



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
FOR LANGUAGE TESTING
AND ASSESSMENT



Report on ~~EALTA~~-funded **WORKSHOP**

“CEFR Companion Volume

Piloting the new descriptors in Romania”

9-10 March 2018

Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, Faculty of Letters and Sciences, Philology Department
ROMANIA

Report by PhD Assoc. prof. Maria-Ionela NEAGU



INTRODUCTION

In spring 2017, with no knowledge regarding the extended CEFR and the piloting process of the new scales of descriptors, the Romanian Ministry of Education ended the restructuring process of the curricula for foreign languages devised for the lower secondary education (OMEN nr. 3393/28.02.2017).

On the other hand, the curricula for foreign languages devised for the primary education have not been updated since 2013 (OMEN nr. 3418/19.03.2013), while those devised for the upper secondary education have not been restructured since 2004 (nr. 3458 / 09.03.2004).

In spite of the fact that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is mentioned as the main source for competence design and performance standards setting in all curricula, the research I conduct every year since I published my PhD thesis (Neagu, 2008) proves that there are inherent gaps at the three levels of intended policy, actual policy and policy in use in the field of modern languages and that the relationship can only be made coherent by applying the European instruments of language education policy on all curricular components.

In order to address the problems that teachers face due to these inconsistencies, we got involved in the piloting process of the new descriptors included in the CEFR Companion Volume (2017), following several stages: completing the survey regarding the extended version of the CEFR; registering for piloting some of the new scales between March and June 2017; sending the Report (20 June 2017); training primary and secondary teachers (21 June 2017).

Furthermore, as a teacher trainer and coordinator of teachers' *Gradul I* papers (the highest degree that a teacher can get in the Secondary Education system), I was also able to extend the piloting process within a network of institutions from 6 Romanian counties, namely: Prahova, Brasov, Buzau, Dambovita, Bucharest, and Ialomita.

The EALTA-funded event represented the focal point to spread major information regarding FL teaching, learning and assessment, the best way to update professionals' knowledge and competences they require once they start working with and implementing the new descriptors from the CEFR Companion Volume.

WORKSHOP ORGANISATION

Organised under the auspices of the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA), the workshop entitled *CEFR Companion Volume. Piloting the new descriptors in Romania* aimed primarily at highlighting the innovative areas of the CEFR descriptor scales that have been the focus of the Council of Europe Language Policy Division's project since 2014. Secondly, the

workshop was meant as a dissemination event on the use of the CEFR Companion Volume, closing the series of piloting activities undertaken by Romanian practitioners.

The grant generously awarded by the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) contributed to ensuring the good organisation of the two-day workshop (9-10 March) for 38 participants coming from 5 different Romanian counties (Prahova, Bucharest, Dambovita, Buzau, Brasov), but also from 2 neighbouring countries, namely 1 representative of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and 1 representative of the University of Belgrade (Serbia). Moreover, the grant covered the travel costs, accommodation, and honorarium of the invited keynote speaker and Workshop leader, dr. Brian North, co-author of the CEFR itself and Council of Europe project coordinator and consultant.

The Workshop homepage designed by dr. Maria Paraschiv <https://ealtaworkshop.wordpress.com/> provides information with regard to the Workshop programme, facilitators and participants, useful links to resources, follow-up events, and a few photos to remind us of the insightful exchange that took place within these two fruitful days.

WORKSHOP LEADERS

Dr. Brian North is a researcher in language education. He has extensively collaborated with international organizations, particularly the Council of Europe, as a project coordinator and consultant. He has spent most of his career at Eurocentres, the Swiss-based foundation with language schools in several countries, which has been an official NGO to the Council of Europe since 1968. In his PhD thesis he developed the levels and descriptors for the CEFR. He then co-authored the CEFR itself, the prototype European Language Portfolio, the Manual for relating examinations to the CEFR, and Eaquals' CEFR Core Inventories for English and French and was Chair of Eaquals 2005–2010. He recently coordinated the 2013–17 project that produced the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors.

Dr. Maria-Ionela Neagu, associate professor at the Philology Department, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, holds a PhD in Philology and one in Sciences of Education. She took part in the piloting stage (2006-2008) of the Council of Europe's *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to CEFR*. The research involved relating tests to the CEFR focusing on different competences, following the Manual's procedures and validating them on a group of 1801 secondary students in Prahova county, relating objectives and competences in the English curriculum for lower and upper secondary education (in particular the 8th and the 12th grades) to CEFR descriptors to identify the gaps between the level of performance targeted by the objectives and the target level stipulated by the curriculum, and relating texts and tasks from English textbooks to the CEFR in order to identify the gap between

the level targeted by the textbooks and the level stipulated by the curriculum. She also took an active part in the piloting process (2016-2018) of the new descriptors included in the CEFR Companion Volume.

