Assessing the Linguistic Competence
of Austrian Language Learners within a National
and European Context

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für Little Big Brother Max
Mama
Papa
und
Robert

Then happy I that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove, nor be removed.
(William Shakespeare, Sonnet 25)

Acknowledgements

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A INTRODUCTION

Following the publication of the Council of Europe's seminal *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment,* a number of European countries have undertaken intense efforts to implement innovative measures in the areas of language learning and teaching, and to achieve a fair, communicative, and differentiated assessment of language competence. Especially the latter issue, i.e. fair assessment, is quite a sensitive area. The development of feasible guidelines to qualified assessment that is in keeping with the communicative approach[1] seems, at present, an extremely difficult task. Secondly, however, the topic does not bear superficial treatment, as a result of which experts all over Europe see themselves forced for the moment to leave some questions relating to assessment unanswered.

Austria, especially after achieving rather disappointing results in the PISA Study of 2000, showed a somewhat hasty reaction to these results and launched a number of reforms that were introduced rather on the spur of the moment, such as the reform of all curricula for Secondary Education. Thus, quite understandably, a number of teachers are increasingly reluctant to get involved in further reforms and attempts to introduce other innovations, even though the concepts and instruments that were recently introduced in Austrian schools, e.g. the European Language Portfolio, are indeed carefully designed and thought-through.

In my thesis, the following issues are dealt with in 3 major chapters:

Chapter 1 discusses eight publications or instruments that can be considered as likely to influence the learning, teaching, and assessment of languages. These are the following:

(1) The *Common European Framework of Reference*, which provides the basis for all the other instruments; (2) the framework of ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe); (3) the DIALANG Assessment System; (4) the *European Language Portfolio* as well as (5) online versions of the *European Language Portfolio*. Furthermore, (6) the Educational Standards for English, year 8 and 13 are discussed, which are currently being developed or piloted in Austria. Further attention is given to (7) the Austrian curricula for Secondary Education, and lastly (8), to innovative Austrian school book series such as *English to go*, which is based on the principles and ideas of the *Common European Framework of Reference* and the *European Language Portfolio*.

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[1] The development from traditional approaches towards language learning, teaching, and assessment towards a communicative approach is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 1.2.2.1.2.2.

My method is the same throughout these eight sub-chapters: The general introduction to the instruments, assessment systems or documents, is interwoven with the discussion of arguments relating to what sort of positive or negative impact the above-mentioned innovations are likely to have on the Austrian assessment system. Questions that arise in connection with these issues are posed in short concluding 'questions-relating-to-assessment'-chapters at the end of each section.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of an Austrian school and assessment system designed for the future, which was developed by the present writer and which takes account of the fact that assessment needs to be fair and differentiated but should also reflect a communicative approach towards languages in order to enhance students' motivation. Hence, the certificate form presented in this chapter is centred on the assessment of students' performance rather than on their knowledge of dates, facts, and grammatical structures. *Achievement Certificate 2525*, as I call this certificate prototype, is based, then, on descriptors for various areas of language education. Moreover, self-assessment is a fixed and indispensable element in this certificate.

Other suggestions as to how Austria's assessment culture might be changed is the abolition of marks and *Sitzenbleiben* as well as its replacement by the *Trampolining System*, which is intended to help language learners of all levels of competence and ability to reach their language learning goals.

Chapter 3 is an attempt to 'tie up loose ends', i.e. to discuss questions and aspects that might not have been answered or discussed in greater depth in the previous course of the paper. Moreover, the end of this chapter forms my conclusion, since Chapters 1.3 and 2 taken together already form a summary of the conclusions of the present thesis. More precisely, Chapter 1.3 presents and explains my concept and model of *The House of Innovative Language Learning*, which summarises in a visual form the relationship between all instruments that are discussed in Chapter 1, whereas Chapter 2 discusses how at least some of these conclusions can be put into practice.

Finally, I would like to mention at this point that I do not presume in the present paper to answer questions which experts all over Europe have so far been unable to answer in a satisfactory way. Rather, this thesis shows what recent innovations there are – starting from a European level and zooming in on the specifically Austrian situation – and how their interplay

and mutual influences could be put to good use in order to achieve an assessment culture which encourages students to study for the sake of learning languages rather than for merely achieving good marks.

1 CURRENT SITUATION AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

After the publication of the results of the PISA study[2] in 2000, a national debate arose about the question of what kind of reforms could set the Austrian school system on the path towards a top position in future PISA rankings. PISA as well as other projects, programmes, and recently developed instruments such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (cf. Chapter 1.2.1) have had the effect that comparability and objectivity of assessment have become the main focus of attention in these discussions, on a national as well as on European and international level.

The present chapter, therefore, has two major aims: firstly, the discussion of the present situation of Austrian teachers, who might well seem to be stuck in a largely deficient school system but who are, at the same time, in the very midst of innovative inter-European endeavours to bring about a sustained rectification of these deficiencies; secondly, I am going to discuss recent instruments and projects which have the potential of changing the Austrian approach towards language teaching, learning, and assessment. In doing so, special emphasis is put on the possible influence of these instruments on assessment and methods of assessment. Moreover, questions will be posed that arise with regard to these described effects, regardless of whether they are likely to be positive or negative.

1.1 Austria: Current situation

> Professional language testing is playing an increasingly important role in Austria as well as in all countries of the EU. Although language competence is being assessed in Austria at secondary and tertiary level in the educational system, professionalism in the current practice is largely missing. For instance, it is unknown what school-leaving certificates mean in terms of achievement in foreign languages. The reliability of the assessment procedures and of the resulting grades is unknown, and, consequently, information about validity does not exist. Examination content and format, as well as assessment criteria, [sic] vary from school to school. As a result, school-leaving examinations are neither comparable across schools nor, clearly, among different regions of the country. Also, not surprisingly, it is far from clear how these examinations relate to the Common European Framework. (LTC 2006 a)

The paragraph quoted above touches upon a few important issues with respect to the current situation and problems Austria has to face as regards marking and examinations. In fact, one is tempted to assign the blame for the main difficulties in the Austrian school system to one

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[2] PISA is the acronym for *Programme for International Student Assessment*. In intervals of three years, students from around 30 countries all over the world that participate in the programme are tested in the subjects or skills, respectively, of Reading, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Problem Solution. PISA is a decentralised OECD (*Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*) project, Austria's participation in and implementation of which was ordered by Elisabeth Gehrer, the Austrian Federal Minister for Education, Science and Culture (cf. PISA 2003: 2 ff).

major feature of this system in particular, namely the five grades to which we – and indeed many other countries – still adhere, thereby paying little attention to students' actual achievements, in the area of linguistic competence and otherwise.

