BLOCK 5.
The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)
Outline

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1. Objectives of this unit

1. Describe the origins of the CEFR.
2. Analyse the linguistic, psychological and pedagogical ideas underlying the CEFR.
3. Understand the flexible approach of the CEFR in terms of language learning and teaching.
4. Become aware of one of the most important contributions of the CEFR: A new description of language levels and scales for measuring such levels.
Unit 4.3.1.

Council of Europe

- 1957  First intergovernmental conference on European co-operation in language teaching
- 1971  Beginning of the Modern Languages Project, or the “Threshold Level”
- 1975  Publication of first ‘Threshold Level’ specification
- 1994  European Centre for Modern Languages established
- 2001  European Year of Languages

**Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment**

(available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf)

European Language Portfolio
2. Origins of the CEFR

The general rationale for the CEFR complies with the three basic principles set down in the preamble to Recommendation R (82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

- that the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding;

- that it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination;

- that member states, when adopting or developing national policies in the field of modern language learning and teaching, may achieve greater convergence at the European level by means of appropriate arrangements for ongoing co-operation and co-ordination of policies.

(CEFR, 2001: 2)
3. What is the CEFR and what are its aims?

✓ The aims of the CEFR are:

• to promote and facilitate cooperation and mutual information among educational institutions in different countries;

• to provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications;

• to assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to reflect on their current practice and to situate and co-ordinate their efforts.

(CEFR, 2001: 5-6)
3. What are the CEFR and what are its aims?

✓ A fourth essential aim can also be distinguished: making educational bodies and teachers aware of the need that students develop **plurilingual and pluricultural competence**.

✓ **Plurilingualism is not the same as multilingualism.**

In multilingualism, students are encouraged to learn more than one language in their schools; plurilingualism promotes the belief that languages and their accompanying cultures are not to be kept in isolation. The knowledge and experience gained from these languages will not exist separately; on the contrary, they will interact and assist each other.
3. What is the CEFR and what are its aims?

✓ The result of over twenty years of research, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) is exactly what its title says it is: a framework of reference. It was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency. It is used in Europe but also in other continents and is now available in 39 languages:

Arabic, Albanian, Armenian, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, Friulian, Galician, Georgian, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Macedonian Language, Moldovan, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian (lekavian version), Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Ukrainian.

The CEFR is also being translated into Romanian.

(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Cadre1_en.asp Last accessed: 04/05/2013. Our highlighting)
3. What are the CEFR and what are its aims?

✓ What is it meant by the comprehensive, transparent and coherent labels attached to the CEFR?

- ‘Comprehensive’: Specification as detailed as possible of the range of language knowledge, skills, use and dimensions of language proficiency involving other dimensions beyond the strictly linguistic; also, specification of a series of references points or levels by which progress in learning can be measured.

- ‘Transparent’: information must be clearly formulated and explicit.

- ‘Coherent’ – in relation to the following components of educational systems:
  - the identification of needs;
  - the determination of objectives;
  - the definition of content;
  - the selection or creation of material;
  - the establishment of teaching/learning programmes;
  - the teaching and learning methods employed
  - evaluation, testing and assessment
3. What are the CEFR and what are its aims?

✓ The construction of a comprehensive, transparent and coherent framework for language learning and teaching does not imply the imposition of one single uniform system. On the contrary, the framework should be open and flexible, so that it can be applied, with such adaptations as prove necessary, to particular situations. CEF should be multi-purpose, flexible, open, dynamic, user-friendly, non-dogmatic.

(CEFR, 2001: 7-8)
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

Chapter 1. The Common European Framework in its political and educational context

Chapter 2. Approach adopted

Chapter 3. Common Reference Levels

Chapter 4. Language use and the language user/learner

Chapter 5. The user/learner’s competences

Chapter 6. Language learning and teaching

Chapter 7. Tasks and their role in language teaching

Chapter 8. Linguistic diversification and the curriculum

Chapter 9. Assessment

Description of a comprehensive model of language use and the language user (contents and objectives of learning)

Description of methodology
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

Synopsis of chapters in the CEFR
(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Synopsise_EN.asp)

**Chapter 1** defines the aims, objectives and functions of the proposed Framework in the light of the overall language policy of the Council of Europe and in particular the promotion of plurilingualism in response to European linguistic and cultural diversity. It then sets out the criteria which the Framework should satisfy.
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

Chapter 2 explains the approach adopted. The descriptive scheme is based on an analysis of language use in terms of the strategies used by learners to activate general and communicative competences in order to carry out the activities and processes involved in the production and reception of texts and the construction of discourse dealing with particular themes, which enable them to fulfill the tasks facing them under the given conditions and constraints in the situations which arise in the various domains of social existence. The words underlined designate the parameters for the description of language use and the user/learner's ability to use language.

