Adapting CEFR for English Language Education in ASEAN, Japan and China

J.A. Foley
The Graduate School of Human Sciences,
Assumption University, Thailand
Email: jaf2705@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper will first outline and discuss the revised version of the Common European Framework of Reference Languages: Learning, teaching and assessment (CEFR) [2018] together with the Frameworks of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand Malaysia, Vietnam, Japan and China which are based on the CEFR. The indications are of potentially several issues that need to be addressed, including the fact that the local versions of CEFR were mainly based on the 2001 framework and not the 2018 which came later. Other issues such as using the same proficiency scales as the basis for rating scale criteria may lead to perceived equivalence but does not necessarily lead to greater comparability of shared criteria. There are also indications from a number of studies that the perceived view that CEFR as being mainly an assessment tool rather than about language competency may result in a negative attitude from both teachers, students and stake-holders.

Keywords: CEFR 2001, CEFR 2018, English Language, Education, Competency, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia and China

Introduction

There has been and still is a major concern to establish standards for the user/learner of English within the ASEAN region, and countries in East Asia such as Japan, and China orchestrated in part by the general trend towards globalization. Mainly, focusing on countries within the ASEAN region as well as Japan and China that have implemented versions of CEFR in their education systems, this article will outline the Common European Framework of Reference as applied to users/learners of English in both the 2001 and 2018 versions. There have been a number of modifications made over the intervening years after critical comments were made concerning the 2001 version. Changes have been brought about in the 2018 version particularly in relation to the concept of 'native-speakerism', the importance of plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires of users/learners as well as a 'can do' approach to language competence. A number of these modifications in the CEFR 2001 version are reflected in the adapted versions used in the ASEAN region as well as Japan and China,

although there are still serious issues that need to be addressed to successfully implement CEFR.

Background

The history of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is linked with the history of the Council of Europe (CoE). Founded in the wake of the Second World War, the CoE aims to protect human rights, the rule of law, and parliamentary democracy in its 47 Member States. As the CoE strives to advance mutual understanding between nation states, language education, communication and multilingualism are central to its mission. In 1959, the CoE launched an initiative to support communicative language teaching in Europe. This project was to investigate the possibility of developing a pan-European unit-credit system that would allow language learners to document their foreign language qualifications in a modular way. These efforts led to the Threshold Level (van Ek, 1975); a description of the day-to-day linguistic challenge's learners/users faced when living in a foreign country (Deygers, 2019). Based on the success of the Threshold level, the authors were asked to develop additional levels. This was not thought to be a good idea as they did not want to apply a compartmentalized, level-based logic to language learning (Trim, 2012). Nevertheless, in order to advance communicative approaches to language learning, Vantage (2001) and Waystage (1990) were eventually published as part of CEFR (2001), using their previously established linguistic descriptions, such as Threshold (B1), Vantage (B2), and Waystage (A2), supplemented with newer levels and descriptors, in a framework with a vertical dimension to the levels by mapping them onto a common scale (Deygers, 2019). This Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) of a set of six global levels, describing users as Basic (A1, A2), Independent (B1, B2) or Proficient (C1, C2), has fundamentally impacted language teaching and assessment in Europe (Figueras, 2012; Barni, 2015) and across the globe (Byram & Parmenter, 2012). CEFR has become the most widely used language proficiency framework worldwide. It has impacted language policies, language curricula and language tests across the globe (Figueras, 2012) and had also attracted scrutiny and criticism. Criticism typically focused either on the CEFR's use or on its scientific foundations. Usage-based criticism has highlighted that the CEFR allows policymakers to easily use language proficiency levels as gatekeepers without a thorough needs analysis (Barni, 2015). Scientific critique has focused on the development and validation of the level descriptors (Fulcher, 2004; Alderson, 2007), on theoretical gaps in the CEFR's foundation (Hulstijn, 2007), or on the impressionistic wording of the level descriptors (Alderson, 2007). Still others have questioned why multilingualism received comparatively little attention in the scales (Krumm, 2007) and why the CEFR (2001) appeared to uphold a native speaker norm (McNamara, 2014; Barni, 2015). The purpose of the recently published CEFR (2018) was to expand, clarify, and update it. The CEFR (2018) provides new scales for language activities that were not covered in the CEFR (2001) (for example: online communication and mediation) and presents more elaborately defined plus levels, pre-A1 levels, and C levels. It also focuses on plurilingualism and foregrounds mediation and new descriptors for sign language users and young learners.