1.1.1 The five grade grading system

As is mentioned in the quotation above, grades are awarded on the basis of criteria which are subjectively defined by teachers. Some teachers apply a very high standard, use effective and communicative teaching methods, and thus have students with a very high level of achievement who, when they take their school leaving exams, have attained an exceptionally high level of language competence in the languages they study, and especially in English. Other teachers, however, unfortunately have not attained a real mastery of English themselves, some lack the ability to encourage their students to become autonomous learners and develop an interest in their language learning and language experiences, whereas others merely apply too low a standard in their language lessons to be able to create an atmosphere of ambition and the requisite willingness on the part of learners to learn languages and to improve their language skills. In the final analysis, then, it is well-nigh impossible to determine the actual value and to compare the marks of students of one school – or even class – with the grades of students in another school or class. The result of this incommensurability is that grades in Austria have no significance in themselves and also fail to give a third party any real insight into the actual abilities and skills a student has – or has not – acquired.

One major problem of the five grade system is inherent in the criteria which the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (*Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur*/bm:bwk) formulated, and which are intended to serve as the basis of grading in Austria. In order to demonstrate beyond any doubt the insufficiency of these definitions I will quote them in full before proceeding to discussing them:

> Mit „Sehr gut" sind Leistungen zu beurteilen, mit denen der Schüler die nach Maßgabe des Lehrplans gestellten Anforderungen in der Erfassung und in der Anwendung des Lehrstoffes sowie in der Durchführung der Aufgaben in weit über das Wesentliche hinausgehendem Ausmaß erfüllt und, wo dies möglich ist, deutliche Eigenständigkeit beziehungsweise die Fähigkeit zur selbstständigen Anwendung seines Wissens und Könnens auf für ihn neuartige Aufgaben zeigt.[3] (bm:bwk 2000 c: 20)

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[3] This definition says that the grade *Sehr gut*, i.e. the top grade, which corresponds to grade A in English-speaking countries, is to be awarded if a student's achievement **exceeds by far** the requirements that she should be able to meet according to the curriculum. Moreover, the student needs to act in a **clearly autonomous and independent way**, where this is possible, and to demonstrate the ability to apply her skills and knowledge autonomously to tasks that are new to them.

The criteria for the best grade *Sehr gut* are, in fact, neither clearly comprehensible nor do they function well as clear-cut guidelines, but above all, many teachers would agree that hardly any of their students who are given this grade fulfil the criterion of attaining an achievement that goes far beyond the requirements that they are expected to fulfil. In actual practice, it can be said that students who fulfil the requirements in quite an autonomous and, perhaps, creative way and who, moreover, do not make more than one or two mistakes are awarded a *Sehr gut*. Moreover, the question arises of what precisely is meant by exercises that are new to the students. Are such tasks stipulated to be new in terms of their contents, in terms of the types of exercise they represent, in terms of the form of the response that is expected, or in terms of all of these aspects?

> Mit „Gut" sind Leistungen zu beurteilen, mit denen der Schüler die nach Maßgabe des Lehrplans gestellten Anforderungen in der Erfassung und in der Anwendung des Lehrstoffes sowie in der Durchführung der Aufgaben in über das Wesentliche hinausgehendem Ausmaß erfüllt und, wo dies möglich ist, merkliche Ansätze zur Eigenständigkeit beziehungsweise bei entsprechender Anleitung die Fähigkeit zur Anwendung seines Wissens und Könnens auf für ihn neuartige Aufgaben zeigt.[4] (Ibid)

In fact, and this makes this second definition above just as problematic as the first one, students who are awarded a real-life B grade are not usually expected to exceed the requirements. If teachers use assessment scales for text grading in Upper Secondary Education which differentiate between various language skills and contents, the actual grading is, perhaps, more likely to come close to the official definition. However, even if some teachers do actually grade in accordance to these definitions, that is not enough.

> Mit „Befriedigend" sind Leistungen zu beurteilen, mit denen der Schüler die nach Maßgabe des Lehrplans gestellten Anforderungen in der Erfassung und in der Anwendung des Lehrstoffes sowie in der Durchführung der Aufgaben in den wesentlichen Bereichen zur Gänze erfüllt; dabei werden Mängel in der Durchführung durch merkliche Ansätze zur Eigenständigkeit ausgeglichen.[5] (Ibid)

It seems fair to state that students who receive the grade *Befriedigend* do not always fulfil the essential requirements, as is suggested in the definition above, but often teachers' reasons for awarding a C lie mainly in the fact that a piece of work is a bit better than a piece of work that would deserve a *Genügend*, i.e. the next lower grade. Secondly, the average *Befriedigend* is not the grade for a level on which students actually show any obvious potential to act autonomously.

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[4] This definition says that the grade *Gut*, i.e. the second best grade, which corresponds to grade B in English-speaking countries, is to be awarded if a student's achievement **exceeds** the requirements that she should be able to meet according to the curriculum. Moreover, the student is expected to show potential to act autonomously and independently, where this is possible, and to demonstrate the ability to apply her skills and knowledge autonomously to tasks that are new to her, if they receive appropriate instructions.

[5] This definition says that the grade *Befriedigend*, which corresponds to grade C in English-speaking countries, is to be awarded if a student's achievement **fully fulfils** the **essential** requirements that she should be able to meet according to the curriculum. Deficiencies in performance need to be compensated for by the obvious potential to act autonomously and independently.

> Mit „Genügend" sind Leistungen zu beurteilen, mit denen der Schüler die nach Maßgabe des Lehrplans gestellten Anforderungen in der Erfassung und in der Anwendung des Lehrstoffes sowie in der Durchführung der Aufgaben in den wesentlichen Bereichen überwiegend erfüllt.[6] (Ibid)

In actual practice, *For the most part* means that a student needs to achieve 60 per cent of the possible top score in order to receive a pass grade, i.e. a *Genügend*. Often, for instance with grammar exercises that are assessed etc., teachers tend to define a maximum of mistakes which students are allowed to make, then simply count the mistakes and give those students the fail grade, i.e. a *Nicht genügend*, whose papers exceed the permitted number of mistakes. One major problem with this method of grading, however, lies in the fact that a considerable number of teachers do not distinguish adequately between serious mistakes and minor mistakes. Teachers that do make this distinction, on the other hand, often apply criteria which other teachers would never choose to apply. Thus, grading in Austria is a very subjective process – especially when it comes to assessing and grading language competence – a situation which could be partly avoided if there were more detailed and clear-cut definitions of what a student needs to achieve and to be able to do in a language in order to receive a particular grade.

