Launching Conference for the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors

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Key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning

- ➤ innovative areas
  - ➤ filling gaps in descriptor scales in 2001 publication
  - ➤ fleshing out mediation and plurilingual/ pluricultural competence
- ➤ building on success and responding to users:
  - ➤ incorporating signing
  - ➤ more fully defining 'plus levels'
  - ➤ new 'Pre-A1' level
  - ➤ adding to scales for listening and reading
  - ➤ descriptors for other communicative activities - online interaction, using telecommunications, expressing reactions to creative text and literature
- ➤ **enriching description** at A1, and **at C levels, particularly C2**

Key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning

The CEFR in language education (p.27): the **action-oriented approach** (p.26)

CEFR is *neutral* ('does not prescribe any particular pedagogic approach', 'raises questions rather than answering them') BUT '*not educationally neutral*'

Presents language user/learner as **'social agent**,**'** acting in social world; exerting agency in learning process.

A **paradigm shift** in both course planning and teaching, promoting learner engagement and autonomy.

Paradigm shift

The CEFR is… (p.28)

- a tool to **facilitate educational reform projects**
- a tool to **assist the planning of curricula, courses and examinations** by working backwards from **what the users/learners need to be able *to do* in the language**
- shift away from
    - syllabuses based on linear progression through language structures, or predetermined set of notions and functions
    - *deficiency* perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired.
- shift towards
    - syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions.
    - *proficiency* perspective guided by '**Can do' descriptors**

'Work backwards' from needs profiles
...but users will need to look elsewhere for process
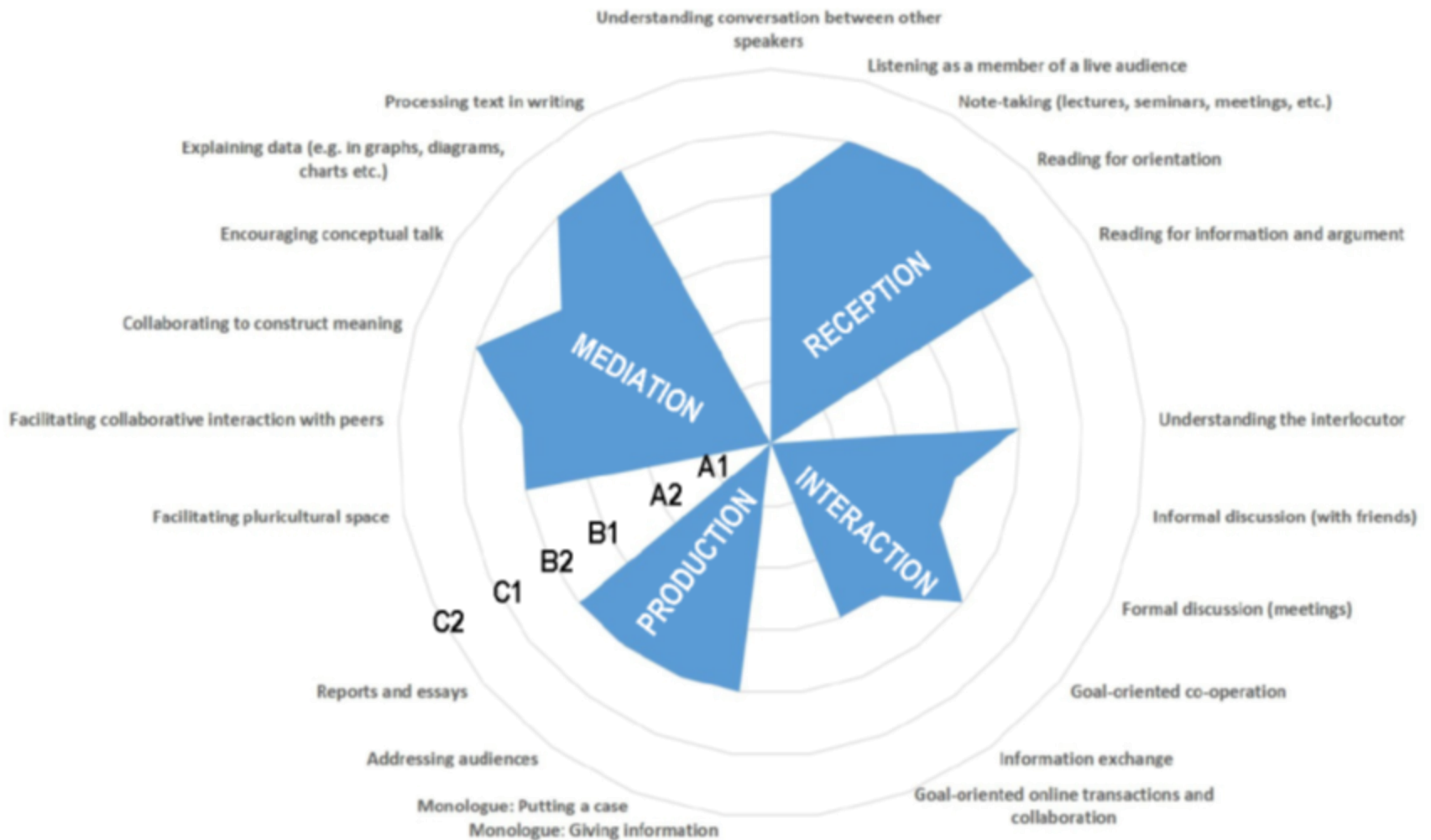
Descriptors (p.23)

