

Contextualizing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

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Abstract

There is increasing interest around the world in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (CoE, 2001). Many language teachers living and working within Europe, particularly those who are old enough to remember the impact of World War II, are likely to be familiar with the organization out of which the CEFR emerged (The Council of Europe) and to appreciate the reasons why that organization was set up and why it was felt necessary to develop such a framework. However, language teachers who are living and working outside of Europe may be less familiar with the background to the CEFR and, therefore, less likely to be in a position to appreciate the interaction between its political goals and its possible practical applications. In that the latter rely to a considerable extent for their likely effectiveness on the former, it is important that those involved in language education should have some understanding of the political, historical and social context out of which the CEFR developed and of the various stages in its development. The aim of this article is to provide readers with information that will help them to locate the CEFR politically, socially and historically and, therefore, to be in a better position to make a realistic assessment of its potential relevance to the contexts in which they are operating.

Introduction: Post-war Europe and the issue of European cooperation

This section deals with the situation in Europe after the Second World War and demonstrates how that situation impacted on the views of Europeans and led European nations to seek unity and how this, in turn, led to the establishment of a range of organisations and treaties, such as the Council of Europe and the European Cultural Convention, whose aim was, whilst accepting and celebrating difference and diversity, to establish and/or reinforce a sense of cultural and political unity in a wide range of areas. It is in this context that the importance of the Council of Europe and that of the European Cultural Convention in relation to the focus on unity in diversity can best be understood.

The European historical and political context

At the end of the Second World War, Europe was in shambles. The war had broken off normal international relations, setting European nations against one another. The full scale of the disaster to which extreme nationalism had led was revealed only at the end of the war. The economy was in ruins. A period of rationing and financial restrictions was accompanied by introversion. Later, the Cold War split Europe in two, with citizens of the Soviet Bloc enduring restriction of their freedom to travel and to establish contact with foreigners. As John Trim (2005, p. 13) observed in a lecture delivered for the 10th anniversary of the European Centre for Modern Languages in 2005: “Under such conditions, language teachers became quite out of touch with the up-to-date realities of the languages and cultures they were teaching and concentrated their attention on puristic formal correctness and the heritage of national literature”.

All of the events to which reference has been made had a profound impact on European ways of thinking. Post-war Europeans began to believe that the only way to prevent a recurrence of the horrors of the war was to unite. Moreover, following the difficult period of reconstruction, and in the context of competition from the United States, Japan and, more recently, emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil, Europeans also began to appreciate the advantages of getting together to create a stronger entity which could better defend Europe's position on the international scene. Such an entity would, it was believed, be in a better position to address the increasing challenges of globalisation and new technologies and, associated with them, greater international mobility and a higher level of outsourcing than was previously the case. However, equally important, perhaps more so, however, was the perception that there was a need for Europeans to adhere to a range of important characteristics and values, notable among which were cultural and linguistic diversity along with tolerance and mutual understanding.

The Council of Europe and the European Cultural Convention

The characteristics and values referred to above were included in the objectives of the Council of Europe, created in May 1949, and are echoed in the CEFR. Thus, it is noted in the first chapter that the CEFR “serves the overall aim of the Council of Europe as defined in Recommendations R (82) 18 and R (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers:¹ ‘to achieve greater unity among its members’, and to pursue this aim ‘by the adoption of common action in the cultural field’” (Council of Europe [CoE], 2001, p. 2). In the preamble to Recommendation R (82) 18, adopted in 1982, it is observed that although “the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed . . . a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding”. It is also asserted 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”. European governments were therefore encouraged to adopt or develop national policies in the fields of modern language learning and teaching and cultural development which promote greater convergence “by means of appropriate arrangements for ongoing co-operation and co-ordination”.

Recommendation R (98) 6 (1998) acknowledges the progress made by the member states since 1982, progress that reflects “[awareness] of the dangers that might result from marginalisation of those who lack the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe”. Recognizing that communication across linguistic and cultural differences requires a lifelong effort, it asserts “the growing need to equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry”.

At the end of 1954, the member states of the Council of Europe signed the European Cultural Convention, “designed to foster among the nationals of all members, and of such other European States as may accede thereto, the study of the languages, history and civilisation of the others and of the civilisation which is common to them all” (CoE, 1954, European Cultural Convention). The European Cultural Convention is a starting point for the work of the Council of Europe in the field of modern languages,

and for cultural co-operation in Europe in general which, to that point, had taken place on a very sporadic and one-off basis.² In its article 2, the Convention (CoE, 1954) calls each contracting party to:

- a) encourage the study by its own nationals of the language, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory; and
- b) endeavour to promote the study of its language or languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory.

In 1957, at the first intergovernmental conference on European co-operation in language teaching, following a suggestion by France, a Committee of Experts was set up to plan the development of modern language teaching in Europe (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 2). In December 1961, the Council for Cultural Co-operation was created by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, with four committees in charge of education, higher education, culture, and cultural heritage, to replace the Committee of Cultural Experts that had been provided for by the Cultural Convention.³

The European language policy

This section outlines the different stages of the European language policy up to the creation of the CEFR. These stages took place in the context of a growing body of research on political cohesion in Europe (encompassing the domains of language and culture) and evolving ideas and theories in the area of language teaching and learning.

Towards development of the CEFR

Le Français Fondamental: A first stage

In 1961, at the first Intergovernmental Symposium (held in Paris under the auspices of the Council for Cultural Co-operation), France presented *Le Français Fondamental*, the specification of a basic vocabulary and grammar for the French language. This was a pioneering work in many respects. Accompanying it was the launch of the first audio-visual course for adult learners of French language: *Voix et images de France*, which Trim (1997a, p. 48) has described as “the fountainhead of all our subsequent work over 35 years”. This was by no means the first attempt to simplify the learning of a language so as to facilitate its wider use. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, attempts to create and promote artificial languages which were often based on Indo-European word roots (e.g. Volapük, Esperanto and Ido) were superseded by the idea of promoting, through limitation and simplification, an already existing language.⁴ The principles used to select the vocabulary of *Le Français Fondamental* (presented below) were, however, totally different.

Research whose aim was to establish a fundamental, or basic, French started in 1947, following a recommendation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that approaches to language diffusion should be investigated in order to facilitate mass education in developing countries. Thus, the French government sought to facilitate the diffusion of French within and beyond the countries of the French Union (l’Union Française).⁵ The government asked specialists to establish a lexical and grammatical gradation from a corpus of oral texts.⁶ Under

the supervision of Georges Gougenheim, research underpinning what was then named *Français Élémentaire*⁷ was undertaken by the Centre d'étude du français élémentaire.⁸ The aim of that research was to determine, within the context of reflection on the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language, precisely what language should be taught. A series of surveys was conducted in the 1950s and 1960s⁹ to establish a list of basic words and grammatical structures that were considered to be necessary in order to communicate in the language. From a total of 312,135 words collected,¹⁰ 1000 words were selected in relation to a frequency of occurrence criterion (*fréquence*).¹¹ Among these were 270 grammatical words, 380 substantives, 200 verbs, 100 adjectives and 50 other words (Laborie, n.d.).¹² Notable by its absence, however, was vocabulary relating to health, arts and technology and a number of clearly useful words (e.g. *fourchette* [fork], *veste* [jacket], *nationalité* [nationality], *chèque* [cheque]).