> Mit „Nicht genügend" sind Leistungen zu beurteilen, mit denen der Schüler nicht einmal alle Erfordernisse für die Beurteilung mit „Genügend" (Abs. 5) erfüllt. (Ibid)

The official criteria for a negative grade, which are quoted above, are actually not a definition of any specific criteria but merely the statement that any achievement that is not good enough for a D deserves negative grading. Thus, however, only the students' deficiencies are pointed out, whereas in a more motivating and innovative definition of grades one would step back from listing deficiencies and rather state exactly what shortcomings there are. Ideally, however, negative grades should be done away with entirely, and teachers should try to formulate in positive terms what abilities a student has, even at a very low level of language competence. The concrete reasons for undertaking steps in that important direction are discussed below.

1.1.2 Other deficiencies of the Austrian school system

Closely connected with the issue of the five grade system is the issue of the so-called *Sitzenbleiben*, which is the Austrian colloquial expression for having to **repeat one year**[7]. In

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[6] This definition says that the grade *Genügend*, which corresponds to grade D in English-speaking countries, is to be awarded if a student's achievement **fulfils for the most part** the **essential** requirements that she should be able to meet according to the curriculum.

[7] When concepts or terms are introduced or mentioned for the first time, they are highlighted through bold print.

Austria, students who have the negative final grade *Nicht genügend* in too many[8] subjects and also fail the re-examinations that take place at the beginning of September, before the new school year starts, have to repeat the entire school year in which they got too many negative grades. Unfortunately, however, this repetition system has quite a great number of negative effects; seen from the point of view of a disinterested observer, one would have a hard time finding arguments in favour of *Sitzenbleiben*. Some of the negative consequences are:

1. First of all, students who have to repeat one whole year have to leave behind all their schoolmates and friends who have passed the preceding year, but also teachers whom they might have come to trust and respect, and thus often feel alone in their new classes, where they have to adapt to students and teachers they do not know. Sometimes, of course, such students are additionally filled with feelings of self-doubt and insufficiency, and frequently have to face trouble at their homes due to a failure ambitious parents are unable to understand or accept.

2. Students who have to repeat one year do not simply receive special instruction for the subject(s) concerned but have in fact to repeat the whole year, including lessons in all subjects. This entails, of course, that a student who has difficulties in languages and who received an E in English, French, and Latin, for instance, has to go through the same subject syllabus again in subjects such as mathematics, chemistry, physical education, musical education, biology, etc, even though she might have had an A or B in those subjects. This frequently leads to boredom, rebellion, and anger, especially because teachers at most schools use the same school books series for all classes in their respective subjects. Thus, students already know many exercises from the preceding year, and sometimes even take their old school books to simply transfer their previous answers into the new ones instead of practising the same contents and skills over and over again.

3. Students who have to repeat a year thus lose one whole year of their lives which they could certainly make better use of in their later course of education, e.g. for going abroad, etc. Therefore, it might be more reasonable to develop a special remedial course system which students who – perhaps constantly – fall below their classes' learning goals have to attend.

The second negative influence the Austrian approach towards assessment and grading has on students is the power it gives teachers to use (negative) grades in order to exert considerable

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[8] What is meant by ‚too many' depends on what grades a student receives in all the other subjects, on how a staff conference considers her chances and ability to improve, and on whether she passes the re-examination(s) in the September, when the new school year starts.

pressure on their students in order to make them study. It is fair to say, in fact, that in Austria grades are not so much used to show progress or to create a positive working atmosphere but to place the sword of Damocles above their students' heads in the form of a negative grade. Sadly, the message our students are thus given is *If you don't do X, you will get a five!*, which creates pressure and a fear of bad grades and grading in general in students instead of motivating them to study for the sake of the improvement of their skills. Hence, for the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture the best steps to take would be

- the abolition of *Sitzenbleiben*,
- the promotion of clear definitions of grading criteria, and
- to train teachers to pass on motivating messages to their students, such as *If you do X, you will get better; you will be able then to communicate about Y! Isn't that great?*

The last of the three measures might, at first glance, seem over-idealistic: Many people might think that a student would only laugh and decide not to study at all if she was told without the threat of any consequences that learning something will enable her to express something that is desirable to express. However, the fact that many students would probably react in such a way – because there would be no threat of failure – proves that the values we pass on to our children and students are inappropriate. This issue is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Another adverse side effect of grades and the fear of having to repeat a year is the flourishing business of **private tuition** as well as an explosion of prices for private tuition. In Austria, there is a well-established tradition of 'private tuition', which means that older students or university students teach the respective subject on a private basis, and usually at a lower price than at institutes offering private tuition and remedial courses. Such institutes offer 'official private tuition', often at a higher price, which, however, usually includes a 'passing warranty', i.e. they guarantee that if the student does not pass her re-exam in September, parents will get their money back. Average prices for private tuition are between € 15 and 30 for lessons of 50 or 60 minutes. Thus, parents who have to send their children to private tuition lessons often face serious financial problems and are forced to cut back on other areas of family life so as to make up for an insufficiency that is not caused by themselves but by deficiencies in the Austrian assessment system.

Lastly, many language tests and examinations that take place in everyday Austrian school life put strong emphasis on assessing students' **knowledge**, rather than their **performance**. This means that the knowledge of a grammatical rule, a few historical dates, or some genealogical trees of the British Royals is considered more important when it comes to assessment than how well students perform in communicative activities and situations. And

yet, the development of a student's ability to communicate and perform successfully should be the major objective in language lessons, since nowadays all kinds of data, dates, and facts can easily be looked up in the World Wide Web and in (online) high quality encyclopaedias and dictionaries. Therefore, it would appear to be more important to be able to handle everyday situations successfully than just to retrieve data from one's mind which one has been forced to learn by rote.

1.1.2 The role of Austrian teachers

Even though there is always an exception to the rule, there is still a strong tendency among Austrian teachers to consider themselves as 'the sage on the stage' with respect to the role they play in the classroom. In more concrete terms, many teachers think that as teachers they have to act as role models for the perfectly educated and erudite person who knows everything, one adverse effect of which is either an overestimation of their own knowledge, or the self-imposed pressure of having to, or at least claiming to know everything. Secondly, teachers who have adopted and cling to the view that they are the (only) ones who know everything also often have the feeling that they are the only ones who are able to present a topic, grammatical rule, etc. in a competent way. In their lessons, this has the negative effect that students hardly get the chance to speak themselves, let alone to get really involved themselves in a topic by doing autonomous project work, or by discovering grammatical rules on their own, in pairs, or in groups.