However, in order to avoid inconsistencies between the CEFR (2001) and the CEFR (2018) the CEFR (2001) scales are included in the CEFR (2018) in their original form. Today, some descriptors read as outdated ('watching tv news' rather than on a 'smartphone'), or Eurocentric, ('propose a toast' at A1). Moreover, their focus on target language use contexts, such as leisure, travel, and especially academia ('Can present a topic in a short report or poster' at B1) may diminish their applicability in a global community of language learners, where less than 10 per cent has a university degree (Barro & Lee 2013). Not all descriptors have remained unchanged, however, and one of the most noticeable changes relates to the use of the term 'native speaker', which has been replaced with speakers of the target language (Deygers, 2019). Even though this change corresponds to the current orthodoxy in applied linguistics, it does present a problem (Houghton, Rivers & Hashimoto, 2018). The term 'native speaker', as used in the CEFR (2001), implies a competent, fluent language user who is able to convey and comprehend nuanced and idiomatic language use. The CEFR (2018), does not specify the proficiency level of Speakers of the target language. The idea of uneven proficiency profiles is referred to as partial competence which is significant in that it recognizes that a language user's proficiency is fundamentally uneven. No two users share the same language profile as even the most proficient language user is unlikely to have the same proficiency across all CEFR scales. Another major change in CEFR (2018) is the focus on mediation—an activity whereby 'the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another' (Council of Europe, 2018: 103). Mediation was already discussed in the CEFR (2001), but in the CEFR (2018) it has become such a central concept that it is listed as one of the four primary communicative language activities and strategies. Theoretically, mediation is loosely defined in the CEFR (2018). It is stated that subdividing communication into reception, production, interaction, and mediation is 'closer to real-life language use, which is grounded in interaction in which meaning is co-constructed' (Council of Europe, 2018: 31). Mediation was introduced in CEFR (2001) as a move away from the traditional four skills as one of the four modes of communication. In reality, when we use a language, several activities are involved: mediation combines reception production and interaction. Also, when we use language it is not just to communicate a message, but rather to develop an idea through what is called 'languaging' (for example, articulating our thoughts) to facilitate understanding and communication. However, operationalizing mediation as a rating criterion might well present a challenge for test developers (Deygers, 2019). They will need to consider how to reliably and validly score that as times can be a vague construct from other constructs. If this true, it remains unclear why the mediation scales are presented as speaker-centered unidirectional 'can-do' statements, since mediation must logically include at least two other communicative activities to take place. The diagram in CEFR (2018 p. 32) does little to help the reader understand the conceptual necessity of mediation. Because of the theoretical and conceptual difficulties of assessing mediation, operationalizing it as a rating criterion will present substantial challenges for test developers.

In spite of these issues, mediation does fit the CEFR's communicative approach, as it links in with the CoE's values, and may lead to more communicative language teaching and testing. In fact, language testing organizations have already started developing

integrated, communicative language tasks in response to the mediation scales. Mediation has been subdivided into 20 subscales, and the CEFR (2018) includes over 30 new or redeveloped scales. These proficiency scales are introduced by a brief definition. In itself, that is a useful addition, but sometimes the dense writing style makes these introductions hard to grasp. Users who were troubled by the style of the CEFR (2001) (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007) will find the CEFR (2018) a challenging read as well. The sometimes vague and impressionistic language that was a problem for language testers working with the CEFR (2001) and for Alderson, 2007) they are still present in CEFR (2018). On a more strategic level, the attention devoted to proficiency scales in the CEFR (2018) marks a shift. CEFR (2001) proponents have often stressed that the scales are illustrative only and have become more important than originally intended (Trim, 2012; North, 2014). Consistency with this argument would have dictated that the CEFR (2018) focused less on the scales, not more. However, CEFR (2001) had embraced the idea that for most learner/users, the scales are the framework (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). The centrality of the scales in the CEFR (2018) warrants a closer look at their methodological foundation. The authors have provided documentation (North & Piccardo 2016) to explain how they were designed and validated. These reports, however, do not justify why the validation and revision relied on language professionals judging and mapping descriptors in a contextual vacuum. As far as is clear, no learner performances were involved in the construction or calibration of the new scales, and neither were the learners themselves. For a document that claims to support learner empowerment, this is somewhat contradictory. Moreover, even though the authors signal the danger of circularity in validation processes, it is unclear how circularity was avoided when participants had to demonstrate their knowledge of the CEFR (2001) before taking part in the validation of new descriptors (Deygers, 2019). Overall, one can question, why the CEFR (2018) remains true to the CEFR's approach to scale development when this methodology has received such fundamental criticism (Fulcher, 2004; Alderson, 2007). Studies have repeatedly shown that the original CEFR scales are largely unsuitable with regards to comparing performances across or within educational systems (Deygers, Carlsen, Saville & Van Gorp, 2018). Lastly, while the CEFR (2018) incorporates some conceptual criticism on the CEFR, it remains agnostic on its 'political use' in the role it plays in assessment both local and international using CEFR levels as potential 'gatekeepers' (Byram & Parmenter, 2012).
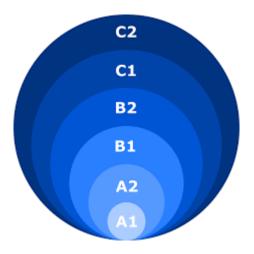
One of the main purposes of CEFR is the promotion of the formulation of educational aims and outcomes at all levels. Its 'can do' aspects of proficiency are intended to provide a shared road-map for learning and a more nuanced instrument to gauge progress than a focus on scores in tests and examinations. The principle is based on the CEFR view of language as vehicle for opportunity and success in social, educational and professional domains. This presents the language learner/user as a social agent, acting in the social world and exerting agency in the learning process (CEFR, 2018). The CEFR action-oriented approach represents a move away from syllabuses based on linear progression through language structures, or a pre-determined set of notions and functions. The goal is a communication's perspective guided by what someone 'can do' in terms of the descriptors rather than a deficiency perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired. Fundamentally, the CEFR, as originally devised is a tool to assist the planning of curricula. Courses and examinations

can be based on what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language in their own context. To further promote and facilitate cooperation, the CEFR provides common reference levels A1-C2 defined by illustrative descriptors. However, CEFR is proposed as a tool to facilitate educational reform projects, not a standardizing tool but one of the major issue is whether the adaptations of CEFR in the region is leading to an over emphasis on testing as a standardized tool of language proficiency. As a recent official CEFR document points out:

