

BROADENING THE SCOPE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION: MEDIATION, PLURILINGUALISM, AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: THE CEFR COMPANION VOLUME

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The CEFR's action-oriented approach, including its concept of the user/learner as a social agent mobilising a plurilingual repertoire, represents a significant development from the communicative approach. The CEFR moves beyond the traditional four skills (spoken and written reception and production) to also include interaction and mediation, opening to a complex vision of the situated and integrated nature of language learning and language use. Advances in research highlight the need to overcome a vision of languages as stable, pure objects existing outside their speakers/users and a reductive view of learning as an internal cognitive process, meant to prepare for later real-life use. These theoretical advances have been flanked by bottom up developments bringing a more dynamic vision of language education that engages more meaningfully with the principles of the CEFR.

The time was therefore ripe to complete the CEFR descriptive apparatus with new descriptors for mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural competence.

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This article outlines the conceptualisation, development and validation of these descriptors and their publication in the CEFR Companion Volume (2018), alongside a text clarifying the paradigm shift in language education implied by the notion of the user/learner as a plurilingual/pluricultural social agent. The goal is to promote quality, inclusive education for all, and in particular to further the recognition and valorisation of linguistic and cultural diversity and the promotion of plurilingual interculturality.

1 The CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR: Council of Europe, 2001) is generally accepted to have given a positive impulse to language education in Europe and beyond (Byram & Parmenter, 2012). As Piccardo (2014) and Piccardo & North (2019 in press) explain, the action-oriented approach proposed by the CEFR, along with core underlying concepts such as that of the user/learner as social agent, represent a significant development beyond the communicative approach. The CEFR descriptive scheme moves beyond the traditional four skills (as spoken and written reception and production) to include interaction and mediation. This shift opens to a complex vision of the situated and integrated nature of language learning and language use. With its focus on the agency of the user/learner, taking into account both the social and individual nature of language use, as well as the external and the internal context, the CEFR was very forward-looking in its time. In this way, the CEFR views learners as social agents who mobilise *all* their competences, including their general (i.e. personal, non-linguistic) competences, and strategies in the fulfilment of a task, with a commensurate improvement of those competences and strategies as a result. This vision is a call to move away from seeing language as a code to be taught, with subtraction of marks for mistakes, towards seeing *language as action* in experiential learning. With the recent publication of the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors (Council of Europe, 2018), this forward-looking vision of the CEFR has been further defined and articulated, particularly, though not exclusively, in the areas of mediation and plurilingualism.

Plurilingualism focuses on the interrelationships between languages in the social agent's holistic, dynamic and integrated language repertoire, based on a notion of partial competences that emphasises the glass half-full rather than half-empty, and acknowledges the lack of balance in people's intralinguistic and interlinguistic profiles. These were revolutionary concepts in 1996 when they first appeared in an early draft of the CEFR, and were intended to encourage learners and society to value linguistic diversity and the richness of plurilingual repertoires. However, the field of language education was, in general, slow to pick up on plurilingualism. In 2007 at the intergovernmental Language Policy Forum in Strasbourg, John Trim sadly said:

“This [*plurilingual*] approach meets better the realities of globalisation than various forms of purism which regard each language and culture as a separate entity, to be preserved and protected against the threat offered by alien forces. Most users of the CEFR have applied it only to a single language but its descriptive apparatus for communicative action and competences, together with the ‘can-do’ descriptors of levels of competence, are a good basis for a plurilinguistic approach to language across the curriculum, which awaits development.” (Trim, 2007, p. 51)

This call for development did not go unheard. Advances in research have increasingly highlighted the need to overcome a vision of languages as stable, pure objects existing outside their speakers/users and a reductive view of learning as an internal cognitive process, meant to prepare for later real-life use. These theoretical advances beyond traditional viewpoints have been flanked by bottom up developments in the practice of language teaching, and the shared international vision of language education has evolved towards a more dynamic one that engages more meaningfully with the core principles of the CEFR. The time therefore became ripe for a revision of the CEFR that would bring its descriptive apparatus to full completion and extend its scope for positive impact on learning and teaching through new ‘can-do’ descriptors in the CEFR Companion Volume (2018).

