**CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox**

Video scripts for “Online Interaction”

This is the script of the videos in the online interaction module, the scripts follow the order of the videos, with a very brief 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. Introduction to online interaction

## Slide 2

What is online interaction and why was it included in the Companion Volume to the CEFR? Online interaction refers to any form of communication that takes place through digital channels such as the internet. With the rise of digital technologies and the internet, online interaction has become an increasingly important aspect of our daily lives, both socially and professionally, which is why it was an important addition to the CEFR and it is now included in section 3.3.1. of the Companion Volume dealing with interaction activities.

Including online interaction in the CEFR mirrors the changes in communication throughout the world. Online interaction has made it possible for individuals and organizations to collaborate and work together across borders and time zones and it has also enabled the development of new forms of communication, such as social media, online gaming, and virtual reality.

## Slide 3

The CEFR not only includes more detailed descriptor scales but also new descriptors for other communicative activities such as online interaction. But how is online interaction addressed in the Companion Volume to the CEFR?

Interaction is a fundamental part of using language. The CEFR scales address online interaction separately because it involves one medium and several means of communication, including visual, gestural, written, and spoken language. Multimodal communication is typical of online interaction, with examples such as chats, blogs, and video conferencing.

## Slide 4

Online communication is always mediated through a machine and has characteristics that differ from face-to-face communication or from communication in writing that is not instantaneous. There is a large availability of resources that can be used in real time during the communication act and miscommunication can occur easily.

At the same time, affective or emotional nuances that are transmitted in communication that is not machine-mediated need to be expressed differently, as acts of speech online can be virtually face- to-face (as with zoom or skype) but not actually face-to-face (as in person in the same room), resulting in a loss of affection and emotion in the communication act that needs to be compensated for. Also, the characteristics of online writing have specificities that need to be considered.

## Slide 5

There are two scales for online interaction in the Companion Volume:

Both scales concern multimodal activities as they deal with activities related to web use:

The first one is Online Conversation and Discussion, and deals with Conversation and discussions online, both formal and informal.

This type of communication encompasses a myriad of examples that include a mixture of spoken communication, written communication and communication using symbols to convey tone, stress and emotions.

The second one is goal-oriented transactions and collaboration and deals with communication focused on interaction and transactions with the objective of achieving a specific goal.

One of the most salient characteristics of online transactions is that there isn’t a clear separation between written and oral interaction. Depending on the context where the communication act is taking place, many media tools can be used simultaneously.

# Video 2. Online interaction

## Slide 2

In this presentation, we are going to look at what computer-mediated communication is and how important it has become in recent years. We will also examine how technology has changed the way we communicate and how these changes are relevant to language teaching and learning. Then we will discuss the characteristics of online communication and how online communication is addressed in the Companion Volume to the CEFR.

## Slide 3

So, how has online interaction changed in the last fifteen years and why is it relevant for language teaching and learning.

Online communication started as asynchronous communication due to technological constraints: the sender and the receiver of the message were not communicating at the same time and there was a delay between when the message was sent and when it was received (an example of this are emails). Because interned bandwidth, that is the amount of data that could be transmitted over a network at a given time, was limited, instant messages were rare and video streaming, and therefore face-to-face communication, was not possible.

However, technological advances have changed the way we communicate online, allowing us to go beyond asynchronicity and permitting real-time interaction. Bandwidth has increased and now we can send a very large amount of data over our networks, which means that we can communicate in real time (or synchronically) as in the case of zoom sessions, for example.

As a result, synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) has been introduced in the learning and teaching of a second language as it is particularly apt at helping learners focus not only on meaning but also on form (Lee, 2008; Simpson, 2002; Ware & O’Dowd, 2008).

And what does this mean? Since we are using several channels of communication, when we listen to a message, we are not only focusing on the information that is being transmitted (the meaning) but also on the structure and grammar of the language, including how words are formed, how sentences are structured, and how grammar rules are applied (the form).