"One thing should be made clear right away. We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. We are raising questions and not answering them. It is not the function of the European Common Framework to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ." (Council of Europe: Notes to the User, 2018 p. 26)

The message from CEFR (2018) is that language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures. The action-oriented approach puts the co-construction of meaning (through interaction) at the center of the learning and teaching process. The construction of meaning may take place across languages and draw upon users/learners' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires (translanguaging). CEFR (2018) distinguishes between multilingualism (the co-existence of different languages at the social or individual level) and plurilingualism (the developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner). The fundamental point is that plurilinguals have a single, inter-related, repertoire that they combine with their general competencies to accomplish tasks. Such tasks might require moving from one language to another or giving an explanation in another language to make sense of what is said or written (CEFR, 2018).

CEFR (2018) has two axes: a horizontal axis of categories for describing different activities and aspects of competence, and a vertical axis representing progress in proficiency in those categories. To facilitate the organization of courses and to describe progress, the CEFR (2018) presents the same six Common Reference Levels providing a roadmap that allows user/learners to engage with relevant aspects of the descriptive scheme in a progressive way. However, the six levels are not intended to be absolute (CEFR, 2018).

As previously indicated, there has been a tendency for some educational bodies and testing organizations use these categories without this flexibility but in fact, all categories in language testing are conventional, socially constructed concepts. Like the colors of the rainbow, language competence is a continuum, both vertical and horizontal. As with the rainbow, despite the fuzziness of the boundaries between colors, we tend to see some colors more than others (CEFR, 2018).

CEFR (2001) was never considered to be a completed or standalone document, indeed supporting work on CEFR scales had started in 2005 with the English Profile Programme (EPP) (Green 2012) . Cambridge University has been developing Reference Level Descriptions (RLD's) of English that provides language specific guidance for each level of CEFR. Komorowska (2004) had found that teachers and teacher trainees did not like the CEFR's lack of guidance for choosing curriculum options, nor it's non-evaluative to teaching methods. Costa (2007) expressed doubts about the empirical and statistical validation outside the original Swiss context where it was being used. Hulstijn (2007) also indicated that the empirical foundations of the CEFR scales were based on the judgements of teachers and experts and not on Second Language Processes or research. Poszytek (2012) also warned publishers not to use CEFR's global scale or 'can do' concept to sell their textbooks as they were often misaligned with the CEFR scales and had limited theoretical background.

English Profile Project and the British Council- EQUALS Core Inventory for General English were developed to provide language support with more finally tuned contextually, discrete language points in both global and illustrative scales (North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010). Equally important was the vertical and horizonal dimension of language development reflect the fact that users develop their overall communicative language competence by improving the quality of their language (vertical development) and expanding the breath of communicative activities that they are engage in (horizontal development) . Indeed, as indicated earlier, the CEFR's concept of partial competence can help in appreciating that language development does not solely have to be about moving up the vertical scale of complex language use. Broadening performance ability in communicative activities and strategies across domains is seen as equally important.

Adapting the Framework of Reference for English Language Education for the region.

Recently frameworks based on CEFR have been adopted, with modifications as a proficiency benchmark for both English teachers and students in Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and China. The CEFR version in Thailand will be discussed in some detail to indicate the main global and illustrative scales used in CEFR in terms of English. Japan, Vietnam and Malaysia will be discussed in relation to when they were first fully implemented. However, it should be pointed out that CEFR can be applied to any language, not just English as it has been in Indonesia in French albeit at university level.

Thailand

Thailand is ranked 53rd among 80 non-native speaking countries in Education First Standard English Test (2017) with a score of 49.78 which is classified as low proficiency.

According to the Thai Minister of Education, 40,000 Thai English teachers were tested using Cambridge English standards. Only 6 scored at C level, indicating fluency, 350 score at B level or intermediate, while the majority was at advanced beginners' level (UNDP Report 2015; Mala, The Bangkok Post, 9 August 2016). English, however, plays an increasingly important role in international communication for people in the region. This has seen an even greater emphasis with the ASEAN Economic Community Integration (AEC). With a view to enhancing the English abilities of Thai people to cope with and perform effectively in this changing context. In April 2014, The English Language Institute (ELI), a branch of the Ministry of Education (MOE) announced a policy of basing all aspects of English language curriculum reform on the CEFR framework. A local version of Common European Framework of References for Languages-Thailand, FRELE-TH (2018) was published including Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality Language Services (EAQUALS). The FRELE-TH has two scale types to describe the English proficiency levels: a global scale (overall descriptors) and illustrative scales, (communicative activities, communication strategies, and communicative language competence).