2 From a linear to a complex vision of language learning and use

Language education does not happen in a vacuum, it is dependent on the particular context and the contextual societal vision of what characterizes language and language learning/teaching. In linguistically and culturally diverse societies, languages take shape both at the level of each individual and at the level of communities. Cultures and identities are composites, structured at different levels, as are languages (Wandruska, 1979), similarly to the way fractals are (Larsen-Freedman, 2011). Both languages and identities look like neat, stable delineated entities from the outside but once they are seen from the inside they reveal themselves as unstable aggregates. The process of globalization gives rise to dynamic sociological landscapes where plurality and diversity are the norm, highlighting the need to reconceptualise language education. Unfortunately one very noticeable response is to try and reduce cultural and linguistic differences through the introduction of an impoverished form of English as a lingua franca, promoting this as a historically inevitable form of ‘progress’. The mistaken underlying belief is that equivalency between languages and cultures is assured in a transactional, ‘information-gap’ view of language, whereas in fact “Communication is the co-construction of meaning

in context – not the transfer of information across a gap” (Orman, 2013, p. 91). This tendency is a dangerous one: rather than examining a phenomenon from richly articulated different perspectives, a linear, monocular vision prevails that erases all cultural diversity and thus depriving individuals of multiple lenses to interpret phenomena.

Because languages are in fact the lenses through which we make sense of the world, acquire knowledge and articulate thoughts, alone or with others, through the process of *linguaging* (Swain, 2006). Having several languages means having several lenses, embracing a wider perspective, and, generally speaking, embracing interculturality (Byram & Wagner, 2018). This is increasingly important in our interconnected world faced with the ghosts of its past and present history. The potential of individual and societal linguistic diversity is a profound one, and should not be reduced to ‘being nice to one another’. Studies have started to show the benefits of several languages on the functions of the brain (e.g. Adesope *et al.*, 2010; Bak *et al.*, 2014, Malafouris, 2015) and on creativity (European Commission, 2009; Piccardo, 2017). The complexity of liquid modernity (Baumann, 2000) requires a ‘homo complexus:’ shaped by semiodiversity (Halliday, 2002), who is at ease with the unknown, embraces nonlinearity, and reflects and capitalizes on forms of mixing and meshing, of assemblage (Pennycook, 2017; Canagarajah, 2018). Complex societies need people who are able to thrive creatively in a complex paradigm.

If languages are potentially door-opening tools, language education has an important role to play in this process. Language education needs to move beyond the 1950s/60s paradigm of a linear, grammatically based syllabus in which learners (hopefully) acquire the ability to understand and produce a code, towards an approach capable of embedding both the individual and the societal dimensions in a broader educational frame. Different phases of pedagogic intervention contribute in an iterative, spiral pattern to awareness raising, enhancement of proficiency, and eventually autonomy. In such a new classroom landscape, where language learning follows dynamic, iterative, contextually and socially driven paths, mediation takes a crucial role with its capacity to enable and support the user/learner as a social agent in their development processes. Mediation was therefore the main focus of the development of the CEFR Companion Volume.

3 The interpretation of mediation

Mediation was introduced as the fourth mode of communicative language activity in the CEFR from the earliest versions in 1996. Simply stated, whereas production is concerned with self-expression, and interaction involves the joint construction of discourse to reach mutual understanding, mediation introduces

an additional element: the construction of new meaning, in the sense of new understanding, new knowledge, new concepts. Mediation usually involves reception and production – and often interaction. However, in mediation, in contrast to production and interaction, language is not just a means of expression; it is primarily a vehicle to access the ‘other,’ the new, the unknown – or to help other people to do so. Thus, mediation can be cognitive – in school or a training course; it can be relational – establishing the relationships, the space, time and conditions for successful communication; it can be cross-linguistic and/or cross-cultural. Such cross-linguistic/cultural mediation may be between subcultures, between (technical or colloquial) jargon and plain, standardised language as well as across named languages and cultures. On the other hand, it may in fact remain the whole time within one single variety of one language, since, if there is a barrier to understanding, it may not necessarily be language or culture that is causing it, but simply lack of information. On the other hand, it may not involve bridging barriers to understanding for other people, but rather a process of groping towards a new understanding, a eureka moment. This is generally achieved by articulating thoughts, frequently with others, in a process called ‘*linguaging*’ or, when all language resources are mobilised, *plurilinguaging* “a dynamic, never-ending process to make meaning using different linguistic and semiotic resources” (Piccardo, 2017, p. 9).

