The Common European Framework of Reference for Language; learning, teaching, assessment.

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Abstract

This paper outlines the theory underpinning the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, but points out that the CEFR is principally designed as an instrument for ensuring equivalence of qualifications in the teaching of modern European languages. The CEFR is not designed as a bench-mark for English Language Teaching, but publishers and ELT institutes have been quick to make use of it as a marketing tool.

The paper examines the literature that supports the CEFR, but notices that little has appeared since 2005. It questions whether this is a significant development, and also questions the validity of the CEFR outside Europe.

Keywords: communicative; competencies; discrimination; heritage; sub-skills.

At the 2005 IATEFL Conference English Language Teaching Journal Debate, the motion proposed was "Common European Framework. We don't need bureaucrats to tell us what to teach." One of the proposers was a man called Frank Heyworth, and he won the debate by a convincing margin.

The motion, however, was based on two misconceptions. The first was that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was an initiative by the European Union, and that the EU had the power to enforce it.

Both assumptions are untrue. The CEFR is an initiative by the 47 member Council of Europe, which is dedicated to sponsoring human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. To this end, it assists European countries to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, organized crime, cybercrime, violence against children and women, and human trafficking. It also fosters cultural interchange and supports the rights of speakers of minority languages.

The smaller, 27 country European Union, by contrast, is a body committed to the economic and political union of its members, and to that end it is committed to regional integration.

Background

The Common European framework of Reference (CEFR) has its roots in the work of Van Ek and Alexander (1975) but one of the confusing elements about this framework is that, while the same terms have reappeared over the years, they have frequently done so with different meanings.

If we begin with the work of Van Ek and Alexander, we see that their use of the term Threshold Level indicated the lowest level of language that could be assessed in any meaningful way. That term has now been supplanted with the Waystage Level, but the CEFR claims that it is possible to go even lower, to the level designated as A1 (These terms will be described in detail below.)

To the outsider, moreover, it must be admitted that some of the literature devoted to the CEFR balances a wide-eyed naivety of vision with fairly hard-nosed economics. This is particularly the case with the CD-ROM issued by Weiterbildungs-Testsysteme GMBH (Tranter, 2004) and it is a feature remarked by Smith (2005, p. 70) who states that "the CEF is a brilliant business idea, and I take my hat off for those who initiated it."

The CEFR has also generated a great deal of supporting literature although very little has appeared since 2005. There was one paper at the IATEFL 2006 Conference (Wilson & Buyuk, 2006) and one other at IATEFL 2008 (Green, 2008). There were also some papers in Taylor and Weir (2008) but these were originally delivered at the 2005 Association of Language Teachers in Europe Conference in Berlin, and so their publication date is misleading.

There is more earlier literature - Council of Europe (2001); Little and Perclova (2001); Alderson (2002); Lang and Schneider (2002); Little (2002); Morrow (2004) Heyworth and Blakey (2005) – but it must be pointed out that much of this literature is self-referential. Heyworth and Blakey's (2005) article in Modern English Teacher cites Morrow's (2004) collection, which, in turn, contains a paper by Heyworth.

There has also been criticism of the theory that underpins the CEFR. Bausch, Christ and Konigs (2002) point out the ironic fact that a supposedly ***European*** (my emphasis) document virtually ignores linguistic theory not published in English or French. Fulcher (2004) has taken exception to the Guardian Weekly's assertion that the CEFR "is rapidly becoming the standard reference for teaching or testing language in Europe", while Weir (2004) has also pointed out that the CEFR has limitations.

In the paper that follows, the sub-headings are all taken from that Tranter's CD ROM, but additional comments have been added where appropriate.

Political and Educational Content

The CEFR was devised for three principal reasons.

Firstly, Europe has a rich heritage of different languages and cultures. This is a valuable resource that should be developed and protected, but a major international effort is required if Europe's linguistic diversity is ever to be developed into a source of mutual understanding and enrichment. At present, the very diversity of languages acts as a barrier to communication.

For example, within the European Union, there are 20 official languages which require 380 cross translations. Within the 47 states of the Council of Europe, 250 languages are spoken.