(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Synopsise_EN.asp)
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

Chapter 3 introduces the common reference levels. Progress in language learning with regard to the parameters of the descriptive scheme can be calibrated in terms of a flexible series of levels of attainment defined by appropriate descriptors. This apparatus should be rich enough to accommodate the full range of learner needs and thus the objectives pursued by different providers, or required of candidates for language qualifications.

Chapter 4 establishes in some (but not exhaustive or definitive) detail the categories (scaled where possible) needed for the description of language use and the language user/learner according to the parameters identified, covering in turn: the domains and situations providing the context for language use; the themes, tasks and purposes of communication; communicative activities, strategies and processes; and text; especially in relation to activities and media.

(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Synopsise_EN.asp)
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

Chapter 5 categorises in detail the user/learner's general and communicative competences, scaled where possible.

Chapter 6 considers the processes of language learning and teaching, dealing with the relation between acquisition and learning and with the nature and development of plurilingual competence, as well as with methodological options of a general or more specific kind, in relation to the categories set out in Chapters 3 & 4.

Chapter 7 examines in greater detail the role of tasks in language learning and teaching.

Chapter 8 is concerned with the implications of linguistic diversification for curriculum design and considers such issues as: plurilingualism and pluriculturalism; differentiated learning objectives; principles of curriculum design; curricular scenarios; life-long language learning; modularity and partial competences.

(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Synopsise_EN.asp)
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

Chapter 9 discusses the various purposes of assessment and corresponding assessment types, in the light of the need to reconcile the competing criteria of comprehensiveness, precision and operational feasibility. The General Bibliography contains a selection of books and articles which users of the Framework may wish to consult in order to go into greater depth with regard to the issues raised. The bibliography contains relevant Council of Europe documents as well as works published elsewhere. (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Synopsise_EN.asp)
4. Overview of the chapters of the CEFR

- **Appendix A** discusses development of descriptors of language proficiency. Methods of and criteria for, scaling and the requirements for formulating descriptors for the parameters and categories presented elsewhere. are explained.

- **Appendix B** gives an overview of the project in Switzerland which developed and scaled the illustrative descriptors. The illustrative scales in the text are listed with page references.

- **Appendix C** contains the descriptors for self-assessment at series of levels adopted by the DIALANG Project of the European Commission for use on the Internet.

- **Appendix D** contains the "Can Do" descriptors at the series of levels developed by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Synopsise_EN.asp)
Developed through a process of scientific research and wide consultation, this document provides a practical tool for setting clear standards to be attained at successive stages of learning and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner. The Framework provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility. It is increasingly used in the reform of national curricula and by international consortia for the comparison of language certificates. A recent European Union Council Resolution (November 2001) recommended the use of this Council of Europe instrument in setting up systems of validation of language competences.

(\url{http://www.webcef.eu/?q=node/12}
Last accessed 04/05/2013)

 Accordingly, the CEFR proposes three broad ascending levels of language proficiency (A, B and C):

A: Basic User
B: Independent User
C: Proficient User

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5. Key issues of the CEFR for the purposes of this course
5.1. The six foreign language proficiency levels: Descriptors and scales

✓ These three broad levels are in turn subdivided in three broad levels:

A: Basic User
   A1: Breakthrough (beginner)
   A2: Waystage (elementary)

B: Independent User
   B1: Threshold (intermediate)
   B2: Vantage (upper-intermediate)

C: Proficient User
   C1: Effective Operational Proficiency (advanced)
   C2: Mastery (very advanced level)
5. Key issues of the CEFR for the purposes of this course

5.1. The six foreign language proficiency levels: Descriptors and scales

✓ The CEFR offers global scales of “can-do” descriptors for each of the six levels on page 24.

✓ Specific scales for each level in relation to understanding (listening and reading), speaking (spoken interaction and spoken production) and writing are included on pages 26 and 27 of the CEFR (Table 2. Common Reference levels: self-assessment grid).

Note that one of the main purposes of the CEFR is the learner’s self-assessment.

✓ Chapter 4 of the CEFR includes specific scales for each level concerning all the language activities and strategies described in this chapter (e.g., “Understanding conversation between native speakers”, page 66).
Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences.