The CEFR made it clear that mediation can be across languages and varieties or it can also be within them. One can summarise this point in relation to the sections of the CEFR where mediation is introduced:

- Section 2.1.3: make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly
- Section 4.4: act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly, normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages.
- Section 4.6.6: Both input and output texts may be spoken or written and in L1 or L2. (*i.e. they could both be in L1 or they could both be in L2*).

Nevertheless, in the context of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity that we discussed above, and with the introduction of the exciting concept of plurilingualism that we consider next, it is not surprising that both in the production of the CEFR and in its reception, it is primarily cross-linguistic and cross-cultural mediation that caught the imagination of project users. This is highlighted in the CEFR itself in two ways, *mediating communication* as an intermediary and *mediating text*.

German-speaking countries in particular were quick to adopt this approach to cross-linguistic mediation since, as Backus et al. (2013) point out, studies have shown that non-professionals are fully capable of performing such

mediation activities in informal situations. Cross-linguistic mediation started appearing in German curricula from the early 2000s (Kolb, 2016), in the HarmoS educational standards in Switzerland and, in the very detailed set of descriptors for mediation that appeared in *Profil Deutsch*, the CEFR content specifications for the German language (Glaboniat *et al.*, 2005). However, as Piccardo (2012) pointed out, the CEFR vision of the social agent, with its consideration of the social and individual, opened the way for a broader, richer interpretation of mediation. This includes social and intercultural mediation, Kramsch's (1993) notion of 'third space:' as an "alternative to linguistic and cultural confrontation[, a] plural area [in which] difference is pinpointed, negotiated and adapted" (Zarate, 2003, p. 95) by focusing on the ability to navigate the 'in-between spaces' thus developing what Kramsch (2009) calls symbolic competence.

Mediation in the sense of *mediating concepts* is also referred to in theories that have been recently informing language education, such as the socio-cultural theory (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Mediation is a complex phenomenon that has been classified in many ways. Lantolf and Poehner (2014) cite Miller (2011) in identifying three orders of mediation: (a) metacognitive - originating in interpersonal communication and having a regulatory function, (b) cognitive - that has to do with culturally constructed tools that help construct concepts and knowledge, and (c) concerning the macro-level of institutions and society which influence both first and second order mediation. As Marginson and Dang point out:

"Vygotsky repeatedly emphasized the role of mediation in the development of reflexive self-determining human agency, or "active adaptation" (Vygotsky 1981, pp. 151–152). Humans internalized their own evolution while securing change in their environment, remaking both their conditions of existence and themselves." (Marginson & Dang, 2017, p. 119).

The CEFR's emphasis on the interaction between the social and individual, in relation to both the user/learner's internal competences and mental context and the external context of domain and situation, also reflects a complex, ecological perspective (Van Lier, 2004). In this view, learning occurs through "perception in action" (p. 97) when the social agent notices an 'affordance', an "opportunit[y] for action in the environment" (Käufel & Chemero, 2015, p. 166), which might be something the social agent needs in order to accomplish a task. Like Halliday, van Lier sees "meaning potential" (Halliday, 1973) as "the semiotic potential or the affordances" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 74) that are apparent. In exercising agency, one accepts invitations perceived in the environment. Mediation facilitates this perception of the relevant affordances.

Teachers perform this type of mediation all the time, as do user/learners when collaborating in small groups – provided they have clear goals and a sense of self-efficacy, as suggested by Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory of agency. This relates to theories such as situated cognition (Gallagher, 2009), situated learning and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the actional turn (Filliettaz, 2004) and collective intelligence (Levy, 2010). Then again, the user/learner can be viewed as a complex adaptive system (CAS), nested within the small group (another CAS), itself nested within the class in a fractal pattern. The interaction of these CASs with their environment leads to the emergence of – temporary – states of balance, which in turn will change over time, as presented in complexity theories (Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Larson-Freeman & Cameron, 2008).

