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The Pre-A1 Level in the Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

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Given the gap in the literature regarding the integration of the CEFR in the Early Language Learning (ELL) classroom, this paper aims at presenting the philosophy and characteristics of the new CEFR Pre-A1 level descriptors included in the new Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018/2020),¹ discussing their theoretical underpinnings and examining the extent to which they reflect any teaching methodologies. To this end, this paper (a) analyses and evaluates the new Pre-A1 descriptors, (b) discusses the scales in which they appear and why—as not all scales include the Pre-A1 level, and (c) explores ways that these descriptors can be translated into practice. The paper ends by concluding that the new Pre-A1 level can-do statements can be employed for the creation of language programmes, curricula, syllabi and materials for early language learning. However, more concrete instructions accompanied by linguistic descriptions are needed so as to help practitioners and material developers.

Key words: Pre-A1, young learners, pedagogy, CEFR, vocabulary, assessment, preschool, pre-primary

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on a rather neglected proficiency level, that of Pre-A1 as only recently it has appeared in the updated content of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*, henceforth CEFR (Council of Europe 2001). In 2018², the Council of Europe published the new *CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors*, which suggests new illustrative descriptors encompassing a number of more recently appreciated communication needs (for example, mediation and translanguaging, online interaction, plurilingual and pluricultural competence). An important inclusion, with which this present paper is concerned, are the Pre-A1 level descriptors; this inclusion finally recognizes the need for solid and concrete descriptors for young and very young learners and highlights the importance of Early Language Learning in Europe. In the CEFR Companion Volume, Pre-A1 “represents a ‘milestone’ half way towards Level A1, a band

¹Note that the new CEFR Companion Volume was initially published in 2018 but in 2020, its final version was uploaded to the webpage of the Council of Europe. It is the one which is now being translated in different European Languages.

²Find the latest version of the CEFR Companion Volume: <https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>

of proficiency at which the learner has not yet acquired a generative capacity, but relies upon a repertoire of words and formulaic expressions” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 243). Although limited in the range of communicative ability, this level is an important stepping-stone to later language proficiency.

For the purposes of this paper, 84 new scales – as included in the Companion Volume - were studied (see Appendix) with the intention to explore in which scales the Pre-A1 level appears and what the characteristics of these scales and thus of the descriptors included in each scale- are. The descriptors are presented through six main categories: 1. Reception activities and strategies, 2. Production activities and strategies, 3. Interaction activities and strategies, 4. Mediation activities and strategies, 5. Communicative language activities, and 6. Plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Ultimately this paper explores ways that these descriptors can be translated into practice.

2. Teaching languages to very young learners as a European priority

2.1. Developing young learners’ plurilingual competence: why learn at an early age?

Early foreign language instruction has been a hot issue for a number of years now. Although a series of research studies and projects have been carried out, there is no consensus regarding the ideal onset age. And rightly so, as data show that an array of other parameters (amount and quality of input, continuity in syllabus, systematic exposure, etc.) decisively affect eventual success and not only the onset age (Enever, 2011, 2015; Murphy et al, 2016).

However, Europe has acknowledged the multidimensional benefits of introducing languages at an early age, even at the pre-primary level. These benefits cover a broad spectrum of gains that are not just linguistic. Cognitive gains have been demonstrated such as greater mental flexibility, divergent thinking as well as development of memory, inductive learning, reasoning skills (Rosenbusch, 1995; Alexiou, 2009). Moreover, socio-cultural benefits are also reported (i.e. respect for cultural diversity (Kearney & Ahn, 2013), socio-cultural and language awareness (Brumen, Berro & Cagran, 2017; Lourenço & Andrade, 2015) to name just a few). Last but not least, motivation increase and positive predispositions and attitudes towards other languages (Andúgar & Cortina-Peréz, 2018; Chen et al, 2020) complete the picture making early language learning even at a preschool level a ‘pedagogically solid step’ (Alexiou, 2020, p.68) that contributes to the holistic development of children’s learning.

Taking all the above into consideration, early language learning has become a priority in most European countries which see plurilingual competence as a significant goal to be achieved by learners. Global policies and practices involved in foreign language instruction are affected by research evidence while this year (2020) the introduction of English in 58 Greek state preschools is being piloted for the very first time. Although it is early to present any data, the preliminary indications of this project appear indeed positive.

Since there are educational policies interested in introducing languages and developing plurilingualism from an early age, it is vital to have a set of descriptors for these ages where the model of learning is still under scrutiny. A set of descriptors would provide the foundations for realistic expectations at that particular level bearing in mind the particular age groups and their advantages and limitations. It would also be a good guide for the teacher to monitor learners’ progress. One could only hope that with the new level some level of continuity, consistency and smooth transition can be guaranteed. Before any discussion on the aforementioned aspects, let us review how very young learners approach language learning.

