

EUROCENTRES

Language Learning Worldwide

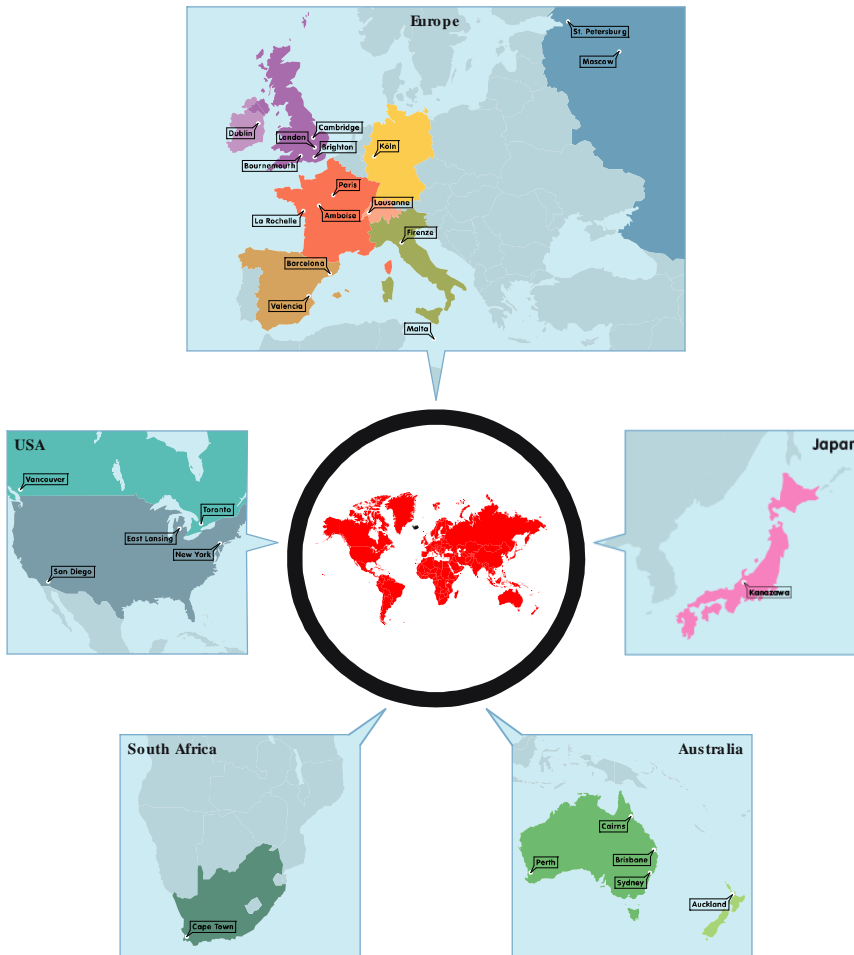
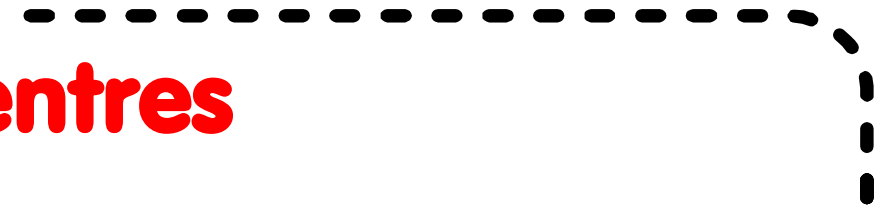
The CEFR Levels: Key Points and Key Problems

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The World of Eurocentres

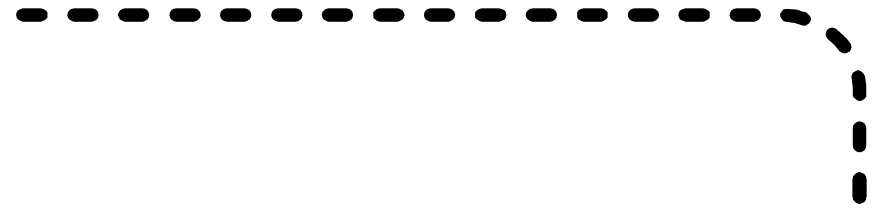


- Over 20 schools worldwide
- > Languages in cultural context
- > Educational foundation since 1960
- > NGO to Council of Europe since 1968
- > Language proficiency framework since 1989
- > Development of CEFR descriptors
- > Academic excellence
- > Quality management



