THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

The Common European Framework and its evolution

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR) is the result of developments in language education that date back to the 1970´s and beyond, and its publication in 2001 was the direct outcome of a long process which had taken place over the previous 10 years.

The development of the CEFR coincided with fundamental changes in language teaching, with the move away from the grammar-translation method to the functional/notional approach and the communicative approach. The CEFR reflects these later approaches and is also the result of a need for a common international framework for language.

It is not a political or cultural tool used to promote Europe or European Educational systems. The word European refers to European Languages, although the CEF has been translated into more than 30 languages, including non – European languages such as Arabic and Japanese, making it accessible to everyone around the world.

It is a descriptive framework for all language levels. How the levels are going to be taught, depends on the institution, coordinators, teachers, etc. It gives plenty opportunities to help learners to achieve new levels of proficiency using the appropriate methodology.

In practice, can provide a straightforward tool for enhancing teaching and learning, a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, planning, textbooks, etc.

In order to facilitate both teaching and learning, it becomes   a way to specify what learners are able to do at certain levels. A common language was needed to describe how language learning, teaching and assessment could be.

In most countries there is a general agreement that language learning can be organized into three Levels: *basic/beginner*, *intermediate*, and *advanced*. The idea is to know how these levels can guide teaching, and the way course books and resources could be selected.

Based on that, the Council of Europe developed the *Common European Framework of References for Languages* to establish international standards for learning, teaching, and assessment for all modern European languages.

The idea is to have a transparent   and coherent integrator   in the teaching and learning   of a language in the settlement of objectives, evaluation and certifications.

Some characteristics of the CEF Framework are:
- **Multiple purpose**: it is related to different and varied purposes of the planning and teaching of a language.
- **Flexible:** its use could be adapted to different circumstances.
- **Open:** ready to be extended and improved.
- **Dynamic:** offering a constant evolution based on the experiences obtained from its use.

- **Easy to use**: they way results are presented are easy to understand and use.
- **Non dogmatic:** does not tend to promote or respond   to any theory or methodology in particular. It is not a methodology and it doesn`t prescribe a way of teaching.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) plays a central role in language and education policy worldwide. It has growing relevance for language testers and examination boards, helping to define language proficiency levels and interpret language qualifications.

Language teaching is most successful when it focuses on the useful outcomes of language learning. Linking teaching to the CEFR is a very effective way of achieving this. A clear proficiency framework provides a context for learning, as for each learner there is an optimal level at which they should be working. It allows teaching to focus on strengths and weaknesses   which are helping or hindering learners. It enables a shared understanding of levels facilitating the setting of realistic learning targets for a group, and relating outcomes to what learners can do next-successfully perform a particular job, or pursue university studies using the language.

APPROACH:
It´s approach is based on the   cognitive, attitudinal and volitional actions and   all the specific skills (abilities) of a person.

The use of a language involves actions that develop   general competences and specific ones, as the communicative competence.   People use those competences in different contexts and under different conditions and restrictions in order to produce a language and receive it in a specific context or knowledge as well. This is where strategies and tasks are being done and practiced. The control of these actions is what makes the learner to have reinforcement or a change in his/her competences.

The text of the CEFR emphasizes learner´s communicative needs, including dealing with the business of everyday life, exchanging information and ideas, and achieving wider and deeper intercultural understanding. This is to be achieved by "basing language teaching and learning on the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of learners".

This conveys the CEFR´s communicative, action-oriented approach. This approach is broad and should be coherent with the aims of most school language learning. It is based on the model of language use and language learning. In this model, the two key notions are tasks and interaction. Language is seen as purposeful, involving communication of meanings which are important to learners, in order to achieve goals. The principle underlying this is that learning will be more effective where language is used purposefully.

The following terms are all related and integrated when learning and using a language:

- **COMPETENCES**: the sum of individual knowledge, abilities and characteristics to allow a person to act.

- **GENERAL COMPETENCES:** They are not related directly with the language, but it could be used whenever needed, including to perform communicative activities.

- **COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCES**: are the ones who allow a person to act using specific communicative ways.