2.2. Characteristics of young learners: how they learn languages

Teaching languages to very young learners is a highly demanding process and specific actions and steps are required (Nikolov & Djigunović, 2006). Spontaneity and limited control of feelings surely characterise young learners. Moreover, young learners do not feel comfortable with the sense of being controlled and they wish to be autonomous deciding for themselves (Donaldson, 1978).

Children are playful and curious by nature and they do not need to be convinced to learn as they are motivated innately for anything new. They experiment, they discover and when it comes to a foreign language they get enthused by the idea of deciphering this new code. However, they have short attention spans, they possess very little conceptual and language knowledge and these learners are still developing cognitively (Alexiou, 2015). Any descriptors for this age group need to consider these very specific characteristics. This, in turn, means that any teaching method must fit within the range of their conceptual understanding and language ability.

Thematic and cross-curricular approaches are proposed for the specific age group as these frameworks help provide context and “facilitate memory associations and recall” (Alexiou, Roghani & Milton, 2019, p.212). Oracy skills are emphasized over literacy skills at this level so oral exposure to and interaction with the new language present valuable learning opportunities. Mealtime conversations (Beals et al., 1994), school routines, free play, daily activities and tasks around school and immediate environment socialization provide ideal contexts for learning. A mascot, a soft toy or a puppet creates the communicative conditions and contexts for exposing and enriching children’s language. Common frameworks for teaching vocabulary to preschool and primary learners include but are not limited to songs, rhymes, drama, arts and crafts, projects and IT. Story reading, cartoon series (Alexiou, 2015; Alexiou et al., 2019; see also Kokla in this volume) are suggested for implicit vocabulary and formulaic uptake. Generally, a holistic approach is recommended so that children develop cognitively, linguistically, emotionally, socio-culturally.

Materials include realia (authentic items) picture books, flash and story cards puppets, board games and projects. Incidental word building is paramount (Sivanova-Chanturia & Webb, 2016) and the focus is on the development of oracy. Literacy usually comes later at a steady pace. Playful practices and tasks such as inductive learning tasks that facilitate mapping thematic concepts of words, visual perception tasks, such as ‘spot the differences’ games, and reasoning tasks, story sequencing are all part of the techniques teachers at preschool should use for further cognitive practice since research showed that they facilitate FL learning (Alexiou, 2005). Explicit grammar instruction should not be applied as children at that early age do not possess metalinguistic skills (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Shin & Crandall, 2014) and they have not matured cognitively to deal with grammar and metalanguage.

Even assessment is practiced and implemented implicitly and alternatively at this age through games, projects, portfolios (Alexiou, Roghani & Milton, 2019). Any tool of assessment must “target the things they do know rather than the things they do not” (Alexiou & Milton, 2020, p.111).

3. The CEFR: from past to present

3.1. An overview of the CEFR (2001)

Within the context of promoting languages at a very young age in Europe as presented in Section 2, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001) has always been a tool, which emphasized the importance of learning languages. It helps decision makers, curriculum planners, syllabus designers, course developers and testers by suggesting a

comprehensive (but not exhaustive) list of can-do statements (or descriptors) which specify what language learners are able to use at different proficiency levels. It has been employed in Europe as a policy document and as a tool to provide a common basis for curriculum planning and assessment purposes thus providing transparency (Council of Europe, 2020).

The CEFR actually adopts a plurilingual vision giving value to cultural and linguistic diversity and is based on the principles of the Council of Europe such as learner autonomy, equal rights, social justice among others. As stated,

it promotes the need for learners as ‘social agents’ to draw upon all of their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences in order to fully participate in social and educational contexts, achieving mutual understanding, gaining access to knowledge and in turn further developing their linguistic and cultural repertoire (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 123)

This influential document has become available in 40 languages. It has been the focus of the Recommendations provided by Europe’s Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly³ and has been exploited by the European Commission (see for instance the EUROPASS project⁴ and the project which led to a European Indicator of Language Competence). Some of its principles that the Committee of Ministers recommends to be implemented by stakeholders and authorities responsible for the development of language education programmes are the following (Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7):

- provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of foreign/second language qualifications;
- provide guidance for the diversification of language learning within educational systems in order to maintain and develop plurilingualism among citizens of Europe as a means of knowledge building and skills development, with a view to enhancing social cohesion and intercultural understanding;
- encourage learners, teachers, teacher trainers, course designers, textbook authors, curriculum developers, examining bodies and education administrators to adopt a learner-focused, competence-based approach; take into consideration the social and cultural dimensions of language learning; consider and treat each language in the curriculum not in isolation but as part of a coherent plurilingual education; take into consideration, in their analysis, the specific needs of the different groups of learners and of the general needs of modern European societies;

It is thus an important tool in the direction of enhancing plurilingualism while its update was more than necessary given today’s multilingual societies. The new Companion Volume, which is the outcome of a Council of Europe project launched in 2018 and constitutes the extension of the CEFR, updates existing scales and includes new components for the parallel use of languages thus becoming an important tool which softens linguistic barriers. For the first time, it includes mediation descriptors and descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Descriptors were also developed for aspects of online interaction and reactions to creative text/literature. Although this paper focuses on the introduction of the Pre-A1 level descriptors as a new component of the CEFR, in the section that follows there is a short overview of the main changes that took place in the updated document and how these are linked to the new –Pre-A1– level introduced.

³https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805d2fb1

⁴<https://europa.eu/europass/en>

3.2. The updated CEFR (2018/2020): what the Companion Volume includes

From 2014 to 2017 more than 1500 experts, and 300 institutions were involved in updating the CEFR. Hundreds of validation workshops and 60 pilot projects took place before its launch through the website of the Council of Europe. The updating of the CEFR involved three different phases. It began with the intuitive development of new descriptors on the basis of experts' knowledge, readings and experience, Phase 2 involved the qualitative aspects of the descriptors while Phase 3 the quantitative analyses. This final phase concerned the calibration of the best descriptors using a Rasch model analysis for scaling with the intention to assess the degree to which the new descriptors are appropriate for the proficiency level for which they are developed (North & Piccardo, 2016). Mediation, which was an area not touched in 2001, is a central component in the CEFR Companion Volume. Scales and can-do statements are provided for mediating a text, for mediating concepts, for mediating communication, as well as for mediation strategies and plurilingual/pluricultural competences. Ultimately, the Companion Volume completes the CEFR descriptive scheme by including/ updating the following:

1. Changes to existing A1-C2 descriptors (with the majority of changes focusing on C2)
2. New scales for *Reading as a leisure activity* (under Written Reception), for *Using telecommunications* (under Spoken Interaction), and for *Sustained monologue: Giving information* (under Spoken Production)
3. New scales for *Online conversation and discussion* and *Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration*;
4. A new scale for *Phonological control*
5. Introduction of scales relevant to creative text and literature.
6. Introduction of scales for *Building on pluricultural repertoire* and *Building on plurilingual repertoire*
7. The introduction of Pre-A1 as a new proficiency level which finally appeared in many scales

The following section focuses on this final innovative aspect of the CEFR Companion Volume by discussing what is new as far as this level is concerned and how it could be exploited for the purposes of teaching and assessing young learners.

4. The Companion Volume and the teaching of languages to very young learners: The new descriptors for Pre-A1 as a major advancement

4.1. The Pre-A1 descriptors in the Companion Volume: an overview

In the CEFR document in 2001, there were certain descriptors relevant to tasks with limited linguistic and cognitive demands and that's why they were considered as belonging below A1 level. These simple tasks, which were then foreseen, were related to the following objectives:

- can use some basic greetings;
- can say yes, no, excuse me, please, thank you, sorry;
- can make simple purchases where pointing or other gesture can support the verbal reference;
- can ask and tell day, time of day and date;
- can fill in uncomplicated forms with personal details, name, address, nationality, marital status;
- can write a short, simple postcard (CEFR Section 3.5)

In the 2018/2020 publication, on the contrary, the new label of Pre-A1 was introduced and the aforementioned objectives were exploited and expanded. This was actually an innovative aspect of

the CEFR, which seems to help educators, materials developers and syllabus designers dealing with the teaching of very young learners.

4.2. Features of the Pre-A1 level descriptors: judging their language and content

What the analysis has shown is that in the 84 scales studied (see Appendix), the total number of Pre-A1 level descriptors is 46 while the scales *not* including pre-A1 level descriptors are 54 (out of 84). This latter point indicates that the Pre-A1 level is not represented in the 65% of the scales. Of course, this is natural if we consider that the Pre-A1 is defined as the half road towards A1 and also the fact that this is usually the level young or very young learners will probably be at. In addition to this finding, the vast majority of Pre-A1 level descriptors appear in the scales relevant to reception, either reading or listening. Reception of a word is expected with the aid of visual stimuli, gestures and/or body language, which assist understanding, which is in line with the teaching and learning theories at an early age.

