

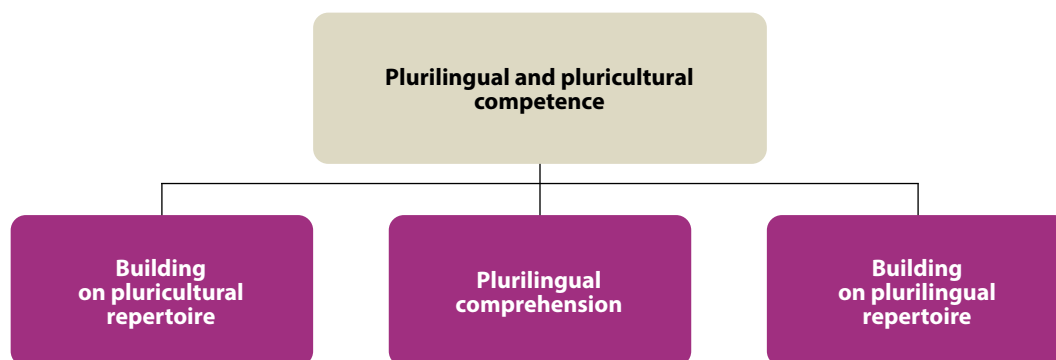
Chapter 4

THE CEFR ILLUSTRATIVE DESCRIPTOR SCALES: PLURILINGUAL AND PLURICULTURAL COMPETENCE

The notions of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism presented in the CEFR 2001 (Sections 1.3, 1.4, and 6.1.3) were the starting point for the development of descriptors in this area. The plurilingual vision associated with the CEFR gives value to cultural and linguistic diversity at the level of the individual. It promotes the need for learners as “social agents” to draw on all their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences in order to fully participate in social and educational contexts, achieving mutual understanding, gaining access to knowledge and in turn, further developing their linguistic and cultural repertoire. As the CEFR 2001 states:

the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. (CEFR 2001 Section 1.3)

Figure 15 – Plurilingual and pluricultural competence



The vision of the learner as a social agent in the action-oriented approach takes these concepts further in relation to language education, considering that:

the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve “mastery” of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the “ideal native speaker” as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. (CEFR 2001 Section 1.3)

In the development of descriptors, the following points mentioned specifically in the CEFR 2001 were given particular attention:

- ▶ languages are interrelated and interconnected, especially at the level of the individual;
- ▶ languages and cultures are not kept in separated mental compartments;
- ▶ all knowledge and experience of languages contribute to building up communicative competence;
- ▶ balanced mastery of different languages is not the goal, but rather the ability (and willingness) to modulate their usage according to the social and communicative situation;
- ▶ barriers between languages can be overcome in communication, and different languages can be used purposefully for conveying messages in the same situation.

Other concepts were also taken into consideration after analysing recent literature:

- ▶ capacity to deal with “otherness” to identify similarities and differences, to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration;
- ▶ willingness to act as an intercultural mediator;
- ▶ proactive capacity to use knowledge of familiar languages to understand new languages, looking for cognates and internationalisms in order to make sense of texts in unknown languages – while being aware of the danger of “false friends”;
- ▶ capacity to respond in a sociolinguistically appropriate way by incorporating elements of other languages and/or variations of languages in their own discourse for communication purposes;
- ▶ capacity to exploit one’s linguistic repertoire by purposefully blending, embedding and alternating languages at the levels of utterance and discourse;
- ▶ readiness and capacity to expand linguistic/plurilingual and cultural/pluricultural awareness through an attitude of openness and curiosity.

The reason for associating descriptors in this area with CEFR levels is to provide support to curriculum developers and teachers in their efforts (a) to broaden the perspective of language education in their context and (b) to acknowledge and value the linguistic and cultural diversity of their learners. The provision of descriptors in levels is intended to facilitate the selection of relevant plurilingual/pluricultural aims, which are also realistic in relation to the language level of the user/learners concerned.

The scale “Facilitating pluricultural space” is included in the section “Mediating communication”, rather than here, because it focuses on a more proactive role as an intercultural mediator. The three scales in this section describe aspects of the broader conceptual area concerning plurilingual and intercultural education.