Secondly, it is hoped that the promotion of language learning in all member states of the Council of Europe will help to overcome barriers, discrimination and prejudice. This is obviously a very worthy aim, and no one could fault it. Even so, it is unlikely to be realized. Hymes (1985, p. v) points out that "The functional equality of all languages has been a tenet of the faith from the founders of structural linguistics to most practitioners today.", but as Tupas (2004, p. 48) counters, "Mazrui (1998) warns us about complacency about the ideology of linguistic diversity because it is deployed under a politico-economic global order that is anathema to genuine forms of cultural diversity or polycentricity."

The truth of Mazrui's warning can be seen in Eastern Europe, where speakers of Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian have shown tremendous willingness to learn English, but far less enthusiasm for Danish, Dutch or Portuguese, and no desire whatsoever to learn Roma – the language of their own states' Gypsy underclass.

Thirdly, it is recognized that a further intensification of language learning and teaching in Council of Europe member countries is necessary in the interests of greater mobility; more effective international communication, combined with respect for diversity and cultural diversity; better access

to information; more intensive personal interaction; improved working relationships and a deeper mutual understanding.

All of this is a very tall order, and again, many of the aims are desirable rather than immediately achievable. There is, for example, the immediate political point that having a language in common does not, necessarily, promote mutual understanding. During the 20th Century, Europe saw full blown civil wars in Russia, Ireland, Spain, Greece and Yugoslavia, not one of which was caused by the inability of the opposing sides to speak a common language.

Hardcastle (2005) suggests that the unspoken concern of the CEFR is to promote mobility in the European labour force, rather than European cultural understanding, but whatever the underlying motivation, this is a lifelong task that can be promoted and facilitated only if educational systems in member countries are prepared to fund language education from pre-school level through to adult education.

Frankly, few member states of the Council of Europe are prepared to invest the sums required to meet this aim, or they will do so only selectively. Estonia, for example, has been brutally effective in curtailing the teaching of Russian, replacing it with English (Graddol, 2006, p. 92). The British education system, by contrast, has an abysmal record in language education. In most British comprehensive schools, language learning means learning French. Some schools offer German, fewer offer Spanish. Italian, Portuguese, Modern Greek and Polish are almost never taught.

In Holland, the educational system is wonderfully effective at promoting English, French AND German. At the same time, it completely ignores Turkish, despite the presence of a large immigrant population from a fellow Council of Europe state.

Nevertheless, the Council of Europe continues to hope that the CEFR will facilitate and promote co-operation among educational institutions in different countries, particularly in allowing school-leaving certificates from one European country to be recognized in other European countries.

The CEFR, therefore, is intended to provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, and to assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts.

This is certainly an idea whose time is long overdue. Within Britain alone, England, Scotland and Ulster have maintained different, and mutually unintelligible, sets of school examinations since 1945. Within the European Union, growing numbers of international students are entangled in the debate as to how "A" Levels rank against the Abitur and Baccalaureate. The countries of eastern Europe have only added to the problem, engaging societies with proud histories of academic achievement in a fight for recognition.

The CEFR Approach

To facilitate the mutual recognition of language qualifications, the CEFR sets out to provide a comprehensive framework covering all aspects of learning and teaching, at all levels, in all types of schools, for all age groups, in all member countries of the Council of Europe.

The CEFR offers the following definition of language use and communication:-

"Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and social agents develop a range of competences, both general and particular language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive

text in relation to topics in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate to carrying out the tasks to be accomplished."

In other words, the CEFR is based on the belief that language use is not simply knowledge of a language, but employing that language to perform actions in both everyday life AND in the classroom, where authentic language activities should be the primary aim. Unfortunately, in many classrooms, display language remains the norm (see Jendli 2005 for an account of this in the UAE) placing authentic everyday communication at variance with the type of authentic pedagogic interaction practiced in the classroom.

One aim of the CEFR, therefore, is to define a common communicative approach in line with the language policy principles of the Council of Europe. This, it must be stressed, is an approach that applies equally to ALL languages. It is not, in any way, an endorsement of the teaching of English.

Common Reference Levels

The question is, therefore, how general language competence can actually be defined and measured, given the different demands of, for example, personnel departments, learners, teachers, schools and colleges.

It is interesting that Weiterbildungs-Testsysteme put the demands of personnel departments at the top of their list, but when a company advertisement specifies that a candidate should be "fluent in oral and written Danish", what does that really mean?
Does the personnel manager have some type of specific benchmark in mind, or is the concept of fluency just a vague subjective requirement?