It is to be welcomed, then, that new instruments and guidelines have been developed in Europe which will in the future contribute to a major change in teachers' perceptions of their role, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the *European Language Portfolio*. The new role teachers may adopt is no longer that of the 'sage on the stage' but that of the 'guide by the side'.

1.2 Recent innovations and trends: The impact of European developments on the Austrian situation

1.2.1 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)

1.2.1.1 The CEFR: A general introduction

When the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*[9], hereafter CEFR[10], was published in its final version in 2001, very few people would have thought that this publication, and above all its concept of Common Reference Levels of language proficiency, would trigger a substantial revolution in the sectors of language learning, teaching and assessment.

The first steps towards the CEFR were taken in November 1991, when an Intergovernmental Symposium was held in Rüschlikon, Switzerland, on "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, Certification". At this symposium, the necessity of a common European framework was recognised (cf. CEFR 2001: 5 f.) and further steps were initiated.

The result of the work that followed is the CEFR, which is thus an instrument that is intended to provide a "common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks etc. across Europe" (ibid, 1), and which uses so-called descriptors to specify what the learners of languages should be able to do so as to "use a language for communication[,] and what knowledge and skills they have to develop" (ibid) in order to be able to "act effectively" (ibid). Moreover, it provides language teachers and users with question boxes at the end of each chapter which encourage reflection on how to teach, assess and learn, and in which important issues are raised concerning the needs and prerequisites of language learners.

The CEFR consists of nine chapters, some of which have an introductory character, informing the user of the CEFR about the document's purposes and backgrounds.

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[9] Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[10] Keith Morrow (2004: 7) states that "The full title of the CEF is 'The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Learning, Teaching, Assessment'. The key words in this are unfortunately two which are often left out: of reference." Interestingly, Morrow's book is called *Insights from the Common European Framework*, and he and all his contributors consistently use the abbreviation CEF and thus, ironically, follow in the footsteps of those who leave out the words "of reference" out of ignorance.

1.2.1.1.1 Principles, objectives, and effects

What the CEFR puts great emphasis on throughout the whole publication is the cultural context in which language and language-based (inter-)action takes place. This focus on context, of course, shows awareness of the fact that language is never used without its users having a cultural background and purpose. Naturally, cultural backgrounds and attitudes differ between the various European countries, and sometimes even within countries. This "rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures" (CEFR 2001: 2) is rightly considered by the authors of the CEFR a "valuable common resource to be protected and developed" (ibid) that should be converted "from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding" (ibid). Moreover, the Council of Europe wishes to "promote methods of modern language teaching which will strengthen independence of thought, judgement and action, combined with social skills and responsibility" (ibid, 3), an objective which, as can be seen from the results of a recent study by go-international (cf. ibw 2006), has also been proved necessary from the perspective of Austrian employers in the economy sector. According to this study, which was the first study across various branches of industry and touched on the issues of needs and quality in the employees' knowledge of foreign languages in companies, the need for employees who speak foreign languages, and above all English, is noticeably increasing (cf. ibid), as can be seen from the following figures:
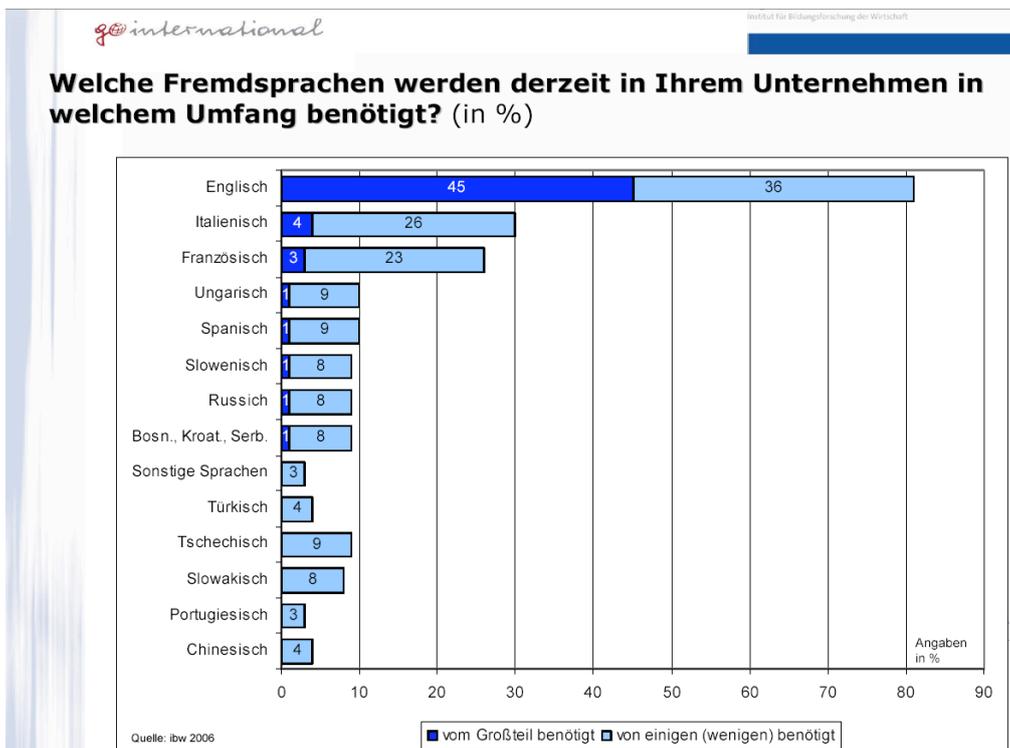
Figure 1: Which languages Austrian employees need