In many ways, multimodality facilitates communication, in the sense that it can help clarify the message being conveyed, a verbal explanation accompanied by a visual aid, such as a diagram or chart, can help to reinforce the message and make it easier to understand, for example.

## Slide 4

At the same time, online communication, and the dual focus on meaning and form allows for successful scaffolding, which in turn facilitates language acquisition. The term scaffolding is used in language learning as an analogy to the temporary structures used in construction to support a building while it is being built. Scaffolding is facilitated in online communication because online communication provides flexibility, access to a wide variety of learning resources and collaborative learning, as well as access to feedback and guidance from the teacher or from peers in real time. Scaffolding activities in language learning can include providing visual aids (as in the diagram example we mentioned before) or demonstrating how to use the language (by looking at how the sentence is formed if the learner can see the written text while listening to the speaker).

Online collaboration activities in a second language can also help develop pragmatic and intercultural competence (Chapelle, 2004). Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social situations. It includes understanding social and cultural norms, as well as the ability to use language to achieve different social goals, such as making requests, giving advice, or expressing politeness. Online collaboration activities in a second language can help develop pragmatic competence by providing learners with opportunities to practice using language in different social situations. For example, learners might participate in online discussions or group projects, where they must negotiate meaning, express opinions, and work collaboratively with others.

In terms of interactional features, that is turn-taking, negotiating meaning, etc., comparative studies between face-to-face and synchronous computer-mediated communication have proven to be similar (Ziegler, 2015), with the advantage of offering more opportunities for learners in terms of accessibility to interlocutors and interaction opportunities. Finding interacting opportunities online is easier and learners can practice their language skills.

## Slide 5

But how would we define computer-mediated communication and how has the meaning of the term changed in recent years with the changes in technology?

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) originally referred to human communication via computers, although nowadays, it refers to human communication via machines, as communication is now carried out not only with computers but also (and probably mostly) with handheld devices such as smart phones, gaming systems or tablets. It can include:

\*synchronous CMC, where the participants in the communication act are connected simultaneously (chats, video-conferencing, online meetings, etc.) and

\*asynchronous CMC, where participants interact at different times (online forums, emails, online reviews, etc.)

The term CMC focusses on the means used, that is, on the fact that we use machines to communicate, but Crystal (2001), when talking about communication carried out online, also uses the terms ‘Netspeak’ ‘cyberspeak’, ‘electronic discourse’ and ‘electronic language´ to focus, not on the machine but on the language, that is, on the characteristics of the language used. This is an important point to consider because computer-mediated communication is different to face-to-face communication, not only because it is mediated by a machine but also because the language changes when this mediation occurs. The fact that not only the medium but the language changes means that we are facing a different type of communication.

## Slide 6

We have talked about computer-mediated communication and the different terms that are used to define this concept. In the Companion Volume, online communication is covered in its section on interaction, but in a section separate from oral and written interaction because:

Online communication is always mediated through a machine; it shows characteristics that differ from face-to-face communication or communication in writing. Not only that, but online communication is multimodal, that is, instead of relying solely on spoken or written words, multimodal communication utilizes different types of cues, such as body language, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and even images or videos, to convey meaning. This is possible because machines allow us to see images, hear audio and read text, simultaneously. And it is one of the characteristics that makes online communication different to other types of communication and justifies the development of a set of specific descriptors.

For example, in a face-to-face conversation, a person may use not only spoken words, but also facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture to convey their message. In a written communication, such as an email, the sender may use not only words but also formatting, such as bold or italicized text, to convey emphasis or emotion. The possibility of combining both creates new scenarios and therefore characteristics that were not contemplated in the previous scales.

Communication is richer, since there is a larger availability of resources that can be used. It is also more effective and can reach a wider audience, but at the same time it also means that there are more possibilities of misunderstandings occurring.

With online interaction, there is a larger availability of resources that can be used in real time (videos, dictionaries, texts, etc.) and the response is in many cases instantaneous, but this can result in miscommunication problems. And why could these communication problems occur? An example of this could be conflicting messages arriving through the different modes of communication, that is, a person’s words might indicate agreement, while their simultaneous chat messages could indicate otherwise. Different people may interpret cues differently and gestures that mean something in one culture might be understood differently in another.