Similarly, when learners say they have "A" Level Spanish, "six years of German" or in Erling's (2002) phrase "I learn English since ten years", or that on their last course they learnt "2000 new words", what indication of ability, if any, does that give?

If language teachers describe students as "poor", "average", or "relatively good", what does a third party understand from these phrases? "Poor" is poor in relation to whom? Is the student "poor" when compared to other students of similar background, or when compared to a highly educated native speaker?

Again, when a school or college advertises courses like "Italian for False Beginners", how false must the beginners be before they will benefit? What are the general public supposed to understand from course titles like "Active German I", "Business Spanish II" or "Arabic Conversation"?

To resolve these questions, the CEFR has established six broad levels of competence, spread across three general areas. The levels are as follows:-

A1	Breakthrough	
A2	Waystage	Basic User
B1	Vantage	
B2	Threshold	Independent User
C1	Effective proficiency	
C2	Mastery	Proficient User

but these have been described by Fulcher as "nothing more than a set of scaled descriptions that reflect what groups of teachers drawn from around Europe could agree represented 'more' and 'less' proficient."

Language Use and the Language User/Learner

In an attempt to make the six cells as unambiguous and transparent as possible, the CEFR defines each level in terms of skills i.e. what people at various levels can do. There are no lists of lexical items, no lists of grammar and no lists of topics, just descriptions of skills and competences offered at three different levels.

   A. Global descriptions of competence.

   B. Skill-based levels of competence.

   C. Sub-skill based levels of competence.

This approach, it must be said, differs radically from that adopted by Van Ek and Alexander, whose first version of The Threshold Level stipulated mastery of specific lexis and specific structures.

Their detail has become more general, to the extent that, so far as Global Descriptions are concerned, the metalanguage used to formulate the descriptions has already been shown to confuse both learners and some teachers (Komorowska, 2004; Little & Simpson, 2004; Manasseh, 2004; Wall, 2004). For example, at the A1 Breakthrough level, the learner:

"Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at

the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce himself/herself and others and

can ask and answer personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and

things he/she likes. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly

and clearly and is prepared to help."

The question raised by this description, of course, is what, precisely, is intended by terms like "familiar everyday expressions", "very basic", "concrete needs" and "a very simple way"? Are one

word demands – "Food!", "Water!" intelligible but ungrammatical expressions – "Me Tarzan" and a total dependence on slowly delivered "foreigner talk" intended, or does the CEFR demand something more?

The Skill Based descriptions, in fact, suggest that more than monosyllables are required, for these descriptions are more specific and cover the following areas:-

Reading
Listening
Oral Production
Spoken Interaction
Written Production
Written Interaction

So, again at the A1 Breakthrough level, the learner is defined in the following terms:-

Listening	Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.
Reading	Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, basic words and phrases and re-reading as required.
Spoken Interaction	Can interact in a simple way, but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
Written Production	Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.

Again, if we look at this critically, it becomes clear that at A1 Breakthrough level, the learner's listening skills will be exceptionally basic and highly dependent on a number of artificial factors. Reading ability is unlikely to be more than the simplest processing of text at speeds below those required for understanding – thus Metro indicates an underground train station; "eczane" is Turkish for pharmacy.

It must be remembered, however, that A1 is the lowest possible level. If we look at Oral Production across three levels (A1; A2; B1) then it is possible to see that the definitions of competence form a triple hierarchy.

A1	Can produce simple, mainly isolated phrases about people and places.
A2	Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routine, likes/dislikes etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.
B1	Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.

In terms of topics, the three levels move from people and places (A1) through "people, living and working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes" (A2) to "one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest" (B1) although the last definition leaves open the question of language learners who have very narrow fields of interest. Nor do terms like "reasonably fluent" and "straightforward" offer much as objective standards.

In terms of length of utterance, A1 goes from "isolated" phrases, to the "short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list" (A2); to a linear sequence of points (B1).

So far as complexity of language is concerned, A1 requires only simple phrases. At A2 level these have been expanded into "simple description" and at B1 level this has, in turn, become "a straightforward description" – however "straightforward" is understood.

While on the topic of language complexity, moreover, it is important that we notice one particular factor. In ***English*** (my emphasis) the communicative or performance-based dimension is described through what are termed "Can Do" statements. This, however, may give the misleading impression that we are talking about simple matters.

