Time for a new CEFR?
Recommendations from the field

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Warwick, 30 May 2014
Institute of Information and Education Sciences & Linguapolis

- Partner / coordinator in over 20 European projects (e.g. EuroCatering.org, Precolt, iTILT.eu, Teaching Languages to Caregivers)

- National calls for project proposals (e.g. CEBIR, AKOV, ZorgTaal): language learning and language testing

- Host of international conferences:
  - Antwerp CALL: Research Challenges in CALL (07/2014)
  - Linguapolis Summer School: A Toolbox for Design-Based Research
  - Linguapolis Master Class: Educational Engineering

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Can express simple opinions or requirements in a familiar context. (A2)

Can prepare/draft professional correspondence, take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or write an essay which shows an ability to communicate. (C1)
Do you use the CEFR in daily practice?
Does it help you?
What would you suggest to improve the CEFR?
Star(t)ing point: Our daily practice...

- **Competence and performance**
  What is the link between ‘can do’ performance statements and areas of linguistic knowledge? To what extent can or should the levels be made more explicit in terms of required vocabulary and grammar?

- **Degree of difficulty of the levels**
  How can we make sure that our examinations are measuring at the CEFR levels we claim they are? What evidence do we have to support our claims?

- **Test purpose**
  Why are we testing? What kind of decisions will be made on the basis of information collected via the test? What will be the consequences of these decisions?

- **Practicality**
  How do we link our tests to the CEFR? How practical, applicable and operational is the CEFR for concrete language testing situations?

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“The impact of the CEFR on language testing far outweighs its impact on curriculum design and pedagogy.” (Little, 2007)

“To date the CEFR’s greatest impact by far has been on language testing” (Little, 2014 – EALTA Conference Programme, p. 10)
“The impact of the CEFR on language testing far outweighs its impact on curriculum design and pedagogy.” (Little, 2007)

- Reference point for the development of tests and assessment procedures
  - DIALANG at European level
  - Other tests in national and regional educational settings (e.g. Alderson & Huhta 2005; Little 2005)

- Common set of standards (existing) examinations have been related to

“the basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications in Europe” (Figueras e.a. 2005, pp. 65)
The CEFR has not been without controversy or criticism...

- Framework itself (content and structure)
- Usefulness for language testing
- Actual usage or misuse
The CEFR has not been without controversy or criticism...

- Detailedness: does it include what stakeholders need?
- Clarity: easy to understand, ambiguities, inconsistencies?
- Authenticity: correlation with real-world language use tasks?
- Applicability: use the framework as such?
- Practicality: how easy to make CEFR-based tests or to link existing tests?
- Usefulness: does it help stakeholders in their job?

(e.g. Alderson 2007; Figueras 2005, 2012; Fulcher 2010; Hulstijn, 2007; Little 2007; Weir 2005)
Stakeholders: researchers, practitioners, policy makers

Research questions:

RQ1  How and when is the CEFR being used for language testing?
RQ2  How practical, applicable and operational is the CEFR in concrete language testing situations?
RQ3  Which aspects of the CEFR are amenable to improvement?
Two research methods:
1. websurvey (RQ1 & RQ2) (2’)
2. conference on the topic
   - RQ1 and 2: starting point
   - RQ3

Language Testing in Europe: Time for a New Framework?
International Conference hosted by the University of Antwerp
27-29 May 2013

188 stakeholders, 26 countries
1. Websurvey

- Survey 1
  - (Pre-conference survey) Sent to participants
  - Return 115 (64,7%)

- Survey 2
  - Sent to colleagues in (CA)LL database
  - Posted on L-test listserver & LinkedIn Groups
  - Return 276 (end 2013)
1. In my job I mostly use the CEFR as follows....
2. When I use the CEFR in my job, I use it to...
3. When I use the CEFR in my job, I do this because...
4. I evaluate the CEFR on the following points as...
   - Applicability
   - Practicality
   - Usefulness
   - Authenticity
   - Clarity
   - Detailedness
5. I evaluate the CEFR levels and descriptors as...
   - Difficulty degree
   - Definition
2. Conference