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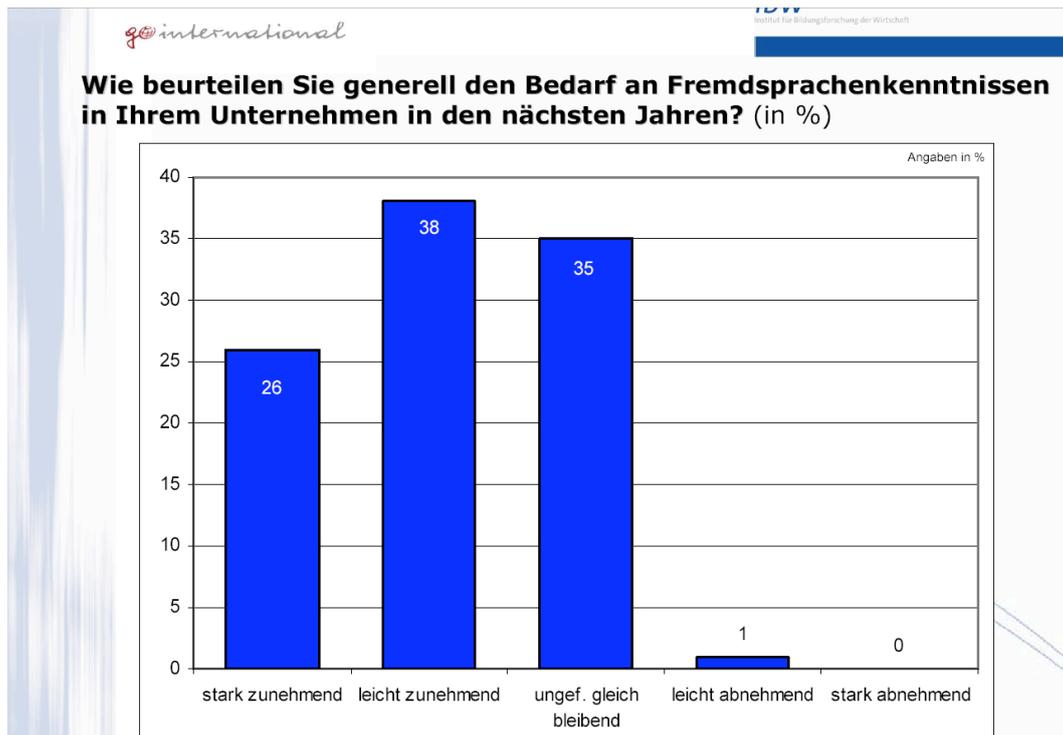
Figure 2: To what extent the necessity of knowing languages might increase within the next few years

The CEFR has influenced language learning, teaching and assessment all across Europe in that it meets its original objective and helps facilitate "mutual recognition of qualifications, and communication concerning objectives and achievement standards [by providing] agreed common reference standards, purely descriptive in nature" (Trim 2001: 5). The keyword in this objective is 'descriptive', as is explicitly mentioned in the first chapter of the CEFR (cf. 2001: 7 f.) as well as, among others, by Morrow (cf. 2004: 7), who points out that the Council of Europe attempted to develop a descriptive rather than a prescriptive and dogmatic instrument which should convince its users through its "flexibility" and "multi-purpose" (CEFR 2001: 7), its capability of further refinement and extension, its dynamic, its user-friendliness and non-dogmatism (cf. ibid, 8).

The above-mentioned common reference standards are short descriptive statements on what users of a language should be able to do in a foreign language in order to be able to claim to have reached a certain level of proficiency in the language concerned.

The six levels of proficiency on which the CEFR and all of its descriptors are based are called **Common Reference Levels** and are grouped into three broad levels – A, B, and C – A being the lowest level, and C being the level of highest achievement in a language (cf. CEFR 2001: 22 f.). These three groups of levels are further sub-divided into the levels A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2, each of these levels having a descriptive label, as can be seen from the following figure:
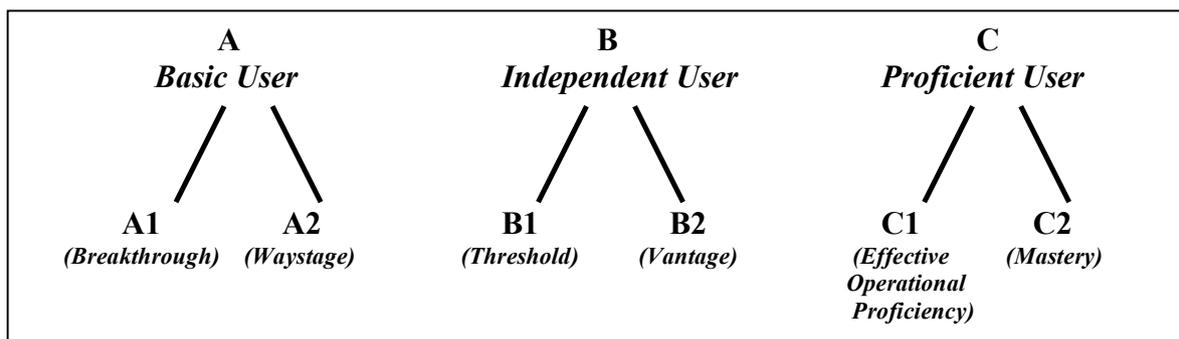
Figure 3: from CEFR 2001: 23

However, the six levels system has not been established, nor is it intended, to "divide the whole learning world into six." (cf. Heyworth 2004: 17) Rather, each user of the CEFR should exploit it to her needs, i.e. an employer may consider the three broad levels to be sufficient for a job advertisement. Teachers, who attempt to make pupils aware of their progress, may prefer smaller sub-levels (cf. ibid) so as to increase the motivation in the language classroom.

The **descriptors for Common Reference Levels** should ideally meet four criteria, two of which are related to description issues, the other two being related to measurement issues:

Firstly, scales in the CEFR should be context-free and yet context-relevant, i.e. they are not intended to be produced for a specific context such as the school context and then to be applied in a totally different context, but they should be "relatable to or translatable into each and every relevant context – and appropriate for the function they are used for in that context" (cf. CEFR 2001: 21).

Secondly, descriptor scales must be based on theories of language competence, but still remain user-friendly, which is rather difficult to achieve, partly due to the inadequacy of the available theory and research (cf. ibid).

As regards measurement issues, the CEFR descriptor scales should be objectively determined "in that they are based on a theory of measurement" (ibid) in order to avoid "systematising error through adopting unfounded conventions and 'rules of thumb' from the authors, particular groups of practitioners" (ibid) or already existing scales which may have been consulted.

Lastly, the number of levels should be high enough to show progression on the one hand but an unreasonably high number of sub-scales should be avoided on the other, so that rationally consistent distinctions still remain possible.

What is referred to as the Global Scale (cf. Fig. 4) of the CEFR is the most generally worded descriptor scale. It is holistic and thus incorporates learners' competences not only from one field of linguistic competence, but each descriptor includes more than one of the five skills between which the CEFR differentiates, namely (1) *oral production*, (2) *written production*, (3) *listening*, (4) *reading* and (5) *spoken interaction*. At this point it should be mentioned that not all skills are mentioned in every descriptor of each level, since there are activities which learners cannot perform unless they have already reached a minimum level of proficiency. Conversely, there might be activities which cease to be an explicit aim of language learning at a higher level of proficiency (cf. ibid, 25). For example, being able to "understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type" (Level A1) is no longer mentioned in descriptors for higher Levels, since such abilities are preliminary to reaching a higher Level of mastery.