- **THE CONTEXT:** a group of internal and external situations and facts (social, physical, cultural, etc) in which communication takes place.

- **LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES:** are the practices of the communicative competence (comprehension or production) in a specific context when one or more tasks are being done.

- **THE PROCESS:** a group of neurological and physical activities implied in the production of the written and oral comprehension and expression.

- **TEXT:** any kind of oral or written discourse related to a specific context. During an activity, it is the center of the language activity, as a goal or as a product or process.

- **AREA:** any social area in which learning takes place and is the appropriate for the learning, teaching and use of the language. (Personal, social and professional)

- **A STRATEGY:** any kind of organized, ruled and intentional activity, chosen by the person face and do as a specific task.

- **A TASK:** any action that a person consider necessary to obtain a concrete result to solve a problem or to get a goal.

COMPONENTS OF THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE:

The CEF deliberately does not refer to grammar or structures. It is designed to describe how language users communicate and how they understand written and spoken texts. As it is used to describe and compare European languages, can´t provide a detailed list of structures.

Throughout each one of the levels the following communicative components are going to be developed:

- **Linguistic:** syntaxes, lexical and phonological skills.

- **Socio Linguistic**: socio cultural use of the language

- **Pragmatic:** functional use of the language (production)

-

COMMON LEVELS OF REFERENCE (GLOBAL SCALE)

The CEFR scales describe levels in terms of what students can do and how well they can do it. Focusing on tasks and interaction enables teachers to understand students´ performance level as that level where they can tackle reasonably successfully tasks at a level of challenge appropriate to their ability. This is not the same as demonstrating perfect mastery of some element of language; a student can perform a task successfully but still make mistakes.

The CEFR describes language ability on a scale of levels from A1 for beginners up to C2 for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing (learners, teachers, teacher trainers, etc.) to see the level of different qualifications. It also means

that employers and educational institutions can easily compare qualifications and see how they relate to exams they already know in their own country.

The Global scale is based on a set of statements that describe what a learner can do. The "can do" statements are always positive: they describe what a learner is able to do, not what a learner can´t do or does wrong.
This helps all learners even those at the lowest levels, to see and understand that learning has value and that they can attain language goals.

The Common European Framework describes what a learner can do at six specific levels that matches with the general concepts of the Global Scale:

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
CEF GLOBAL SCALE	BEGINNERS – BASIC		INTERMEDIATE		ADVANCED	
	BASIC USER		INDEPENDENT USER		PROFICIENT USER	
	Break Through	Waystage	Threshold	Vantage	Effective Operational Proficiency	Mastery

These common reference levels, the CEFR provides a 'Descriptive Scheme' of definitions, categories and examples that language professionals can use to better understand and communicate their aims and objectives.

In each one of the levels the CEF complements it by describing in depth the following:
- Competencies necessary for effective communication
- Skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies
- Situations (people, place, time, organization, etc) and contexts (study, work, social, tourism, etc) in which communication takes place.

The Global scale is not language –specific. It can be used with practically any other language and can be used as well   to compare achievement and learning across languages.

Example: An A2 in Spanish is the same as A2 in Japanese or English

The Global Scale also helps teachers, academic coordinators and course book writers to decide on curriculum and syllabus content and to choose the appropriate material, books or resources to teach.

These scales can be used as a tool for comparing levels of ability amongst learners of foreign languages and also offer 'a means to map the progress' of learners

The CEF is more than the Global Scale. It goes further by breaking down the Global Scale into more descriptive scales covering three areas of communication:

1. UNDERSTANDING: (Listening and Reading)
2. SPEAKING(Spoken interaction and Spoken Production)
3. WRITING: (written production)

USING THE REFERENCE LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS IN LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

When using resources from Reference Level Descriptions there are some principles to keep in mind:
- Reference Level Descriptions are reference tools for teachers´ language testers and other language learning professionals to support curriculum design and item writing.
- Reference Level Descriptions should not be viewed or used as a replacement for a teaching or testing method; for a course curriculum or test specifications.
- Reference Level can be used in different ways according to the learning situation and requirements. It is up to the user to decide which points to include in a particular course, syllabus or test depending on a range of factors like:
  - The level and range of learners in the program
  - The age   and educational background of the learners.
  - Their reasons for learning English.
  - Their first language
  - Their experience of learning English so far
  - Other sources of input and opportunities to practice English.