FRELE-TH adopted components from EAQUALS (North, 2008), the Threshold Level (Trim & Trim, 1980; van Ek & Trim, 1990), the Core Inventory of General English (North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010), the English Profile Program (Salamoura & Saville, 2010) and the Word Family Framework (West, 2015). The FRELE-TH used the plus (+) levels from the Swiss Project (Goullier, 2007) to make sure that Levels A (Basic User) and B (Independent User) were not too high for Thai learners to achieve these levels of performance (Hiranburana et al., 2018). Outlining more discrete levels makes sense for pedagogical reasons (North, 2004, p.48) as it shows that the FRELE-TH framework following CEFR is flexible allowing levels and categories to merge and sub-divide as appropriate. Similar practice can be seen in the CEFR-J for use in Japan (Negishi , Takada, Tono, 2013, p.156-163) and in China by three stages divided into nine levels (CSE, 2018). The rationale behind the development of FRELE-TH lies in the principle of CEFR's inception that CEFR does not offer ready-made solutions but must be adapted to the requirements of particular contexts. In order to meet these objectives a 10-level reference framework was developed as an adaptation of CEFR to make it relevant to English use in local and international communication in Thailand. English is one of the working languages in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), not only in education but for job applications and work promotion (Pitsuwan, 2014). It was also hoped that the FRELE-TH global scale could be used for the design of specifications on the high-stakes standardized tests of English proficiency, the results of which can be benchmarked with those of international standards. In this way, in principle, students and users' performance and progress can be measured and tracked to be calibrated with other international standards for educational and professional purposes (Hiranburana et al., 2018).

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 with its internal labor market and English as its sole working language raised concerns about the nation's economic competitiveness. The adoption of CEFR and the contracting of the British Council to deliver a CLT-based training program for Thai English language teachers were presented as a possible solution to Thailand's English language problems (Mala, 2016). In fact, Thailand was rather late in joining a global trend of countries embracing CEFR to

reform their English language curriculums and assessment mechanisms. Japan in 2012 developed CEFR-J to suit the Japanese EFL context by re-mapping the 'can do' statements and subdividing the lower proficiency levels and B by adding sub-levels to allow for more differentiation at the levels relevant to the majority of Japanese learners (Tono, 2012). In 2008 Vietnam ratified 'Project 2020' to improve English language proficiency by basing the reform efforts around a CEFR framework to facilitate the teaching of English under Vietnamese conditions (Chung, 2014).

Japan (CEFR-J)

Japan used a modified version CEFR-J to ensure that the framework reflects its local standards in teaching and learning, curriculum development as well as assessment (Bucar, Ryu, Skof & Sangawa, 2014). Part of the impetus for change came from the need felt to transition from a knowledge-based English curriculum to a competency-based language one. Stakeholders' consent for a new skill-based language curriculum was more in favor of curriculum objectives that aimed at marketable results on reputable language proficiency tests (Moser, 2015). However, it was also realized that the proficiency level in English of students enrolling in tertiary education was too low to achieve the proficiency test results required. It was suggested that CEFR's globally recognized 'can do' scales could be used as these scales identified language gains at the lowest levels of language proficiency. The CEFR-J the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology (MEXT. 2011) published a report encouraging the use of 'can do' lists in junior and senior high schools.

The 'can do' lists, in addition to using the CEFR descriptors, triangulation was used (Naganuma, 2010) with banks of descriptors for EQUALS/ALTE, ELP as well as textbooks influenced by CEFR such as Longman's Total, and Cambridge University Press' English Unlimited. Negishi, Takada & Tono (2013) survey of Japanese EFL users indicated that 80 per cent were between A1 and A2. CEFR-J unlike CEFR introduced scales using a branching approach with narrower levels of A1+ and A2+ B1+ and B2+ to make CEFR more useable in the Japanese context (Negishi, Takada & Tono, 2013). It was felt that this increase in levels allowed teachers to better fine-tune student assessment, which meant being able to create more separation between students within a band. This use of CEFR-J scales allowed students of near A2 or A2 students who did not see their progress improve on the vertical scales in the initial stages of the program because of the time needed to acquire skills to be considered as A2+ or B1. As North (2007) pointed out a branching approach with its narrow levels would allow teachers and students to see more progress, which especially at the earlier levels is critical for developing motivation. A drawback of this narrower scaling was distinguishing these sublevels became more nuanced and created a little more variability in teacher assessment (Tono & Negishi, 2012).

Vietnam: CEFR-V

The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in 2008 officially began to use CEFR to define English language exit benchmarks for students ranging from primary

through to tertiary levels of education. The national project Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System 2008-2020 (Hung, 2013) expected all university graduates not majoring in languages to reach B1 English. MOET also adopted CEFR levels A1 (beginners) A2 and B1 as the required standards for students leaving Primary, Junior and Secondary High schools (Nguyen, 2010). However, in a meeting organized by the education ministry, university and government representatives it was reported that the government's targets for language proficiency were too ambitious (Nguyen, Wilkinshaw & Pham 2017; Nguyen & Hamid 2015). According to a survey, only one in five students achieved that level in 2015. The consequence was that institutions had to lower the requirement to A2. The reasons given for not reaching the targets were the teachers' poor English, lack of resources and outdated teaching methods with a heavy focus on traditional grammar. The government has reportedly moved some of the objectives of the language learning and teaching plan to 2025. A new approach was to be undertaken, creating CEFR-V, a Vietnamese version, similar to CEFR-J. The Management board for the National Foreign Language Teaching Program, indicated that the original framework would be adjusted to make it more suitable for Vietnamese studying foreign languages. However, because it was felt that it would take a long time to fulfill the English teaching program, with MOET now focusing on training teachers of English. It is expected that Vietnam would need 100,000 English teachers to fulfill the program's objectives (Viet, 2015).