Proficient	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
User	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
User	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
User	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Figure 4: The CEFR Global Scale (CEFR 2001: 24)

As can be seen from the above figure, one of the main features of these so-called *Can do*-descriptors is that they are **positively worded**, i.e. it is not the language user's weaknesses which are emphasised but the scale describes what the language user is already able to do in the foreign language – even if at a lower level of proficiency it might seem rather hard to find a positive wording for a learner's achievement. Being positively worded, the *Can do*-descriptors "are intended to demonstrate that even 'low' levels of language learning have value and worth" (Heyworth 2004: 16). This is a motivational factor which has a considerable influence on learning and assessing.

Apart from the Global Scale there are two more general scales which are used in the CEFR for illustrating and introducing the Common Reference Levels, namely a **self-assessment grid** which serves the purpose of helping learners evaluate their overall level of language proficiency (cf. Appendix 1; CEFR 2001: 26 f.), and the **table of qualitative aspects of spoken language use**, which gives a description of levels of competence regarding the aspects of range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence (cf. Appendix 2; CEFR 2001: 28). These three scales are summaries of the 58 more detailed illustrative scales of *Can do*-descriptors that occur in the CEFR in chapters 3, 4 and 5 (cf. CEFR 2001: 25 ff.) and have been developed on the basis of the outcomes of a Swiss research project whose purpose was the conception of "transparent statements of proficiency of different aspects of the CEFR descriptive scheme, which might also contribute to the development of a European Language Portfolio" (CEFR 2001: 217).

1.2.1.1.2 Assessment in the CEFR

Although there is much more to the CEFR than the *Can do*-descriptors and illustrative scales, especially the Global Scale "has had so much influence on teaching in many countries that people often speak of it as if it was the whole of the Framework" (cf. Heyworth 2004: 17).

However, there is a whole chapter of the CEFR that is dedicated to the issue of assessment, namely Chapter nine, *Assessment*. As Heyworth (cf. ibid, 21) points out, Chapters three, *Common Reference Levels*, and nine together provide a useful guide to attaining a sensible and accurate assessment of language proficiency and language achievement.

As regards the structure of Chapter nine, there is first of all a rather helpful introduction to terminological issues in connection with assessment. In this introduction it is stated very rightly that any discussion of assessment should be guided by the consideration of three main concepts, namely *validity*, *reliability*, and *feasibility*.

If a test or assessment procedure is *valid*, it can be demonstrated that what is being assessed is what is intended to be assessed in the context concerned (cf. CEFR 2001: 177) and that "the information gained is an accurate representation of the proficiency of the candidates concerned" (cf. ibid).

A test or assessment procedure which shows high *reliability* is a test which can be administered twice, three times or more often but still makes possible through its conception that the same rank order of the candidates is replicated time after time.

Feasibility, with regard to an assessment procedure, refers to the practicability of the procedure, i.e. an assessor, who has to operate under considerable time pressure, is confronted with only a "limited sample of performance" (ibid, 178) and thus can only handle a limited number of categories as criteria (cf. ibid). A test, therefore, which is selective in choosing the criteria of assessment, is feasible.[11]

Next, the CEFR states in what ways assessors, teachers, and indeed language learners, can make use of the CEFR as a resource for assessment:

1. For the specification of the content of tests and examinations:
2. For stating the criteria to determine the attainment of a learning objective:
3. For describing the levels of proficiency in existing tests and examinations thus enabling comparisons to be made across different systems of qualifications: (ibid)

As regards the first point, the authors of the CEFR emphasise – as they have done several times earlier in the document – the importance of a communicative approach towards the assessment of language competence, which, in turn, requires the assessors to sample a range of relevant types of discourse, as are described in Chapter four, *Language Use and the Language Learner*.

Basically, the CEFR differentiates between (1) descriptors of communicative activities which are to be found in Chapter four, and (2) descriptors of aspects of proficiency that are related to special competences and can be found in Chapter five, *The User/learner's competences* (cf. ibid, 178 f.). A very helpful list of all the communicative activities for which there are descriptors in the CEFR as well as the pages on which the descriptors can be found in the English version of the CEFR has been put together by the authors of *Insights from the Common European Framework* (Morrow 2004). In order to give some impression of what such a specified descriptor scale looks like, I shall provide the following two exemplary *Can do*-descriptor scales:

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[11] For more detailed information on *reliability* and *validity*, and *feasibility/practicability*, which have to be seen as clearly defined technical terms, cf. Davies' (1990: 21 ff.) interesting discussion of the issue, as well as Weir (1990: 22-31), Harrison (1983: 10-13), Chauncey/Dobbin (1970: 60-68), and Hughes (2003: 26-52).

	ADDRESSING AUDIENCES
C2	*Can present a complex topic confidently and articulately to an audience unfamiliar with it, structuring and adapting the talk flexibly to meet the audience's needs.* *Can handle difficult and even hostile questioning.*
C1	*Can give a clear, well-structured presentation of a complex subject, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples.* *Can handle interjections well, responding spontaneously and almost effortlessly.*
B2	*Can give a clear, systematically developed presentation, with highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.* *Can depart spontaneously from a prepared text and follow up interesting points raised by members of the audience, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression.*
	Can give a clear, prepared presentation, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. *Can take a series of follow up questions with a degree of fluency and spontaneity which poses no strain for either him/herself or the audience.*
B1	*Can give a prepared straightforward presentation on a familiar topic within his/her field which is clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision.* *Can take follow up questions, but may have to ask for repetition if the speech was rapid.*
A2	*Can give a short, rehearsed presentation on a topic pertinent to his/her everyday life, briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions.* *Can cope with a limited number of straightforward follow up questions.*
	Can give a short, rehearsed, basic presentation on a familiar subject. *Can answer straightforward follow up questions if he/she can ask for repetition and if some help with the formulation of his/her reply is possible.*
A1	*Can read a very short, rehearsed statement − e.g. to introduce a speaker, propose a toast.*

Figure 5: CEFR scale for Oral Production: Addressing Audiences (CEFR 2001: 60)

	UNDERSTANDING CONVERSATION BETWEEN NATIVE SPEAKERS
C2	*As C1*
C1	*Can easily follow complex interactions between third parties in group discussion and debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics.*
B2	*Can keep up with an animated conversation between native speakers.*
	Can with some effort catch much of what is said around him/her, but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way.
B1	*Can generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect.*
A2	*Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her, when it is conducted slowly and clearly.*
A1	*No descriptor available*

Figure 6: CEFR scale for Aural Reception (Listening):
Understanding Conversation between Native Speakers (ibid, 66)

As can be seen from the above scales, their detailed wording can help assessors evaluate their students' achievement appropriately. Arguably, moreover, the usage of such scales may help

to prevent teachers from over- or underestimating their level of proficiency. As is suggested in the CEFR, teachers who feel the need for even more detailed *Can do*-descriptors may further sub-divide some or all descriptors to meet their needs (cf. ibid, 31 f.).