In Spanish, for example, "Can Do" takes on a far more sophisticated implication – Especificaciones de capacidad linguistica ('puede hacer'), while in German the same concept appears to be even more formidable – Kann-Beschreibungen, Kompetenzbeschreibungen (oder Fahigkeitsbescreibungen) (Hardcastle, Bolton, & Pelliccia 2008, p.135). The definite implication here is that the faux-simplicity of the English term hides a far more detailed concept that is difficult, if not impossible, to translate directly into other major European languages.

A third level of definitions, moreover, is based on the concept of sub-skills, with all six skills areas being sub-divided into a total of 31 sub-skills. These are listed below.

Overall Written Production

- Creative Writing
- Reports and Essays

Overall Written Interaction

- Notes, Messages and Forms
- Correspondence

Overall Reading Comprehension

- Reading for orientation
- Reading for information

- Reading instructions
- Reading correspondence

Overall Oral Production

- Sustained monologue – putting a case
- Sustained monologue – describing experiences
- Public announcements
- Addressing audiences

Overall Oral Interaction

- Understanding a native speaker interlocutor
- Interviewing and being interviewed
- Informal exchange
- Conversation
- Transactions to obtain goods and services
- Informal discussion with friends
- Formal discussions and meetings
- Goal orientated co-operation (consensus finding)

In this case, it is open to question exactly how many of these sub-skills will ever be required, particularly by younger (teenage?) learners. I would suggest that it is highly unlikely that any secondary school student will require the ability to make public announcements, conduct interviews or participate in formal discussions and meetings.

The spread of ICT, moreover, has conflated "notes, messages" and "correspondence" into e-mailing and texting – particularly among teenagers. (McBeath 2006). EFL publishers are beginning to play catch-up in this area, by issuing textbooks on e-mailing (Emmerson, 2004; Pile, 2004), but texting is still driven by the linguistic needs of teenagers themselves, and may ultimately prove impossible to regulate.

User/Learner Competences

User/Learner competences is the rather untidy term used by the CEFR to cover those linguistic, pragmatic and strategic factors that cannot be measured in terms of skills and sub-skills. As before, the scare of definitions rises from A1 to C2, and the full range of definitions is as follows.

Linguistic Competences

- General linguistic range
- Vocabulary range
- Vocabulary control
- Grammatical accuracy
- Phonological control
- Orthographic control

Pragmatic Competences.

- Flexibility
- Turn taking
- Thematic development
- Coherence/cohesion
- Spoken fluency
- Prepositional precision

Strategic competences

- Asking for clarification
- Taking the floor
- Co-operating
- Interpreting cues and inferring
- Compensating
- Processing text
- Note-tasking seminars, lectures

Once again, many of these definitions raise more questions than they answer, with, for example, Riggenbach (2000) having edited an entire collection of papers in an attempt to clarify the single concept of "fluency".

When combined, however, the skill-based and competence-based definitions for the six reference levels of the CEFR (A1-C2) provide more than 50 categories, giving teachers a checklist which can be used:

A. In course design – to determine whether language functions, topics and texts are appropriate for the level concerned.
B. In assessing course materials – checking the suitability of courses at any given level.
C.   In assessing language exams – to determine whether the examination meets the needs of the learners.

That, at least, is the claim. In reality, the longer the checklist, the more likely it is that the material or examination will only serendipitously match the majority of the categories, and the more likely it is that many of the categories will be inapplicable to specific groups of students. Smith (2005, p.70) explains "If I try to use the table for social interaction, I would probably use it in a testing situation with three candidates speaking at the same time. However, the table includes at least 30 wordy descriptors for each candidate, meaning that I have to juggle 90 descriptors (30 for each candidate)while assessing reliably, validly, fairly and professionally each candidate within 10-15 minutes of performance."

Methodological Implications

The CEFR has a task-based approach, and its communicative approach applies not only to communication in everyday life, but also to the use of language within the classroom. According to

Tranter, many of the CEFR ideas are taken from Nunan's (1989) work, which emphasises that classroom tasks and/or activities should be as authentic and communicative as possible.

Very generally, these ideas can be paraphrased as follows:-

- Tasks should have an end / result / end product.
- The participants should be interested in achieving the end / result.
- The participants should be allowed to make use of their own experience, ideas, needs, views etc.
- The task should have an information and/or opinion gap.
- There should be a reason for speaking/writing/reading/listening.
- Language behaviour should be as authentic as possible, with no simplifications or unnaturally slow speech. The use of compensation strategies and spontaneous speech should be encouraged.

