

A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Japan

Institution: Tokai University

Type of context: Classroom level; Textbook creation

Educational sector: Tertiary; Adult (including private sector)

Main focus of your project: Materials

SUMMARY

Name: CEFR-based textbook

Abstract: This research project developed an English language integrated skills textbook that suitably adapted and applied the CEFR for the higher education context in Japan. The textbook focused on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), rather than focusing on the everyday conversation approach that is typical of many lower-level textbooks on the market. Themed units require discussion, presentation and academic writing tasks relating to controversial issues on topics such as technology and health issues. Furthermore, in order to support learner and teacher autonomy and the classroom implementation of the text, we aimed to develop supplemental learning materials and autonomy-promoting resources. The significance of this current project is that it develops a contextualised CEFR-informed integrated skills textbook for Japanese learners of English. The textbook is connected to recent results of research on the CEFR, and develops the principles and practices encouraged by the CEFR and European Language Portfolio (ELP).

Stage: Planning

Theme: Materials

CEFR aspects used: Levels, descriptors, self-assessment, language portfolio, assessment with defined criteria

Main features of this example:

- CEFR illustrative descriptors
- English for Academic Purposes: units organised by themes
- scaffolding learning
- cyclical learning
- learner autonomy

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Relevance, Validity, Transparency, Coherence, Inclusiveness, Sustainability



2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background:

CEFR-informed textbooks are not common in Japan. Use of the CEFR often involves merely placing 'Can Do' descriptors at the beginning of units, without any real engagement with the tools of the CEFR such as the illustrative scales, and related principles such as contextualised learning aimed to assess and reflect in terms of progression on these scales.

Stated aim:

Provide a fully CEFR-based EAP textbook that encourages learners to acquire a deeper understanding of social issues familiar to university students by providing multiple resources from different perspectives based on tasks that involve all of the major skills.

Steps/stages:

1. *Situational analysis*

In the initial year of the project, in order to assess the need and availability of CEFR-informed resources, we analysed texts to see how they correlated to the CEFR, surveyed teacher needs, and gathered examples of actual classroom practices in Japan.

By analysing exemplar practices in classrooms using teaching materials used in CEFR-informed curricula, we suggested possible measures that should be incorporated into the textbook. We also examined challenges when implementing the CEFR in Japanese university classes. A needs survey of English language educators in universities in Japan investigated the possibility of the acceptance of CEFR-informed texts and other matters, including the scope of current classroom practices. The general results of the survey were that many teachers were interested in implementing the CEFR in their classroom, but they were not happy about current provisions in popular textbooks in Japan. Another common viewpoint was that teachers did not feel comfortable with, or have the relevant experience for, guiding learners through the illustrative scales of the CEFR, and reflective practices encouraged by the CEFR and ELP. Our principal interpretation of the survey results was that there is a need for a textbook that provides guidance to both teachers and learners in these aspects.

2. *Development & piloting*

In the following year, we developed the textbook materials with a piloting of the text to determine effectiveness and to assess the need for revisions in the final year.

Connections to Thinking in English: The CEFR-informed Textbook Series A2+/B1 to B1+, or 'Connections' for short (Naganuma, Nagai and O'Dwyer 2015) has five chapters (Technology, Health, Economics, Environment, and Learning) and students will learn related themes on a particular social issue across three units in each chapter, which allows them to acquire a deeper understanding of the issue from multiple perspectives. This textbook targets Level B1 learners (A2+ with scaffolding) with the goal to help them achieve B1+.

The illustrative scales of the CEFR are used for task design and goal settings and contextualised for peer-and self-assessment.

We used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages level estimation grid for teachers (CEF-ESTIM Grid) (European Centre for Modern Languages 2011) to help us identify level-specific tasks and texts. By analysing the CEFR learner proficiency descriptors and illustrated scales for texts and tasks, we established relevant basic content and tasks for the textbook.

We specified the wordlists and grammar items relevant for the textbook by analysing the language level descriptions and wordlists from the CEFR T-series (van Ek and Trim 1991a, 1991b, 2001), the British Council Core Inventory (North, Ortega and Sheehan 2010), the English Vocabulary and Grammar Profiles (see Hawkins and Filipović 2012), and the CEFR-J wordlist (based on an analysis of major English textbooks in Asian regions, see

Tono 2013).