The affective or emotional nuances that are transmitted in communication that is not machine- mediated need to be expressed differently when using a machine for communication, since changing the means changes the rules. An example of how these nuances can be expressed though other codes or symbols when using a machine for communication could be the use of memes or emojis.

## Slide 7

How is online interaction addressed in the Companion Volume to the CEFR?

We can agree that interaction is a fundamental part of using language. CEFR scales address online interaction separately because, as we already mentioned, it is a multimodal activity, involving one medium (online) and several modes of communication: visual, gestural, written and spoken.

If we reflect about it, multimodal communication is typical of online interaction, with examples that use several and different modes simultaneously. Think for example about chats, blogs, online fan fiction, video conferencing, collaborative online games etc.

## Slide 8

There are two scales for online interaction in the Companion Volume. Both scales concern multimodal activities as they deal with activities related to web use.

The first one deals with *online conversation and discussion*, with communication acts that are open- ended and can be social in nature. This refers to conversation and discussions online, both formal and informal, and they encompass a myriad of examples that include a mixture of spoken and written communication, together with communication using symbols and images to convey tone, stress, and emotions.

The second of the scales deals with *goal-oriented transactions and collaboration*, that is, communication oriented towards a specific outcome. These communication acts present simultaneity of writing and speaking, but also introduce the use of other multimedia tools. Depending on the context where the communication act is taking place, many media tools can be used simultaneously. A good example of this are online games with multiple players, in which the players need to achieve a goal by playing together.

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

Hampel, R., & Stickler, U. (2005). New skills for new classrooms: Training tutors to teach languages online. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 18(4), 311–326.

Ware, P., & O’Dowd, R. (2008). Peer feedback on language form in telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12(1), 43-63.

Lee, L. (2008). Focus-on-form through collaborative scaffolding in expert-to-novice online interaction. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12(3), 53-72.

Chapelle, C. (2004, December). Learning through online communication: Findings and implications from second language research. In *University of York Seminar Series on Researching Dialogue and Communities of Enquiry in E-Learning in Higher Education*.

Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simpson, J. (2002). Discourse and synchronous computer-mediated communication: uniting speaking and writing?. *British Studies in Applied Linguistics*, 17, 57-71.

Ziegler, N. (2015). Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication and Interaction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 38(03), 553–586.

# Video 3. Online interaction: online conversation and discussion

## Slide 2

Having talked about general aspects of online interaction in the previous presentation, we will now focus on specific aspects relating to online interaction that are particularly relevant when looking at the scale of online conversation and discussion.

Communication and interaction, in their different forms, are one of the driving forces behind language learning. Online interaction has facilitated conversation with people around the world by facilitating contact and social interaction. According to Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, social interaction shapes cognitive development since language and thought are intertwined and develop together. The fact that interaction is now easier means that the learner has many more opportunities to develop their language.

At the same time, the percentage of conversations that are carried out online has increased exponentially. Learners can now communicate easily online, but since online interaction is multimodal, language learning has moved towards multimodal modes of engagement, with online platforms and social media, or computer-mediated learning tools and synchronous or asynchronous online teaching, to name but a few examples. In a world of teaching and learning, where a large part of the conversations amongst teachers and students are carried online, this multimodality needs to be considered.

And what do we mean by that? Although the principles of interaction still apply, the medium used (the interaction is carried out exclusively online) reflects on the nature of the conversations and success in communication depends on a different set of rules. Only by understanding these rules are we going to achieve quality interaction that will facilitate learning online.