A second criterion was then applied, that of availability (*disponibilité*),¹³ and a second survey was undertaken, with, at its core, 16 centres of interest, including food and drink, parts of the body and furniture. Although less frequent, the words identified in this way were clearly of communicative significance.¹⁴ On the basis of this survey, a second series of 1500 words (constituting fundamental available vocabulary) was added to the first series of words. The total set, now referred to as *Français fondamental*, was divided into two stages: the first (*Français Fondamental: 1^{er} degré*¹⁵) was limited to fewer than 1500 words, the second (*Français fondamental: 2^e degré*¹⁶) included approximately 1700 words. Following further refinement by a commission of teaching specialists and grammarians, final lists were established. These included some words that had been absent (e.g. words relating to hygiene, health, values and religion) and omitted some either considered too sensitive (e.g. *mosquée, temple*) or too colloquial (*bouquin, machin, truc*).

Le Français Fondamental was, according to Blache, Guénot and Portes (2005, p. 1), a pioneering work:

L'élaboration du français fondamental a été un travail précurseur non seulement du point de vue de ses objectifs et ses applications, mais également par la méthode employée. Il s'est agit en effet d'interpréter une analyse statistique sur un corpus de français parlé, avant que la linguistique de corpus n'apparaisse avec ses outils.

[The elaboration of *Le Français Fondamental* was a pioneering work not only from the point of view of its objectives and its applications, but also in terms of the method used, which involved the type of statistical analysis of a corpus of spoken French before the appearance of corpus linguistics with its tools.¹⁷]

It must not be forgotten, however, that in the 1970s *Le Français Fondamental* became the centre of a heated debate among academics, politicians and the public. On the political level, it was criticized by both the left and the right. The Communist party, for example, expressed the view that it promoted the teaching of a kind of *sous-français* (sub-French) which was regarded as an adequate substitute for genuine linguistic and cultural education in the case of immigrants. So far as some right wing commentators were concerned, it encouraged laziness and involved a form of linguistic degeneration which could lead to a type of pidgin French.

From the perspective of linguistics and language learning and teaching, there are a number of flaws associated with *Le Français Fondamental*, and the processes leading to its construction. Among these are the ways in which the surveys were constructed, the ways in which the resulting lists were manipulated and the artificiality of some of the language based on the final lists. Nevertheless, *Le Français Fondamental* represents an important move away from the traditional grammar translation methodology and provides a solid basis for subsequent developments in the area of language teaching and learning. Thus, for example, in the 60s, the selection and grading of linguistic elements associated with audio-visual methodology was based on its frequency lists and, as indicated later, it also had an influence on the Threshold level model in the early 1970s. Indeed, the idea of a limited, simple vocabulary to facilitate understanding still exists, as can be seen in news bulletins in French on Radio France Internationale (RFI, *le Journal en français facile*), which uses a basis of 300 simple terms (RFI, n.d.). This is similar to the approach adopted by *The Voice of America* since 1959, its *Special English* programmes making use of a list of approximately 1500 terms.¹⁸ Furthermore, it is now a well-established tradition to write and/or rewrite texts in simple language for language learners.

The Major Project in modern languages (1963-1972)

This project was launched in response to the French desire to create a European Institute of Applied Linguistics on the model of the Centre for Applied Linguistics in the United States. Although the member states rejected that proposal on the grounds of cost (Saville, 2005, pp. 275, 278), they did decide to launch a Major Project in Modern Languages (1963-1972). This involved all educational committees of the Council for Cultural Co-operation, promoted interaction between university-based language research and the language teaching profession, and led to the introduction into European universities of applied linguistics as a recognised academic discipline and to the establishment of AILA (acronym for *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée* or International Association of Applied Linguistics) which held its first congress in 1964 in the French city of Nancy. The Major Project also encouraged international co-operation in the area of the development and use of audio-visual methodology in language teaching (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 3).

In the 1970s, two phenomena led to a rethinking of language teaching methodology. First, increasing numbers of people who were not language specialists were seeking ways of accessing the information in documents written in languages in which they lacked an advanced level of proficiency. Secondly, increasing numbers of adult migrants needed to develop the language skills required for day-to-day communication in their host countries. New approaches to the specification of objectives, content and methodology were required (Saville, 2005, pp. 275, 278). Consequently, in the 1970s, a new approach was developed, one that represented a reaction against audiolingual and audio-visual methodologies as well as the situational method that had been developed in Great Britain.

The unit-credit scheme (1971-1977) and the Threshold Level

In 1971, a Symposium on Languages in adult education was organised by the Eurocentres foundation at Rüslikon in Switzerland. A small working group (including Jan van Ek, René Richterich, John Trim and David Wilkins) was set up to examine the feasibility of a unit-credit system for language learning in adult education, a system originating in Nancy (in France) in which the Council of Europe

was interested. Although Marchl and Kingsbury, for Eurocentres, were in favour of a “situation-based approach” (Saville, 2005, p. 276), the Council, in line with the Major Project, was pushing for an ‘audio-visual approach’.¹⁹ Whereas the situational method (or ‘oral approach’ as it was also called) in favour in Great Britain was influenced by behaviourism, audiovisual methods, based on the joint use of image and sound²⁰ and developed in France in the 1950s, distanced themselves from American structuralism, rejecting behaviourism along with the type of structural exercises proposed by Skinner.²¹ In terms of linguistic content and progress, audio-visual approaches were influenced by *Le Français Fondamental*; in terms of psychological theory, they were influenced by Guberina’s structuro-global approach,²² in which the use of the word ‘global’ signalled the fact that account was taken of factors involved in oral communication (such as the situation, emotional meaning, non verbal aspects of communication, interactional factors, and the participants’ state of mind) (Puren, 1988, p. 345).²³

John Trim began to list speech act function types. These were taken up by David Wilkins and first published in 1973 and later in 1980 in a paper entitled “The Linguistic and Situational Content of the Common Core in a Unit/Credit System” which appeared in the collection *Systems Developments in Adult Language Learning* (see Saville, 2005, p. 276). Meanwhile, René Richerich was working in the area of needs analysis and Jan van Ek was attempting to apply to German what had been done for French with *Le Français Fondamental*. Van Ek’s work in this area had a powerful influence on his first papers on the *Threshold Level*.