Such a broader conceptualisation of mediation has been pivotal in the revision of the CEFR. A broader view provides fertile ground for reconceptualising languages around the notion of the social agent that the action-oriented approach suggests. By developing mediation, the CEFR Companion Volume completes the CEFR descriptive scheme, making explicit the move beyond the four skills discussed above. At the end of a long process, the macro-categories that emerged for mediation activities were the following:

3.1 Mediating texts

Mediating texts (including video, graphic etc. as well as spoken text), by *Relaying specific information*, *Explaining data* verbally, *Processing text* or *Translating a written text* for someone else. *Note-taking* (in lectures, seminars, meetings, etc.), *Expressing a personal response to creative texts* (including literature), and *Analysis and criticism of creative texts* are also included under this heading. The first four categories listed above are common in professional and academic life at all levels, but particularly in teaching. Creese and Blackledge (2010) and Lewis *et al.* (2012) describe managing collaborative interaction or narrating text in different languages in multilingual classrooms. The mediation of creative text is of a different kind, reflecting the fact that in education and in everyday life, reading a good book or seeing a good film often leads to talking about it. The mediation of texts does not need to be limited to texts used in class. User/learners can be asked to read stories, read different versions of a fairy story or urban legend, research a topic on the web, and bring their findings to the class.

3.2 Mediating communication

Mediating communication by creating shared spaces that facilitate creativity,

openness and mutual understanding, (*Facilitating pluricultural space*), by *Acting as an intermediary in informal situations*, and by helping to avoid or solve critical situations or disagreements (*Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disputes*). The aim here is to facilitate understanding between user/learners who may have sociocultural, or sociolinguistic or personal differences in perspective, possibly in addition to speaking different languages. Mediating communication can involve acting informally as a linguistic intermediary between two parties, where research suggests that: "... lay interpreters can in fact achieve successful understanding in these situations, despite sometimes limited linguistic resources" (Backus *et al.*, 2013, p. 203).

Understanding the other requires an effort of empathy, keeping both one's own and the other perspectives in mind. Sometimes, as Backus *et al.* suggest, tensions and even disputes may arise that need to be acknowledged and faced in order to move further. This is the type of mediation associated with professional mediators – but treated here in the everyday sense of helping to resolve a misunderstanding, delicate situation or disagreement. It is not so difficult to imagine situations in today's diverse classrooms in which such lay interpretation may be useful. One can also imagine tasks which involve the L2 and L3 in situations in which two additional languages are being taught. Tasks reflecting this type of activity are already appearing in oral exams in Germany (see Kolb, 2016) and Austria (Piribauer *et al.*, 2015).

3.3 Mediating concepts

Mediating concepts involves, firstly, setting conditions for learning by *Managing interaction* (as a knowledgeable 'other') or *Facilitating collaboration interaction with peers* (as a group member), and secondly by *Encouraging conceptual talk* (as a knowledgeable 'other'), the kind of dialogic talk (Alexander, 2008) and languaging (Swain, 2006) that will help reach new conceptual ground by *Collaborating to construct meaning* (as a group member). The distinction between the two types echoes (in reverse) Halliday's "basic distinction between an ideational (representational, referential, cognitive) and an interpersonal (expressive-conative, social, evocative) function of language" (1975, p. 52). Collaborating in small groups increases user/learners' sources of mediation (van Lier, 2004; Walqui, 2006) and mediating for others in the group "is an opportunity to verbalise, clarify and extend their own knowledge of the subject matter" (Walqui, *op. cit.*, p. 168).

However, as Webb (2009) discusses, students do not automatically know how to explain, to reason, and to engage in reciprocal questioning – that is how to *collaborate to construct meaning*. Webb states that the students of teachers who have themselves received communication skills training – and

who then as teachers “asked more questions and carried out more mediated-learning activities (e.g. challenging students to provide reasons, highlighting inconsistencies in student thinking, prompting students to focus on particular issues, and asking tentative questions to suggest alternative perspectives)” (Webb, 2009, p. 16) – gave more elaborated explanations, themselves asked more questions, and built on each other’s contributions. That is, these students of teachers who had been trained to *encourage conceptual talk* tended to then do this themselves within the group, without needing further prompting from the teacher.