CEFR Levels: Key Points

- > Origin of the CEFR levels and descriptors**
- > Salient characteristics of the levels**
- > Life beyond C2**
- > Validity claim of the illustrative descriptors**
- > Consistent interpretation of the levels**



Wilkins 1978

ALTE 1992

CoE 1992-6

Ambilingual Proficiency

Comprehensive Operational Proficiency

Adequate Operational Proficiency

Limited Operational Proficiency

Basic Operational Proficiency (Threshold Level)

Survival Proficiency

Formulaic Proficiency

Proficiency

DALF / CAE

FCE Vantage

Threshold

Waystage

Mastery

EOP

Vantage

Threshold

Waystage

Breakthrough

C2

C1

B2

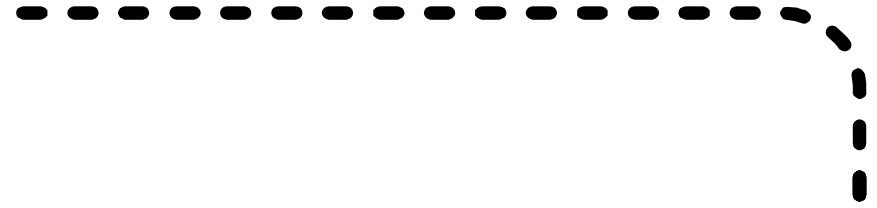
B1

A2

A1



Descriptors



Intuitive Phase:

- > Creating a pool of classified, edited descriptors

Qualitative Phase:

- > Analysis of teachers discussing proficiency
- > 32 teacher workshops sorting descriptors

Quantitative Phase:

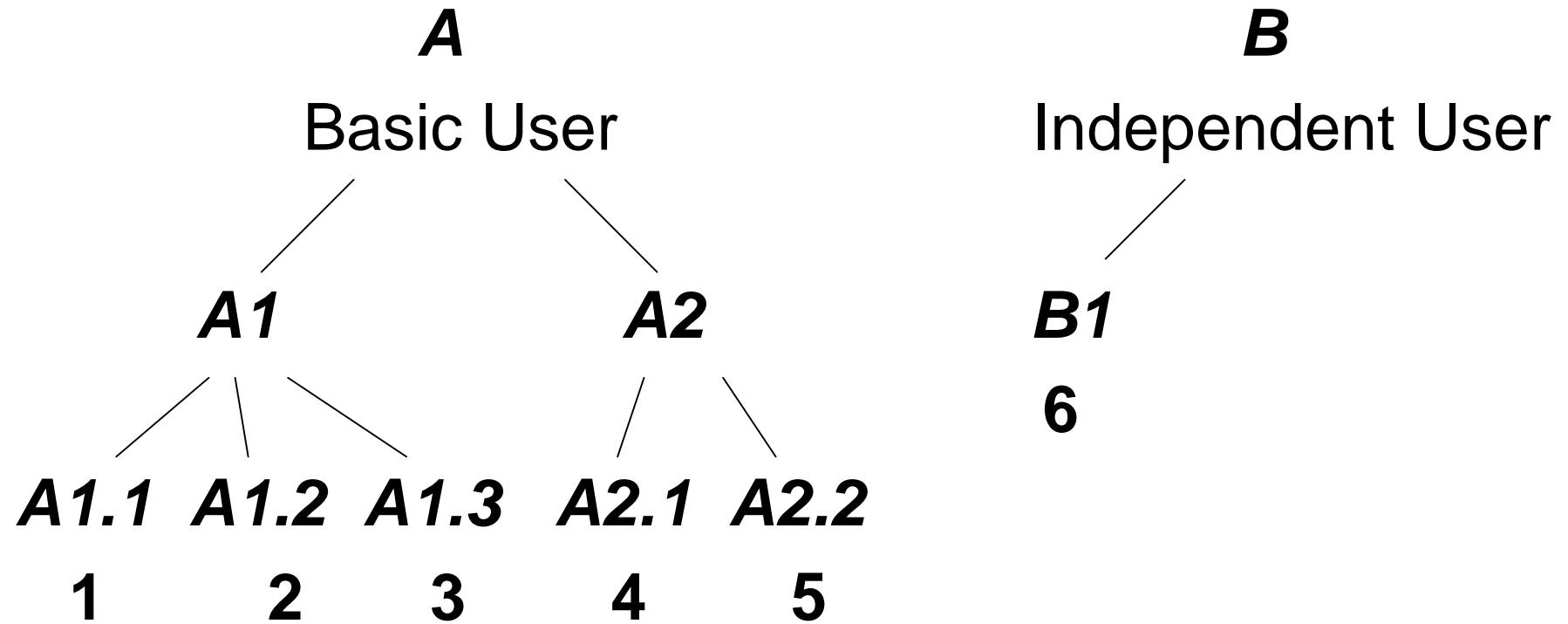
- > Teacher assessment of 2800 learners on descriptor-checklists (500 learners, 300 teachers)
- > Teacher assessment of videos of some learners