The working group laid down the principles on which a language teaching policy should be based if it were to serve the fundamental political objectives of the Council of Europe. These principles served as the foundation of all subsequent work (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 3):

- languages for all;
- languages are learnt for use;
- language learning is a life-long activity;
- language teaching should specify worthwhile, appropriate and realistic objectives based on a proper assessment of the needs, characteristics and resources of learners;
- language teaching should be planned as a coherent whole, covering the specification of objectives, the use of teaching methods and materials, the assessment of learner achievement and the effectiveness of the system, providing feedback to all concerned;
- effective language teaching involves the co-ordinated efforts of educational administrators and planners, textbook and materials producers, testers and examiners, school inspectors, teacher trainers, teachers and learners, who need to share the same aims, objectives and criteria of assessment.

A ‘functional-notional’ model was elaborated for specifying objectives in operational terms, describing “1) functions performed by acts of speech in communication (e.g. explaining, questioning, apologising, offering, congratulating, etc.); 2) general concepts (e.g. place, time, causality, etc.); 3) concrete, situation-specific concepts ... (e.g. house, train, score, grill, etc.)” (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 4). This model was intended to define the abilities that specific groups of learners, such as migrants,

business people or tourists, needed in order to reach a communication ‘threshold’ in the foreign language, that is, what a learner should be able to do to be an independent user of a particular language in a country where it is used as a common medium of communication. This led to the publication of the *Threshold Level* (van Ek, 1975), followed one year later by the French version, *Un Niveau Seuil* (Coste, Courtillon, Ferenczi, Martins-Baltar & Papo, 1976).

Project 4 for modern languages (1977-1981)

Threshold Level and *Un Niveau Seuil* were both presented, along with the framework for a unit-credit system, to an intergovernmental symposium in Ludvigshaven (Germany) in 1977. This represented the launching of Project 4, entitled ‘Modern Languages: improving and intensifying language learning as factors making for European understanding, co-operation and mobility’ (1977-1981). In this project, “the principles developed by the unit-credit group were applied in projects across the different sectors of general secondary, vocational and adult education, as well as in migrant education” (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 4). Versions of the *Threshold Level* in different languages started to be elaborated, involving application of the original concept to those languages while taking into account their linguistic and cultural context.²⁴ An intermediate level, *Waystage* (van Ek & Alexander, 1977), was developed for English,²⁵ the aim being to define the minimum linguistic knowledge necessary for a learner to be able to communicate with native speakers of the foreign language in casual contacts and everyday situations. This level corresponds to the acquisition of basic and general competences in a foreign language. The passage from the Waystage to the Threshold level is gradual, both specifications sharing the same model and components (more rudimentary in the case of Waystage), both referring to a ‘Common Core’, and both using the terminology popularized by Wilkins (1976).

Project 12: Learning and teaching modern languages for communication (1981-1988)

The findings of the works launched at the symposium in Rüschiikon were presented in 1982 at the First Strasbourg Conference, where they were approved and incorporated into Recommendation R (82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Project 12 (1981-1988) was set up to help member states to implement this recommendation, which played a major role in the 1980s, leading to changes to national language policies and curricula and to an overall emphasis on the need to teach and learn languages for communicative purposes. A schools’ interaction network that had already been set up as part of Project 4 was extended in order to help member states to share their experience and expertise. Teacher trainers, who played a major role in bringing new methods and materials to the classroom, were seen as key agents for modernization. For them, and for others perceived as primary change agents, a first series of 36 international workshops on specific priority themes was held between 1984 and 1987, involving 226 presenters and 1500 participants. Many of these workshops focused on aspects of what had come to be known as ‘the communicative approach’ to language teaching, including possible ways of incorporating it into language programmes and language teacher training. This series of workshops had a deep impact on language teaching. Indeed, it has been claimed that it helped to create a “broad consensus on the aims and methods of language teaching across member states and in fact much more widely” (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 4).

Language learning for European citizenship (1989-1997)

In 1988, at a second Strasbourg conference, reference was made to the positive impact of projects 4 and 12 and to Resolution R (82) 18 on national curricula, especially at lower secondary level. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Council of Europe expanded from 23 members to 40 between 1989 and 1996. Resolution R (82) 18 “provided important guidelines for the reform and re-orientation of language teaching in those new member states” (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 4).

A new project, *Language learning for European citizenship (1989-1997)*, was set up, with a series of ‘new style’ twinned workshops extending to new sectors and including new themes, such as information and communication technologies, bilingual education, educational links and exchanges, learner autonomy and enriched models for specifying objectives (Trim, 26 September 2001, p. 5 and CoE, 2006, p. 8). These twinned workshops were organized in the following way. A first workshop was organized in a member state to launch a two-year programme of development. Co-ordinators then oversaw the work of teams in different countries. After two years, a second workshop was held in another member state, the aim being to synthesize the results, plan their diffusion and draw up recommendations for language policies. This led, at the final conference held in Strasbourg in 1997, to Recommendation R (98) 6, which stresses the role of intercultural communication and of plurilingualism, promotes the provision of concrete measures for different sectors of education²⁶ (including the initial and in-service training of teachers) and encourages international co-operation and the sharing of experiences and competences through exchanges.

The Rüschnikon symposium: The birth of the European Framework of Reference for Languages and of the European Language Portfolio

On the initiative of the Swiss federal government and several Swiss organisations, an Intergovernmental Symposium entitled *Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, Certification* was held in Rüschnikon in November 1991. The first objective of the Symposium was originally to relate language programmes and examinations in Europe by the means of a common framework of reference (North, 2005, p. 5). This idea was not new: Trim had already “put forward the draft of a system in 1977 and . . . tried to get a unit developed to establish and administer it”, but at that time the political will was not there and there was a strong suspicion of European centralism, particularly in Scandinavia (Saville, 2005, p. 278). Switzerland, although not a member of the Council of Europe, brought the concept back in 1991, mainly for internal reasons: education in that country was the prerogative of the cantons, not of the federal government (which has no Ministry of Education) and so Switzerland was confronted with the same problems of internal mobility as was Europe (though on a smaller scale) and, therefore, with the same need for a common basis for evaluating qualifications (Saville, p. 279). Switzerland stressed that “the degree of educational and vocational mobility means that people are always having to evaluate qualifications which they don’t know anything about” (p. 279). Hence the perception that there was a need for a greater degree of transparency and coherence.

From 1989 to 1990, a group of representatives from Eurocentres language schools and a working party from the CILA (Commission Interuniversitaire de Linguistique Appliquée²⁷) had worked on the problem of determining the linguistic competences

attested by exams, diplomas and other forms of certification and had examined the possibility of establishing a common reference system and a model for the transparent description of exams, diplomas and certifications. In a meeting in London in autumn 1990, they had also concretized the idea of a Language Portfolio (CERLE, 2003, ¶ 2). This clearly had an impact on the way in which the aims of the development of a Common European Framework, as outlined at the Rüschtikon Symposium, were formulated. These aims were (Trim, 2005, p. 14):

- to promote and facilitate co-operation 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 situate and co-ordinate their efforts.