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

The EALTA-funded event lasted for 2 days and it was held in one of the rooms of the Philology Department, at Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti. Accommodation was offered by the University upon request.

Friday, 9 March 2018 (Room JII11)

- 08:30 Opening and introduction to the workshop (Ionela Neagu and Brian North)
- Aims of the Workshop
 - Introduction participants
- 09:00 Presentation: Key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning (Brian North)
- 10:00 Presentation: Using European instruments of language education policy in Romania (Ionela Neagu)
- 10:45 Coffee Break
- 11:00 Presentation: CEFR Companion Volume – Piloting new descriptors in Romania (Ionela Neagu)
- 11:30 Presentation: Mediation – an undervalued and underspecified concept (Brian North)
- 12:30 Lunch Break
- 13:30 Piloting mediation descriptors with bilingual students. Case study (Ionela Neagu)
- 14:15 Piloting mediation descriptors with military staff. Case study (Elisabeta Ivan)
- 15:00 Group work on mediation. Designing mediation tasks. Identifying mediation skills and strategies in the curriculum. Relating mediation activities from textbooks to the CEFR scales.
- 15:45 Coffee break
- 16:00 Young learners: Pre-A1 descriptors (Olimpia Coman and Mioara Popa)
- 16.45 New tasks for the 5th grade entrance examination for English intensive classes (Roxana Zinca)
- 17.30 Planning Day 2

Saturday – 10 March 2018 (Room JII11)

- 09:00 Group work on Pre-A1 descriptors. Rephrasing curricular prescriptions for Pre-A1 young learners FL competences. Devising assessment tasks for Pre-A1 young learners.
- 10:30 Coffee break
- 10:45 Using telecommunications in the classroom. Case study (Aurelia Dumitru)
- 11.30 Expressing a personal response to creative texts. Case study (Cristina Stroie)
- 11.45 Group work. Relating the 9th grade entrance examination for English intensive classes to the CEFR
- 12:30 Lunch
- 13:30 Piloting online interaction descriptors. Case study (Veronica Manescu)
- 14:15 Building on pluricultural repertoire. Case studies (Ionela Neagu)

- 15:00 Group work. Adjusting the examination tasks for the language certificate issued by Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti (Ionela Neagu and Brian North)
- 16:00 Workshop evaluation by participants
- 16:30 Future planning of events and publication of the workshop volume

PARTICIPANTS

The organization of the EALTA-event gathered academics, teacher trainers, inspectors, and teachers of English from the lower and upper secondary institutions. Currently, the Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, owing to its Teacher Training Department, represents the main provider of teacher training courses in the area. However, the participants covered a larger geographical distribution, coming not only from 5 counties (Prahova, Bucharest, Dambovită, Buzău, Braşov), but also from 2 neighbouring countries, namely 1 representative of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and 1 representative of the University of Belgrade (Serbia). We should also mention the presence of 6 representatives of the Foreign Languages Centres affiliated to Carol I National University of Defense (Bucharest) and Military Unit 01107 (Braşov) who were interested in relating the CEFR descriptors to STANAG 6001 (NATO Standardisation Agreement) standards of performance that military staff must achieve.

Organiser and keynote speaker

Assoc. prof. dr. Maria-Ionela Neagu
Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti

Invited keynote speaker

Dr. Brian North
Council of Europe, Eurocentres

No	PARTICIPANTS	AFFILIATION
1.	IRINA TOMA	Head of Department, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti Associate professor – English Literature
2.	ANCA MIHAELA DOBRINESCU	Vice rector of Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti Professor – English Culture and Civilization
3.	ARLEEN IONESCU	Dean of the Letters and Sciences Faculty, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti Professor – English Literature and Critical Theory
4.	ADRIANA ARCOSI	Inspector, Prahova Inspectorate English teacher, ‘I.L.Caragiale’ National College, Ploiesti
5.	MARIA MIRICA	Inspector, Dambovită Inspectorate English teacher, ‘Constantin Brancoveanu’ Technological Highschool, Targoviste
6.	MIHAELA BADEA	Associate professor in ELT Methodology, Director of the Teacher Training Department, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti

7.	CARMEN-GABRIELA BOSTAN	Senior Researcher, Institute of Educational Sciences, Bucharest
8.	ANDREEA VLASCEANU	Doctoral student, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu Assistant, International Relations Department, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
9.	LOREDANA NETEDU	Lecturer - Romanian as a foreign language, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
10.	MARIA PARASCHIV	Lecturer - English and French Linguistics, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
11.	LOREDANA ILIE	Lecturer – Romanian as a foreign language, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
12.	ADELINA FARIAS	Lecturer – Romanian literature, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
13.	ELISABETA IVAN	English Teacher, Carol I National University of Defense, Foreign Languages Center, Bucharest
14.	ANA IONESCU	English Teacher, Carol I National University of Defense, Foreign Languages Center, Bucharest
15.	IULIAN COJOCARU	Colonel, Carol I National University of Defense, Foreign Languages Center, Bucharest
16.	GABRIELA IORDACHESCU	English Teacher, Military Unit 01107, Foreign Languages Center, Brasov
17.	IONELA STACHE	English Teacher, Military Unit 01107, Foreign Languages Center, Brasov
18.	FLORIN DRAGOSLAV	Director of the Foreign Languages Center, Military Unit 01107, Brasov
19.	IOANA JIEANU	Lecturer – Romanian as a foreign language, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
20.	MONICA HUTANU	Lecturer – Romanian as a foreign language, University of Belgrade, Serbia
21.	AURELIA DUMITRU	English Teacher, Ziduri Secondary School, Buzau
22.	MIOARA POPA	English Teacher, Beceni Theoretical Highschool, Buzau
23.	OTILIA SLATINEANU	English Teacher, Beceni Theoretical Highschool, Buzau
24.	CARMEN NEAGU	English Teacher, Margareta Sterian Arts Highschool, Buzau
25.	ROXANA ZINCA	English Teacher, Gura Vitioarei Primary and Secondary School
26.	PETRESCU ANA-MARIA	English Teacher, I.L.Caragiale Theoretical Highschool, Moreni, Dambovita
27.	CRISTINA STROIE	English Teacher, 142 Secondary School, Bucharest
28.	RAMONA DOBRE	English Teacher, 124 Secondary School, Bucharest
29.	IOANA NICOLA	English Teacher, Vlad Musatescu Secondary School, Gageni
30.	RALUCA CURSARU	English Teacher, I.L.Caragiale National College, Ploiesti
31.	LAVINIA DUMITRASCU TIGANIILA	English Teacher, Toma T. Socolescu Secondary School, Paulesti

32.	COSTINA IULIA ANGHEL	English Teacher, George Cosbuc Secondary School, Ploiesti
33.	VIRGINIA-LILIANA VADUVA	English Teacher, Mihai Voda Secondary School, Pleasa
34.	BIANCA ROMAN	English Teacher, Mechanical Technological Highschool, Campina
35.	OLIMPIA COMAN	English Teacher, Magureni Secondary School
36.	COSMINA DUMITRU	English Teacher, Berceni Secondary School, Prahova
37.	CARMEN APOSTOL	English Teacher, Carol I Technological Highschool, Valea Doftanei
38.	VERONICA MANESCU	English Teacher, I.A.Bassarabescu Secondary School, Ploiesti

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS AND CASE STUDIES

The workshop included plenary speeches, but also presentations of case studies as part of the extended CEFR piloting process and several group work sessions with practical training activities.

In terms of content areas, Day 1 was dedicated to Mediation and Young Learners, whereas Day 2 focused upon Telecommunications, Online Interaction, and the Pluricultural competence. Relying on the new CEFR descriptors, the teachers devised appropriate sets of activities that matched their students' level in order to teach them certain structures, to develop or assess certain competences, and to monitor their reactions. In some cases, they even suggested further reformulations of the new descriptors. Moreover, it was proposed that some scales (eg. Expressing a personal response to creative texts) could benefit from additional descriptors.

Dr Brian North highlighted the socio-pragmatic dimension of the action-oriented approach that views the learner as a social agent. Moreover, he underlined the importance of mediation to meaning making, intercultural sharing, and socialisation.

Dr Ionela Neagu provided an overview of the stages Romania followed and the events that were planned to adopt the European instruments of language policy since 2001 until present. In addition, I started the case studies presentations with my own experiment that I conducted during the piloting process with the bilingual students specialised in English and French Language and Literature. Drawing on the descriptors of performance from the scales *Processing text in writing*, *Linking to previous knowledge*, *Breaking down complicated information*, and *Adjusting language*, I planned several activities in order to improve the students' mediation competence, raising their awareness of the cognitive processes they went through while processing a chapter from a highly specialized monograph in French on the psychology of emotions and trying to summarise it in English keeping in mind the double connection they had to make, on the one hand, to their previous knowledge in

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and on the other hand, to the future task of selecting and interpreting conceptual metaphors of emotion in the English version of Anne Frank's diary.