Interpretation Phase:

- > Setting “cut-points” for common reference levels

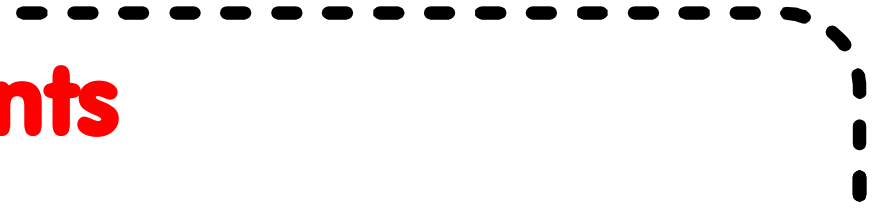


CEFR: Concertina-like Reference

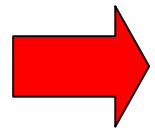




CEFR Levels: Key Points



> **Origin of the CEFR levels and descriptors**



Salient characteristics of the levels

> **Life beyond C2**

> **Validity claim of the illustrative descriptors**

> **Consistent interpretation of the levels**



Salient Characteristics A1

The point at which the learner can:

- > *interact in a simple way*
- > *ask and answer simple questions about themselves*
- > *respond to statements in areas of immediate need*

rather than relying purely on a rehearsed repertoire of phrases



Salient Characteristics A2

The majority of descriptors stating social functions:

- > *greet people, ask how they are and react to news*
- > *handle very short social exchanges*
- > *discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements*

Descriptors on getting out and about:

- > *make simple transactions in shops, banks etc.*
- > *get simple information about travel and services*



Salient Characteristics B1

Maintain interaction and get across what you want to:

- > *give or seek personal views and opinions*
- > *express the main point comprehensibly*
- > *keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing evident, especially in longer stretches*

Cope flexibly with problems in everyday life:

- > *deal with most situations likely to arise when travelling*
- > *enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics*



Salient Characteristics

B2

Effective argument:

- > *account for and sustain opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations and arguments*
- > *explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options*

Holding your own in social discourse:

- > *interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers possible*
- > *adjust to changes of direction, style and emphasis*

A new degree of language awareness:

- > *make a note of "favourite mistakes" and monitor speech for them*



Salient Characteristics C1

Fluent, well-structured language:

- > *good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions*
- > *express self fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly*
- > *produce clear, smoothly-flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices*



Salient Characteristics

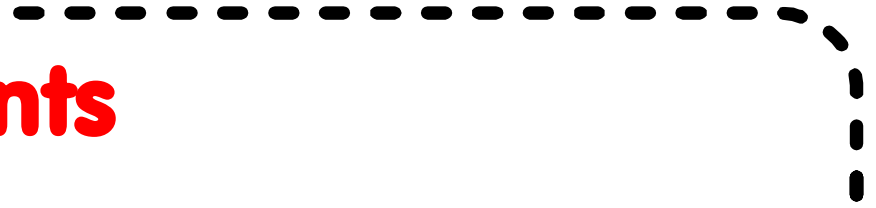
C2

Precision and ease with the language:

- > *convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices*
- > *show great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity*