## Slide 3

And so, how can we ensure that we are successful in interacting online? The Companion Volume gives us some ideas to achieve successful communication:

* Redundancy and repetition in messages:
  + to help compensate for lack of common context. Although in online communication, there is in many cases a common context for the interlocutors, this context is less defined than in real life communication, which can lead to misunderstandings. For example, a speaker could mention something they are seeing, or a feature of their immediate surroundings that the other speakers are not aware of because they are not there and cannot see it. This would call for the need of a further explanation.
  + to add emphasis, in the case for example of many people on a video conference, where many screens are visible and the number of stimuli is larger and therefore so is the possibility of the listener getting distracted; the speaker might need to repeat the idea to make sure its importance is registered.
  + to help the recipient process information in case there was some sort of interruption in the message being transmitted. Since we cannot be sure that the sound, image, etc. is reaching all listeners equally, there might be a need to repeat the message to ensure it reached the listeners.
  + to correct errors or misunderstandings in cases like the example already mentioned. Repeating the idea ensures that if the message did not get across, there is a second or third opportunity for the listener to understand the message.

## Slide 4

* Checking for understanding:
  + to detect miscommunication problems at early stages and clarify points that might be unclear. This is particularly important when dealing with an audience with different linguistic backgrounds and helps address any potential misunderstandings before they become larger problems;
  + as a form of active listening to your interlocutors’ needs and their feedback, demonstrating willingness to engage in a dialogue and work collaboratively to ensure that the message is effectively communicated and understood;
  + as a strategy to keep people focussed, as mentioned before, when communicating online there are many distractions that can potentially break down communication.

## Slide 5

* Reformulation, to facilitate comprehension. Reformulation is useful to:
  + correct errors or mistakes that can be made particularly when communication is mediated through a machine;
  + to accommodate the recipient's cultural or linguistic background and ensure that the message is clear to everyone. Reformulation can make it easier for the recipient to comprehend the message by restating it in a different way that may be easier to process or remember.

## Slide 6

* and handling emotional reactions, as collective emotions arise in online interaction, such as in online forums, twitter messages or real-time chats, to give some examples:
  + to avoid misinterpretation due to frustration and anger. This requires effective communication skills: by acknowledging and responding to emotional reactions in a calm and constructive manner, the speaker can help to ensure that the conversation remains productive and effective.
  + to facilitate the establishment of a personal connection or rapport. Online communication often takes place between people who are physically distant from one another, which can make it more difficult to establish a personal connection or rapport. This lack of connection can make people more likely to interpret messages in a negative or defensive way.

Although ideally, redundancy should be eliminated from communication to increase effectiveness, such elimination in online interaction would not work unless communication errors did not occur, which is seldom the case.

## Slide 7

The online conversation and discussion scale focusses on interlocutors communicating online to handle social exchanges and professional and discursive interaction. Social exchanges refer to informal conversations or interactions, such as chatting with friends on social media. Professional interaction refers to communication that occurs in a work or business setting, such as emailing colleagues or participating in a video conference with co-workers. Discursive interaction refers to communication that is focused on a particular topic or issue, such as a discussion forum or online debate.

Elements of conversation and discussion that have been considered when designing the scales and determining the different levels are:

Simultaneous interaction, which allows no preparation time between the input and the response; it occurs in real-time, where two or more people communicate with each other at the same time, similar to a face-to-face conversation. Some examples of simultaneous interaction online include video conferencing, instant messaging or online gaming.

Consecutive interaction, which is a type of online communication that occurs with a time delay, where each person takes turns to communicate with each other. Some examples of consecutive interaction online include emails, discussion forums or asynchronous video conferencing.

## Slide 8

Sustained interaction with one or multiple interlocutors. Sustained interaction involves conversations or discussions that are longer than a single exchange. People may engage in back- and-forth exchanges over a period of hours, days, or even weeks and can delve deeper into topics than they might in a briefer exchange.

Writing posts or contributions, which can be short and merely informative – as in a restaurant review on a travel website – or longer – as in a wiki entry or a contribution to an online forum. These involve the use of both formal and informal language, as well as the use of acronyms (such as LOL – laugh out loud), emoticons or emojis, hyperlinks, non-standard spelling and grammar, and of course multimodality (use of images, audio or video for example).

## Slide 9

Responding to posts or contributions of others, which involves being able to link your contribution to the previous contributions in the thread and being able to express reactions to the other posts.

