



Networking in Excellence



The CEF: Basics



Legal terms and notices

Publisher

ELCL Deutschland GmbH
Schanzenstraße 35
51063 Cologne

Date

January 2010

Copyright

The contents of this brochure may be copied by ELCL Member schools. Any further photographic or other technical reproduction is only possible with the permission of the publishers. Any references to conclusions of third parties in this publication are recognised.

© ELCL Deutschland GmbH

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Competence model	3
3. The six competence levels	5
4. Domains	6
5. The self-assessment grid	7
Literature	8

1. Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: teaching, learning assessment (referred to the CEF or Reference Framework in the following) provides common criteria for learning, teaching and assessment of foreign languages, to enable reliable cross-border comparison and evaluation of language competence is possible. Originally applied as a recommendation, its implementation in professional life provides for a new culture of transparency and offers security to employers and employees, teachers and learners, nationally and internationally. The intensity and quality of research, testing and discussion which resulted in the publishing of the CEF in 2001 gave the CEF a dimension of validity, which no other system of competency description or certificate can offer.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

- was developed on behalf of the Council of Europe
- is recommended by the Council of the European Union
- is considered in the Europass concept
- has been implemented in national curricula

Currently, with the CEF, a standard for language learning has been developed and established. International firms across the board, for example, 3M Deutschland, Allianz, Audi, BASF, BMW, Ford, VW, Porsche, Mercedes Benz, Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Dresdner Bank, UBS, DBV Winterthur, Lufthansa, T-Mobil, Alcatel, Siemens, Kodak, Degussa, Dornier, Esso, Henkel, Hewlett Packard, IBM, EADS, Michelin, Rheinmetall, Schering, Merck recognise the CEF and support its recommendations. This has developed to the extent that the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), with over 3.5 million members, advises its members to recognise foreign language certificates which consider the CEF competence levels only. Moreover, the CEF references have been included in the curricula of state schools all over Europe.

All aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment are included in the CEF descriptors. These descriptors are independent of location, target groups or methods and are always oriented to the same criteria. The CEF displays a wide spectrum of approaches and recommendations, thus enabling one to develop or choose through reflection, suitable and methodical systems for a target group, learning aims or a learning situation.

Orientation to authentic spoken communication and interaction between people in different life spheres can be used as a point of reference. The CEF is therefore completely undogmatic and leads to a reassessment of priorities

- from learner to educational partner
- from teacher to educational process supervisor
- from teaching to learning

2. Competence model

The competence model of the Framework of Reference is defined as a language action model. This model describes what it means to be able to speak a (foreign) language and how individual levels of application in language proficiency can be formulated best in each dimension and in every partial competence. The Framework of Reference itself is not a diagnostic instrument, however it systematises dimensions and levels in language activity skills, substantiates these through descriptors and thus is a good starting basis for the development of tasks, tests and other examination procedures.

Following competences are differentiated:

General competences:

- Declarative knowledge (empirical) knowledge
- Skills and know-how
- Existential competence (attitudes, motivation, individual characteristics and personality traits)
- Ability to learn ('learning styles or 'learning profiles', learning techniques)

Communicative language competence (competence in its narrowest sense):

- Linguistic competence (include lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills)
- Socio-linguistic competence (rules of politeness, norms governing relationships, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in communities)
- Pragmatic competences (production of language functions, speech acts)

These competences are extended by communicative strategies into cultural skills. These competences are not directly observable but present themselves in various written, spoken communicative language activities of:

- reception
- interaction
- production
- mediation

On the whole, it is feasible to say that other general areas of communicative activities such as listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing are closely related.

Language activities are contextualised within domains (e.g. public, personal, educational and occupational) and relate to situations from this and are, in relation to reception, interaction, production, writing, speaking, further specified (e.g. understand the language of the country, lead discussions etc.). Language activities involve the exercise of one's communicative language competence in a specific domain in processing (receptively and/or productively) one or more texts in order to carry out a task. These additional performance categories and parameters are necessary for the description level of activity. For the building and formulating of sequences of activity and to be able to name sufficient specific contexts for the construction of exemplary tasks.

The Framework of Reference defines a differentiated competence grid for the areas of foreign language proficiency and provides a number of assessment criteria and scales which facilitate a foreign language learner on the completion of processing tasks, to identify his/her competency levels relatively accurately, i.e. a dependable evaluation of how good he/she can do something and at which level descriptor this competence is to be identified.

3. The six competency levels

Basically, the CEF has six levels of competence (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). A1 and A2 categorise basic language use, B1 and B2 independent use and C1 and C2 proficient language use.