Malaysia: CEFR-M

The implementation of CEFR in Malaysia started with the establishment of English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) 2013. Alignment of the education system against CEFR is an important element in the Malaysia Education Blueprint MEB) with the aim to boost the level of education to international standards (Azman, 2016) . The implementation of MEB brought about an additional impact on English Language education especially in primary schools such as the inclusion of English literacy in the Literacy and Numeracy Screening or the LINUS program. However, in 2018, the government introduced CEFR. Students' proficiency was to be graded using CEFR descriptors in order to ensure that the students' grades are recognized at international levels. LINUS 2.0 was seen to give more emphasis on English language literary skills together with numeracy, consequently assessment was shared between LINUS 2.0 and CEFR. Only the first three levels of CEFR descriptors (A1, A2, B1) were to be used integrating CEFR into LINUS 2.0 because of the low proficiency of the students and the fact that they might progress at a slow pace. CEFR is in part a language policy intended to define levels of language proficiency in terms of real-world practical ability. However, it was felt that the integration of CEFR into existing programs had to take into account the reality of the Malaysian education landscape as well as whether the CEFR-LINUS screening program assessment is really measuring what it is intended to measure (Ishak & Mohamad, 2018).

CEFR is part of the Malaysian roadmap with an overall plan covering 2013 to 2015 with the main aim to provide the best language education starting from pre-school up to tertiary education. The roadmap consists of three phases. Phase 1 (2013-2015) focused on raising the level of English proficiency of teachers. Phase 2 (2016), in the first part appropriate

CEFR levels were to be matched against educational levels starting from pre-school to teacher education. The second part of Phase 2, School Based Assessment (SBA), syllabus and curricula were also aligned with CEFR descriptors (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Phase 3 is for ELSQC to evaluate, review and revise the implementation of CEFR (Mohammad Uri & Sallehhudin Abd Aziz, 2017).

China's Standards of English (CSE)

China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) (2018) has been developed by the National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) to establish a national framework of reference for English language education. The management structure of education in China had different governmental departments taking charge of education at different stages. One of the issues arising from such management structure was the inconsistent learning objectives specified in the curricula for learners of English at each educational stage. Another issue was reflected in the proficiency levels of national assessment aligned to the curriculum at each stage. National tests were developed and administered by different testing organizations. The introduction of a common English proficiency scale it is hoped will facilitate test construction and score interpretation. Added to this is the challenge of globalization by making the education system more transparent to the outside world. China has developed a nine-level scale so that the standards of English language education can be aligned to international frameworks and thus prepare Chinese people to become global citizens. It is also significant that the descriptive framework for (knowledge has sub-divisions of organizational knowledge (grammatical and textual); pragmatic knowledge (functional and sociolinguistic) and interpreting and translation following the genres outlined in sociolinguistic knowledge (Yan Jin et al., 2017). In general, this seems to reflect a much more 'functional' approach to language knowledge than in the original CEFR (2001) document. For example, sociolinguistic knowledge is subdivided into genres, dialects/varieties, registers, and idiomatic expressions and cultural and figures of speech.

As mediating activities, interpretation and translation occupy an important place in the linguistic function of Chinese society and are taught as a language skill at tertiary level of education. Issues have also been identified particularly with the use of CEFR for developing examinations. Papageorgiou (2010), identified problems with some of the descriptors when used for setting cut-off scores, as CEFR was not designed specifically for test specifications. More importantly, in the Chinese context, the CEFR (2001) 'can do' descriptors were too narrowly focused to be useful for teachers to reflect on teaching and constructing a teaching syllabus. A key difference between CEFR (2001) and CSE is in the target users. CSE is intended for Chinese learners of English at all educational stages, whereas, as previously indicated, CEFR was developed to aid foreign language learning in an adult context in Europe.

Summary of Approaches to CEFR in the Region.

Competency in a language is a multi-dimensional system that accounts for the situations, the functions, the linguistic elements needed in communicative competencies.

However, measures of language competency can be arbitrary. North (2000) pointed out that CEFR as originally designed was a common measure for recording language competence and that the motivation for a common framework was more pragmatic (thus the 'can do') rather than academic. However, there were some inherent limitations in the original version of CEFR (2001) which did affect its applicability, not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world (Fulcher, 2004). There was in the CEFR (2001) a lack of empirical evidence between the products and the research to underpin the descriptions and reference levels of CEFR (2001) in its early stages. Consequently, as already mentioned, examination providers, textbook publishers and curriculum developers made claims about the relationship between their products and CEFR (2001) but little hard evidence was produced to back up such claims (Alderson, 2007).