Using symbols and other codes to convey emotions, such ascii symbols or emojis. This is related to the idea of expressing emotional nuances through alternative means when communication is not carried out face-to-face or a common context is lacking or insufficient. It also helps avoid conflicts when there is potential for a misunderstanding in the tone of a message.

## Slide 10

Having considered some of the criteria for scaling, let us now look at the actual scales of the CV. As in all the CEFR scales, the progression of levels is illustrated by a transition in activities and goals, from the most immediate needs (asking or answering questions in a simple exchange), through social exchanges and argumentative discussions, to critical evaluations and cultural ambiguities.

Consequently,

A levels are characterised by social and personal communication. Consecutive interaction, short posts or comments. Let’s look at an example of an A2 descriptor: *Can engage in basic social communication online (e. g. a simple message on a virtual card for special occasions, sharing news and making/confirming arrangements to meet).*

B levels involve real-life interactions with discussions in which several participants can interact. Linking contributions to the contributions of the other participants and solving miscommunication. Let’s look at an example of a B2 descriptor: *Can participate actively in an online discussion, stating and responding to opinions on topics of interest at some length, provided contributors avoid unusual or complex language and allow time for responses.*Lastly, C levels deal with real-time interactions on complex topics, in which agents/learners/users need to be able to adapt their register and deal with cultural implications and communicative intentions. Let’s look at an example of a C1 descriptor: *Can engage in real-time online exchanges with several participants, understanding the communicative intentions and cultural implications of the various contributions.*

## Slide 11

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

Garcia, D., Kappas, A., Küster, D., & Schweitzer, F. (2016). The dynamics of emotions in online interaction. *Royal Society open science*, 3(8), 160059.

Herring, S. C. (2007). A faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse. *Language@ internet*, 4(1).

Jaggars, S. S., & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance?. *Computers & Education*, 95, 270-284.

Lapadat, J. C. (2002). Written interaction: A key component in online learning. *Journal of computer- mediated communication*, 7(4), JCMC742.

Shiao-Yun Chiang & Han-Fu Mi (2011). Reformulation: a verbal display of interlanguage awareness in instructional interactions. *Language Awareness*, 20:2, 135-149.

Smith, B. (2004). Computer-mediated negotiated interaction and lexical acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 365-398.

Tu, C. H., & McIsaac, M. (2002). The relationship of social presence and interaction in online classes.

*The American journal of distance education*, 16(3), 131-150.

# Video 4. Online interaction: Goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration

## Slide 2

We are now looking at the second category of online interaction identified by the Companion Volume. Unlike the previous category, this one is ‘goal-oriented’, that is to say, the interaction takes place to achieve some kind of outcome. Examples of this are: interacting to buy goods, complaining with the objective of obtaining a compensation or working with a team to write a report at work.

## Slide 3

There are two concepts intertwined in this online interaction scale: transactional discourse and collaborative discourse.

On the one hand, transactional discourse is used for transmitting information, and thus characterised for being “message-oriented” rather than “listener-oriented” (Nunan, 1989). The main goal is to transmit the information and therefore the main focus is on the meaning of the message and not on the form; that is, the goal is that the message is communicated and that it is understood. This distinction goes back to the difference between two language functions, the transactional function, concerned with the transfer of information, and the interactional function, concerned with the maintenance of social relationships.

Collaborative discourse and argumentation, on the other hand, is characterised by critical thinking and the evaluation of arguments and counter arguments, as the individuals participating in the exchange interact with each other to build on or refute each other’s arguments to achieve their goals.

## Slide 4

With the advent of technology and machine-mediated communication, the relationship between technology and collaboration has led to the notion of e-collaboration – collaboration amongst individuals to achieve a common task using electronic technologies (Kock 2001); that is, collaborating online. More and more frequently, team and collaborative work are carried out online. The Companion Volume reflects this change and provides descriptors that better describe the particular characteristics of goal-oriented interaction when it is carried out mediated by a machine.