The Council of Europe entrusted a small working group, consisting of John Trim (Project Director), Daniel Coste (CREDIF, France), Brian North (Eurocentres, Switzerland) and Joe Sheils (Council of Europe Secretariat), with the task of producing the text of the Framework. The task took a decade, with a first draft being published in 1995. The draft Framework was submitted for consultation (1996), with 1000 copies being sent out to institutions and individuals. Over 200 evaluation questionnaires were returned and analysed (Saville, 2005, p. 279). A second draft was then published in 1997 and presented in Strasbourg at the Final Conference of the *Language Learning for European citizenship* project, which recommended the testing of the Common European Framework. Recommendation R (98) 6, in a section on the Specification of objectives and assessment in its Appendix, “encourage(s) institutions to use the Council of Europe’s Common Framework of Reference to plan or review language teaching in a coherent and transparent manner in the interests of better international co-ordination and more diversified language teaching”.

The second draft of the Framework was distributed in 1998 for pilot experimentation, along with a General Guide and 10 User Guides. Then, following revisions, a final edition was published in English and in French and presented (with the European Portfolio) under the title of *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (hereafter CEFR) in 2001 as part of the activities organized for the European Year of Languages (jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the European Union).

Development of the Threshold level series

In parallel with the drawing up of the CEFR, the original versions of *Threshold Level* and *Waystage* were developed and extended in 1990 (van Ek & Trim, 1991a & b) in the light of developments in the field, with the addition of sections dealing with discourse analysis, the sociocultural component, compensatory strategies in interaction, communicative competences and life-long learning (Viña Rouco, 2005, p. 99). A third, higher level specification, *Vantage Level* (van Ek & Trim, 2001), was prepared, first for English (1996), then for some other languages, such as German and Greek. The *Threshold Level* had an immense impact on language policies, language programmes and textbook design. Saville (2005, p. 281) has claimed that:

One thing which the Threshold level did was to bring together, with a common recognized objective, the independent agents who are working independently

of each other but having to feed into the same system — the textbook writers, the teacher trainers, examining authorities, and so on. They could all refer to it although what they could do in respect to it would be entirely different.

The impact of the *Threshold Level* was reinforced by the appearance of the *Waystage* and *Vantage* levels, the three together underpinning notions of competencies that impacted strongly on the Common Reference Levels of the CEFR, a scale of six levels (elaborated between 1993 and 1996) in which *Waystage*, *Threshold* and *Vantage* levels correspond to the levels A2, B1 and B2 respectively.

The content of the CEFR: An outline

The CEFR begins with a prefatory note (CoE, 2001, p. ix), notes for the user (pp. xi – xiv) and a synopsis (xv – xv). The first chapter (pp. 1-8) defines the aims and objectives of the CEFR and outlines how it is intended to function in relation to the Council of Europe’s language policy. In the context of what are referred to as ‘plurilingualism’ and ‘pluriculturalism’, there is a discussion of why the CEFR is perceived as being needed, and the criteria (comprehensiveness, transparency and coherence) it should meet. The second chapter (pp. 9-20) outlines the underlying approach, one that is defined as being ‘action-oriented’, and makes reference to some key concepts, including ‘general competences’ (knowledge [*savoir*]; ‘skills and know-how’ [*savoir-faire*]; ‘existential competence’ [*savoir-être*]; ‘ability to learn’ [*savoir-apprendre*]); and ‘communicative language competence’ [comprising linguistic²⁸, sociolinguistic²⁹ and pragmatic competences³⁰]). Also referred to are language activities (involving reception, production, interaction or mediation), domains, (public or private, occupational, educational) and tasks, strategies and texts. What are referred to as ‘common reference levels of language proficiency’ are introduced and there are, finally, sections dealing with language learning and teaching and language assessment.

The third chapter (CoE, 2001, pp. 21-42) is devoted to a discussion of the common reference levels. The fourth chapter (pp. 43-100) introduces a series of categories intended to help those involved in language teaching and learning to reflect upon and state clearly what learners can be expected to know and be able to do with language in order to communicate.³¹ Chapter 5 (pp. 101-130) explores competences that users/learners are said to require in order to deal with communicative situations.

The sixth chapter (CoE, 2001, pp. 131-156) focuses on language teaching and learning and concerns what learners have to learn or acquire, the processes of language learning and what users of the Framework can do to facilitate learning. Some methodological options are provided and there is a discussion of errors and mistakes. The focus of the seventh chapter (pp. 157-167) is tasks and their role in language learning and teaching.³² The eighth chapter (pp. 168-176) deals with linguistic diversification and the curriculum. The ninth, and final chapter (pp. 177-196), is concerned with assessment, which is differentiated from programme evaluation and defined, in the context of the CEFR, as relating to “the proficiency of the language user” and discussed in terms of validity,³³ reliability³⁴ and feasibility (p. 177).

There are four appendices to the CEFR. The first (CoE, 2001, pp. 205-216) deals with the development of proficiency descriptors and details the requirements for their

formulation. The second appendix (pp. 217-225) describes the Swiss research project which led to the development of the illustrative scales of descriptors presented in the Framework, outlining the methodology used to develop them. The third appendix (pp. 226-243) presents the DIALANG online assessment system (available at the time in fourteen European languages) which is aimed at adults who wish to assess their level of proficiency and receive feedback. It is noted that although the self-assessment statements included in a number of tables are “mostly taken from the CEF”, they have been “adapted where necessary to fit the specific needs of the system” (p. 226). The fourth appendix (pp. 244-257) outlines the nature, purpose and development of ‘can do’ statements developed by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE).³⁵

Documents complementing the CEFR: The European Language Portfolio and the guides and manuals developed for the CEFR

Several documents have been elaborated in relation to the CEFR. The first presented is the European Language Portfolio, a self-assessment tool intended not only to help learners to assess their own progress but also to motivate them, to help them better understand the learning process and to facilitate international mobility. Its development was parallel to that of the CEFR and both were officially launched at the same time. The other documents are guides and manuals which have been designed to help users to better understand and implement the CEFR. The first one, *A Guide for Users*, has replaced the eleven guides accompanying the 1996 version of the CEFR.³⁶ The second one, of which the final version was published in 2009 (CoE, 2009a), is a manual for relating language examinations to the CEFR. It is complemented by a series of reference materials, CD-ROMs, videos and DVDs that provide samples of calibrated performances (intended to help examination providers to co-ordinate their judgements),³⁷ and a *Reference Supplement* (CoE, 2009b) containing additional information.³⁷

The European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a tool for self-assessment in which learners can record their results, qualifications and competences in the learning of various languages as well as intercultural experiences of all kinds, at any level, all life long, whether at school or outside of school.