➢ newly developed illustrative descriptor scales alongside existing ones;

➢ schematic tables provided - grouping scales belonging to the same category (communicative language activities or aspects of competence);

➢ short rationale presented for each scale, explaining thinking behind categorisation

Descriptors further explained

Descriptors are (p.41)

- Illustrative: merely *illustrations* of competence in the area concerned at the different levels.

- Focus on **aspects that are new and salient**; do not attempt to describe everything relevant in a comprehensive manner.

- They remain **open-ended and incomplete**.

- Illustrative descriptors are **one source for the development of standards** appropriate to the context concerned;

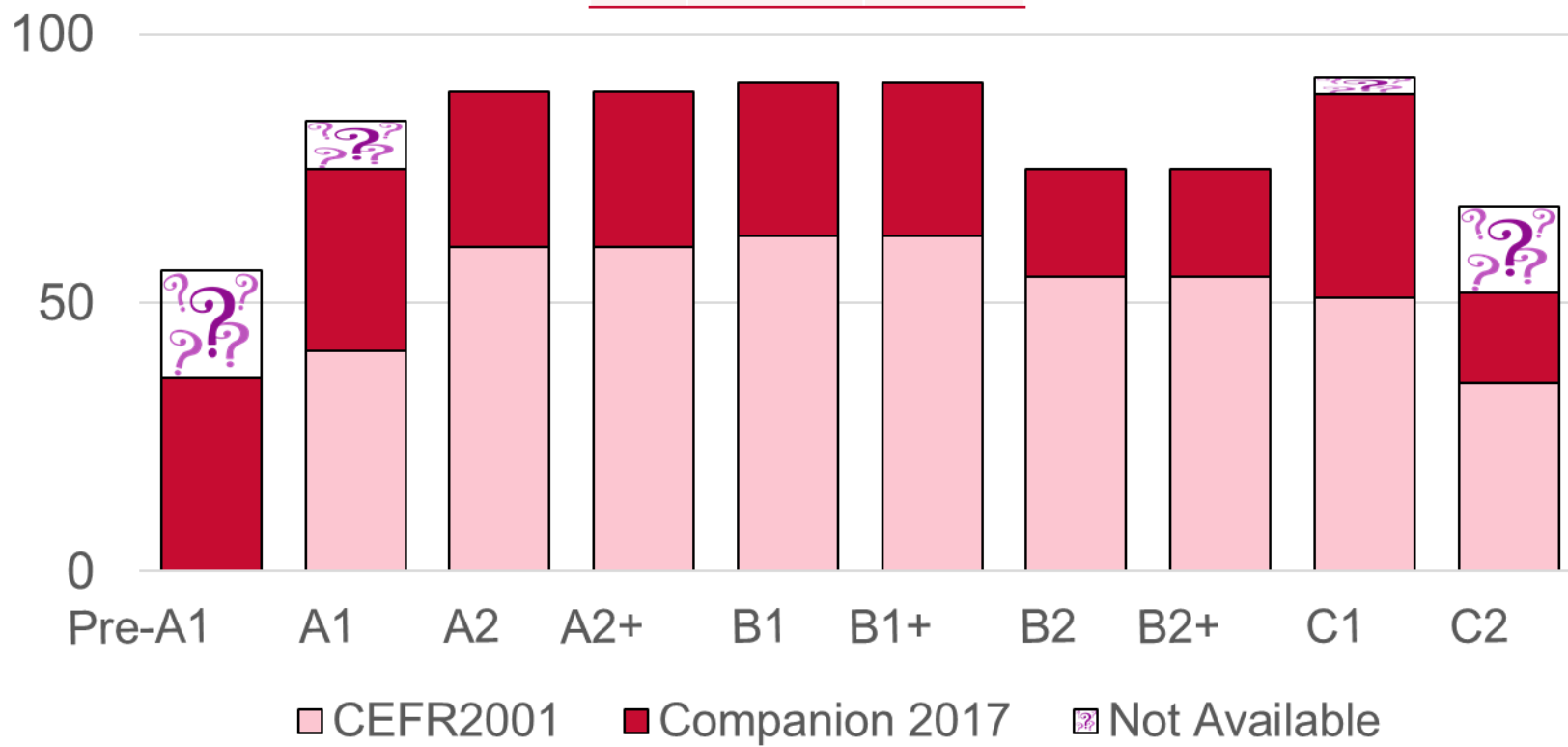**descriptors are not in themselves offered as standards**