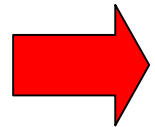


CEFR Levels: Key Points



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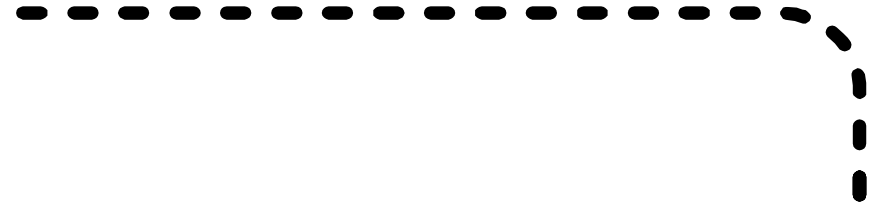


Life beyond C2

> **Validity claim of the illustrative descriptors**

> **Consistent interpretation of the levels**

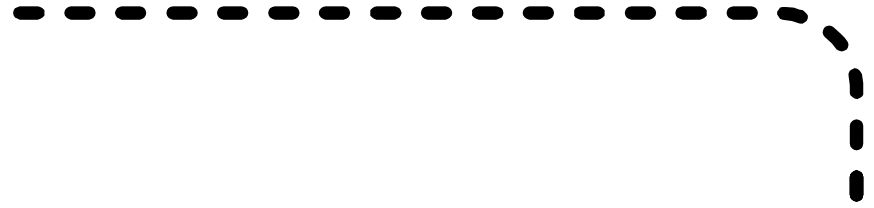
Life beyond C2



	E	WENS: Well-educated Native Speaker
	D2	Genuine bilinguals (+ Beckett etc.)
Ambilingual Proficiency	D1	Language professionals: Interpreters, translators, some university professors
Comprehensive Operational Proficiency	C2	Highly successful learners
Adequate / Effective Operational Proficiency	C1	
Limited Operational Proficiency	B2	
Basic Operational Proficiency	B1	
Survival Proficiency	A2	
Formulaic Proficiency	A1	



Global Scale: C2



- > Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.
- > Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.
- > Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.



Salient Characteristics

C2

Precision and ease with the language:

- > *convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices*
- > *show great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity*



Salient Characteristics

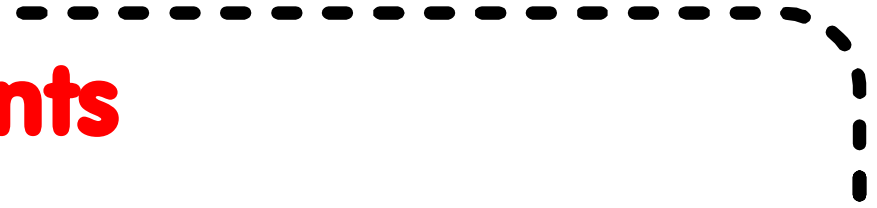
D?

Apparent ambilingualism:

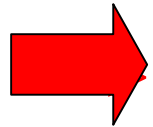
- > *Convey, elaborate or translate to explicit expression the nuances and subtleties of their own and of others' meaning by exploiting a comprehensive knowledge of the language to do so*
- > *function in all situations to all intents and purposes exactly as the mother tongue; use the language in a sophisticated, natural, accurate manner apparently indistinguishable from the performance of a native speaker*



CEFR Levels: Key Points



- > **Origin of the CEFR levels and descriptors**
- > **Salient characteristics of the levels**
- > **Life beyond C2**



- > **Validity claim of the illustrative descriptors**
- > **Consistent interpretation of the levels**

Typical Illustrative Descriptors

Informal Discussion: Level B2:

- > “Can take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts.”
- > “Can with some effort catch much of what is said around him/her in discussion, but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way.”
- > “Can account for and sustain his/her opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments.”



Validity: Scales before CEFR

- > Wording tended to be relative. The descriptors were seldom stand-alone criteria one could rate “Yes” or “No”
- > Wording often created semantic appearance of a scale, without actually describing anything
- > Situation of descriptors at a particular level was arbitrary - following convention/cliché
- > Lower levels tended to be worded negatively

Validity: Methodology



Developed scientifically:

- > comprehensive documentation of existing descriptions
- > relation to theory through descriptive scheme
- > *what* learners can do **and** *how well* they do it
- > positive, independent criterion-descriptors
- > checking teachers could use categories & descriptors
- > scaling on same scale as learners (video samples)
- > data from real, end-of-year assessment
- > four educational sectors in a multi-lingual environment
- > three foreign languages (English, French, German)
- > values replicated: ALTE 0.97; DIALANG: 0.92 / 0.96