It has already been noted that the idea of establishing an ELP was presented at the 1991 Symposium in Rüslikon where the Swiss delegation launched the idea of a research project to develop a system of description of language competences which would serve as a basis for the first prototypes of a Portfolio (see CERLE, 2003). A working group was set up to elaborate descriptors of strategic and intercultural competences and language proficiency benchmarking descriptors. Language competency descriptors were elaborated between 1993 and 1996 by Günther Schneider, Brian North and René Richterich.^{38,39} After a period of experimentation and some modifications in 1995 and 1996, the Council of Europe decided, in April 1997,⁴⁰ to pursue work on the development of the CEFR and to develop different versions of a European Language Portfolio.⁴¹ In October 2000, following a pilot phase between 1998 and 2000, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe (at their 20th Session in Poland) adopted a resolution in which they recommended the “implementation and wide use of the ELP” in the member states (*Resolution on the ELP*, 2000, recommendation 1). In an attempt to ensure that

common standards and quality are respected, the Council of Europe created, in the same year, the *Validation Committee*, a committee of national delegates and experts for the accreditation of all new versions of the Language Portfolio. The European Language Portfolio was officially launched, together with the CEFR, in 2001. The overall goal was to raise motivation and support for the study of languages by providing learners with a means to “document their progress towards plurilingual competence by recording learning experiences of all kinds over a wide range of languages” (CoE, 2001, p. 20).

The Portfolio consists of three parts: a Language Passport, a Language Biography and a Dossier. The Language Passport provides “an overview of the individual’s proficiency in different languages at a given point in time” (CoE, Language Policy Division, n.d., ¶1).⁴² The *Passport* can be regularly updated and records formal qualifications and diplomas, as well as self-assessments and intercultural experiences of all kinds. The *Language Biography* is a record of the language learning history of learners in which they record their experiences of language learning as well as their intercultural experiences, in formal or informal educational contexts.⁴³ It is intended to encourage individuals to involve themselves in the learning process, including planning their progress and evaluating their achievements, by helping them to reflect upon it. Learners can select for inclusion in the *Dossier* work that illustrates their skills, achievements and experiences in the field of foreign languages. The dossier can be updated as the learning progresses and as the individual grows older.⁴⁴ A critical aspect of the Portfolio is that it can reflect the learning processes involved in several languages at the same time and is not confined to recording qualifications gained in formal educational contexts. Also critical is the fact that, although many different types of portfolio can be designed in relation to age and local (national, regional) contexts, the same standards, as approved by the Council of Europe’s Validation Committee, apply so that, in order to ensure coherence, all of them share a Common Core with the CEFR. Eighty models of Portfolios have been validated to date (October 2006). A series of documents have been developed to help teachers, teacher trainers and portfolio developers,⁴⁵ and an electronic version of the Language Passport for adults, the *Europass Language Passport*,⁴⁶ has been developed by the Council of Europe and the European Union (in 2004) and can be completed online or downloaded. Moreover, the first electronic European Language Portfolio, developed by EAQUALS and ALTE, has been accredited (see EAQUALS-ALTE, n.d.).

Guides to facilitate the use of the CEFR

A series of eleven guides, including a *General Guide for Users* (CC-LANG (98) 1) (Trim, 1997b) and ten specialised guides (CC-LANG (96) 9-18) complemented the 1996 version of the CEFR. For the final version of the CEFR, they were replaced (in April 2002) by a single *Guide for Users* (Trim [Ed.], 2001), which included the information contained in the previous guides along with new developments. This 232 page-document consists of four sections giving advice to different categories of user. The first section concerns all users; the second deals with those directly engaged in the learning/teaching process; the third section is intended for those involved in the planning, organisation, delivery and quality assessment of language education;⁴⁷ the fourth is intended for textbook and materials writers.

These guides represent one response to those who criticized the Framework on the grounds of its complexity. However, as John Trim noted in an interview with Nick

Saville (2005, p. 283), “in general, they haven’t been very influential, partly because many people did not know about them, and also perhaps, because some of the guides themselves didn’t build in the user dimension adequately”.

The Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR

Figueras (2008, p. 28) notes that one of the areas in which the CEFR has been most subject to criticism is that of assessment. Rapid adoption of the CEFR’s Common Reference Levels by examination institutions (elaborating and commercializing language tests) has not always been backed up by validation studies. This criticism, according to Figueras (p. 28), was at its height at a seminar organised in Helsinki by the Finnish Ministry of Education in July 2002. Following that seminar, the Council of Europe organised a working group to design a manual for those wishing to relate examinations to the levels of the CEFR. That manual, *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (hereafter the Manual, CoE, 2009a) represents a continuation of earlier work of the Council of Europe in the field of language policy, and particularly the Threshold Level and the CEFR.^{48,49} However, the authors also wished to take into account more recent developments on levels and objectives which had been elaborated on the basis of the CEFR and which included a series of content specifications for different languages. In relation to these, it was claimed that this manual is a ‘logical complement’ (Manual, p. 4).

The Manual recommends following four sets of procedures (Chapters 3-6): *familiarisation* with the CEFR; *specification* of examinations in terms of objectives, content and tasks profiled in relation to the levels of the CEFR and the categories presented in Chapters 4 and 5; *standardisation* to achieve and implement “a common understanding of the meaning of the CEF levels” (Manual, p. 7) and *empirical validation* through the collection and analysis of test data. The last chapter (Chapter 7) provides guidelines for reporting on the content of examinations and the procedures followed in order to link it to the CEFR levels.

The Manual is complemented by a Reference Supplement (CoE, 2009b) which “discusses approaches to standard setting, classical test theory, qualitative methods in test validation, generalisability theory, factor analysis, and item response theory” (Little, 2006, p. 184).⁵⁰ It is also supported by a series of reference materials for different languages in CD-ROM format which provide calibrated samples of performances in writing, listening and reading. There are also videos/DVDs which provide samples of spoken performances by learners from different countries (not necessarily European countries)⁵¹ at different levels. It has been claimed that these illustrations should “make it possible for testers and examiners to co-ordinate their judgements, and for classroom teachers to have a clearer picture of what to expect from students at different levels” (Trim, 2005, p. 17).⁵²

Moving towards language-specific descriptions and a framework for languages of school education

Two recent developments are outlined here. The first involves the development of Reference Level Descriptions for national and regional languages; the second is a project involving the design of a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of School Education (which necessarily involves mother tongue education).

Reference Level Descriptions for national and regional languages

One of the most recent projects involves the development of Reference Level Descriptions (RLDs) for national and regional languages and would appear to represent a response to those who have argued that the specifications of the CEFR are too broad to be very helpful (CoE, n.d. a, ¶ 7).⁵³

The descriptors [of the CEFR] specify progressive mastery of each skill, which is graded on a six-level scale (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). However, for operators, textbook authors and teachers, the specification set out in the CEFR may appear excessively broad. Work began on drafting CEFR specifications language by language.