## Slide 5

So what are the characteristics of online transactional and collaborative discourse that will be reflected in the Companion Volume scales?

Online language, whether it is interactional, as the online conversations and discussions we have already seen, or transactional, that is with a goal in mind, share the same characteristics with respect to the distinction between spoken and written text being blurred.

Transactional language, since it focusses on the message and the goal, is characterised by the use of specific vocabulary that helps communicate effectively, concisely and with fewer misunderstandings. The use of clear and direct language helps ensure that the communication is efficient and effective, allowing participants to exchange information or negotiate terms with minimal confusion or misinterpretation.

## Slide 6

At the same time, collaborative discourse, is characterised by the use of vocabulary and structures that are common to the individuals collaborating, who share a common knowledge and interest. This specialized vocabulary helps facilitate effective communication among individuals who share a common knowledge or expertise in a specific field. By using precise and industry-specific terms, participants in a transaction can convey their intentions, requirements, and expectations more accurately, minimizing misunderstandings.

In fact, in transactional and collaborative language online, it is not uncommon to see the use of translanguaging or code-switching, that is the use of other languages by plurilingual speakers to ease communication and transmit a message effectively. In collaborative online environments, such

as virtual teams, online communities, or collaborative projects, the emphasis is on collective problem-solving, knowledge sharing, and cooperation. Translanguaging or code-switching can be employed by plurilingual speakers to facilitate effective collaboration. When participants share different linguistic backgrounds, they may use their multilingual abilities to switch between languages as needed to express complex ideas, clarify concepts, or negotiate meaning.

## Slide 7

All these characteristics that we have seen feed into the Companion Volume goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration scale, which focusses on interlocutors communicating online to achieve a common goal through collaboration.

Key concepts included in the scale are:

Purchasing goods and services online, such as registering for a course or buying a product and enquiring about its characteristics;

Engaging in transactions requiring negotiation of conditions, as a provider or a client, as it would be the case when managing a holiday tour operator company and dealing online with clients, or when dealing with online banking transactions or with insurance complaints, for example;

Participation in collaborative project work, as in the case of home offices and colleagues communicating online to complete projects, or even in classroom projects carried out collaboratively from home.

Dealing with communication problems, such as those that can occur in exchanges with real or virtual assistants online, or remote technical help offices.

## Slide 8

The progression of levels on the scale goes from simple transactions that require a basic exchange of information, through a more proactive participation in the exchange and towards collaborative work and group cooperation to achieve goals.

Consequently,

A levels are characterised by providing simple information, using formulaic language and engaging in reactive activities, such as filling in a questionnaire or accepting terms and conditions in a contract, for example. Let’s look at an example of an A2 descriptor: *Can make simple online transactions (e.g., ordering goods or enrolling in a course) by filling in an online form or questionnaire, providing personal details and confirming acceptance of terms and conditions, declining extra services, etc.*

B levels involve solving problems to successfully achieve the common goal or complete the transaction. This involves discourse that is more proactive in activities such as clarifying information, working in groups and even negotiation and management of teams. Let’s look at an example of a B2 descriptor: *Can deal with misunderstandings and unexpected problems that arise in online*

*collaborative or transactional exchanges by responding politely and appropriately in order to help resolve the issue.*

Lastly, C levels deal with coordinating online projects and solving frictions to reach a goal and managing online negotiations using media to support arguments, for example. Let’s look at an example of a C1 descriptor: *Can deal effectively with communication problems and cultural issues that arise in an online collaborative or transactional exchange by reformulating, clarifying and providing examples through media (visual, audio, graphic).*

## Slide 9

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

Garcia, D., Kappas, A., Küster, D., & Schweitzer, F. (2016). The dynamics of emotions in online interaction. *Royal Society open science*, 3(8), 160059.

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Knight, D., Walsh, S., & Papagiannidis, S. (2017). I’m having a Spring Clear Out: A Corpus-based Analysis of e-transactional Discourse. *Applied Linguistics*, 38(2), 234-257.

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Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge University Press. 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).