Creating a language competency framework for Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and China has involved decisions which are more than simply transferring CEFR to other educational contexts. The various implementations of CEFR in this part of the world have been based on CEFR (2001) as the revised version of (2018) came later. In spite of the fact that in general teachers and government officials' views saw the potential for the implementation of CEFR to help to raise the level of competence in English within the contexts of their educational system, the way CEFR was introduced has led many teachers to associate CEFR with the framework's proficiency scale with possibly too much emphasis on testing. This supported what Freeman (2017) called a 'deficit view' of for teachers and their teaching abilities. Wider forms of self-assessment advocated by the developers of CEFR seem to have been missed. For example, in Thailand, the feedback on the 2015 online placement test using either Cambridge / Oxford exam board was considered by the teachers as being more suitable for a European context. The teachers did not object to being tested as they wanted to improve their English proficiency as they felt it needed to be higher than their students. But for those English teachers below B1 in the test, there was little additional support from the Ministry of Education in terms of offering special assistance (as it was to those attaining B 1 and above) to help improve their English proficiency (Franz & Teo, 2018).

A brief summary of the various issues identified in the implementation of CEFR in the region shows a number of similarities:

- ambitious target levels for students and teachers,
- centralized decision making and the need to resort to external consultancies,
- teachers having very limited knowledge and exposure to CEFR,
- teachers' level of English proficiency,
- the traditional resistance to change,
- the lack of local CEFR experts who were able to construct and produce local CEFR textbooks'
- the lack of adequate training and the notion that many teachers had that it would be difficult to incorporate CEFR in their teaching,
- seeing CEFR as simple a measure of language proficiency rather than a goal in terms of a 'can-do' approach.

In some respects, China（CSE）had major differences with CEFR（2001）in the enormous range of target users. CSE is intended for Chinese learners of English at all educational stages just as FRELE-TH in the Thai context. It has already been pointed out that CEFR（2001）was developed for foreign language learning in the adult context in Europe. Also, a six-level structure in China did not seem to suit the needs of China in providing guidance to English language teaching and learning. Although the CEFR has an open and flexible structure which allows a breakdown into sub-levels, China needed a framework tailored to the needs of English language teaching in China in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing, interpretation and translation were to be added to fit the language curriculum. What this has required is extensive research into the motivations, domains and levels of language proficiency that will be more attuned to Chinese learners. Indeed, as Byrnes pointed out the dangers of the simple and inappropriate transfer of CEFR content to other educational contexts called for CEFR research to focus more based on ‘how a context-free, though by no means context-indifferent, framework like CEFR can and should be translated into context-relevant forms in diverse educational environments in order to be implemented’ (Byrnes, 2007: 642-643).

Conclusion

The fact that the emergence of the Asian-Pacific economies has led to a rethinking of what is meant by the term ‘native speaker’, as well as the reality of linguistic pluralism and multilingualism have become part of the linguistic dynamism that is in flux. A century ago, Ferdinand de Saussure (1914/74) wrote about the contrasting principles of provincialism (ésprit de clocher) and intercourse. On one hand, he argued, provincialism keeps a community faithful to its traditions and encourages cultural continuity. On the other hand, there is an opposing force, the need for broader communication for which Saussure used the English word intercourse. What this reflects was a tension in desires to retain something local, traditional or ‘authentic’. We have to recognize that English in a global context will be subject to variation and change as it spreads into different domains of use and communities of users. Languages do not vary and change proactively under their own steam but reactively in response to certain social forces. We are talking about matters of pluralism and assimilation which CEFR has been attempting to address, as well as, linguistic practicality, communicative efficiency, social mobility and economic advancement. This means balancing the need for an awareness of other varieties of English with the need for transparency in what is nationally and internationally acceptable in terms of being a competent language user.

References

Alderson, C. （2007）. The CEFR and the need for more research. The Modern Language Journal 91(4) 695-663. doi:10.1111/modl.2007.91.issue-4

Azman, H. （2016）. Implementations and challenges of English Language education Reform in Malaysian Primary Schools. 3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies. 22(3), 65-78.

Barni, M. (2015). 'In the name of the CEFR: Individuals and standards' in B. Spolsky, O. Inbar-Lourie, and M. Tannenbaum (eds): Challenges of Language Education and Policy. Making Space for People. Routledge, pp. 40–52.

Barro, R. & Lee, J. (2013). 'A new data set of educational attainment in the world, 1950–2010,' Journal of Development Economics 104: 184–98.

Byram, M. & Parmenter, L. (eds). 2012. The Common European Framework of Reference: The Globalisation of Language Education Policy. Multilingual Matters.

Byrnes, H. (2007). Perspectives. The Modern Language Journal.91 (4) 641-645

Bucar, C.S., Ryu, H., Skof, N.M. & Sangawa, K.H. (2014). The CEFR and Teaching Japanese as a foreign language. Linguistica (54(1), 455-469. Doi: 10.4312/linguistica.

China's Standards of English Language Ability (2018). Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.

Chung, V. (2014). Vietnam considers using CEFR-V standard for English teaching. Viet/ Nam/ Net, Hanoi, Vietnam 15th November. [Online URL] http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/education/116476/vietnam-considers-using-cefr-v-standard-for-english-teaching.html.