Reference Level Description resources facilitate decisions about what language to include for teaching and testing at each CEFR level.

APPLICATION AND EXTENSION OF THE CEFR FOR ENGLISH:

Users of the CEFR are recommended to adapt it as necessary to meet their specific needs, and to develop it further for a variety of different purposes and contexts. An obvious way in which the CEFR needs to be adapted and developed is when it is used with specific languages (the CEFR itself being neutral and deliberately underspecified in this respect).

Reference Level Descriptions represent a new generation of descriptions which identify the specific forms of any given language (words, grammar, etc.) at each of the six reference levels which can be set as objectives for learning or used to establish whether a user has attained the level of proficiency in question.

The scales of the CEFR refer to the theoretical model, but each separate scale refers to particular aspects, elements, contexts, processes, etc. distinguished within the model. Developing competence is described in the scales mainly along two broad dimensions: the **quantity** dimension (the number of tasks persons can perform successfully by language use, in what number of contexts, in relation to what number of themes, domains etc.) and a **quality** dimension (how effectively and efficiently the persons can achieve their goals through language use. To illustrate the interrelationships between the CEFR scales two branches of the hierarchy are presented below, the first referring to the quantity dimension and the second to the quality dimension.
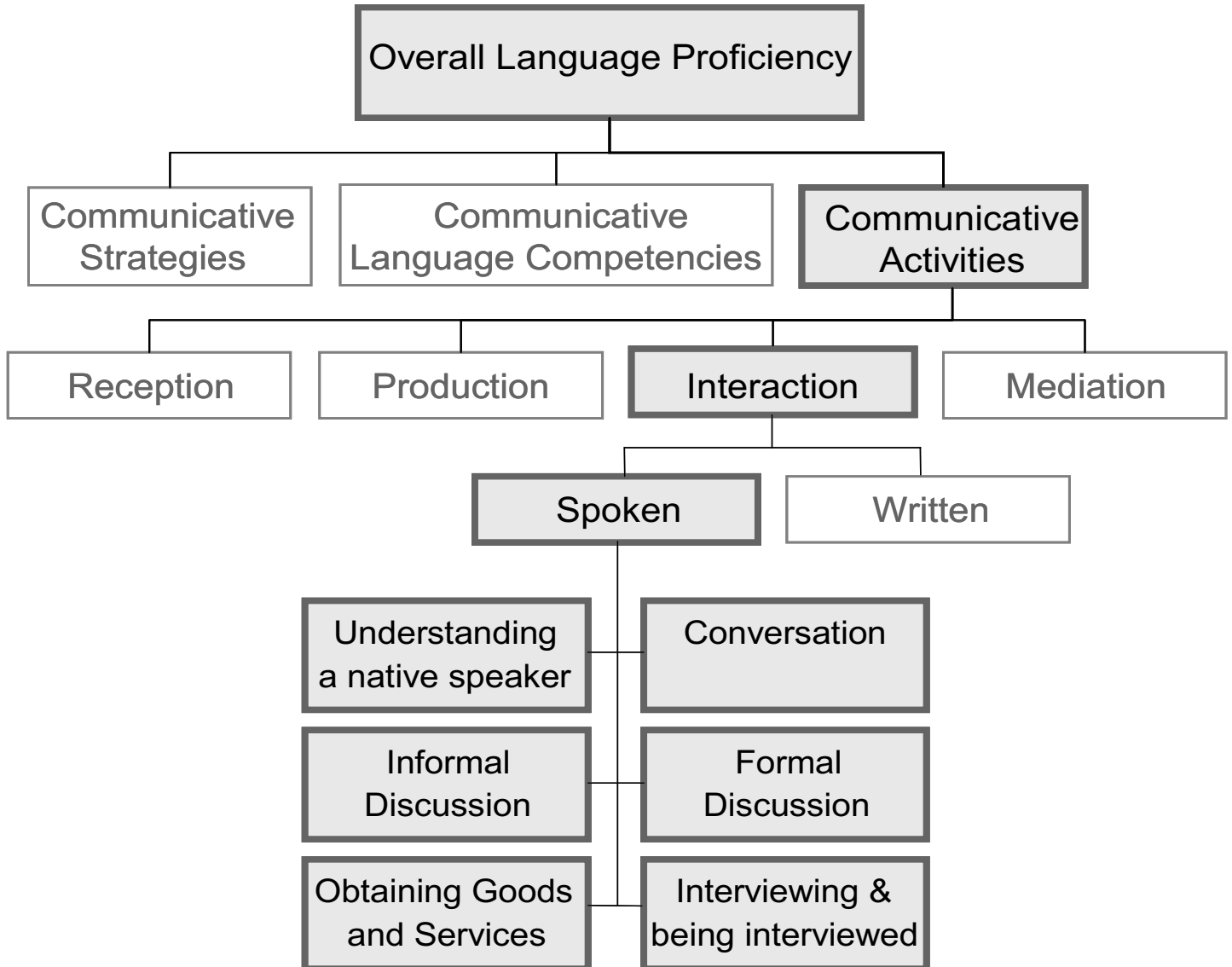
THE QUANTITY DIMENSION:

- **B**ranches out from overall language proficiency into "Communicative Activities".
- Four main types of activities are distinguished: Reception, Production, Interaction, and Mediation.
- Similar branching can be derived from the CEFR for the other three types of activities.

- Within Interaction a spoken and a written branch are distinguished. Finally within the spoken branch several contexts of language use are presented. For each of the boxes in the diagram descriptive scales are available in the CEFR.
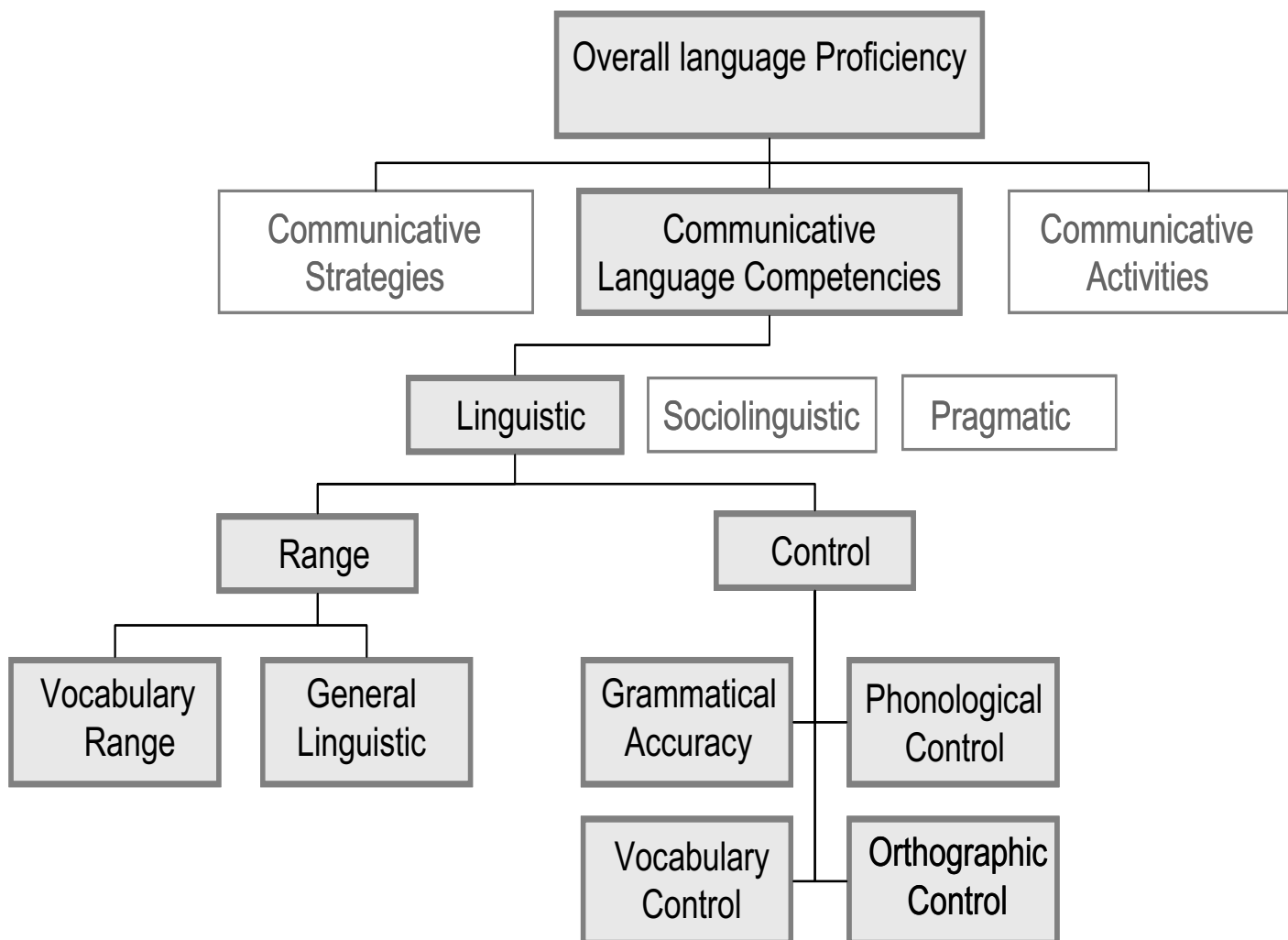
THE QUANTITY DIMENSION:

```
                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                    │   Overall Language Proficiency    │
                    └──────────────────────────────────┘

  ┌───────────────┐   ┌───────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
  │ Communicative │   │       Communicative       │   │  Communicative   │
  │  Strategies   │   │  Language Competencies     │   │    Activities    │
  └───────────────┘   └───────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘

  ┌───────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
  │ Reception │   │  Production  │   │ Interaction  │   │  Mediation   │
  └───────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘

                          ┌──────────┐        ┌──────────┐
                          │  Spoken  │        │ Written  │
                          └──────────┘        └──────────┘

        ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
        │  Understanding    │        │   Conversation   │
        │ a native speaker  │        │                  │
        └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────┘

        ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
        │     Informal      │        │      Formal       │
        │    Discussion     │        │    Discussion     │
        └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────┘

        ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
        │  Obtaining Goods  │        │  Interviewing &   │
        │   and Services    │        │ being interviewed │
        └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────┘
```