As the integrated skills tasks are similar across all units, the textbook encourages cyclical learning, or spiral learning in confidence building. Furthermore, several CEFR-informed resources are provided for learners to scaffold their learning appropriately. These resources also provide helpful hints for teachers to apply a reflective type of learning based on the CEFR.

3. Organisation of the course

In Unit 1 of each chapter, learners read a main academic text analytically with a graphic chart (with learners scaffolding through the use of a parallel text in the level below: A2+) and explain the ideas in the text through oral reproduction as a basis for spontaneous speaking. Contextualised '*Delivery*' and '*Organization*' scales – based on the '*Spoken Fluency*' scale (Council of Europe 2001:129) and that for '*Addressing Audiences*' (Council of Europe 2001:60) – are provided for peer- and self-assessment. For homework, learners draw a graphic chart to summarise a short passage related to the main text. Groups of three choose different texts so that they have different information to provide opportunity for information-gap activities and independently draw a chart as a homework assignment.

In the beginning of Unit 2 of each chapter, groups conduct a summary presentation based on the graphic chart prepared at home. The '*Delivery*' and '*Organization*' scales are again used for peer- and self-assessments. Learners then listen to a main academic talk analytically by creating questions for confirmation (literal and inferential) and opinions, and a summary of the talk as a basis for spontaneous writing (short to extended summary). Further scaffolding, such as a parallel audio track in the level below (A2+) is provided in the appendix at the end of each chapter. For homework, based on the given prompt related to the contents learned in Unit 1 and 2, learners write an essay after organising the ideas and opinions from different perspectives summarised in a table. They can also look at the supplementary texts for further information when writing their essay. '*Descriptive*' and '*Argumentative*' scales based on the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001:59) are provided for self-assessments. Model essays with annotations in writing level-appropriate to A2+, B1 and B1+ are provided to show the process of writing development. Learners can analyse criterial features that distinguish writings at each level and take notes on the expressions and discourse flow (e.g. use of discourse markers) from the models they can use in their own essay.

In Unit 3 of each chapter, with an integrated understanding of the contents they have learned through Unit 1 and 2, learners organise information and exchange ideas based on their essays, and finally give a presentation using a graphic chart created collaboratively in a group. The '*Delivery*' and '*Organization*' scales are again contextualised and used for peer- and self-assessments. Learners are encouraged to give comments to each other and write a reflection note for further learning. For homework, learners revise and develop the essay written previously, based on the discussions in the group in class. The '*Descriptive*' and '*Argumentative*' scales are again used for self-assessments. Learners can use model essays in A2+, B1 and B1+ as their reference.

Resources for scaffolding at the end of each unit include chunk-based reading, adjusted for three levels (A2+, B1, and B2). Vocabulary appropriate for Level B2 and higher is highlighted in bold, and paraphrased or given meanings in the glossary (see Figure 1). Both reading and listening texts are chunked with slashes (double slashes at the end of sentence) in sense-groups and also formatted to be used in timed reading. Listening scripts and parallel main reading and listening texts in the lower level (A2+) are also provided. Sentence structures in B1 and beyond are modified with A2 grammar, showing the major changes in grey highlight at both levels and the rewriting processes step by step. Other scaffolding tasks include a graphic organiser task (learners present a graphic organiser based on a text like Figure 1), and an extended summary task (again based on text like Figure 1).

The lexical and grammatical items listed in grammar-processing scaffolding are selected based on the publication *Criterial Features in L2 English* by Hawkins and Filipović (2012), which is used as one of the guiding materials to adjust the level of reading texts as well as the listening manuscripts in the textbook. The lexical and grammatical items listed in the step-by-step guidelines of grammar processing for scaffolding from A2 to B1 in the textbook are classified into six categories: sentence length, verb argument structure, sentence structure, adverbial clause, noun modification and others.