As examples of these product-orientated tasks, requiring interaction, reception and/or production, Tranter gives the following:-

- Reading a report and discussing it with colleagues, in order to arrive at a decision.
- Interacting with a police service official and filling in a form.
- Writing and delivering a public lecture.
- Following instructions to assemble something and asking an observer for help.

What Tranter does not consider, however, is the problem of the faux-communicative task; the type of "task" which appears when amateur materials writers follow what they imagine to be the demands of the CEFR. Already, in Oman, the Royal Air Force of Oman has sponsored the creation of a course called SAF Target (RAFO 2003), which claims to be written in accordance with the CEFR Principles.

Among other faux-communicative tasks, SAF Target Level Two requires Omani servicemen to:

(A) Complete a Visitor Information Form on behalf of a fictitious Canadian Colonel who is staying at an equally fictitious hotel in Glasgow. This task is complicated by the fact that the writers themselves do not distinguish between the concepts of "Job" and "Rank". (Workbook P. 39)

(B) Talk about posed photographs with their partners. The photographs show a number of tri-service personnel carrying copies of SAF Target (product placement) and either inspecting military vehicles or gazing in admiration at other servicemen's textbooks. When the writer was asked what she expected students to produce during this activity, she looked momentarily blank, and then answered "Anything! It's open ended." It would be less open-ended had the book previously taught the clothing vocabulary required to give anything like an adequate description of the men concerned – "In this picture I can see four men. One of them is in RAFO uniform. One of them is a civilian. He is wearing a white dishdasha. The other two men come from HQ RAO. One of them is a corporal" etc.

(C) Write a postcard from Holland to a fictitious Omani friend, describing a fictitious holiday spent windsurfing, scuba diving, eating and riding on a big wheel. The postcard will never be delivered to Oman, because it is being sent on a 1930's Dutch two cent stamp.

Tranter claims that the council of Europe's aim is NOT to prescribe standards and levels, but rather to offer all persons and institutions involved in language training the opportunity to adapt their programmes and teaching to a system of recognized European quality standards. In fact, this approach appears to be having some success. Mention has already been made of SAF Target, but it is now usual for commercially produced coursebooks from Britain to carry claims (usually in a footnote on the back cover) that they revise CEFR Level A1, and proceed to A2 etc. (Craven, 2008; MacIntyre,

2009). This advertising even extends into the field of ESP, where language demands are specific rather than common (Hughes & Naughton, 2008).

Even so, it is open to question how far this attempt at quality assurance has really succeeded. The vast majority of European language learners study languages in state school systems, and the textbooks that they use have to conform to the demands of the national, or regional, school curricula. If British publishers are lucky, then one or two of their titles may be adopted for use, in which case the publisher has hit the jackpot.

What is more likely, however, is that British publishers' textbooks will be used in private language learning institutes, where students will be allocated to classes on grounds that have more to do with room capacity and teacher availability, than on the students' linguistic knowledge.

Tranter again claims that the significance of the CEFR is as follows:-

For Colleges and Schools:

- The CEFR offers colleges and schools a way of integrating their language teaching programmes into a system of European quality standards.

- The CEFR makes language programmes more transparent for learners, teachers and other stakeholders.

- The CEFR reference levels are a useful instrument when (a) advising or (b) placing students on courses.

- Using the CEFR when organising language programmes is a useful marketing instrument for colleges and schools.

- The CEFR offers colleges and schools a useful way of structuring language courses.

- The CEFR proficiency levels offer an excellent basis for planning in-house company courses, or new courses.

- The CEFR approach to language teaching can form the basis of teacher-development programmes.

- The skill and competence-based definitions can be used as a checklist for classroom observation.

- Language programmes based on the CEFR will create a better impression on state authorities, customers, parent organizations etc.

For Teachers:

- The skill and competence-based definitions help teachers to plan courses in terms of content and methods.

- The definitions also help to improve student learning awareness and learning habits.

- The CEFR proficiency levels give a good idea of general language competence across the six levels.

- The CEFR offers useful ideas for evaluating lessons and courses.

- The CEFR definitions offer a useful checklist for the assessment of teaching materials.

- They also offer a useful for checklist for the assessment of examinations.

- They are useful when counseling students.

- They can demonstrate to students that they are making progress.

For Learners:

- The CEFR definitions make learning progression a more transparent process.