Elisabeta Ivan designed a contrastive study of the CEFR and STANAG descriptors and standards of performance. Furthermore, she presented the mediation strategies she used and the activities she organised in order to increase classroom dynamics with military students.

Olimpia Coman and Mioara Popa dedicated their presentations to young learners' needs. The new Pre-A1 descriptors must be adapted and included in our curriculum for English as a foreign language, because at the moment the curricular prescriptions are rather ambiguous.

Roxana Zinca discussed the inconsistencies between the action-oriented approach and the plurilingual perspective promoted by the European bodies and the tasks included in the 5th grade entrance examination for English intensive classes. She suggested certain changes relying on the A1 descriptors of performance.

Cristina Stroe highlighted the importance of retelling and acting as A2 learners' favourite means of reacting to creative texts, including literature. Moreover, she piloted Pre-A1 descriptors as well, noticing that young learners are able to express their feelings using short adjectives if literary texts are summarised in images.

Veronica Manescu and Aurelia Dumitru introduced a variety of activities they had planned with their A2 learners using telecommunications. Veronica Manescu insisted on the introduction of CALL competences and strategies as a grid in the CEFR and she even developed appropriate descriptors and technology standards for all levels of performance.

The group work included a variety of tasks, such as:

- Relating objectives and competences in the English curriculum for primary, lower and upper secondary education to the CEFR descriptors to identify the gaps between the level of performance targeted by the objectives and the target level stipulated by the curriculum. Reformulate the objectives and competences in the curriculum closely following the CEFR descriptors.
- Relating texts and tasks from English textbooks to the CEFR in order to identify the gap between the level targeted by the textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and the levels of performance stipulated by the curriculum.
- Devising activities meant to pilot new descriptors of performance included in the CEFR Companion Volume.

- Devising assessment tasks in the case of Pre-A1 young learners' FL competences at the beginning of primary education.
- Planning the research instruments and stages in the case of some of the participants' First Degree (Gradul I) research papers that are going to be conducted in 2018-2019.

FEEDBACK

All participants were invited to take a survey with a view to assessing their satisfaction regarding the training activities and resources, as well as the suitability and efficiency of the Workshop.

<https://ealtaworkshop.wordpress.com/workshop-evaluation/>

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HHQWFDS>

25 feedback forms were returned and the participants expressed their appreciation for the Workshop, deeming the event *extremely useful* (72%).

Information: 15 participants admitted that *a great deal* of information was transmitted, 8 *a lot*, 2 *a moderate amount*. 52% deemed the content *highly innovative* and 64% appreciated it as *extremely helpful*.

Preparation and delivery: 18 participants considered the quality of the presentations as *very high*, 4 as *high*, 3 as *neither high nor low*.

Organisation: 24 participants rated the event as *extremely/very organized*, while 1 participant considered it *somewhat* organized.

Website: 24 participants deemed the website *extremely/very* appealing and informative, while 1 participant considered it *somewhat* appealing.

All participants stated that they are *extremely/very likely* to attend another EALTA Workshop again in the future.

Strengths. Here are some thoughts expressed by the participants, highlighting the most valuable things they have learnt during the workshop and the impact this event may have upon their future career:

- *I have realized the huge importance of mediation in education and in everyday life*
- *I learned up to date information so that I can further improve ELT and Romanian as a foreign language teaching.*
- *Mediation strategies and activities will be extremely useful in my future teaching methods*

- *Everything learnt at the event is of great value, starting from general ideas, very organised presented, and ending with particular facts, such as mediation descriptors. I learnt how to be fully aware of my students' levels in English and how to work with descriptors.*
- *How to better design tasks in accordance with CEFR levels as well as rethinking certain activities so as to encourage mediation as part of the learning process of my students.*
- *As a language assessor, I am directly interested in the CEFR and I want to be up-to-date with the changes within it. This event gave me the possibility to understand better the differences between levels and to know better how to assess my students.*

Weaknesses: 1 participant would have liked more group work; 1 participant expressed interest in designing more tests based on the new descriptors; 1 participant was disappointed about the breaks between/during the presentations. Otherwise, no other shortcomings were mentioned.

- *Everything was very interesting, carefully prepared and useful so I cannot say there was something I disliked. Not only the atmosphere and the information presented, but also the people present there were great!*

FOLLOW-UP EVENTS

All presentations and case studies will be included in a volume to be published with an international publishing house. We are going to send the book proposal soon.

Moreover, I am honoured to take part in the launching conference entitled “Building Inclusive Societies through Enriching Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education” organized at Strasbourg, on 16-17 May.

As a result of the activities and events I have conducted in the recent years, I intend to set up a Research and Testing Center in the field of plurilingual education.

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