More specific descriptions, related to CEFR levels, were first developed for the German language. On the initiative of the Goethe Institut, a team of representatives from Germany, Austria and Switzerland drew up *Profile Deutsch* (Glaboniat, Müller, Schmitz, Rusch & Wertenschlag, 2002).^{54,55} The motivation for this has been discussed by Trim (2007, ¶ 10).⁵⁶ Other sets of descriptions followed or are currently being developed for other languages (see for example, *Un référentiel pour le français* for French, *Plan curricular del Instituto Cervantes for Spanish*, *English Profile* for English, etc.).⁵⁷

According to Beacco, Bouquet and Porquier (2004, p. 8), the authors of the French RLDs for level B2 the major aim in producing these language-specific descriptions is to facilitate the development of piloting tools for language policies, language curricula and certifications. Thus, these descriptions (CoE, 2005, p. 4) “are meant to serve as a starting point for the preparation of teaching programmes for the language concerned”. Interestingly, in the online presentation of the *English Profile* (*What is the English Profile?* [n.d.], ¶ 1), the ambitions of the project are defined in the following terms: “It is intended that the project will lead to the production of a *core curriculum* [italics added] and a tool kit for English as a foreign or additional language, linked to the general principles and approaches of the CEFR”.

The function of the RLDs is to transpose the descriptors of each level of the CEFR into linguistic terms that are language-specific, something that is considered necessary if the competences described in the CEFR are to be implemented. Thus, it has been argued that the RLDs should provide “inventories of the linguistic realisations of general notions, acts of discourse and specific notions/lexical elements and morpho-syntactic elements considered characteristic of [the level concerned]” (CoE, 2005, p. 5). However, although the descriptions will necessarily differ according to the languages concerned, they need, according to Beacco, et al. (2004, p. 10), to share certain features if they are to contribute to the convergence of education systems made possible by the development and diffusion of the CEFR. With that in mind, the Council of Europe has published a *Guide for the Production of RLD* (CoE, 2005) which outlines common general principles, identifies the features that these descriptions should share and specifies the methodology that should be used to create the inventories “in order to give these reference level descriptions for individual languages a degree of scientific status and a social audience compatible with their aim” (CoE, 2005, p. 6).

All of this is, according to Beacco, et al. (2004, p. 9), predicated on the hypothesis that it is possible to identify linguistic forms for particular languages which would, on the whole, correspond to the competences which are described in the CEFR independently of the languages concerned, thus moving from general reference descriptions common to different languages to reference descriptions specific to French (and other) language(s). Thus, the RLDs' function is to "décrire, sous forme d'inventaires de "mots", des contenus possible d'enseignement" [describe, in the form of inventories of 'words', the possible teaching contents] (Beacco, et al., p. 7 – my translation).

The inventories associated with these descriptions can be adjusted with time, as the language changes, and are, it has been asserted, "one of the anchor points proposed by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division for the development of programmes that are consistent with one another, from one language to another and also with the common tools which already exist" (CoE, 2005, p. 3).

Project for a framework for languages of school education

The Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, "concerned with the development of effective skills in the language(s) of instruction" (CoE, n.d. b, ¶ 1) has launched a project to draw up, on the model of the CEFR, a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of School Education, that is, the languages through which school curricula are delivered, which, in most cases, will be pupils' first (mother) language. A preliminary survey was launched in April 2005, its aim being to secure a general overview of the curricula used to teach the language of instruction in member states at national or regional level, a primary focus being on identifying similarities and differences as well as any major problems that would need to be addressed.

At the time of writing, the feasibility of designing a framework of the kind to which reference has been made is still being considered. However, its potential significance can be considered in the context of the fact a number of problems have been identified in relation to the teaching of the languages of academic instruction (Beacco & Byram, 2006, p. 3).⁵⁸

David Little (2006, p. 187) has claimed that although the notion of plurilingualism is central to the Council of Europe, "neither the CEFR, nor the ELP does full justice to the concept". The CEFR (CoE, 2001, 1.3, p. 4) recognizes that "an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other people (whether learnt at school or by direct experience)". This represents acknowledgement of the essential role of the mother tongue in the construction of plurilingual competence. Even so, "the CEFR offers an apparatus for describing second and foreign language proficiency, and the ELP is explicitly concerned with learning languages other than the mother tongue" (Little, 2006, p. 187). The project on Languages of School Education is intended to address this issue. Thus, in the online presentation of the project on the Council of Europe site (CoE, n.d. b), it is noted that the project includes a focus on language as a school subject, language as a medium of teaching and learning across the curriculum and "possible convergences between the language(s) of school education and modern (foreign) languages" in the context of "a global or

holistic approach to language education policy aimed at promoting coherence in the development of the learner's plurilingual repertoire”.

What appears to be being proposed here is a common language policy for first, second and foreign languages. It has been claimed that if this project were to succeed, it would “have important consequences not only for the CEFR but also for the ELP and the elaboration of language curricula” (Little, 2006, p. 187). As Byram (CoE & Jagiellonian University, 2006, p. 17) observes, there are a range of critical issues that need to be addressed in this context: “[It is] important to discuss the differences between concepts such as Mother Tongue Education, Standard Language Education, Key Language, Language of Instruction, First Language Education, Home Language, National Language, State Language Education, etc.”. Furthermore, he notes (p. 17):

[There] is a trend to specialisation, with the result that there is a lack of contact between for example those dealing with foreign/second language education and those specialising in mother/first/official/national language – as well as between those specialising in teaching literature and those interested in teaching language itself.

Several intergovernmental conferences have already taken place to discuss this project (Krakow, April 2006; Strasbourg, October 2006; Prague, November 2007, etc.). In his report of the last of these (held in Prague), Fleming (2007, p. 11) outlined several themes that emerged. One of these is “the importance that language plays in ensuring that disadvantaged learners⁵⁹ have full access to the curriculum and derive full benefit from it” (p. 11).⁶⁰ In relation to the Framework itself, participants made a number of potentially significant points. First, because the education world is always changing, a “more fluid set of theoretical perspectives, examples of policy and practical support” is preferable to a “single static document evolved through many years of deliberation and research” (p. 11). Secondly, the complexity of the project means that a single publication would be too expansive and/or too difficult to access and navigate. Third, there is a need to consider at an early stage the need for support mechanisms for teacher education and development. Fleming also noted that the suggestion of having an electronic format, first made at the intergovernmental conference in Strasbourg in 2006, had become clearer and more convincing in Prague. Finally, Fleming claimed (p. 11) that “the Framework document does not need a common core or centre to provide the necessary stability, coherence and direction”. On the basis of Fleming's observations, it appears that what is being contemplated is a framework for languages of education that is presented from the outset in a number of documents (rather than a single one) that are more flexible and more user-friendly than the CEFR. If this is the case, it will be interesting to see what impact this will have on CEFR developments to date in that it is a project that appears to have the potential to lead to a reworking of everything that has preceded it.