Council of Europe (2018). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Companion Volume with New Descriptors Council of Europe, Language Policy Programme, Strasbourg. [Online URL] www.coe.int/lang-cefr

Costa, D. (2007). Contextualizing uses of the common European framework of reference for languages, In Council of Europe, The common European framework of references for languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenge and responsibilities. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. (40-49). [Online URL] www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistics/Publications_en.asp

Deygers, B. (2019) The CEFR Companion Volume: Between Research-Based Policy and Policy-Based Research. [Online URL] https://academic.oup.com/applij/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/applin/amz024/5487749

Deygers, B., C. Carlsen, N. Saville, & K. Van Gorp. (2018). 'The use of the CEFR in higher education: A brief introduction to this special issue,' Language Assessment Quarterly 15/1: 1–2.

Education First Standard English (2017). Test Proficiency Index. [Online URL] www.ef.cf.com/epi

Figueras, N. (2012). 'The impact of the CEFR,' ELT Journal 66/4: 477–85.

Fulcher, G. (2004). Deluded by artifices? The Common European Framework and Harmonization. Language Assessment Quarterly, 1(4) 23-266. Doi:10.1207/s1434311laq0104_4

Franz. J, & Teo, A. (2018). 'A2 is Normal'- Thai Secondary School English Teachers' Encounters with CEFR. RELC Journal vol. 49 (3) 322-338.

Freeman, D. (2017). The Case for Teachers' Classroom Proficiency. RELC Journal 48 (1): 31-52.

Green, A. (2012). Language functions revisited: Theoretical and empirical bases for language construct definition across the ability range. English Profile Studies vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goullier, F. (2007). Impact of the Common framework of Reference for Languages and the Council of Europe's work on the New European educational area, in Council of Europe (2007) The Common European Framework of References (CEFR) and the Development of Language Policies: Challenges and responsibilities, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. 29-37

Hiranburana, H. Subphadoongchone, P. Tangkiengsirisin, S. Phoochaeoensil, S. Gainey, J. Thogsongsri , J. Sumonsriworakun, P. Somphong, M. Sappapan. P, & Taylor, P. (2017). Framework of reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH) based on the CEFR

Hiranburana, H. Subphadoongchone, P. Tangkiengsirisin, S. Phoochaeoensil, S. Gainey, J. Thogsongsri , J. Sumonsriworakun, P. Somphong, M. Sappapan. P, & Taylor, P. (2017). A Framework of reference for English Language education in Thailand (FRELE-TH) – based on the CEFR, The Thai experience. LEARN Journal 10 (2) 90-119.

Hiranburana, H. Subphadoongchone, P. Tangkiengsirisin, S. Phoochaeoensil, S. Gainey, J. Thogsongsri , J. Sumonsriworakun, P. Somphong, M. Sappapan. P, & Taylor, P. (2018). Framework of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand – (FRELE-TH). Based on CEFR: Revisited in the English Educational Reform. PASAA PARITAT JOURNAL vol. 33(2018).

Houghton, S. A., D. J. Rivers, and K. Hashimoto (2018). Beyond Native-speakerism. Current explorations and future visions Routledge.

Hulstijn, J. (2007). The shaky ground beneath the CEFR quantitative and qualitative dimensions of language proficiency. The Modern Language Journal, 91(4) 663-667

Hung, N.N. (2013). Vietnam's National Foreign Language 20/20 Project: Challenges, Opportunities, and Solutions. [Online URL] http://bruneiusprogramme.org/wp-content/uploads/2013-Forum-Publications-Complete.63-65.pdf

Ishak,W & Mohamad, M. (2018). The Implementation of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): What Are the Effects Towards LINUS Students' Achievements? Creative Education, 9 2714-2731. Doi: 10.4236/ce.2018.916205

Krumm, H.J. (2007). 'Profiles instead of levels: The CEFR and its (ab)uses in the context of migration,' The Modern Language Journal 91/4: 667–9.

Komorowska, H. (2014). The CEF in pre- and in-service teacher education. In K, Morrow (Ed), Insights from the common European framework (pp. 55-64). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mala, D. (2016, March 9). English in the news: govt launches app, teacher's 'boot camp'. Bangkok Post. [Online URL] http://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/advanced/891472/english-in-the news-govt-launches-app-teachers-boot-camp.

Martyniuk, W. & Noijons, J. (2007). Executive Summary of Results of a Survey on the Use of the CEFR at National Level in the Council of Europe Member States. Council of Europe Language Policy Division.

McNamara, T. (2014). '30 years on—Evolution or revolution?' Language Assessment Quarterly 11/2: 226–32

MEXT (2011). Five proposals and specific measures for developing proficiency in English for international communication. [Online URL] http://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2012/07/09/1319707_1.pdf

Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013). Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 Putrajaya: Ministry of Education Malaysia. [Online URL] http://www.moe.gov.my/userfiles/fil/PPP/Prelimiary-Blue print-Eng.pdf

Mohamad Uri, N.F. & Sallehhudin Abd Aziz, M. (2017). CEFR in Malaysia: Current issues and challenges in the implementation of the framework. The 3rd International Conference on Language Testing and Assessment and 5th British Council New Directions in Language Assessment Conference 2-3 December 2017. Shanghai, China.

Moser, J. (2015). From a Knowledge-Based Language Curriculum to a Competency-Based One: The CEFR in Action in Asia. Asian EFL Journal (88) 1-29.