4. Portfolio element

The reflective learning approach suggested by the European Language Portfolio (LP) of this textbook allows teachers and learners to plan for, reflect on and record progress in learning activities. The LP is designed to be used alongside the tasks of the textbook to encourage learners to use 'Can Do' descriptors in self-assessment, goal-setting and reflection. In general, the learning practices suggested by the LP promote a cyclical type of learning: learners are encouraged to see progress throughout the course by using their thoughts on reflections after tasks and chapters to inform goals and directions for future learning.

Learners can first use the LP for initial self-assessment. Based on this self-assessment, they can set goals for both the whole textbook/course, and chapter 1. The next part can be used to start cyclical learning.

For example, based on initial self-assessment, learners can set goals for chapter 1. After performing chapter 1 tasks, learners can reflect on how well they have achieved their goals for chapter 1. Based on this reflection learners can then self-assess and set goals for chapter 2, using the 'My next language learning target' sheet from the LP. As chapter 1, chapter 2 and the other chapters involve similar tasks and 'Can Do' descriptors, learners can use this learning cycle to gradually improve in language learning. In this way, learners can be encouraged to develop self-efficacy.

The 'My next language learning target' is first used for goal setting at the beginning of a chapter. When the chapter has been finished the learners can use hints in the final section of the sheet ('Review of learning progress on or near my target date') or a separate page to evaluate how well they have carried out the tasks involved in terms of the 'Can Do' descriptors. They should note the things they have done well and the things they could improve upon. Other learners and the teacher may give advice as to how these improvement points can be incorporated into upcoming learning stages. Learners could also be advised to make personal learning goals as a result. By using the LP learners can take action, step by step, in creating, planning, and working towards goals related to the textbook tasks and 'Can Do' descriptors. It is hoped that by working through this learning cycle, learners can get into the habit of reflecting upon their learning, and thinking about and working towards achieving the steps for their next goal.

The learners can use the dossier to keep a sample of their learning from the textbook and elsewhere. This can be used as proof of learning and learning progress. The learners can be encouraged to continue to use the LP after the textbook (by providing a link to the ELP-based *LP for Japanese University*).

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:

This text is based on:

Naganuma, Naoyuki, Nagai, Noriko & O'Dwyer, Fergus (2017) Applying the CEFR to English for Academic Purposes textbooks In O'Dwyer, Fergus, Hunke, Morten, Imig, Alexander, Nagai, Noriko, Naganuma, Naoyuki & Schmidt, Maria Gabriela (Eds) *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (The English Profile Studies series, volume 6), pp. 77-94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Steps to think about when developing CEFR-informed textbooks:

- Make a list of 'Can Do' descriptors which describe each activity used in the textbook (including subskills) by referring to the illustrated scales (and the EAQUALS Bank of Descriptors). Also, adopt the 'Can Do' descriptors whose level is above or below the target level to build self-efficacy and autonomy.
- Think about the order of activities and the balance of skills according to the aim of the textbook. Design activities in each unit based on the 'Can Do' list and then modify or contextualise the 'Can Do' descriptors if any change. Fix the same task pattern for each unit throughout the textbook or make chapters of several units with different focuses or development of skills. A spiralled task design (see Bruner 2009) is important to facilitate self-efficacy and autonomy.

- Add possible scaffolding tasks or materials to help learners to reach the target level. Think about an input and output chain and independent and integrated skill task flow, so that each task is well connected and gives scaffolding to the next task. Provide not only language scaffolding, but also cognitive scaffolding.
- Write a main text and supplementary text and check the lexical and grammatical level of the text by consulting the English Vocabulary Profile and the English Grammar Profile. Also make a parallel text in the lower level to scaffold learning. The input level can be intentionally lower to promote an output if the main target skill is productive, and not a receptive skill.
- Model essays or presentations can also be prepared in different levels to show the process of development. The model needs to be an output model to give self-efficacy and autonomy, but not an input model just to give a target structure. Also provide a rubric for self- and peer-evaluation of the products based on the CEFR written/oral assessment criteria grids. Use the criteria to make annotation of criterial features of each level on the models.
- Compile 'Can Do' descriptors for each task and make a checklist so that students can evaluate their own progress and set their goals in each unit. Make sure that the checklist has a space for reflective comments. Providing another version of the checklist by skill helps learners to plan and reflect on their own learning. Also, use a portfolio for learners so that they can select and record evidence of learning.