As is reflected in the action-oriented approach of the CEFR, language users do and should have a repertoire of various strategies, which are a means they exploit to

> mobilise and balance his or her resources, to activate skills and procedures, in order to fulfil the demands of communication in context and successfully complete the task in question in the most comprehensive or most economical way feasible depending on his or her precise purpose. (Ibid, 57)

The key words in the above quotation are certainly the activation of skills, communication in context, and precise purpose. In order to apply communication strategies, the language user (sub-consciously) applies metacognitive principles such as pre-planning, execution, monitoring, repair-action, compensating, and message adjustment (cf. ibid, 57 ff.).

The CEFR aptly distinguishes (1) *avoidance strategies*, i.e. strategies of decreasing ambitions so that they fit resources, which maintains successful communication in a more limited area, and (2) *achievement strategies*, i.e. ways of "scaling up and finding ways to cope" (ibid, 63) by adopting a positive approach towards a language user's own resources: she may approximate or overgeneralise with "simpler language" (ibid), use paraphrasing or the strategy of describing aspects of what she wishes to express, or even "foreignise" (ibid) words or phrases from her first language (L1) (cf. ibid).

This foreignising strategy may work better between, for instance, Romance languages such as Spanish or Italian, since many expressions are fairly similar in languages from one language family. However, even between English and German, German and French, or French and English, this strategy is at times both helpful and successful, because of the common Indo-European roots of many European languages, as well as due to loan words or commonly accepted foreign words.

The foreignising of words is highly important as a strategy. Moreover, it is also one aspect of what the CEFR promotes and wishes to advertise under the term ***plurilingualism***. This concept has gained importance in the Council of Europe's language policy over the past few years and stands out due to its notion of language experience. This means that the term *plurilingualism* is not to be equated with *multilingualism*, which is "the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society" (cf. ibid, 4 f.). While the latter may be achieved through offering more foreign languages in an educational system, by stimulating people to learn more than one foreign language, or by "reducing the dominant position of English in international communication", plurilingualism means quite the contrary of co-existing concepts of language in a language user's mind. It

means that a learner's first language and culture as well as all foreign languages and cultures she knows – wherever she might have acquired or learnt these languages and cultures – should not be kept in "strictly separated mental compartments" (ibid) but all linguistic and cultural knowledge should contribute to a communicative competence of the language user's, in which languages "interrelate and interact" (ibid). Having developed plurilingual competences, a person can then

> call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. For instance, partners may switch from one language or dialect to another, exploiting the ability of each to express themselves in one language and to understand the other; or a person may call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, written or even spoken, in a previously 'unknown' language, recognising words from a common international store in a new guise. (Ibid)

With regard to the (teachers') aims in terms of teaching and assessing, the promotion of *plurilingualism* and effective communication is certainly one of the most pioneering and one of the most significant passages in the CEFR.

Closely related to the important notions of *purpose* and *context* is the keyword **domain**, about which much has been written over the past few years, not only in the CEFR, which defines four main domains (i.e. spheres of action, here: places of language use). In the CEFR, it is acknowledged, however, that ultimately there is an indeterminate number of possible domains (cf. ibid, 45). The four above-mentioned domains which, according to the CEFR, should be distinguished as a minimum, are the following:

- the **personal** domain, in which the person concerned lives as a private individual, centred on home life with family and friends, and engages in individual practices such as reading for pleasure, keeping a personal diary, pursuing a special interest or hobby, etc.;
- the **public** domain, in which the person concerned acts as a member of the general public, or of some organisation, and is engaged in transactions of various kinds for a veriety of purposes;
- the **occupational** domain, in which the person concerned is engaged in his or her job or profession;
- the **educational** domain, in which the person concerned is engaged in organised learning, especially (but not necessarily) within an educational institution. (ibid)

Not only does communication take place in different domains, but other factors should be considered, too, when talking about the issue of language use and language learning. **Situational aspects** that have an external influence on the conditions under which communication occurs include *location*, *institution* or *organisation*, *persons* involved, *objects* (animate and inanimate), *events*, *operations*, and *texts*. A situation may be internally influenced, on the other hand, by constraints that are imposed on the user or learner and her interlocutors. Such possible constraints affect (1) physical conditions for speech and/or writing – e.g. clarity of pronunciation, ambient noise, distortions, poor print, poor lighting, etc. – as well as (2) social conditions – e.g. number and familiarity of interlocutors and the social relationship between them, presence or absence of an audience or eavesdroppers, etc. –

and (3) time pressures – e.g. preparation time, limitations on time allowed, anxiety-producing situations such as examinations, etc. (cf. ibid, 46 ff.).

The CEFR provides an entirely helpful and quite exhaustive grid in which the four umbrella-domains are related to some possible situational aspects and which displays neatly what situations may arise depending on various combinations of domain plus concrete persons, texts etc. (cf. Appendix 4).

Especially for teachers – who are simultaneously assessors in Austria and may therefore be called teacher-assessors[12] – it is highly important to be able to tell their students for what purpose an activity they have to perform is intended. Thus, they may not only need to consider the *domain* in which the activity takes place, but they should also make entirely clear in a task they give to their students, in which *locations* and at which *time* the (simulated) situation occurs, and at what *institution* or *organisation*, since the structure and conventions of these institutions may highly influence the organisation and structure of the task to be performed. Also, the *persons* and *objects* involved, the *events* that take place, the operations that are to be performed by the persons involved, as well as the *texts* that are likely to be encountered in this concrete situation, are vital for the students' understanding of a communicative activity, and above all its purpose.

