**CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox**

Video scripts for “Innovative aspects of the Companion Volume”

This is the script of the videos in the innovative aspects module. The scripts follow the order of the videos, with an introduction that summarises the topic for those who are interested in becoming familiar with it but do not wish to go any further, and additional sections that look at the different concepts in more detail. There is also a list of references in each of the sections.

# Video 1. Innovative aspects of the Companion Volume to the CEFR: an introduction

## Slide 2

The Companion Volume was published in 2020. It is not a new CEFR but introduces new scales and reformulations of some of the existing scales. It also reinforces some of the concepts, such as the concepts of the speaker as a social agent. Let’s look at an overview of the new aspects of the Companion Volume, particularly those that are relevant in the context of higher education institutions and professional training.

## Slide 3

There is a new pre-A1 level with descriptors, and the title and wording of some of the previous descriptors are modified. As an example, the concept of the “native speaker” as the ideal speaker disappears and gender neutrality is adopted in the formulation of the descriptors (across languages). There are also descriptors for sign language and more descriptors for the “plus” levels, which are now more defined. The action-oriented approach is emphasised, as is the idea of four modes of communication instead of four skills.

## Slide 4

The new scales also reinforce the concepts of partial competences, learner autonomy and diverse approaches to assessment.

## Slide 5

This graph from De Jong illustrates the number of descriptors added per level. As we can see, they contribute to balance the number of descriptors per levels. In blue, we can see the descriptors that were there in the CEFR in 2001, and in yellow, we can see the descriptors that are added in the Companion Volume.

## Slide 6

If you want to know more, have a look at the following bibliography:

Council of Europe. 2001*. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages:Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. 2018. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion volume*. Council of Europe.

De Jong, J. 2018. Updates to the CEFR. In *The CEFR Companion with New Descriptors: Uses and Implications for Language testing and Assessment*. VIth EALTA CEFR SIG: 3-

# Video 2. Innovative aspects of the Companion Volume to the CEFR: an introduction

## Slide 2

The Companion Volume to the CEFR presents an adaptation to the skills required in the 21st century. Knowledge of media and the internet is reflected in the new descriptors on online interaction. Critical thinking is exemplified by the new descriptors covering mediation strategies and activities. Global awareness and a pluricultural vision are illustrated in the descriptors dealing with plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

## Slide 3

What are the consequences in teaching and assessment of seeing the learner as a social agent? We would first need to start with a definition of what a social agent is: a language user who performs tasks (and not necessarily, or exclusively linguistic tasks) with different circumstances, in different contexts and in specific fields. The use of the language takes place within linguistic activities, and these linguistic activities are not isolated, but are part of a social context that gives them meaning. So, if we talk about an action-oriented approach, we are talking about taking into account all the resources (cognitive, emotional and motivational) and all the abilities of the language user. We are taking into account the language user as a whole and all the linguistic and non-linguistic resources that they are able to mobilise.

## Slide 4

Let's look at the evolution of this concept. Traditionally, the language user was considered as a speaker who had one culture and similar level of proficiency in all the languages they spoke. The goal when learning a language was to achieve native like competence in all the languages. Likewise, when we talked about four skills, the idea was that all speakers would achieve a similar level of competence in each of the skills. The user would receive the input, mobilise language resources and then produce language.

## Slide 5

The CEFR talked about the language user as a social agent, who used the language within linguistic activities and in a broader context. In this context, instead of the four skills, we would talk about four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation.

## Slide 6

This approach recognises the social dimension in language. Interaction is seen as a negotiation of meaning, where the language user needs to mobilise all resources, both linguistic and non-linguistic, and the meaning of the act is negotiated between the interlocutors

## Slide 7

The Companion Volume further insists on this idea, placing the language user at the centre of the communicative act; interaction is carried out as a negotiation of meaning, and the resources that the language users mobilise acquire a pluricultural and plurilingual perspective. Mediation is seen as a co-construction of meaning, where the language user mediates as an intermediary between interlocutors, emphasising the social perspective already introduced by the CEFR.

## Slide 8

And what does this mean for teaching, learning and assessment?

It means greater dynamism in the classroom. We need to encourage students to take a more active role in their learning: they need to start looking for resources, analysing them, and even using their own.