Descriptors-Reception	Descriptors-Production
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can understand short, simple instructions for actions such as 'Stop,' 'Close the door,' etc., provided they are delivered slowly face-to-face, accompanied by pictures or manual gestures and repeated if necessary (see Appendix, Scale 4) 2. Can understand <i>short</i>, very <i>simple</i> questions and statements provided that they are delivered slowly and clearly and accompanied by visuals or manual gestures to support understanding and <i>repeated</i> if necessary. (Appendix, Scale 1) 3. Can understand the simplest informational material that consists of familiar words and pictures, such as a fast-food restaurant menu illustrated with photos or an illustrated story formulated in very simple, everyday words (see Appendix, Scale 8) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Can give basic personal information in writing (e.g. name, address, nationality), perhaps with the use of a dictionary (Appendix, Scale 20) 7. Can describe him/herself (e.g. name, age, family), using simple words and formulaic expressions, provided he/she can prepare in advance. (Appendix, Scale 15) 8. Can say how he/she is feeling using simple words like 'happy', 'tired', accompanied by body language (Appendix, Scale 15)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Can recognise everyday, familiar words, provided they are delivered clearly and slowly in a clearly defined, <i>familiar</i>, everyday context (Appendix, Scale 1) 5. Can recognise familiar words accompanied by pictures, such as a fast-food restaurant menu illustrated with photos or a picture book using <i>familiar</i> vocabulary (Appendix, Scale 6) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Can ask and answer questions about him/herself and daily routines, using short, <i>formulaic</i> expressions and relying on <i>gestures</i> to reinforce the information (Appendix, Scale 26) 10. Can understand and use some basic, formulaic expressions such as 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Excuse me,' 'Please,' 'Thank you,' 'No thank you,' 'Sorry' (Appendix, Scale 28)

Table 1: Examples of descriptors for receptive and productive language use at the Pre-A1 level

Certain observations which concern the reception scales are also necessary to be mentioned in order to better understand the rationale lying behind the particular descriptors. First of all, familiarity is a key concept in almost all the pre-A1 descriptors. As indicated in the descriptors 4 and 5 (see Table 1), learners need to be familiar with a situation, a topic or a domain in order to understand language

and communicate. Also, in oral reception, it is characteristic the fact that the messages should be short and be delivered slowly and clearly. Repetition also aids understanding and this is the reason why it also appears in many reception descriptors (see descriptors 1&2 in the table).

The role of photographs, illustrations, signs, body language and gesture is evident since their use help understanding. This is in line with the literature in early language education as in L1 or L2 or L3 children actively try to understand and elicit meaning based on limited resources or previous schemata and knowledge (Moon, 2000). They are able to get the gist and do not mind if they understand individual words later. They are armed with the ability to decode external clues like intonation, gesture, facial expressions etc. (see Halliwell, 1992). The descriptors 1,2,3 and 5 in Table 1 combine all the aforementioned elements thus being indicative of these features.

At Pre-A1 level, production occurs only at the level of uttering/using individual words (telegraphic speech) or using simple formulaic expressions (e.g. 'Excuse me,' 'Sorry', 'Please,' 'Thanks', 'No thank you' etc). Learners may get the help of a dictionary (although perhaps a picture dictionary would be more appropriate), use body language in order to be understood-very common technique, recall the popularity of Total Physical Response in young learners (Alexiou & Chondrogianni, 2017) -or have some time to prepare in advance. As far as interaction is concerned, communication is achieved through gestures and formulaic expressions.

Regarding mediation, which is a rather complex and demanding activity which requires the selective relaying of information from one text to another or from one language to another for a given communicative purpose (Stathopoulou, 2015), the Pre-A1 level is almost absent. From the 24 mediation scales, only in 2 scales there are descriptors for the particular level and these scales are: 'Relaying specific information in speech' (Scale 44) and 'Relaying specific information in writing' (Scale 45) (see Appendix). The descriptors concern the relaying of simple information provided there is repetition, slow rate of speech and simple language accompanied with visual material (see Table 2 below).

Can relay (in Language B) simple instructions about places and times (given in Language A), provided these are repeated very slowly and clearly.
Can relay (in Language B) very basic information (e.g. numbers and prices) from short, simple, illustrated texts (written in Language A).
Can list (in Language B) names, numbers, prices and very simple information from texts (written Language A) that are of immediate interest, that are written in very simple language and contain illustrations

Table 2: Mediation descriptors at the Pre-A1 level

Also in the plurilingual scales (Scales 82-84) (i.e., 'Building on pluricultural repertoire', 'Plurilingual comprehension' and 'Building on plurilingual repertoire') (see Appendix), which involve the parallel use of languages, the Pre-A1 level is not represented with descriptors. This is strange as the issue of developing intercultural competence is vital (see Karras, in this volume) and certain intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills should be cultivated both for teachers and learners from an early age (Kiose, Alexiou & Iliopoulou, 2019).