Piloting of the mediation descriptors suggests that, given appropriate, transparent descriptors, both learners and teachers can become more aware of mediation competences and strategies, as so move on from ‘ping-pong’ like interaction to more strategic construction of meaning. One teacher wrote: “*We saw how the participants moved from needing to clarify and confirm mutual understanding to interacting more effortlessly by building upon each other’s ideas and presenting one’s own ideas to invoke discussion.*”

4 Plurilingualism

Mediation and plurilingualism were introduced to language education at the same time with the CEFR, and as mentioned above, the interpretation of mediation that has received most attention is, not surprisingly, the cross-linguistic one. However, not all cross-linguistic mediation is necessarily plurilingual: it depends whether there is some reflection and focus on language awareness, on the similarities and differences between the languages.

The distinction between the terms plurilingualism and multilingualism, between pluriculturalism and multiculturalism is a very significant one. The prefix ‘multi’ underlines adding together discrete elements like numbers in a multiplication, people in a multitude; the prefix ‘pluri’ on the other hand is holistic, with the idea of plurality, of embedded difference. The distinction encapsulates the difference between the two opposing perspectives on linguistic and cultural diversity: empathy as opposed to otherness, living together as opposed to living side by side, interest as opposed to tolerance (Balboni, 2015). The reluctance of the English-medium literature to adopt a term originating in another language has led to an inflation of qualifiers added to the word multilingualism in order to overcome its fundamental limitation of suggesting discrete elements or “solitudes” (Cummins, 2008) rather than an integrated, holistic repertoire and awareness; thus we see terminology such as: *holistic view of multilingualism* (Cenoz, 2013); *active bilingualism, active multilingualism* (Cummins, 2017); *dynamic model of multilingualism* (Herdina & Jessner, 2002); *integrated multilingual model* (MacSwan, 2017); etc. However, this

holistic stance of plurilingualism does not deny the existence of separate, named languages, as proponents of translanguaging appear to do (e.g. García & Lin, 2016; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Otheguy *et al.*, 2015; Vogel & García, 2017). A plurilingual approach stresses the potential advantages for language awareness of considering interconnections, rather than pursuing the purist ‘target language only’ approach of the direct method, now past its centenary. As Cummins (2017) and MacSwann (2017) have pointed out, there is really little basis for negating the existence of named languages (E-languages) – whilst recognising their artificial, socially constructed character – from either the educational or linguistic points of view.

Plurilingualism describes “an uneven and changing competence, in which the user/learner’s resources in one language or variety may be very different in nature to those in another” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 28). From a plurilingual perspective, developing language competence is seen as dynamic and unbalanced; therefore the CEFR proposes the concepts of ‘partial competences’ and proficiency profiles of different kinds, further described in the Companion Volume. A plurilingual vision aligns with theories of ecology and complexity, and concepts of situated action and learning moving towards a nonlinear, more experiential, action-based conceptualisation of language education (e.g. Puren, 2009; van Lier, 2007). As Piccardo puts it:

“The new and potentially revolutionary aspects of a plurilingual vision are supported in three theoretical domains, each representing lenses through which the phenomenon can be effectively explored:

- (a) The psycho-cognitive perspective, which studies language acquisition mechanisms. A new connectionist paradigm is increasingly predominant in describing the functioning of the brain (Bickes, 2004, p. 38), and the brain of bi/multilinguals is no longer seen as the sum of monolingual brains but rather considered as a complex and distinct system (Bialystok, 2001; Perani *et al.*, 2003).
- (b) The sociocultural perspective, which posits that language acquisition occurs in the social sphere and is intrinsically linked to interaction and mediation between individuals, each possessing his or her own complex cultural system and all living within linguistically, culturally, and sociologically defined configurations (Lantolf, 2011).
- (c) The pedagogical perspective, a new complex vision of language teaching methodology, supported by the post-method movement (Bell, 2003; García, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2001).” (Piccardo, 2013, p. 603)