Validity: Content coherence

	SETTING	SPEECH	HELP
C1			
B2+	-animated conversation between native speakers		
B2	-even noisy environments	-standard spoken language	-none
B1+	(topics which are familiar)		
B1	-extended everyday conversation	-clearly articulated standard speech	-ask for repetition & reformulation
A2+	-simple, routine exchanges -familiar matters	-clear, standard - directed at him/her	-ask for repetition & reformulation
A2	-simple everyday conversation	-clear, slow, standard - directed at him/her	-if partner will take the trouble
A1	- needs of a concrete type -short, simple questions & instructions	-very clear, slow, carefully articulated repeated speech directed at him	-sympathetic partner -long pauses to assimilate meaning



Validity: Content coherence

	A1	A2	A2+	B1	B2	C1
Recognition not a native-speaker	√	√	√	√	√	
Low background noise	√	√	√	√		
Familiar everyday topics	√	√	√	√		
Clear articulation	√	√	√	√		
Chance to get repetition	√	√	√	√		
Non standard, simplified	√	√	√			
Directly to the user	√	√				
Overtly helpful interlocutor	√	√				
Slow	√	√				
Careful articulation with pauses	√					
Very concrete, immediate topics	√					



Validity: Replication/contradiction

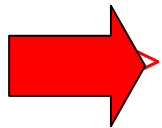
Qualitative Analysis: Cambridge Writing scale

- > Substantial independent confirmation of *salient* features of levels from Cambridge draft Common Writing Scale project
- > Contradiction very limited and restricted to non-calibrated content elements (of socio-linguistic competence)



Common Framework of Reference

- > **What is the purpose of the CEFR?**
- > **Where do the Common Reference Levels come from?**
- > **What claim to validity have the illustrative descriptors?**



How can we ensure consistent interpretation of the levels?



Linking Assessment to the CEFR

Specification (of content in relation to CEF)

- > Description; Coverage: CEF categories, levels

Standardisation (of interpretation of levels)

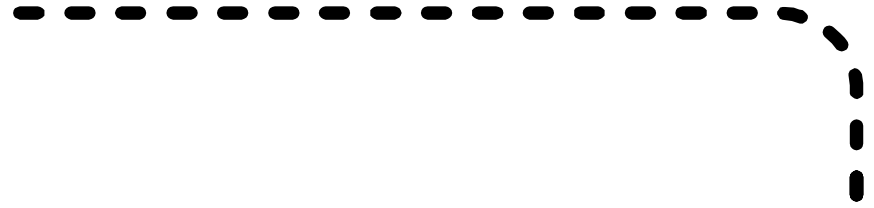
- > Training with calibrated examples provided
- > Transfer to local examples (videos, scripts, items)

Empirical Validation (of test cut-scores to levels)

- > Internal (test characteristics)
- > External (linking to calibrated tests, descriptors)



External Validation



Correlation

- > Is it worth trying to relate the two things. ($0.75 = 50\%$ shared variance)

Decision Power

- > How many matching classifications are there?



External Validation: Decision Table

Test under study (Eurocentres Itebank – German)

T
e
a
c
h
e
r
s

	A1 (1)	A2 (2+3)	B1 (4+5)	B2 (6+7)	C1 8+9)	Total
A1	4	1				5
A2		14	4			18
B1		5	13	2		20
B2			3	16		19
C1				3	3	6
Tot	4	20	20	21	3	68



CEFR Levels: Key Problems

- > Danger of differing interpretations for different languages
- > Under-definition of C2, + some reversals of C1/C2 descriptors (ALTE, DIALANG, Catalonia)
- > Weak definition of socio-linguistic competence (and some contradiction to Cambridge qualitative research)
- > Unrealistic expectations in relation to receptive skills



Differing Interpretation of the Levels

- > Translations, reference levels, samples produced independently, possibly importing problems from 1970s
 - > **Lead language; Cross-linguistic benchmarking**
- > Use of relative/normative terminology banned from English original (e.g. B2 = “avancé”)
 - > **Remove from secondary docs & next printing**
- > Use of criteria & samples for older frameworks rather than illustrative descriptors and samples calibrated to them (= indirect linking)
 - > **Formally link older frameworks to CEFR; avoid borderline samples**



