag

Read the text.
Click and drag.

Put the poster on the wall between the window and the corner of the room.
A2/B1  Click and drag

Read the text. Click and drag.

The home economics teacher is letting us make lunch today. Jimmy is responsible for the soup. He starts by taking the cauliflower out of the plastic bag and peeling off the green leaves. Put the item back where he found it.
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  - **A2**: Definition/description - clauses

- **Click text**
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  - **A2/B1**: Text to text – link between sentences.

- **Click and drag**
  - **A1**
  - **A1/A2**
  - **A2**: Familiar object to location, directly expressed, sentence.
  - **A2/B1**: Object and/or location indirectly expressed. Sentences.

- **Who can say**
  - **A1/A2**: Direct connections between clauses/sents.
  - **A2**: Understanding series of adjacent sentences.

- **Multiple ch.**
  - **A2/B1**: Understanding series of adjacent sents.
Who could say: "My dad can play two instruments at once"?

Tina plays street music together with her dad, Jack. They travel around to many cities by car during her summer holidays. Her dad plays the guitar the usual way and plays the drums with his feet, and Tina sings. People often give them money. Tina likes to spend time with her dad and visit different places.

Sam likes to do everything with his twin brother, David. They have been doing odd jobs in order to save money to go to Quebec City to visit their friend Rene. David managed to earn twice as much as his brother. He mowed their neighbour's lawn, while Sam walked all the dogs in the neighbourhood. Sam wants to fly, but David wants to take the train. They can't wait to go because they have never been to Quebec City before.

Jill and her friend are selling home-made cookies. They are going to donate the money to a children's hospital in Cambodia. The hospital needs more beds and medicine. So far only five people have stopped to buy cookies. Jill's dad said he would take some to his office to sell.
A2/B1 Who could say

QUESTION 4/6

Read the text. Click on the name of the person who could be speaking.

Who could say: "I know the money will help many people"?

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</table>
Read the text. Click on the correct answer.

Thousands of years ago, there were no towns and villages, and no farms. People just moved from place to place, looking for food. They killed wild animals and collected plants for food. Meat was cooked over fires, which kept everybody safe and warm at the same time.

When people discovered that they could tame some animals, they could stay in one place and didn't have to move around any more. So they built real houses and set up fences around the farms to keep the animals there. They had food right where they lived.

How did they find food thousands of years ago?

- They hunted animals.
- They grew the plants.
- They sold the animals.
- They bought the food.

Trykk her for å svare
Low B1 Multiple choice

**QUESTION 4/5**

*Read the text. Click on the correct answer.*

Alice loves to bake cakes. Alice's brothers, Sam and Oliver, have hobbies that are very different from hers. They love to play video games and watch movies. But their favourite hobby is playing pranks on their sister. This drives her crazy!

One day Alice was baking a birthday cake for their father. After tasting the batter, she realized that her brothers had switched the salt and the sugar! Alice decided that she would find a great way to pay them back.

Later that evening, when the boys were busy playing video games in the basement, she went into their bedroom. She set the alarm clock to go off at 5 am. But Alice decided this was not enough. Next she snuck into their bathroom and poured blue food colouring into their shampoo. She knew that, having woken up so early, they wouldn't notice that the shampoo was blue.

Quite a sight met Alice in the kitchen the next morning. Two tired boys with blue hair sat at the table having their breakfast. Alice and her parents couldn't stop laughing.

What is true about Sam and Oliver?

- Their main interest is teasing their sister.
- They took the salt and sugar Alice needed.
- They made a birthday cake for their father.
- Their shampoo was stolen by their sister.
In summary

We have used standard setting to establish a real link between our test scores and the CEFR, around A1-A2, and slightly beyond. We have also analysed features of items shown to be at different levels of difficulty (p-values) and roughly linked these to the result of the standard setting.

This enables us to:
- link feedback on test results to can dos, e.g. from ELP
- write test items targeted at specific levels on the CEFR.

We can characterise 5th grade reading across a range of CEFR levels/half levels, as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Can identify very familiar words / fixed phrases with support of picture/physical context, even in longer text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1/A2</td>
<td>Can identify familiar words / v. simple clauses with support of picture/physical context, even in longer text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Can create meaning from individual clauses/sentences, including in longer texts, not dependent on simple word/phrase recognition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2/B1</td>
<td>Can make connections between individual clauses/sentences. Can create meaning from series of sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower B1</td>
<td>Can create meaning and make inferences from whole texts, beyond level of series of adjacent sentences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The message

In real life, our CEFR level of reading does not define the texts we see, but what we can do with them, in a given context.

This should be taken on board by

• Classroom teachers
• Test developers
• (dare I say it?) CEFR reformers...
References

Norwegian National test of English reading, 5th grade, 2013
https://pgsc.udir.no/kursweb/content/preview?marketplaceId=624075&languageId=&skipSettingLanguageToSession=1&selectedLanguageId=1&contentItemId=36740218&contextType=cms