This area is the subject of the framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (FREPA/CARAP), which lists different aspects of plurilingual and intercultural competences in a hypertextual structure independent of language level, organised according to three broad areas: knowledge (*savoir*), attitudes (*savoir-être*) and skills (*savoir-faire*). Users may wish to consult FREPA/CARAP for further reflection and for access to related training materials in this area.

Building on pluricultural repertoire

Many notions that appear in the literature and descriptors for intercultural competence are included, for example:

- ▶ the need to deal with ambiguity when faced with cultural diversity, adjusting reactions, modifying language, etc.
- ▶ the need for understanding that different cultures may have different practices and norms, and that actions may be perceived differently by people belonging to other cultures;
- ▶ the need to take into consideration differences in behaviours (including gestures, tones and attitudes), discussing over-generalisations and stereotypes;
- ▶ the need to recognise similarities and use them as a basis to improve communication;
- ▶ willingness to show sensitivity to differences;
- ▶ readiness to offer and ask for clarification, anticipating possible risks of misunderstanding.

Key concepts operationalised in the scale at most levels include the following:

- ▶ recognising and acting on cultural, socio-pragmatic and sociolinguistic conventions/cues;
- ▶ recognising and interpreting similarities and differences in perspectives, practices and events;
- ▶ evaluating neutrally and critically.

Progression up the scale is characterised as follows: at the A levels the user/learner is capable of recognising potential causes of culturally based complications in communication and of acting appropriately in simple everyday exchanges. At B1 they can generally respond to the most commonly used cultural cues, act according to socio-pragmatic conventions and explain or discuss features of their own and other cultures. At B2, the user/learner can engage effectively in communication, coping with most difficulties that occur, and is usually able to recognise and repair misunderstandings. At the C levels, this develops into an ability to explain sensitively the background to cultural beliefs, values and practices, interpret and discuss aspects of them, cope with sociolinguistic and pragmatic ambiguity and express reactions constructively with cultural appropriateness.

	Building on pluricultural repertoire
C2	Can initiate and control their actions and forms of expression according to context, showing awareness of cultural differences and making subtle adjustments in order to prevent and/or repair misunderstandings and cultural incidents.
C1	Can identify differences in sociolinguistic/-pragmatic conventions, critically reflect on them and adjust their communication accordingly. Can sensitively explain the background to and interpret and discuss aspects of cultural values and practices drawing on intercultural encounters, reading, film, etc. Can deal with ambiguity in cross-cultural communication and express their reactions constructively and culturally appropriately in order to bring clarity.
B2	**Can describe and evaluate the viewpoints and practices of their own and other social groups, showing awareness of the implicit values on which judgments and prejudices are frequently based. **Can explain their interpretation of the cultural assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices of their own community and of other communities that they are familiar with. **Can interpret and explain a document or event from another culture and relate it to documents or events from their own culture(s) and/or from cultures with which they are familiar. **Can discuss the objectivity and balance of information and opinions expressed in the media about their own and other communities. Can identify and reflect on similarities and differences in culturally determined behavioural patterns (e.g. gestures and speech volume or, for sign languages, sign size) and discuss their significance in order to negotiate mutual understanding. Can, in an intercultural encounter, recognise that what one normally takes for granted in a particular situation is not necessarily shared by others, and can react and express themselves appropriately. Can generally interpret cultural cues appropriately in the culture concerned. Can reflect on and explain particular ways of communicating in their own and other cultures, and the risks of misunderstanding they generate.
B1	Can generally act according to conventions regarding posture, eye contact and distance from others. Can generally respond appropriately to the most commonly used cultural cues. Can explain features of their own culture to members of another culture or explain features of the other culture to members of their own culture. Can explain in simple terms how their own values and behaviours influence their views of other people's values and behaviours. Can discuss in simple terms the way in which things that may look "strange" to them in another sociocultural context may well be "normal" for the other people concerned. Can discuss in simple terms the way their own culturally determined actions may be perceived differently by people from other cultures.
A2	Can recognise and apply basic cultural conventions associated with everyday social exchanges (e.g. different greetings, rituals). Can act appropriately in everyday greetings, farewells and expressions of thanks and apology, although they have difficulty coping with any departure from the routine. Can recognise that their behaviour in an everyday transaction may convey a message different from the one they intend, and can try to explain this simply. Can recognise when difficulties occur in interaction with members of other cultures, even though they may not be sure how to behave in the situation.
A1	Can recognise differing ways of numbering, measuring distance, telling the time, etc. even though they may have difficulty applying this in even simple everyday transactions of a concrete type.
Pre-A1	<i>No descriptors available</i>

Descriptors marked with asterisks (**) represent a high level for B2. They may also be suitable for the C levels.