THE QUALITY DIMENSION:

- Also branches out from overall language proficiency, but into "Communicative language competences".
- Three main constituents of Communicative language competences are distinguished: linguistic, Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic.
- The linguistic competences are important in achieving efficiency and effectiveness in language use.
- For linguistic competence two factors are distinguished: range and control and within each of these two factors several aspects are distinguished. For each box in the diagram descriptive scales are offered in the CEFR.

```
                    Overall language Proficiency

   Communicative         Communicative          Communicative
    Strategies       Language Competencies         Activities

                  Linguistic   Sociolinguistic   Pragmatic

            Range                          Control

  Vocabulary      General          Grammatical      Phonological
    Range         Linguistic        Accuracy          Control

                                   Vocabulary       Orthographic
                                    Control           Control
```

Official Levels of the Common European Framework of Reference

A1 **Beginners Level** **(Official terminology:** **Breakthrough Level**	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/her and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
A2 **Pre-Intermediate** **(Official terminology:** **Waystage Level)**	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
B1 **Intermediate** **(Official terminology:** **Threshold Level)**	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
B2 **High Intermediate** **(Official terminology:** **Independent user)**	Can understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
C1 **Advanced Level** **(Official terminology:** **Effective Operational** **Proficiency Level)**	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/her fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
C2 **Advanced Level** **(Official terminology:** **Mastery**	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations

References: Synthesis done for academic purposes
1. Council of Europe. **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, assessment**. Structure overview of all CEFR scales.
2. Instituto Cervantes. 2002. **Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas: Aprendizaje, Enseñanza, Evaluación.**
3. University of Cambridge.2011. **Using the CEFR.** Principles of Good Practice