- Starting point = Survey > RQ1 and RQ2
- Reflection and discussion
  - Keynote speakers (L. Bachman, W. Martinyuk, E. Devaux, J. Hulstijn)
  - Paper presentations
  - Poster presentations
- Discussion groups (2 to 4 people) > RQ3 (tweets)
- Analysis of the recommendations
- Voting system in order to determine the priorities

www.ua.ac.be/lt-cefr2013
1. Usage and usefulness of the CEFR for language testing (RQ1 and RQ2)
1. In my job I mostly use the CEFR as follows:

(one possible answer)
2. When I use the CEFR in my job, I use it to:

(more answers possible)

- Inform the content of a teaching syllabus/curriculum
- Inform/train teachers about CEFR levels
- Design teaching/learning tasks and activities
- Align existing teaching tasks to CEFR levels
- Design tests that correspond to CEFR levels
- Align existing tests to CEFR levels

Respondent Group A
- 48.8%
- 56.7%
- 48.1%
3. When I use the CEFR in my job, I do this because:

(more answers possible)

![Bar chart showing reasons for using CEFR in job. The chart shows that 50.7% of Respondent Group A and 61.8% of Respondent Group B use CEFR because of research studies they have read, while 50% of both groups do so because their institution requires it. Other reasons include expectations from immediate supervisors and colleagues telling them the CEFR is important.](image-url)
4. I evaluate the CEFR on the following points as:

- Applicability (= Can I use it as such in my situation?):
  - Very negative: 16.2%
  - Rather negative: 57.7%
  - Rather positive: 23.4%
  - Very positive: 2.7%
  - No opinion: 0.9%

- Practicality (= How easy is it to make CEFR based tests?):
  - Very negative: 0.9%
  - Rather negative: 34.5%
  - Rather positive: 56.4%
  - Very positive: 0.9%
  - No opinion: 0.9%

- Usefulness (= Does it help me in my job?):
  - Very negative: 6.5%
  - Rather negative: 50.5%
  - Rather positive: 39.3%
  - Very positive: 3.7%
  - No opinion: 0.9%

- Authenticity (= Does it correlate with real-world language use tasks?):
  - Very negative: 13.8%
  - Rather negative: 61.5%
  - Rather positive: 22.0%
  - Very positive: 2.8%
  - No opinion: 0.9%

- Clarity (= Is it easy to understand/remember?):
  - Very negative: 3.0%
  - Rather negative: 53.2%
  - Rather positive: 11.0%
  - Very positive: 8.3%
  - No opinion: 0.9%

- Detailedness (= Does it include what I need?):
  - Very negative: 4.6%
  - Rather negative: 45.9%
  - Rather positive: 8.3%
  - Very positive: 8.3%
  - No opinion: 0.9%
5. I evaluate the CEFR levels and descriptors as:
Results

1. Usage and usefulness of the CEFR for language testing (RQ1 and RQ2)
   - perception = positive
   - constructive attitude
   - common responsibility to continue to build the CEFR as a tool for internationalization, communication, standardization and design
Results

1. Usage and usefulness of the CEFR for language testing (RQ1 and RQ2)
2. Aspects amenable for improvement (RQ3)
1. Group discussions (2 to 4 people)
   - Which aspects of the CEFR are amenable to improvement?
   - Who should do what and how?
   - Try to formulate 2-3 tweet-like statements per group.

   151 recommendations

2. - Transcription of the paper versions
   - Keywords
   - Definition of possible improvements (n= 32)
   - Quantification