Naganuma, N. (2010). The Range and Triangulation of Can Do Statements in Japan. In Schmidt, M.S., Naganuma, N., O'Dwyer, F., Imig, A., Sakai, K. (eds.) Can do statements in language education in Japan and beyond. Tokyo: Asahi Pres9-34.

Negishi, M., Takada, T. & Y. Tono (2013). A progress report on the development of the CEFR-J In Galaczi, E.D. & Weir. C.J. (Eds) Exploring Language Frameworks: Proceedings of the ALTE Kraków Conference July 2011, Studies in Language Testing, Volume 36, Cambridge: UCLES/Cambridge University Press, 135-163

Nguyen, N. H., (2010) Innovations in English language education in Vietnam: Challenges, opportunities and solutions. Paper presented at the English for All- International Conference in TESOL, Hue, Vietnam.

Nguyen, H. T. ,Wilkinshaw, I. , & H. H. Pham (2017) EMI Programs in a Vietnamese University: Language, Pedagogy and Policy Issues. In Fenton-Smith, B., Humphreys, P., Wilkinshaw, I, (eds) English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in Asia-Pacific : Multilingual Education, Vol 21. Springer –Chem, 37-52

Nguyen, V.H. & Hamid. M.O. (2015). Educational Policy borrowing in a Globalized World: A Case Study of Common European Framework of reference for Languages in a Vietnamese University. Journal of English Teaching, Practice and Critique. 14(1), 60-74. Doi: 10.1108/ETPC-02-2015-0014

North, B. (2000). The development of a common framework scale of language proficiency. New York, Peter Lang.

North, B. (2004). Europe's framework promotes language discussion, not directives. [Online URL] http://education.guardian.co.uk/tefl/story/0,1191130,00.html.

North, B. (2007). The CEFR illustrative scales. The Modern Language Journal 94 (4) 656-59 doi:10.1111/modl2007.91.issue-4

North, B. (2008). EQUALS Bank of Descriptors – as Levels. EAQUALS/ALTE Portfolio Descriptor Revision Project. The European Association of Quality Language Services. Online retrieved: [Online URL] http:// www.eaquals.org

North, B. (2014). 'Putting the Common European Framework of Reference to good use,' Language Teaching 47/2: 228–49.

North, B., Ortega, A. & S. Sheehan. 2010. The British Council-EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English. [Online URL] https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/ sites/default/files/ attachments/books-british-council-eaquals-core-inventory.pdf.

North, B. & 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: 455–9.

Papageorgiou, S. (2010). Investigating the decision-making process of standard setting participants. Language Testing, 27(2), 261-282.

Pitsuwan, S. (2014). Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. TESOL International Convention 2014, Portland, Oregon, USA.

Poszytek, P. (2012). Policy perspectives from Poland. In M. Byram & L. Parmenter (Eds.) The common European framework of reference: The globalization of language education policy (pp. 97-103). Bristol Multilingual Matters.

Salamoura, A. & Saville, N. (2010). Exemplifying the CEFR: criterial features of written learner English from the English Profile Programme. In I Bartning and M. Marten (Eds) Communicative Proficiency and Linguistic Development: Intersection between SLA and Language Testing Research: Eurosla Monograph Series 1 European Second Language Association pp 102-132

Saussure, F. de (1914/74) Course in General Linguistics. London Fontana. (English Translation).

Trim, J. (2012). 'The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its background: A case study of cultural politics and educational influences' in M. Byram and L. Parmenter (eds): The Common European Framework of Reference: The Globalisation of Language Education Policy. Multilingual Matters, pp. 14–36.

Trim, J.L. & Trim, J.L.M (1980). Systems development in Adult Language Learning: a European unit/credit system for modern language learning by adults/ prepared for the Council of Europe. Council of Europe: Strasbourg.

Tono, Y. (2012). What is CEFR-J? CEFR-based framework for ELT in Japan, research project. [Online URL] http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/tonolab/cefr-j/english/whatis.html.

Tono, Y. & Negishi, M. (2012). The CEFR-J: Adapting the CEFR for English language teaching in Japan. Framework & Language Portfolio (FLP) SIG Newsletter, 8 September 2012.

UNDP (2015). The Millennium Development Report. [Online URL] www.th.undp.org/content/thailand/en/home/library/mdg/the_millennium_development_report_2015.html

van Ek, J. (1975). Systems Development in Adult Language Learning: The Threshold Level in a European-Unit/Credit System for Modern Language Learning by Adults. Council of Europe.

Van Ek, J.A. & Trim J.L.M. (1990). Threshold 1990 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vantage (2001). Online retrieved: 28 April 2019. [Online URL] http//www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests.cefr

Viet, Hà Pham (2015). The CEFR in Vietnam from Adoption to Adaption. JALT Conference.

Waystage (1990). [Online URL] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistics/Waystage_CUP.pdf

West, R. (2015). Keeping it in the family. English Language Teaching Professional, 97.

Yan Jin, Zunmin Wu, C. Alderson & Weiwei Song (2017). Common European Framework of reference for Languages (CEFR) for English language assessment in China Language Testing in China (Special Issue) Springer, Open.