Plurilingual comprehension

The main notion represented by this scale is capacity to use knowledge of and proficiency (even partial) in one or more languages as leverage for approaching texts in other languages, in order to achieve a communication goal. Key concepts operationalised in the scale include the following:

- ▶ openness and flexibility to work with different elements from different languages;
- ▶ exploiting cues;
- ▶ exploiting similarities, recognising “false friends” (from B1 up);
- ▶ exploiting parallel sources in different languages (from B1 up);
- ▶ collating information from all available sources (in different languages).

Progression up the scale is characterised as follows: going up the scale, the focus moves from the lexical level to the use of co-text and contextual or genre-related clues. A more analytical ability is present at the B levels, exploiting similarities, recognising “false friends” and exploiting parallel sources in different languages. There are no descriptors for the C levels, perhaps because the sources used focused on the A and B levels.

Note: What is calibrated in this scale is the practical functional ability to exploit plurilingualism for comprehension. In any particular context, when specific languages are concerned, users may wish to complete the descriptor by specifying those languages, replacing the expressions underlined and in italics in the descriptor.

For example, the B1 descriptor:

Can deduce the message of a text by exploiting what they have understood from texts on the same theme in *different languages* (e.g. news in brief, museum brochures, online reviews)

might be presented as:

Can deduce the message of a text in German by exploiting what they have understood from texts on the same theme in French and English (e.g. news in brief, museum brochures, online reviews).

Plurilingual comprehension	
C2	<i>No descriptors available, see B2</i>
C1	<i>No descriptors available, see B2</i>
B2	Can use their knowledge of contrasting genre conventions and textual patterns in <i>languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> in order to support comprehension.
B1	<p>Can use what they have understood in <i>one language</i> to understand the topic and main message of a text in <i>another language</i> (e.g. when reading short newspaper articles in different languages on the same theme).</p> <p>Can use parallel translations of texts (e.g. magazine articles, stories, passages from novels) to develop comprehension in <i>different languages</i>.</p> <p>Can deduce the message of a text by exploiting what they have understood from texts on the same theme in <i>different languages</i> (e.g. news in brief, museum brochures, online reviews).</p> <p>Can extract information from documents in <i>different languages</i> in their field (e.g. to include in a presentation).</p> <p>Can recognise similarities and contrasts between the way concepts are expressed in <i>different languages</i>, in order to distinguish between identical uses of the same word/sign and “false friends”.</p> <p>Can use their knowledge of contrasting grammatical structures and functional expressions of <i>languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> in order to support comprehension.</p>

	Plurilingual comprehension
A2	<p>Can understand short, clearly articulated announcements by piecing together what they understand from the available versions in <i>different languages</i>.</p> <p>Can understand short, clearly expressed messages and instructions by piecing together what they understand from the versions in <i>different languages</i>.</p> <p>Can use simple warnings, instructions and product information given in parallel in <i>different languages</i> to find relevant information.</p>
A1	<p>Can recognise internationalisms and words/signs common to <i>different languages</i> (e.g. haus/hus/house) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deduce the meaning of simple signs and notices; - identify the probable message of a short, simple text; - follow in outline short, simple social exchanges conducted very slowly and clearly in their presence; - deduce what people are trying to say directly to them, provided the articulation is very slow and clear, with repetition if necessary.
Pre-A1	No descriptors available

Building on plurilingual repertoire

In this scale we find aspects that characterise both the previous scales. As the social agent is building on their pluricultural repertoire, they are also engaged in exploiting all available linguistic resources in order to communicate effectively in a multilingual context and/or in a classic mediation situation in which the other people do not share a common language. Key concepts operationalised in the scale include the following:

- ▶ flexible adaptation to the situation;
- ▶ anticipation as to when and to what extent the use of several languages is useful and appropriate;
- ▶ adjusting language according to the linguistic skills of interlocutors;
- ▶ blending and alternating between languages where necessary;
- ▶ explaining and clarifying in different languages;
- ▶ encouraging people to use different languages by giving an example.