As mentioned previously, studies have demonstrated a cognitive advantage

to plurilingualism, including links to creativity. But perhaps the main argument in favour of plurilingualism is educational. Plurilingualism is a springboard to personal growth, self-awareness, language awareness, interculturality, political perspective and professional competence. The CEFR puts this point more modestly:

“... experience of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism:

- exploits pre-existing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences which in turn develops them further;
- leads to a better perception of what is general and what is specific concerning the linguistic organisation of different languages (form of metalinguistic, interlinguistic or so to speak ‘hyperlinguistic’ awareness);
- by its nature refines knowledge of how to learn and the capacity to enter into relations with others and new situations.” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 134)

The definition with which plurilingualism is introduced in the CEFR has proven to be remarkably time-proof, and appears to encompass all the various ‘isms’ (Marshall & Moore, 2016) that have been ‘discovered’ since the publication of the CEFR. It is therefore worth quoting it in full, in the articulated version given in the Companion Volume:

“Plurilingual competence as explained in the CEFR (Section 1.3) involves the ability to call flexibly upon an inter-related, uneven, plurilinguistic repertoire to:

- switch from one language or dialect (or variety) to another;
- express oneself in one language (or dialect, or variety) and understand a person speaking another;
- call upon the knowledge of a number of languages (or dialects, or varieties) to make sense of a text;
- recognise words from a common international store in a new guise;
- mediate between individuals with no common language (or dialect, or variety), even with only a slight knowledge oneself;
- bring the whole of one’s linguistic equipment into play, experimenting with alternative forms of expression;
- exploit paralinguistics (mime, gesture, facial expression, etc.” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 28)

For the Companion Volume, descriptors were developed for all these aspects of plurilingualism except for the last one. Here, informants consistently and without exception rejected references to paralinguistics (except in the context of sign languages) and therefore the attempt had to be abandoned.

Three scales are offered for plurilingual and pluricultural competence: *Plurilingual comprehension*, *Building on plurilingual repertoire*, and *Building on pluricultural repertoire*. In addition, the scales for *Identifying cues and inferring* and *Facilitating pluricultural space*, are relevant to this area, and most of the scales for mediating text refer to cross-linguistic as well as intralinguistic mediation.

5 Developing the descriptors

The project to develop the new descriptor scales took a design-based, iterative research approach (Van den Akker *et al.*, 2006). The first step was to collect existing descriptors that might be relevant, even if not validated, a process which included translating all the mediation descriptors from *Profile Deutsch* (Glaboniat *et al.*, 2005) into English, as well as recording interesting concepts and descriptions of behaviours from the literature and from reflection and discussion. This alone produced a huge number of possible descriptors. The second step was to define the main concepts and behaviours in the construct for the particular scale and formulate these into descriptors. That was then followed by small-scale consultations to select the better descriptors, improve formulations and discuss the proficiency level implied by them. As a result of these consultations, the descriptor pool was revised, pruned, and also expanded in certain areas.

The development process described above took from January 2014 to February 2015. After that, the draft descriptors entered a three-phase validation process that lasted from February to December 2015, with revisions, deletions and additions between each stage. The validation activities were based on those undertaken for the 2001 descriptors (North, 2000; North & Schneider, 1998), but on a larger scale in a mixed methods, sequential, qualitative and quantitative approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The first two main validation phases involved face-to-face workshops undertaken in participating educational institutions (listed in the acknowledgements in the Volume). By February 2015, 140 institutions had been recruited through Ealta, Eequals, CercleS, UNIcert and other associations. The task in the first phase, in which about 1,000 informants took part in pairs, was to identify the scale to which each descriptor belonged, evaluate it for clarity, pedagogical usefulness and relevance to real world language use, plus suggest improvements to formulation. In the second phase, with 1300 participants working in pairs in face-to-face workshops at 189 institutions, the focus was on the level represented by each descriptor. The final phase was an online survey, conducted in English and French – with some 3500 usable responses – which replicated the assessment task with which the majority of the 2001 descriptors had each been calibrated with the Rasch

model (Linacre, 2015) to create the CEFR scales. These three main phases were then followed by two extra validation activities with volunteers: one to provide further validation of descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and the other as the final step in the development of the new scale for phonological control (Piccardo, 2016). More details on the main project are provided in North and Piccardo (2016, 2019 in press).