Conclusion

The development of the CEFR took place in a very specific social and political context. Understanding of this context and awareness of the various projects that led up to the production of the CEFR are critical to an understanding of the nature of the framework itself and to assessment of its possible relevance outside of Europe.

Endnotes

1. Council of Europe [CoE], Committee of Ministers, 1982 and 1998. It must be noted that the Council of Europe, the oldest political organisation of the continent, is distinct from the European Union (or other anterior organization such as the European Economic Community), although “no country has ever joined the Union without first belonging to the Council of Europe (see <http://www.coe.int/aboutCoe/index.asp?page=nepasconfondre&l=en>). The Committee of Ministers is composed of Foreign Ministers of the member states or their deputies in Strasbourg (ambassadors/permanent representatives) and is the Council’s decision-making body. European conventions or treaties are legally binding and many are also open to non-member states. Recommendations give governments’ policy guidelines on different matters including culture, education, etc.
2. See Grosjean (1998), Chap. I, *Introduction*: “[La coopération culturelle européenne] restera cependant très ponctuelle et conjoncturelle jusqu’au moment où, le 19 décembre 1954, est solennellement ouverte à la signature la Convention culturelle européenne qui, depuis 40 ans, constitue le cadre et le fondement d’une action qui n’a cessé de se développer.” ([European cultural co-operation], however, remained on a very sporadic and one-off basis until the moment when, on December 19, 1954, the European Cultural Convention, which for 40 years has been the framework and the foundation of an action that never ceased to develop, was solemnly open for signature.)
3. It is designated by its French acronym CDCC (Conseil de la Coopération Culturelle). In 2001, the CDCC and its specialised committees were transformed into four Steering Committees, designated by their French acronyms (see CoE, Committee of Ministers, 12 November 2001): the Steering Committee for Education (CDED: Comité Directeur de l’Education), the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR: Comité Directeur de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche), the Steering Committee for Culture (CDCULT: Comité Directeur de la Culture) and the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage (CDPAT: Comité Directeur du Patrimoine Culturel).
4. Thus, for example, Ogden’s Basic English was released in 1930.
5. This was the name given to what was at that time the French colonial empire.
6. Gradation (or grading) is “the arrangement of the content of a language course or a textbook so that it is presented in a helpful way” (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992, p. 160). This implies deciding on the order in which elements of the language are introduced, taking account of factors like their complexity, their frequency in the language, their importance for the learner, etc.
7. On those early works, see Gougenheim, Michea, Rivenc and Sauvageot (1956). (A new revised and augmented edition was published in 1964 under the title *L’élaboration du français fondamental: étude sur l’établissement d’un vocabulaire et d’une grammaire de base*.)
8. In 1959, this centre, located in the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Saint-Cloud, was to become the CREDIF : Centre de Recherche et d’Etudes pour la Diffusion du Français, with G. Gougenheim and P. Rivenc respectively as director and vice-director.
9. The first edition of the *Dictionnaire du Français Fondamental de la langue française* (Gougenheim), with 3500 words, was published in 1958 (a second updated and augmented edition was published by the same editor in 1977).
10. These were collected on the basis of the first surveys which involved the recording of 275 conversations.
11. It was observed that there was but a small number of words which repeatedly occurred in oral and written communication whatever the context. It was also observed that only a few grammatical words were truly indispensable for communication.
12. In a synchronic approach borrowed from structural linguistics, only the most widely used forms of standard oral language were taken into account.
13. This availability criterion foreshadowed the context setting of utterances, which would come into favour in connection with what is often referred to as ‘the Communicative Approach’.
14. This vocabulary was then refined in relation to the sex, profession, region of origin, etc. of those polled.

15. Ministère de l'éducation nationale (France), 1954.

16. Ministère de l'éducation nationale (France), n.d.

17. My translation.

18. See Voice of America (n.d.), *The Roots of Special English*: "On October 19, 1959, the Voice of America broadcast the first Special English program. It was an experiment. The goal was to communicate by radio in clear and simple English with people whose native language was not English. Special English programs quickly became some of the most popular on VOA."

19. This does not mean that the audiovisual methodology is not situational, or that any situation-based approach was rejected. What John Trim seems to be referring to in this interview with Nick Saville (2005, p. 276) is the British situational method as opposed to the audiovisual method (Méthodologie Structuro-Globale Audio-Visuelle [SGAV], or, more simply, Méthodologie Audio-Visuelle [MAV]) elaborated in France by a team of the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud (under the supervision of Paul Rivenc) with the major contribution of Petar Guberina and his team of the Phonetics Institute of the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb (hence its initial name of 'méthode de Saint-Cloud – Zagreb'). But John Trim adds (p. 276): "The idea of 'situation' wasn't really any better developed than a dialogue which was learnt off by heart and anatomized and so on".

20. Audio tapes and images, and later, with technical progress, video tapes. Image and sound are used simultaneously, with the image helping learners to understand what they perceive aurally. Methods using them separately are not, properly speaking, audiovisual in nature.

21. These exercises were based on automatisms, without the conscious and intelligent participation of the learner, and leaving aside any subjective data to have him/her answer indifferently, in a mechanical way: "I am tall, I am short, I am French, I am Greek, etc." (see Puren, 1988, pp. 288-386).

22. Although in the first generation of audiovisual courses, there was a division between those who were influenced by behaviourism and those who adhered to structuro-globalism.

23. Puren, here (1988, p. 345), quotes the factors presented by Guberina (1984, p. 96): "la situation (réelle ou dans la pensée), la signification intellectuelle et affective, tous les moyens sonores, les moyens lexicologiques, l'état psychologique des intervenants et leur co-action réciproque, leur perception et leur production satisfaisante de la parole".

24. For instance, although the English version is only concerned with spoken language, the French version, *Un Niveau Seuil*, includes written language.

25. Trim (26 September 2001, p. 4) explains: "An intermediate objective *Waystage* (van Ek & Alexander, 1977) was developed as the objective for the hugely successful Anglo-German multi-media production *Follow Me*, subsequently followed on TV by over 500 million viewers worldwide."

26. See CoE: Committee of Ministers (1998), *Appendix to recommendation No. R (98) 6*. Measures grouped under the titles B to F respectively concern *Early language learning* (language learning before secondary education); *Secondary education*; *Vocational-oriented language learning*; *Adult education*; *Bilingual education in bilingual or multilingual areas*.

27. The Inter-university Commission for Applied Linguistics, in Switzerland.

28. Linguistic competences (5.2.1) include lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic (the accurate pronunciation of sounds and words) competences. A table providing scaling for general linguistic range is followed by five scales relating to vocabulary range and vocabulary control, grammatical accuracy, phonological control and orthographic control.

29. Sociolinguistic competence (5.2.2) deals with linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expressions of folk wisdom, register differences and dialect and accent. A table relating to the scaling of sociolinguistic appropriateness is included.