It is also remarkable the fact that the Pre-A1 level descriptors are absent from the scales related to (reception, production, interaction and mediation) *strategies*. Only one descriptor appears in Scale 13 which concerns reception and is related to deducing through the use of a picture: 'Can deduce the

meaning of a word from an accompanying picture or icon (see Appendix, Scale 13)' and also the ones referring to gestures and physical actions as these can be considered as strategies as well (Psaltou-Joycey, 2010). Developing strategies and teaching them explicitly or integrating them in teaching has been recommended (Chamot, 2008; Psaltou-Joycey et al, 2014). In fact, language aspects should not be taught in isolation from strategies, but the one could complement the other (Stathopoulou, 2016) thus following a holistic approach to the teaching and learning of the new linguistic knowledge.

A general comment before shifting emphasis to the actual use of these descriptors for teaching purposes is related to the importance of context and real-life tasks. According to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 29), "language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures." This principle is actually reflected in the Pre-A1 level descriptors, which imply "purposeful, collaborative tasks in the classroom, whose primary focus is not language" (ibid). The descriptors in Table 3 below are indicative.

Can make simple purchases and/or order food or drink when pointing or other gesture can support the verbal reference (see Appendix, Scale 31)
Can list (in Language B) names, numbers, prices and very simple information from texts (written Language A) that are of immediate interest, that are written in very simple language and contain illustrations (see Appendix, Scale 45).

Table 3: Indicative descriptors of real-life tasks and purposeful communication at the Pre-A1 level

Summing up at the Pre-A1 level emphasis is given on oracy skills' development while reception is paramount for language exposure. We could actually say that based on these expectations, Pre-A1 level relates to preschool or pre-primary level. This is important, as this was a much needed at this age.

5. Using the new Pre-A1 descriptors: Suggestions for teaching languages to very young learners

Following North and Piccardo's words (2019, p. 142) who suggest "using the Companion Volume as a guide for the development of context-appropriate educational objectives", this section suggests ways by which the teaching of very young learners can be assisted through the use of the Pre-A1 level descriptors. The illustrative descriptors as seen here can function as a starting point and a common basis appropriate to the teaching of very young learners. Note, however, that the CEFR itself makes it clear that the descriptors which are presented as suggestions and are not in any way exhaustive but illustrative, can be seen as a basis for reflection and further implementation. As stated therein, "the aim of the examples is to open new possibilities, not to pre-empt decisions" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 41).

From the above, it becomes clear that the criterion of relevance is crucial. The teacher is the one who ensures relevance. In fact, taking into account the student population, their specific needs along with the situational context, s/he has to:

- decide what descriptor scales can be useful for his/her students and context

- decide what sort of (purposeful) mediation tasks to include, at which stage of the lesson, with what objectives
- select authentic texts which will inform the design of the activities, decide on the genres, and discourse environments

In addition to the employment of the Companion Volume descriptors, the Council of Europe suggests the use of another accompanying document which has been published in their website⁵ with the title 'Collated Representative Samples of Descriptors of Language Competences Developed for Young Learners: Resource for Educators' (see Goodier, 2018a, 2018b). As the authors state, the document includes can-do statements for young learners, which have been collected from different sources and have been further subdivided according to age (7-10 years and 11-15 years old). These descriptors are varied and useful and they are complementary to the A1 and A2 level but their discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on Pre-A1 (Council of Europe, 2020).

Obviously, any language-related outcomes will depend on the model of the education curriculum, that will be adopted but setting realistic objectives will support any early start benefits (García Mayo, 2017) so Pre-A1 serves as a general roadmap for achievement and expectations at large.

The Pre-A1 descriptors sketch the profile for a very young learner and thus can provide a much needed model of learning at these ages as well as more information of what a Pre-A1 learner is expected to know (Alexiou & Milton, 2020). However, still more information on the amount of vocabulary and the thematic areas would make it more focused and consistent. The process of needs analysis involves creating an understanding of what exactly learners need to achieve for their learning goals. It serves also as a means of monitoring the knowledge of learners so the teacher can understand where the learners are and how much effort is needed to achieve these goals (Milton & Alexiou, 2020). Moreover, it helps the teacher to plan interventions that meet the learners' needs best. To this end, Pic-lex (see Alexiou, this volume) could be a first start laying the foundations for more assessing tools to be developed for Pre-A1 specifications. These specifications can lead practitioners to a more principled and systematic way of teaching, which can also impact on eventual educational attainment.