(CEFR, 2001: 9. Emphasis in the original)

Which language theory and language teaching approach/method do you think that the CEFR seems to support?
5. Key issues of the CEFR for the purposes of this course

5.3. Competences pursued in the CEFR

Chapter 5 of the CEFR:

5.1 General competences

5.1.1 Declarative knowledge (savoir)
   5.1.1.1 knowledge of the world
   5.1.1.2 sociocultural knowledge
   5.1.1.3 intercultural awareness

5.1.2 Skills and know-how (savoir-faire)
   5.1.2.1 practical skills and know-how
   5.1.2.2 intercultural skills and know-how

5.1.3 Existential competence (savoir-être)

5.1.4 Ability to learn (savoir-apprendre)
   5.1.4.1 language and communication awareness
   5.1.4.2 general phonetic skills
   5.1.4.3 study skills
   5.1.4.3 heuristic skills

Section 6.3 in Block 6

Don't FORGET!
Chapter 5 of the CEFR

5.2 Communicative language competences

5.2.1 Linguistic competences
- 5.2.1.1 lexical competence
- 5.2.1.2 grammatical competence
- 5.2.1.3 semantic competence
- 5.2.1.4 phonological competence
- 5.2.1.5 orthographic competence
- 5.2.1.6 orthoepic competence

5.2.2 Sociolinguistic competence
- 5.2.2.1 markers of social relations
- 5.2.2.2 politeness conventions
- 5.2.2.3 expressions of folk-wisdom
- 5.2.2.4 register differences
- 5.2.2.5 dialect and accent

5.2.3 Pragmatic competences
- 5.2.3.1 discourse competence
- 5.2.3.2 functional competence
- 5.2.3.3 schematic design competence
5. Key issues of the CEFR for the purposes of this course

5.4. The stance of the CEFR in relation to language, language learning and language teaching

1) Language theory. The “what” of learning:

The CEFR does not explicitly advocate any language theory.

For example, in the case of grammatical competence,

There are a number of competing theories and models for the organisation of words into sentences [...] Here we limit ourselves to identifying some parameters and categories which have been widely used in grammatical description.

(CEFR, 2001: 113)

Section 5.2!
5. Key issues of the CEFR for the purposes of this course

5.4. The stance of the CEFR in relation to language, language learning and language teaching

2) Language learning and teaching: the “how” of pedagogy

Up to this point, the Framework has been concerned with the construction of a comprehensive model of language use and the language user, drawing attention along the way to the relevance of the different components of the model to language learning, teaching and assessment. That relevance has been seen predominantly in terms of the content and objectives of language learning. [...] However, a framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment must also deal with methodology, since its users will undoubtedly wish to reflect on and communicate their methodological decisions within a general framework. Chapter 6 sets out to provide such a framework.

(CEFR, 2001: 142. Our highlighting)
5. Key issues of the CEFR for the purposes of this course
5.4. The stance of the CEFR in relation to language, language learning and language teaching

2) Language learning and teaching: the “how” of pedagogy

Methodology is explicitly and intentionally left to teachers and textbook designers to decide, a fact which has received some criticisms but also support, because methodology varies with pedagogic culture.

[...] considering methodological issues, the CEF is not a new approach for teaching languages, so we should not ask for explicit guidelines. We can find those in (post) communicative approaches, which involve a theory of language and, in parallel, a theory of language learning.

(López Rama & Luque Agulló, 2012: 189, 190)
6. Conclusions

1. The CEFR has promoted a lot of research and debate in FLT.
2. It has undoubtedly contributed to homogeneize language standards in qualifications across countries and thus has facilitated students’ and workers’ mobility in Europe.
3. However, there are some criticisms targeted at the CEFR:
   Hulstijn (2007) argues that there is an imperative need to implement longitudinal studies that empirically test the implications of the CEFR in terms of the proficiency levels and scales, by using real L2 learners rather than L1 parameters or researchers’ and teachers’ intuitions.
   In particular, Hulstijn is wary about the fact that there are no empirical studies showing:
   a) That learners progressively go through all the preceding levels prior to their current state level;
   b) that learners can perform all tasks associated with lower levels than that where they currently stand;
   c) that a learner in a given scale (e.g. B2 Overall Oral Production) masters the linguistic scales at the same level (e.g. B2 Vocabulary Range, B2 Grammatical Accuracy, and B2 Phonological Control).