- The definitions give tips for increasing learner awareness and improving learner habits.

- A CEFR-based course is a good basis for a certificate of attendance and for job applications.

- Knowledge of CEFR is a good basis for qualified assessment of one's owsn competences and skills.

  For Publishers, Examination Boards and Employers:

- The CEFR offers a content (syllabus) and methodological basis for course materials and examinations.

- The CEFR makes it possible to compare national and international language examinations.

- The CEFR makes it easier for personnel departments to assess the language skills of people with language course certificates.

- The CEFR allows companies and workplaces to describe the language skills they require.

It must be said that many of these claims are, to date, impossible to verify, and that several of them are effectively the same thing, restated according to the target audience. It should also be noted that we seem to have come a long way from the idea that the CEFR will help to foster peace, love, understanding and the appreciation and celebration of cultural differences within the nations of Europe.

So far as colleges and schools are concerned, the CEFR is now being endorsed on the grounds that it will look good to stakeholders, and make educational managers' jobs that little bit easier. I have the strongest suspicion, moreover, that this wildly overstates the case. It is not being alarmist to suggest that the use of the term "A1" is more than likely to confuse some stakeholders, who will assume that an A1 applicant has a higher proficiency than one described as B2.

Lenz (2004), when discussing the European Language Portfolio, admits that "An ELP which contains full details in every area may be too complex for some who want to make use of the ELP as a documentation or reporting tool." (P. 27). This is an understatement.

Despite its best efforts, the TOEFL examination has never been able to successfully explain that there is no significant difference between the candidate who scores 499, and the one who scores 501. 501 remains a much "better" score.

Expecting stakeholders like future employers or personnel officers to read through a "Language Passport" that "gives an overview of the 'linguistic identity' and current level of communicative language proficiency of its holder" (Lenz 2004, p. 24), and which is backed by a Language Biography and a Dossier of completed work, is expecting far too much.

So far as teachers are concerned, the point about counseling students is effectively a restatement of the idea that CEFR levels are useful to institutions when advising students or placing them on courses. The task-based communicative approach to learning makes it highly likely that teachers who are planning courses in line with CEFR thinking will receive more positive support than those who wish to, say, use grammar-translation. In the same way, the CEFR checklist will value positively that which is in line with its approach, and will ascribe negative value to that which is not.

For learners, there is, as yet, no evidence to support the claim that the CEFR definitions make learning progression a more transparent process, or that they increase learner awareness and improve learner habits. It is possible that all these results may be achieved with highly motivated, self-aware students who are prepared to responsibility for their own language learning, but these "good" students might flourish under different conditions.

One point here is certainly a case of special pleading. ANY course can be a good basis for a certificate of attendance, and particularly in the case of "exotic" languages, a certificate printed in Arabic, Modern Greek, Farsi, Khmer, Turkish or Vietnamese can carry far more value than it deserves. There has been at least one case of an Iranian student in Britain using his birth certificate in lieu of a driving license.

For publishers, examination boards and employers, however, the truly important point is that the CEFR makes it easier to compare national and international qualifications. The needs of personnel departments may rank low on a scale that includes a Europe at peace, but those needs will facilitate international employment opportunities and international educational co-operation. These feature, more than any others, make it likely that the CEFR will establish a hold on EFL teaching within the countries of Europe.

Conclusions

Within the states of the European Union and of the wider Council of Europe, it is in everyone's interest to back the CEFR. It does nothing to threaten the position of any existing national languages. Regional minority languages, such as Hungarian in Slovakia and Rumania; Russian in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, may actually gain some status and protection. The "core languages" of Europe – English, French, German and Italian –
will hold their dominant position, but their speakers will be afforded more mobility and their qualifications will enjoy more respect.

The very lack of recent literature endorsing the CEFR, moreover, can be interpreted as a sign that it has ceased to be a matter for any debate; a suggestion that its criteria are so entirely mainstream that few will question or oppose them. As already indicated, coursebooks published in Britain now include information about the intended CEFR Level as a matter of course.

Within Europe, therefore, the CEFR offers a win-win scenario. The next question is, however, whether this European scenario has any relevance to countries outside the members of the Council of Europe? There is no reason why it should, unless countries beyond Europe intend to tie their educational qualifications into the CEFR system. And if they do not, why should they then accept the

methodology of the CEFR? Is this yet another instance of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) at

work?

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