More importantly, though, the development of an indicative common syllabus with realistic criteria at this CEFR level may prove to be useful and practical. Vocabulary and formulaic language are at the heart of the learning process at this age and stage so more explicit specifications would be very helpful. In such a case, materials and syllabus would be properly sequenced and they would build on learners' varied knowledge thus infusing motivation to learners. It would also be much easier for the teacher to monitor learners' progress. Consequently, continuity, consistency and coordination of syllabi could be attained and lead to a model of language development. This would be very important especially at a Pre-A1 level where it all starts. According to Cameron (2001), teachers are advised to start from where the learners are while socio-culturalism shows that after that scaffolding is vital (Bruner, 1977). This way, teachers will build on what children know or revisit concepts that they have not mastered yet entirely. Sterile repetition is dull and futile and has a negative impact on motivation. Therefore, just repeating information would not take us anywhere. Moreover, any additional language is not viewed as a separate subject especially in preschool curriculum but it is integrated in the curriculum so some specific guidelines and common ground on thematic areas would be essential in the hands of the teachers who face this challenge for the very first time.

⁵<https://rm.coe.int/collated-representative-samples-descriptors-young-learners-volume-1-ag/16808b1688>

6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we presented the rationale behind the descriptors in the newly added CEFR level, Pre-A1. The descriptors focus on receptive skills and oracy and flexibility is provided for stakeholders since most of the descriptors are largely general. Although some of them may potentially be exploited by curriculum planners and syllabus designers whose target groups are early language learners, there is still room for additions and/or clarification. A more concrete guide with common thematic areas and perhaps a threshold of lexis that will enhance communication should be useful. Specifying the 'what' but also the 'how' and 'why' is equally vital if we are to guide, support but also facilitate teachers' demanding task which at this sensitive age is primarily a pedagogical task. Plurilingual competence, integration of strategies and the development intercultural skills could also be emphasized there. As far as strategies are concerned, their teaching could be explicit making students aware of the range of strategies that can be used in different sorts of language tasks (Stathopoulou, 2016, p. 767). Regarding plurilingual competence and the development of intercultural skills, the 'Civil Society Platform to promote multilingualism' (Action Plan for 2014-20) has stressed the importance of supporting successful programmes of plurilingual education which aim at the development of learners' plurilingual competences (see Stathopoulou, 2016, p. 764). In fact, the integration of language in the curriculum rather than the consideration of it as a separate subject is an aspect that needs to be addressed in the future while certain aspects of methodology need also be further discussed including but not limited to the use of L1 (how much if needed and where).

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Appendix

Pre-A1 descriptors

1a. Reception activities

Listening comprehension

SPOKEN RECEPTION

1.OVERALL LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Can understand short, very simple questions and statements provided that they are delivered slowly and clearly and accompanied by visuals or manual gestures to support understanding and repeated if necessary.

Can recognise everyday, familiar words, provided they are delivered clearly and slowly in a clearly defined, familiar, everyday context.

Can recognise numbers, prices, dates and days of the week, provided they are delivered slowly and clearly in a defined, familiar, everyday context.

2. UNDERSTANDING CONVERSATION BETWEEN OTHER SPEAKERS

No descriptors available

3. LISTENING AS A MEMBER OF A LIVE AUDIENCE

No descriptors available

4. LISTENING TO ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Can understand short, simple instructions for actions such as 'Stop,' 'Close the door,' etc., provided they are delivered slowly face-to-face, accompanied by pictures or manual gestures and repeated if necessary

5. LISTENING TO AUDIO MEDIA AND RECORDINGS

Can recognise words, names and numbers that he/she already knows in simple, short recordings, provided that they are delivered very slowly and clearly

Reading comprehension

WRITTEN RECEPTION

6. OVERALL READING COMPREHENSION

Can recognise familiar words accompanied by pictures, such as a fast-food restaurant menu illustrated with photos or a picture book using familiar vocabulary.

7. READING CORRESPONDENCE

Can understand from a letter, card or email the event to which he/she is being invited and the information given about day, time and location.

Can recognise times and places in very simple notes and text messages from friends or colleagues, for example 'Back at 4o'clock' or 'In the meeting room,' provided there are no abbreviations

8. READING FOR ORIENTATION

Can understand simple everyday signs such as 'Parking,' 'Station,' 'Dining room,' 'No smoking,' etc.