The final analysis phase (February-May 2016) was followed by internal consultation with some 60 invited experts, plus formal consultation of member states, leading institutions and associations and over 500 individuals (June 2016-October 2017). All but two scales (for mediation strategies) were considered helpful by at least 80% of both institutions and individuals and the most popular scales among member states were those for plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Altogether in the final validation phase and the consultation phase, some 4,000 comments were analysed – helping to slim down the number of descriptors. Just under 70 pilots were then carried out (January-July 2017) before online publication. At the time of writing, some 30 case studies are now underway as a follow-up to the formal launch at the conference “*Building Inclusive Societies through Enriching Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education at a Grassroots Level: the Role of the CEFR Companion Volume*,” which took place at the Palais de l’Europe in Strasbourg in May 2018.

Conclusion

The Companion Volume was published online in an initial version in October 2017 on the CEFR website,¹ the full version, including descriptors for signing competence, appearing online in February 2018 with the ISBN publication during 2019. Apart from a preface and introduction, the Volume is comprised of three parts. Firstly, there is a text on key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning languages. This clarifies the paradigm shift in language education implied by the CEFR notion of the user/learner as a plurilingual/pluricultural social agent. This section has straightforward short texts and visuals that may be useful in teacher education to help get across the multidimensional, action-oriented approach of the CEFR. Secondly, the Volume provides the complete set of updated CEFR illustrative descriptors, with new scales for aspects of mediation, online interaction, plurilingual/pluricultural competence, phonological control and signing competence. Finally there are a number of useful appendices, including one that provides examples for the personal, public, occupational and educational domains for the descriptors for mediation and online interaction, plus another that outlines the descriptor

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

development project.

The publication of the CEFR Companion Volume marks a milestone in the CEFR development process. This Council of Europe project started in the early 1970s producing *The Threshold Level* (van Ek, 1975), studies in needs analysis (Richterich & Chancerel, 1980) and learner autonomy (Holec, 1981), plus experimentation with self-assessment using ‘can-do’ descriptors (Oscarson, 1979). Following the 1991 Symposium in Switzerland that recommended the CEFR and ELP, there were a number of background studies, for example on existing frameworks and scales (North, 1993), on sociocultural competence (Byram *et al.*, 1996), on plurilingualism (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997) and on possible categories and levels for the framework (North, 1994). Implementation of the CEFR since its publication has been assisted by a user guide (Trim, 2001) a guide for language policy (Beacco & Byram, 2007), a guide for curriculum development (Beacco *et al.*, 2016), a manual for developing examinations (ALTE, 2011) and another for linking examinations to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2009), with an associated set of case studies (Martyniuk, 2010). The Companion Volume now completes the CEFR descriptive scheme and descriptor set, and the next publication will be a volume of case studies in utilising the Volume to further plurilingual and intercultural education.

The goal of this body of work is to promote quality, inclusive education for all, and in particular to further the recognition and valorisation of linguistic and cultural diversity and the promotion of plurilingual interculturality. Other, related, projects of the Council of Europe’s Educational Policy Division aim to protect the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities, assist in the linguistic integration of adult migrants, and promote education in competences for democratic citizenship (CDC project: Barrett, 2016). Readers are directed to the language policy website² for this wider perspective. In some respects, with its focus of mediation, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, the Companion Volume brings the CEFR’s core philosophy closer to the wider context of the Council of Europe’s mission. Certainly it moves beyond a narrow view of modern language education, sharing many sources with the CDC project, and having relevance to CLIL³, language education for migrants, intercultural studies and, to some extent, education in the languages of schooling. This wider focus was overwhelmingly welcomed by informants in the consultation phase. The overall aim of the CEFR-related work, past, present and future, is to make a contribution at a policy level towards a Europe of plurilingually-proficient, interculturally-literate citizens. This is a long term project, with many decades behind it, but in the current political climate of rising nationalism and a seemingly stalled European project, it is more vital than ever.

² www.coe-int/lang

³ Content and Language Integrated Learning

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