It also means encouraging students to engage with the culture or cultures of the language they are studying. Languages are connected to culture, and therefore, by encouraging students to engage with the culture we are helping them acquire the language.

It also means helping them interact with others, because interaction with others fosters learning. Context is important for learning, so we need to ask students questions such as “Is it the same in your language? Can you find the differences? Can you find the similarities? Do your classmates know other languages? Do you know other languages? Do the languages you speak help you understand/remember these concepts? Can you ask a classmate if the languages they speak help them?”.

Multiculturalism fosters global citizenship and empathy. So questions such as: “Is it the same in your culture? Is there a similar tradition in your culture? Are there other cultures in the classroom? Do your classmates have other cultures? Can you find the similarities and the differences?” can help learners understand others.

In the classroom you learn by doing, searching, being active. In assessment, we use portfolios, peer evaluation, evaluation based on tasks or scenarios and oriented towards extrapolating what is being assessed to real life.

Let’s look at the new scales on online communication, mediation and plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

## Slide 9

Online communication has two main characteristics that explain the need for independent scales. First, online communication is always mediated by a machine, and second, online communication is multimodal. There are two scales dealing with online communication. The first is online conversation and discussion (open and social), and the second is goal oriented online transactions and collaboration (towards a goal).

Let's look at these examples from level B1 and level A2.

## Slide 10

Mediation scales. The CEFR already included mediation, although it did not do so explicitly, in the notions of co-construction of meaning in interaction and the learner as social agent.

In the Companion Volume, mediation appears more explicitly, adding the idea of interlinguistic mediation, the concept of mediation related to communication and learning, and the role of social and cultural mediation.

The scales on mediation are organised according to the different mediation activities:

* mediating a text,

## Slide 11

* mediating concepts

## Slide 12

* and mediation strategies – strategies to explain a dense concept and strategies to simplify a text;

## Slide 13

* and mediating communication.

## Slide 14

Plurilingual and Pluricultural competence scales include three scales in the Companion Volume:

* Building on plurilingual repertoire,
* Building on pluricultural repertoire, and
* Plurilingual comprehension

Let's look at examples of the scales for different levels.

## Slide 15

If you want to know more have a look at the following bibliography:

Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. 2018. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion volume*. Council of Europe.

De Jong, J. 2018. Updates to the CEFR. In *The CEFR Companion with New Descriptors: Uses and Implications for Language testing and Assessment*. VIth EALTA CEFR SIG: 3-5.

North, B. and E. Piccardo. 2016. Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): A Council of Europe project. *Language Teaching* 49/3: 455-459.

Figueras, N. 2012. The impact of the CEFR. *ELT Journal* 66/4: 477-485.

Piccardo, E., North, B., & Goodier, T. (2019). Broadening the scope of language education: Mediation, plurilingualism, and collaborative learning: The CEFR companion volume. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society* 15(1): 17-36.

# Video 3. Innovative aspects of the Companion Volume to the CEFR: concepts in depth

## Slide 1

This video explains the innovate aspects of the CEFR Companion Volume in more detail.

## Slide 2

The approach that underlines both the CEFR and the Companion Volume to the CEFR is the action-oriented approach and the notion of the social agent. The Companion Volume reinforces the idea of the four modes of communication and introduces new scales for online interaction, mediation activities and strategies and pluricultural and plurilingual approaches. The paradigm shift that was introduced by the CEFR is therefore strengthened and the idea of aligning learning, teaching and assessment still permeates the theoretical construct behind the framework.

## Slide 3

The action-oriented approach is not a new concept; it was already highlighted in the theoretical part of the CEFR. Viewing the learner as a social agent recognizes that learners are active members of society who interact with others and have the ability to shape their own learning experiences. This approach places a strong emphasis on collaborative tasks and co-construction of meaning, by working together and sharing ideas, learners can take an active role in their own learning process. The action-oriented approach is an important concept that places the focus on the learner as a social agent and emphasizes collaboration and co-construction of meaning.

## Slide 4

In the Companion Volume to the CEFR, descriptors have been regrouped according to the four modes of communication they address: reception, production, interaction, and mediation.

## Slide 5

The relationship between the modes of communication is illustrated with the following diagram.

## Slide 6

The four modes of communication focus on the aims of a situation of communication.