Proficient User
C2 (Mastery)
C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency)

Independent User
B2 (Vantage)
B1 (Threshold)

Basic User
A2 (Waystage)
A1 (Breakthrough)

Descriptors show what the learner can do ('can-do descriptors'), and not the size and number of vocabulary and structures or the accurate use of these. The core objective is communicative spoken competence. Language competence is of less importance. The 'can do' descriptors are shown on a global scale, for example

B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters of immediate need.

To ensure the availability of the communicative activities ...

- Spoken interaction
- Spoken production
- Reading
- Listening
- Writing

the appropriate language tools (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, intonation and orthography) must be developed. Thus, these language tools have a 'feeder' function and serve in structuring actual language actions in the five communicative skills.

In the communicative activity 'speaking', the CEF differentiates between spoken interaction and spoken production, for example, an employee in foreign sales would require the communicative activity spoken interaction, whereas a service employee in gastronomy would require more spoken production.

	Spoken Production	Spoken Interaction
B2	Can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to fields of interest. Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. Can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining views.
B1	Can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions. Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. Can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe reactions.	Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).

As a result, this differentiation between the competence level and the skill allows the creation of a competence profile for each target language. A foreign language competence profile could be depicted as follows:

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production	Writing
C2					
C1		X			
B2	X		X		
B1				X	X
A2					
A1					

4. Domains

Use of language is always applied in context within particular life spheres (domains), into which social life is organised. The level descriptors in CEF are generally adhered to. According to the classic division within sociolinguistics, language is used within the context of four domains: public, personal, educational and occupational.

To give this division justification, it is necessary to formulate appropriate 'can do' descriptors which are suitable for the target group, the domain and the situation. The CEF supplies a range of examples, however, points out, that for obvious reasons, it is the task of curricula developers, authors,

teachers, and programme directors to develop appropriate 'can do' descriptors for each level and skill.

The following describes such a development. The German Chamber of Industry and Commerce with WBT and Henkel have jointly developed 'can do' descriptors for the workplace.

	Listening	Reading
B2	Can understand the basic aspects of information/presentations/discussions when job-oriented if spoken in standard language.	Can read correspondence related to his/her field of specialisation and recognise the important points. Can understand complex texts related to a specialised field, including graphics (graphs). Can selectively use re-search material.
B1	Can understand the main points of clear, standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in the workplace, such as discussions-/meetings, when the delivery is relatively clear.	Can understand standard business letters, and letters from public authorities. Can recognise important information when reading messages and other texts, for example, brochures (what, who, where, when, how). Can recognise the main message and important details in articles and reports on subjects related to his/her specialised field.

The decision on the domain for the learner depends on the choice of situation, aims, tasks, subjects and texts for teaching and assessment material. According to the realistic life sphere in which the learner is active or will be active and which requirements are necessary, appropriate 'can do' descriptors must be considered. Moreover, it is essential that the tasks to be completed are embedded in authentic situations.

5. The self-assessment grid

This competence profile has a direct application in the CEF as a self-assessment grid. With this grid, the CEF gives the learner an instrument that had previously not existed in the teaching/learning process. For the first time a learner can now assess his/her own foreign language competence, and that in a language which he/she understands (I can ...). This establishes the learner as a partner in language teaching and learning. The grid is an essential condition on the path to a knowledge-based society. Self-assessment involves self-directed learning and self guidance.

Examples of the self-assessment grid for listening and reading at levels B1 and A2 are as follows:

	Listening	Reading
B1	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high-frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.

A2	I can understand phrases and highest-frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.
-----------	---	--

According to Rainer Tamchina "Competences are measured and assessed, not deficits, as they were in many systems of assessment and examination which describe what can be done through the measurement of what cannot be done (mistakes). The CEF, therefore, shows "The path to a new evaluation culture (Ingeborg Christ) which could include a new quality dimension for error descriptions, grades, formulaic assessments and testimonials. It is equally important that the learner becomes an active partner in the evaluation process through self-assessment, continuous reflection on his/her learning path and learning progress. He/she has criteria at his/her disposal to which past assessments must also be oriented. A further monopoly seems to be shaking at its foundations: that of the assessment supremacy of schools and universities "(Tamchina, R. 2003).

Literature:

Klieme, Eckhard; Avenarius, Hermann; Blum, Werner; Döbrich, Peter; Gruber, Hans; Prenzel, Manfred; Reiss, Kristina; Riquarts, Kurt; Rost, Jürgen; Tenorth, Heinz-Elmar; Vollmer, Helmuth J. (2007): Zur Entwicklung nationaler Bildungsstandards. Bonn: BMBF

Europarat – Rat für kulturelle Zusammenarbeit (2001): Gemeinsamer europäischer Referenzrahmen für Sprachen: Lernen, Lehren, Beurteilen, Berlin (deutsche Fassung)

Tamchina, Rainer (2003): Warum brauchen wir den GER?, Hamburg