Descriptors by skill
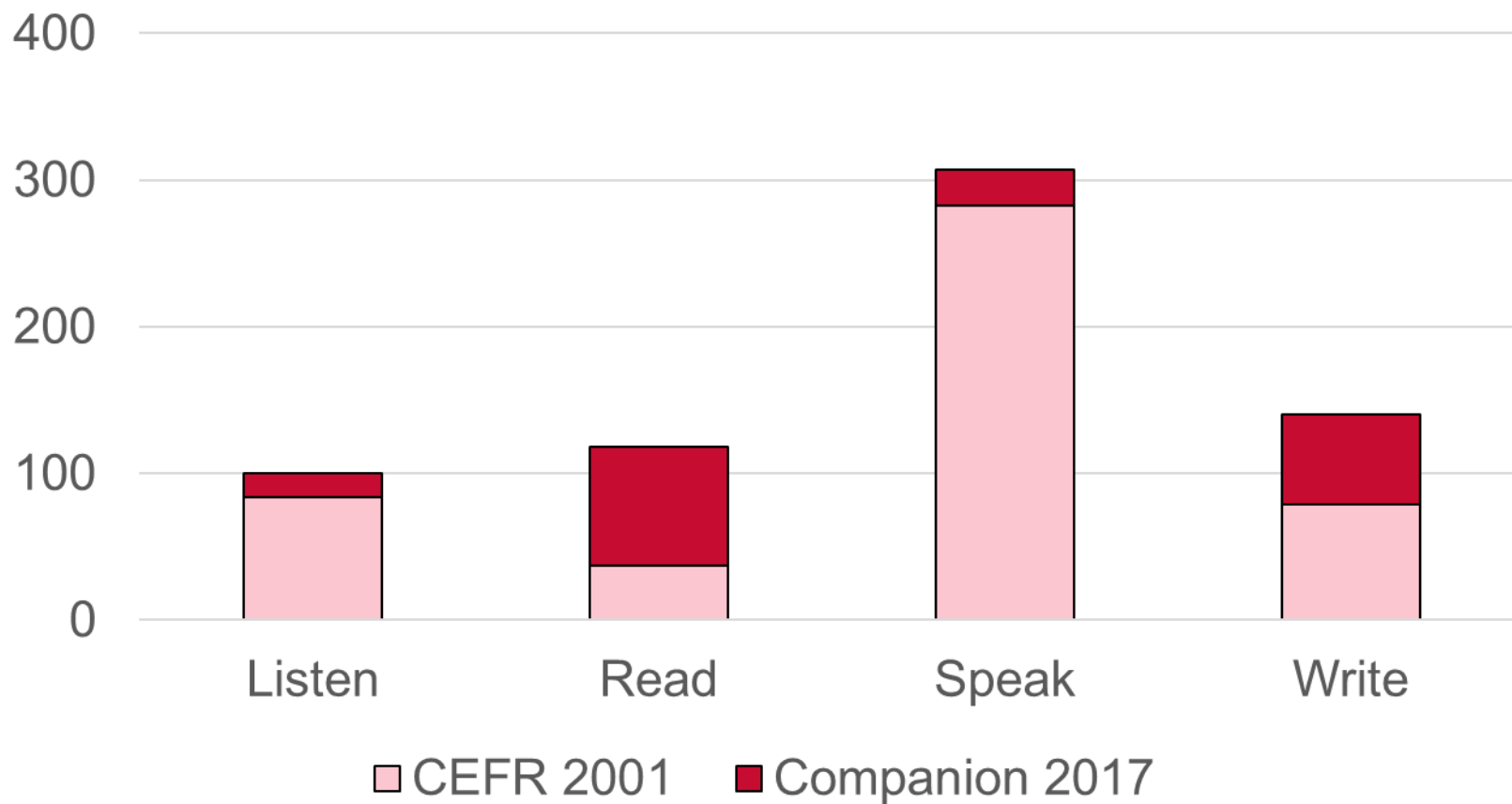
Descriptors by level

No descriptor available	2001	2018
C2	25	19
C1	9	4

Descriptor changes

- 15 descriptors **adapted** (7 at C2) across 12 scales

- 13 native speakers **eliminated**

- **Phonology** *intelligible* rather than *nativelike*

Scaling back on absolutes:

~~Has no difficulty with~~ **Can understand with ease virtually** any kind of spoken language

Elaboration of scales – conceptual bases

Overall phonological control

Intelligibility key factor for discriminating between levels. Focus on effort required from interlocutor to decode speaker's message. Explicit mention of accent at all levels.

Key concepts operationalized in the scale include the following:

➢intelligibility: how much effort is required from the interlocutor to decode the speaker's message;

➢the extent of influence from other languages spoken;

➢control of sounds;

➢control of prosodic features.

Appendix 6 – Examples of use in different domains for descriptors of online interaction and mediation activities

Can explain (in Language B) the relevance of specific information given in a particular section of a long, complex text (written in Language A).

PERSONAL	PUBLIC	OCCUPATIONAL	EDUCATIONAL
in an article, website, book or talk face-to-face/ online concerning current affairs or an area of personal interest or concern	from presentations at public meetings, from public documents explaining policy changes, political speeches	a business report, article, regulation or workplace policy	an article, book, reference book or lecture/presentation

Qualities of descriptors: what are the design principles?

Retain inconsistent wording: catch/ recognize/ follow/ understand etc.

Designing descriptors – what does a CEFR descriptor need to provide for users? What goes into a descriptor with definiteness, clarity, brevity & independence?

- A task

- A speech act/ speech event/ activity?

- Themes/ topics/ situations?

- Nature of input? Nature of output?

- Performance qualities and limitations?

- Restrictions, conditions and constraints?