Can find information about places, times and prices on posters, flyers and notices

9.READING FOR INFORMATION AND ARGUMENT

Can understand the simplest informational material that consists of familiar words and pictures, such as a fast-food restaurant menu illustrated with photos or an illustrated story formulated in very simple, everyday words

10.READING INSTRUCTIONS

Can understand very short, simple, instructions used in familiar, everyday contexts such as 'No parking,' 'No food or drink,'etc., especially if there are illustrations

11.READING AS A LEISURE ACTIVITY

No descriptors available

Audio-visual Reception
12. WATCHING TV, FILM AND VIDEO
No descriptors available

1b. Reception Strategies

13. IDENTIFYING CUES AND INFERRING (SPOKEN & WRITTEN)
Can deduce the meaning of a word from an accompanying picture or icon

2a. Production activities

14. OVERALL SPOKEN PRODUCTION

Can produce short phrases about themselves, giving basic personal information (e.g. name, address, family, nationality).

Spoken Production

15. SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: DESCRIBING EXPERIENCE

Can describe him/herself (e.g. name, age, family), using simple words and formulaic expressions, provided he/she can prepare in advance.

Can say how he/she is feeling using simple words like 'happy', 'tired', accompanied by body language

16. SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: GIVING INFORMATION

No descriptors available

17. SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: PUTTING A CASE (E.G. IN A DEBATE)

No descriptors available

18. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

No descriptors available

19. ADDRESSING AUDIENCES

No descriptors available

Written Production

20. OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION

Can give basic personal information in writing (e.g. name, address, nationality), perhaps with the use of a dictionary

21. CREATIVE WRITING

No descriptors available

22. WRITTEN REPORTS AND ESSAYS

No descriptors available

2b. Production Strategies

23. PLANNING

No descriptors available

24. COMPENSATING

Can point to something and ask what it is.

25. MONITORING AND REPAIR

No descriptors available

3a. Interaction activities

SPOKEN INTERACTION

26. OVERALL SPOKEN INTERACTION

Can ask and answer questions about him/herself and daily routines, using short, formulaic expressions and relying on gestures to reinforce the information

27. UNDERSTANDING AN INTERLOCUTOR

Can understand simple questions which directly concern him/her, for example about name, age and address or similar things, if the person is asking slowly and clearly.

Can understand simple personal information (e.g. name, age, place of residence, origin) when other people introduce themselves, provided that they speak slowly and clearly directly to him/her, and can understand questions on this theme addressed to him/her, though the questions may need to be repeated.

Can understand a number of familiar words and greetings and recognise key information such as numbers, prices, dates and days of the week, provided speech is delivered very slowly, with repetition if necessary

28. CONVERSATION

Can understand and use some basic, formulaic expressions such as 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Excuse me,' 'Please,' 'Thank you,' 'No, thank you,' 'Sorry.'

Can recognise simple greetings.

Can greet people, say his/her name and take leave of them

29 INFORMAL DISCUSSION (WITH FRIENDS)

No descriptors available

30. FORMAL DISCUSSION (MEETINGS)

No descriptors available

31 GOAL-ORIENTED CO-OPERATION

(E.G. ASSEMBLING A FURNITURE KIT, DISCUSSING A DOCUMENT, ORGANISING AN EVENT ETC.)

No descriptors available

32 OBTAINING GOODS AND SERVICES

Can make simple purchases and/or order food or drink when pointing or other gesture can support the verbal reference

33. INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Can tell people his/her name and ask other people their name.

Can use and understand simple numbers in everyday conversations.

Can ask and tell day, time of day and date.

Can ask for and give a date of birth.

Can ask for and give a phone number.

Can say and ask people about their age.

Can ask very simple questions for information, such as 'What is this?' and understand 1- or 2-word answers

34. INTERVIEWING AND BEING INTERVIEWED

No descriptors available

35 USING TELECOMMUNICATIONS

No descriptors available

Written Interaction

WRITTEN INTERACTION

36. OVERALL WRITTEN INTERACTION

Can write short phrases to give basic information (e.g. name, address, family) on a form or in a note, with the use of a

Dictionary

37. CORRESPONDENCE

Can write short phrases and sentences giving basic personal information with reference to a dictionary

38. NOTES, MESSAGES AND FORMS

Can fill in very simple registration forms with basic personal details: name, address, nationality, marital status.

Online Interaction

39. ONLINE CONVERSATION AND DISCUSSION

Can post simple online greetings, using basic formulaic expressions and emoticons.