Under-definition of C2

- > Mostly uncalibrated as very few C2 descriptors calibrated in CEFR/Swiss project
 - > **Integrate suitable descriptors from ALTE, DIALANG, Catalonia, Portfolio bank**
- > Occasional C1/C2 reversals
 - > **Investigate cases; Incorporate insights from qualitative analysis of samples (e.g. Cambridge)**
- > C1 descriptors tend to be more concrete, C2 descriptors less so – but try to avoid “native speaker” attributes
 - > **Define Level D, at least in outline, to give upper boundary; Consult curriculum descriptors**



Weak definition of Socio-cultural

- > Mostly uncalibrated as very few C2 descriptors calibrated in CEFR/Swiss project; none in ALTE, DIALANG etc.
 - > ?? Project ??
- > Some contradictions of uncalibrated with Cambridge Common Scale project
 - > **Investigate cases; Incorporate insights from qualitative analysis of samples**



Socio-cultural: contradictions

B2

CEFR

- > *Can express him or herself appropriately in situations and avoid crass errors of formulation. Can vary formulation of what she wants to say.*

Cambridge

- > *Can only occasionally and quite often inappropriately match style of expression to the topic or use idioms correctly.*



Socio-cultural: contradictions

C1

CEFR

- > *Can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.*
- > *Can express him or herself confidently, clearly and politely in a formal or informal register, appropriate to the situation and person(s) concerned.*
- > *Can adjust what he/she says and the means of expressing it to the situation and the recipient and adopt a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances.*

Cambridge

- > *Can make a positive impact by effectively varying style of expression and sentence length for effect, and through the use of idiom and/or humour, though the use of the latter is not always completely appropriate.*



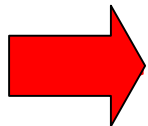
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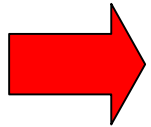
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Unrealistic expectations in relation to receptive skills



Common Framework of Reference:

“Learning, Teaching, Assessment”

NOT a harmonisation tool

“We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do or how to do it.
We are raising questions not answering them.”

NOT a theory of language or skills development

Scales describe learning outcomes, learner behaviours, not the invisible processes involved.

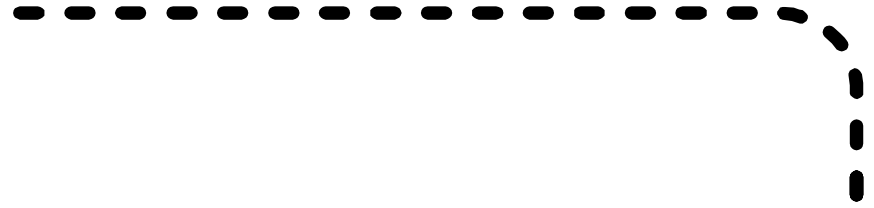
CEFR “Dutch grid” – variables didn’t explain difficulty either

NOT a test specification

Scales and lists can be consulted when drawing up a task specification (Ch4) or defining assessment criteria (Ch5) but need reference to detailed specs for language & context



Logical next steps



- > **Samples:** Benchmark performance samples in international, cross-linguistic seminars (like Sevres for French)
- > **Competences:** Define key *assessment criteria* and *salient features* in those categories at each level as seen in samples ***across languages***:
 - > Confirmation of existing illustrative descriptors
 - > Enrichment of existing illustrative descriptors
 - > Focus on CEFR weak points (socio-cultural etc)
- > **Activities:** Examine other descriptors, esp. C1, C2
 - > Calibrated: ALTE, DIALANG, Catalonia
 - > Non-calibrated: Portfolio descriptor bank, EAQUALS workshop

The CEFR Levels: Key Points and Key Problems

- > North, B. (forthcoming) The CEFR Levels and descriptor scales. 2nd ALTE International Conference, Berlin 19-21 May 2005
- > North, B. (2000). The development of a common framework scale of language proficiency. New York, Peter Lang.
- > North, B. and Schneider, G. (1998). Scaling descriptors for language proficiency scales. *Language Testing* 15, 2, 217–262.