Progression up the scale is characterised as follows: at the A levels, the focus is on exploiting all possible resources in order to handle a simple everyday transaction. From the B levels, language begins to be manipulated creatively, with the user/learner alternating flexibly between languages at B2 in order to make others feel more comfortable, provide clarifications, communicate specialised information and in general increase the efficiency of communication. At the C levels this focus continues, with the addition of an ability to gloss and explain sophisticated abstract concepts in different languages. Overall there is also a progression from embedding single words/signs from other languages to explaining particularly apt expressions, and exploiting metaphors for effect.

Note: What is calibrated in this scale is the practical functional ability to exploit plurilingualism. In any particular context, when specific languages are concerned, users may wish to complete the descriptor by specifying those languages, replacing the expressions underlined and in italics in the descriptor.

For example, the B2 descriptor

Can make use of *different languages in their plurilingual repertoire* during collaborative interaction, in order to clarify the nature of a task, the main steps, the decisions to be taken and the outcomes expected

might be presented as:

Can make use of English, Spanish and French during collaborative interaction, in order to clarify the nature of a task, the main steps, the decisions to be taken and the outcomes expected.

Building on plurilingual repertoire	
C2	<p>Can interact in a multilingual context on abstract and specialised topics by alternating flexibly between <i>languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> and if necessary explaining the different contributions made.</p> <p>Can explore similarities and differences between metaphors and other figures of speech in <i>the languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i>, either for rhetorical effect or for fun.</p>
C1	<p>Can alternate between languages flexibly to facilitate communication in a multilingual context, summarising and glossing in <i>different languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> contributions to the discussion and texts referred to.</p> <p>Can participate effectively in a conversation in <i>two or more languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i>, adjusting to the changes of language and catering to the needs and linguistic skills of the interlocutors.</p> <p>Can use and explain specialised terminology from <i>another language in their plurilingual repertoire</i> more familiar to the interlocutor(s), in order to improve understanding in a discussion of abstract and specialised topics.</p> <p>Can respond spontaneously and flexibly in the appropriate language when someone else changes to <i>another language in their plurilingual repertoire</i>.</p> <p>Can support comprehension and discussion of a text spoken, signed or written in <i>one language</i> by explaining, summarising, clarifying and expanding it in <i>another language in their plurilingual repertoire</i>.</p>
B2	<p>**Can recognise the extent to which it is appropriate to make flexible use of <i>different languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> in a specific situation, in order to increase the efficiency of communication.</p> <p>**Can alternate efficiently between <i>languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> in order to facilitate comprehension with and between third parties who lack a common language.</p> <p>**Can introduce into an utterance an expression from <i>another language in their plurilingual repertoire</i> that is particularly apt for the situation/concept being discussed, explaining it for the interlocutor when necessary.</p> <p>Can alternate between <i>languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> in order to communicate specialised information and issues on a subject in their field of interest to different interlocutors.</p> <p>Can make use of <i>different languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> during collaborative interaction, in order to clarify the nature of a task, the main steps, the decisions to be taken and the outcomes expected.</p> <p>Can make use of <i>different languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> to encourage other people to use the language in which they feel more comfortable.</p>
B1	<p>Can exploit creatively their limited repertoire in <i>different languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> for everyday contexts, in order to cope with an unexpected situation.</p>
A2	<p>Can mobilise their limited repertoire in <i>different languages</i> in order to explain a problem or to ask for help or clarification.</p> <p>Can use simple words/signs and phrases from <i>different languages in their plurilingual repertoire</i> to conduct a simple, practical transaction or information exchange.</p> <p>Can use a simple word/sign from <i>another language in their plurilingual repertoire</i> to make themselves understood in a routine everyday situation, when they cannot think of an adequate expression in <i>the language being used</i>.</p>
A1	<p>Can use a very limited repertoire in <i>different languages</i> to conduct a very basic, concrete, everyday transaction with a collaborative interlocutor.</p>
Pre-A1	<p>No descriptors available</p>

Descriptors marked with asterisks (**) represent a high level for B2. They may also be suitable for the C levels.