30. Pragmatic competence is said to include discourse competence and functional competence. Discourse competence is defined as "the ability of a user/learner to arrange sentences in sequence so as to produce coherent stretches of language" (p. 123). Functional competence is said to be concerned with "the use of spoken discourse and written texts in

communication for particular functional purposes” (p. 125) and includes the categories: microfunctions, macrofunctions and interaction schemata.

31. Here, the ‘context of language use’ is outlined in terms of domains, situations, conditions and constraints, the user/learner’s mental context and the mental context of the interlocutor(s). This is followed by a discussion of communication theme (and sub-themes), communicative tasks and purposes, communicative language activities and strategies, communicative language processes, and texts.

32. It is noted that “[classroom] tasks, whether reflecting ‘real-life’ or essentially ‘pedagogic’ in nature are communicative to the extent that they require learners to comprehend, negotiate and express meaning in order to achieve a communicative goal” (p. 158).

33. A test or assessment is said to be valid if “what is actually assessed (the construct) is what, in the context concerned, *should* be assessed” and if “the information gained is an accurate representation of the proficiency of the candidate(s) concerned” (CoE, 2001, p. 177).

34. Reliability is defined as “the extent to which the same rank order of candidates is replicated in two separate (real or simulated) administrations of the same assessment” (CoE, 2001, p. 177). It is noted, however, that “what is . . . more important than reliability is the accuracy of decisions made in relation to a standard” (p. 177), such as the decision to fail or pass a candidate, this accuracy depending on the validity of the particular standard (e.g. a particular level) for the context.

35. These statements, anchored to the 1996 version of the CEFR (CoE, 2001, p. 248), are presented in seven tables, four of which involve skill level summaries (document D1), social and tourist statement summaries (D2), work statements summaries (D4) and study statement summaries (D6). In each table, descriptors for listening/speaking, reading, and writing are scaled according to the six ALTE levels corresponding to the levels of the CEFR.

36. The version sent for trial in 1996 was actually published in 1995.

37. The *Reference Supplement* contains three main components: quantitative and qualitative considerations in relating certificates and diplomas to the CEF and different approaches in standard setting (see http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Manuell_EN.asp#P19_2121).

38. *Evaluation und Selbstevaluation der Fremdsprachenkompetenz an Schnittstellen des schweizerischen Bildungssystems (Evaluation et auto-évaluation de la compétence en langues étrangères aux points d’intersection du système d’enseignement en Suisse)*. For more details, see also the section on chapter 3 of the CEFR, and for a full account B. North (2002), in C. Alderson (2002, pp. 87-105).

39. These descriptors were included in the CEFR to describe the Common Reference Levels (CoE, 2001, p. 217, Appendix B: *The illustrative scales of descriptors*).

40. The decision was made at the final conference of the Project referred to as *Language learning for European citizenship*.

41. Recommendation R (98) 6 (CoE: Committee of Ministers, 1998, p. 5) “encourage(s) the development and use by learners in all educational sectors of a personal document (European language portfolio) in which they can record their qualifications and other significant linguistic and cultural experiences in an internationally transparent manner, thus motivating learners and acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language learning at all levels in a lifelong perspective”.

42. It gives the ‘linguistic identity’ of an individual by providing a summary overview of his or her competences in each language he or she has learnt, “[the] overview [being] defined in terms of skills and the common reference levels in the Common European Framework” (CoE, Language Policy Division, n.d., ¶ 1).

43. This includes courses taken, school exchanges and work experience.

44. CoE, Language Policy Division (n.d., ¶ 1) and also Trim (26 September 2001), Council of Europe (2006), Rehorick and Lafargue(2005).

45. See http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/documents.html

46. See <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu>

47. It is concerned with curriculum design, revision and updating, organisation and delivery of the curriculum, and quality assurance and quality control.

48. In fact, an earlier guide was prepared under the direction of M. Milanovic on behalf of ALTE, *Language examining and test development* (CoE, 2002).
49. The Manual, is intended to help providers of examinations to link assessments and certifications to the CEFR in a transparent way, providing reference materials, tools and procedures, so that examinations can be situated in relation to the CEFR and be comparable among themselves, thus answering the question raised by Charles Alderson: “How do I know that my Level B1 is your Level B1?” (Manual, Preface, p. ix).
50. These elements correspond to the different sections of the Reference Supplement (CoE, 2004).
51. These materials provide samples of learners of different countries, European or not, and some of these learners come from countries speaking non Indo-European languages, such as China, Korea, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, etc.
52. Examples of these illustrative materials can be found on the site of the Council of Europe, at the following address: http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/illustrationse.html
53. Figueras (2008, p. 31) has noted that this includes assessment professionals, who have noted the necessity of developing detailed descriptions for different languages.
54. The 2002 edition covered levels A1-B2, then the *Profile Deutsch A1-C2 (Version 2.0)* published in 2005 by the same authors covered all six levels of the CEFR.
55. The fact that they immediately adapted their Threshold level to the CEFR, incorporating its main features (Trim, 2007, ¶ 11) explains why the Germans, the Swiss and the Austrians were able to produce RLD for German as early as 2002 (2005 for the six Common Reference Levels).
56. Trim (2007, ¶ 10) notes that: “The appearance of CEFR, published simultaneously in French and English, prompted the Goethe-Institut and others concerned with the teaching of German as a foreign language, to revise and recast Kontaktschwelle [the German Threshold level] as a multilevel survey of resources for the learning of German, distributing the functions, general and specific notions of Kontaktschwelle and their lexical and structural exponents, over the four levels A1–B2, supplemented as was felt necessary. This survey would then provide a concrete basis for each learner, or provider, to extract what was relevant to their needs, motivations, characteristics and resources and to construct individual learning profiles. A project was set up, entitled *Profile Deutsch* (Profiles for German)”.
57. According to the information available on the CoE’s website (see http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/dnr_EN.asp), it seems that only German and Spanish languages have RLD for all of the six levels of the CEFR. For French, RLD exist for levels A1, A2, B2 and A1.1 (for the first acquisition in French), and B1 should be published next. No RLD seem to have been published yet for English but the project for an *English Profile* is under way.
58. These include: a lack of efficiency in teaching/learning reading or writing skills; the failure to eliminate disparities in linguistic skills and experience among children of different backgrounds; the difficulties of teaching migrant children (language problems, cultural problems, and the fact that some of them have received little or no schooling in the country they come from); emphasis in some cases on grammatical knowledge at the expense of communication skills; an approach to the teaching of literature that tends to centre on the transmission of knowledge rather than on reading and analytical skills; and vague definition of objectives to be achieved.
59. This term may include native speakers, indigenous minorities or migrant children.
60. Fleming (2007, p. 11) adds that “[it] is important to recognise the degree to which the language of schooling may serve as a barrier which inhibits rather than promotes learning”.

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