   32 improvements

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Adapt to specific groups of learners (e.g. young learners)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Adapt to specific contexts: different professional contexts and specific purposes (e.g. academic English)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Raise critical awareness of actors/CEFR is not the Bible/Manage expectations</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Define the used terminology (e.g. verbs, adjectives, adverbs)/less subjective - avoid vagueness</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Make the CEFR more understandable + ownership for all actors (learners, teachers, non-specialists)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Adapt to 21st century skills</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Adapt to 21st century knowledge (new semantic fields; text types)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Explain how transitions are to be made from one level to another/ further subdivisions needed?</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Provide better structured information on the official website (for all target groups)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Provide objective and well defined criteria/clearer/more consistent descriptors in order to distinguish</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Provide a platform for the exchange of good practices/evidence</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Control the use that is made of the CEFR in real educational contexts (by policy makers; institutions)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>More detailed information on phonological control descriptors for pronunciation</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Separate linguistic proficiency and socio-/intercultural skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Knowledge (lexis, grammar) should be described in more detail</td>
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<td>Provide a revised version based on the latest findings/compile and analyse research produced on 'weak' areas</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Provide language-specific descriptors</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Take into account multi- and plurilingualism</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Define in more detail specific skills (e.g. listening)</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Provide more examples for course designers, teachers/operationalised descriptors (e.g. Tasks)</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Involve all possible stakeholders when defining the descriptors (learners, employers etc.)</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Elaborate on the lowest/highest levels and beyond</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Maak dat alles public domain blijft (also commercial-owned improvements)</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Give and share practical developments for all languages, not only for English</td>
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</tbody>
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   - Which aspects of the CEFR are amenable to improvement?
   - Who should do what and how?
   - Try to formulate 2-3 tweet-like statements per person/group.
   151 recommendations

2. - Transcription of the paper versions
   - Keywords
   - Definition of possible improvements (n=32)
   - Quantification
   32 improvements

3. Presentation
   Discussion
   Suggestions of the keynote speakers and the attendees
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<td>Provide objective and well defined criteria/clearer/more consistent descriptors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fill the gaps in the CEFR/missing descriptors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make the CEFR more user-friendly; provide an all-in-one system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take into account multi- and plurilingualism</td>
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<td>E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Templates should combine formative and summative aspects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add a glossary that could be used at the same time as an analytical index</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations

- Finetuning (41.7%) (~results of the survey)
  missing descriptors, uncomplete templates, vagueness of terminology

- Improving practice and implementation (35.7%)
  better structured information, more exchange, control on the usage

- Extensions (22.5%)
  other groups of learners (e.g. young learners), other contexts, other skills or specific fields (e.g. phonological control, pronunciation)
1. Group discussions (2 to 4 people)
   ➢ Which aspects of the CEFR are amenable to improvement?
   ➢ Who should do what and how?
   ➢ Try to formulate 2-3 tweet-like statements per person/group.
   151 recommendations

2. - Transcription of the paper versions
   - Keywords
   - Definition of possible improvements (n= 32)
   - Quantification
   32 improvements

3. Presentation
   Suggestions of the keynote speakers

4. 8 most frequently chosen improvements
   Determine together the priorities (n=3) using our voting system

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Selection of most frequently chosen improvements....
Priority 1

1 - Provide objective/clearer/more consistent descriptors

2 - Adapt to specific groups of learners (e.g. young learners)

3 - Adapt to specific contexts (professional contexts; specific purposes)

4 - Provide more examples for course designers/teachers

5 - Provide a platform for exchange of good practices/evidence

6 - Raise critical awareness of all stakeholders/Manage expectations

7 - Explain how transitions are to be made from one level to another

8 - Fill the gaps in the CEFR/missing descriptors

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1 - Provide objective/clearer/ more consistent descriptors 17%
2 - Adapt to specific groups of learners (e.g. young learners) 5%
3 - Adapt to specific contexts (professional contexts; specific purposes) 6%
4 - Provide more examples for course designers/ teachers 9%
5 - Provide a platform for exchange of good practices/ evidence 19%
6 - Raise critical awareness of all stakeholders/ Manage expectations 22%
7 - Explain how transitions are to be made from one level to another 5%
8 - Fill the gaps in the CEFR/ missing descriptors 17%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Priority 1</th>
<th>Priority 2</th>
<th>Priority 3</th>
<th>Calibrated total</th>
<th>Global priority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide objective and well defined criteria/ clearer/ more consistent descriptors</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>105</td>
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<td>Adapt to specific groups of learners (e.g. young learners)</td>
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<td>6%</td>
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<td>Provide more examples for course designers/teachers</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>Provide a platform for the exchange of good practices, examples and evidence</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Raise critical awareness of all stakeholders; manage expectations</td>
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<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explain how transitions are to be made from one level to another</td>
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<td>Fill the gaps in the CEFR/ missing descriptors</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Provide a platform for exchange of good practices/ evidence

2. Raise critical awareness of all stakeholders; manage expectations

3. Provide objective, well defined criteria as well as clearer, more consistent descriptors
Thank you for your attention

Mathea Simons, Jozef Colpaert