It’s important to note that the four modes of communication do not replace the four language skills. Instead, they provide a different and more targeted perspective on a situation of communication.

## Slide 7

A more comprehensive illustration of the interaction between the four skills regrouped into the four modes of communication would be this image by Fischer and Wolder. It shows that in interaction and mediation we also draw upon listening, reading, speaking and writing skills, i.e. the four linguistic skills, but also on grammar and vocabulary as well as pragmatic skills or intercultural skills

## Slide 8

The Companion Volume also introduces new scales on online interaction as a response to the current developments and trends in society. The VITbox module on online interaction deals with this and emphasises the multimodal character of communication mediated by a machine.

## Slide 9

The concept of mediation, and the idea of construction of meaning, was already present in the theory behind the CEFR 2001, but is now elaborated in more than 20 scales, which have generated considerable feedback in the field, and encourages a larger discussion among language professionals.

## Slide 10

Mediation is portrayed as an important mode of communication that involves helping others to understand and interpret language. The VITbox module on mediation provides a detailed overview; there are three scales of mediation activities: mediating a text, mediating concepts, and mediating communication, and two scales on mediation strategies that deal with: strategies to explain a new concept and strategies to simplify a text.

## Slide 11

Plurilingual approaches promote a deeper understanding of language and culture. There are many ways in which we can promote plurilingual approaches, including using heritage languages as a useful resource and fostering social inclusion. Using heritage languages as a useful resource involves recognizing and valuing the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of our learners, while also providing valuable resources for language learning. Simultaneously, fostering social inclusion implies valuing diversity and providing a more culturally rich learning environment.

## Slide 12

Plurilingualism is intrinsically related to pluriculturalism, that is promoting cultural diversity and encouraging intercultural education, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion. The VITbox module on pluriculturalism provides more detailed information on building on pluricultural repertoire and on plurilingual repertoire, on plurilingual comprehension as well as on facilitating pluricultural space.

## Slide 13

The notion of the “learner as a social agent”, introduced in the CEFR 2001 version and then highlighted in the Companion Volume (2020) puts the learner at the centre of any activity (in teaching, learning and assessment) and gives more autonomy to the learner, who is made responsible for his or her learning (self-reflected learning). This notion of the “learner as a social agent” requires action-oriented and task-based approaches to teaching and requires to bring in line teaching, learning and assessment, which is described as “constructive alignment”. This also requires a variety of approaches to assessment allowing the learner to develop individual skills profiles.

## Slide 14

Constructive alignment stresses the importance of aligning teaching, learning and assessment. This requires:

* defining the learning objectives based on the new descriptor scales and descriptors;
* linking assessment tasks to tasks and projects carried out in the classroom;
* i.e. making sure that the exam reflects the skills, competences and activities developed in the classroom and addresses the learning objectives.

## Slide 15

If you want to know more have a look at the following references:

Council of Europe (2001): *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: CUP.

Council of Europe (2020): *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Council of Europe CEFR website: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/home>.

CEFR Descriptors – searchable database: <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-descriptors-2020-/16809ed2c7>.

Fischer, Johann (2021): The Language Learner as a Social Agent – neuer Blick auf die Lernenden dank des Companion Volumes zum GER. In: Brandt, Anikó / Buschmann-Göbels, Astrid / Harsch, Claudia (eds.): *Rethinking the Language Learner: Paradigmen – Methoden – Disziplinen. Erträge des 7. Bremer Symposions*. Bochum: AKS-Verlag, 246-259.

Fischer, Johann / Wolder, Nicole (2021): Erfahrungen in der Umsetzung der Inhalte des Begleitbands zum GeR im Hochschulkontext – Ergebnisse eines Projektes des Europarates und Handlungsbedarf für Hochschulsprachenzentren. *Fremdsprachen und Hochschule* 96, 7-27.

Fischer, Johann / Wolder, Nicole (2022): Implementation of the CEFR Companion Volume in the UNIcert® and NULTE Networks. In: North, Brian / Piccardo, Enrica / Goodier, Tim / Fasoglio, Daniela / Margonis-Pasinetti, Rosanna / Rüschoff, Bernd (eds*.): Enriching 21st century language education.* *The CEFR Companion volume in practice*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 185-201.