Can post online short simple statements about him/herself (e.g. relationship status, nationality, occupation), provided

he/she can select them from a menu and/or refer to an online translation tool

40. GOAL-ORIENTED ONLINE TRANSACTIONS AND COLLABORATION

Can make selections (e.g. choosing a product, size, colour) in a simple online purchase or application form, provided there

is visual support

3b. Interaction Strategies

41. TAKING THE FLOOR (TURNTAKING)

No descriptors available

42. Cooperating

No descriptors available

43. ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION

No descriptors available

4a. Mediation activities

44. OVERALL MEDIATION

No descriptors available

Mediating a text

45. RELAYING SPECIFIC INFORMATION IN SPEECH

Can relay (in Language B) simple instructions about places and times (given in Language A), provided these are repeated very slowly and clearly.

Can relay (in Language B) very basic information (e.g. numbers and prices) from short, simple, illustrated texts (written in Language A).

46. RELAYING SPECIFIC INFORMATION IN WRITING

Can list (in Language B) names, numbers, prices and very simple information from texts (written Language A) that are of immediate interest, that are written in very simple language and contain illustrations

47. EXPLAINING DATA IN SPEECH (E.G. IN GRAPHS, DIAGRAMS, CHARTS ETC.)

No descriptors available

48. EXPLAINING DATA IN WRITING (E.G. IN GRAPHS, DIAGRAMS, CHARTS ETC.)

No descriptors available

49. PROCESSING TEXT IN SPEECH

No descriptors available

50. PROCESSING TEXT IN WRITING

No descriptors available

51. TRANSLATING A WRITTEN TEXT IN SPEECH

No descriptors available

52. TRANSLATING A WRITTEN TEXT IN WRITING

No descriptors available

53 NOTE-TAKING (LECTURES, SEMINARS, MEETINGS ETC.)

No descriptors available

54 EXPRESSING A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO CREATIVE TEXTS (INCLUDING LITERATURE)

No descriptors available

55 ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM OF CREATIVE TEXTS (INCLUDING LITERATURE)

No descriptors available

Mediating concepts

COLLABORATING IN A GROUP

56 FACILITATING COLLABORATIVE INTERACTION WITH PEERS

No descriptors available

57 COLLABORATING TO CONSTRUCT MEANING

No descriptors available

LEADING GROUP WORK

58 MANAGING INTERACTION

No descriptors available

59 ENCOURAGING CONCEPTUAL TALK

No descriptors available

Mediating communication

60 FACILITATING PLURICULTURAL SPACE

No descriptors available

61 ACTING AS INTERMEDIARY IN INFORMAL SITUATIONS (WITH FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES)

No descriptors available

62 FACILITATING COMMUNICATION IN DELICATE SITUATIONS AND DISAGREEMENTS

No descriptors available

4b. Mediation strategies

STRATEGIES TO EXPLAIN A NEW CONCEPT

63 LINKING TO PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

No descriptors available

64 ADAPTING LANGUAGE

No descriptors available

65 BREAKING DOWN COMPLICATED INFORMATION

No descriptors available

STRATEGIES TO SIMPLIFY A TEXT

66 AMPLIFYING A DENSE TEXT

No descriptors available

67 STREAMLINING A TEXT

No descriptors available

5. Communicative language competences

Linguistic

68. GENERAL LINGUISTIC RANGE

Can use isolated words and basic expressions in order to give simple information about him/herself

69. Vocabulary range

No descriptors available

70 Grammatical accuracy

Can employ very simple principles of word order in short statements

71 Vocabulary control

No descriptors available

PHONOLOGICAL CONTROL

72 OVERALL PHONOLOGICAL CONTROL

No descriptors

73 SOUND ARTICULATION

No descriptors

74 PROSODIC FEATURES

No descriptors

75 ORTHOGRAPHIC CONTROL

No descriptors available

Sociolinguistic

76 SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROPRIATENESS

No descriptors available

Pragmatic

77 Flexibility

No descriptors available

78 Thematic development

No descriptors available

79 COHERENCE AND COHESION

No descriptors available

80 PROPOSITIONAL PRECISION

Can communicate very basic information about personal details in a simple way

81 SPOKEN FLUENCY

Can manage very short, isolated, rehearsed, utterances using gesture and signalled requests for help when necessary.

6. Plurilingual and pluricultural competence

82 BUILDING ON PLURICULTURAL REPERTOIRE

No descriptors available.

83 PLURILINGUAL COMPREHENSION

No descriptors available

84 BUILDING ON PLURILINGUAL REPERTOIRE

No descriptors available

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