It goes without saying that the basis for each and every valid, reliable, and especially fair assessment is that the assessor should state his or her objectives in as clear and concrete a way as possible. For this, the CEFR provides a profound basis, not least because it encourages teachers and assessors to ponder their students' needs and previous knowledge as well as the question of how to facilitate the students' development of the necessary knowledge and skills. This encouragement to reflect occurs in many passages of the CEFR, even where the general descriptors and *Can do*-descriptors may not be precise or detailed enough for immediate implementation in the school context and where thus further sub-division of the scales seems necessary.

In terms of assessment, teacher-assessors can consult the CEFR in quite a number of ways: Firstly, the above-mentioned communicative language activities may be exploited "to develop a specification for the kinds of assessment tasks, e.g. a speaking assessment ought to encompass both sustained spoken production and spontaneous spoken interaction" (North 2004: 82). Secondly, the CEFR provides its users with a list of objectives regarding communicative language competences, the usage of which North suggests for the development of a "specification for tests of linguistic competences" (ibid).

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[12]Hereafter, where teachers in Austria, or teachers from other countries who have a role similar to Austrian teachers, are meant, the term *teacher-assessor* is used instead of the term *teacher*.

In the CEFR, *linguistic competence* is not a singular term. It puts (1) *linguistic competences* under the umbrella term *communicative language competences*, together with (2) *sociolinguistic competences* and (3) *pragmatic competences*. In the sub-chapter on linguistic competences, the authors of the CEFR rightly acknowledge that it is arguably impossible to develop an exhaustive description of any language "as a formal system" (CEFR 2001: 108), due to the complexity and constant development of any language system as well as the fact that all languages of a "large, diversified, advanced society" (ibid, 108 f.) are too complex to allow any one of its native speakers to claim to have complete mastery of the language concerned (cf. ibid). Thus, it seems impossible to develop one "universal model of description for all languages" (ibid, 109), nor have recent attempts to determine linguistic universals turned out to be successful enough to allow their immediate application to the facilitation of language teaching, assessing, and learning (cf. ibid). The CEFR, at any rate, distinguishes the following six linguistic competences (a-f), some of which are discussed in the following in greater depth than other categories from the CEFR because of their superior relevance in connection with assessment and thus this paper's contents: (a) lexical competence, (b) grammatical competence, (c) semantic competence, (d) phonological competence, (e) orthographic competence, (f) orthoepic competence.

The knowledge of the vocabulary of a language and the capability of applying this knowledge is called **lexical competence** (a). It consists of lexical elements, i.e. fixed expressions and single word forms on the one hand, and grammatical elements on the other. Sentential formulae, phrasal idioms, fixed frames, phrasal verbs, and fixed collocations belong to the group of fixed expressions, whereas members of the so-called open word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) belong to the group of single word forms – note, however, that open word classes may include closed lexical sets, such as months of the year, days of the week, weights and measures. Grammatical elements are members of closed word classes. The CEFR provides a list of grammatical elements of English (e.g. articles, quantifiers, auxiliary verbs, etc.) as well as illustrative descriptors for the lexical competences Vocabulary Range and Vocabulary Control. (Cf. ibid, 110 f.)

Semantic competence (c) refers to a language user's "awareness and control of the organisation of meaning" (ibid, 115) in a language.

Phonological competence (d) refers to the competence to perceive and produce the phonemes, allophones, distinctive features, the syllable structure and prosody of a language (cf. ibid, 116 f.).

Orthographic competence (e) refers to the competence to perceive and produce the symbols that make up written texts in a language (cf. ibid, 117).

Orthoepic competence (f) refers to the competence to produce orally words which have hitherto only been encountered in written form, i.e. this competence includes the knowledge of spelling conventions and at least the passive knowledge of the phonetic alphabet for the consultation of dictionaries, etc. (cf. ibid, 117 f.).

Grammatical competence (b) is the knowledge of the grammatical resources of a language and the ability to use this knowledge. Grammar can be defined as "the set of principles governing the assembly of elements into meaningful labelled and bracketed strings (sentences)" (ibid, 113). This competence includes the ability to produce and recognise correct phrases that are formed in accordance with this set of principles – however, not by simply "memorising and reproducing them as fixed formulae" (ibid) but by internalising these principles.

Starr Keddle (cf. 2004: 43) states very aptly that in terms of its application in schools the CEFR's insufficient statements on grammar confront teachers with challenges because "it doesn't measure grammar-based progression, [which] creates a barrier between the descriptors and the students' achievements" (ibid). Indeed, when it comes to grammar, the CEFR could and should have gone into greater detail than just to provide an illustrative descriptor scale for grammatical accuracy (cf. Figure 7 below), since the fact that parameters of evaluating a language user's language proficiency are given, does not necessarily imply – nor should it imply – that grammatical competence is the primary and most important competence a learner should achieve to develop.

	GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY
C2	*Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).*
C1	*Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot.*
B2	*Good grammatical control; occasional 'slips' or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect.*
	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding.
B1	*Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express.*
	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.
A2	*Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes – for example tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is usually clear what he/she is trying to say.*
A1	*Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learnt repertoire.*

Figure 7: The CEFR scale for Grammatical Accuracy (CEFR 2001: 114)

As can be seen from the scale above, the descriptors of grammatical accuracy are not entirely positively worded, which is not motivating for users and reflects a very traditional approach towards grammar. Unfortunately, moreover, the value of this scale is thus considerably diminished since statements such as "but still systematically makes basic mistakes – for example tends to mix up tenses and forget [sic] to mark agreement" (Level A2) are not at all in keeping with what the CEFR descriptor criterion of positive wording is all about.

However, one must insist at this point that the CEFR's necessary and commendable promotion of communicative language competence, the main focus of which is successful communication rather than grammatical correctness, must not be subverted by teachers and assessors misreading the CEFR and claiming that grammar is of minor importance only when it comes to language learning, teaching and testing. After all, the extent to which a language user's utterances are grammatically accurate does have an influence on how successfully she communicates.

Starr Keddle, and I would also stress this point, goes on to state that

> [o]verall there is not a consistent approach to grammar, or reference to commonly accepted concept areas such as the future, in the CEF descriptors. In the self-assessment grids […] the general descriptors only speak of a learner's manipulation of grammar in terms of 'use simple phrases', 'connect phrases in a simple way', and 'describe in simple terms'. These general descriptors are not sufficiently linked to concept areas to provide a basis for a teaching programme. (Starr Keddle 2004: 49)

As regards grammar, the CEFR is not only insufficiently linked to concept areas and thus fails to serve as a basis for teaching, but as a consequence it also fails to provide a suitable and sufficient basis for assessment, since one has to be aware that teaching methodology and a teacher's approach towards teaching (traditional, communicative, etc.) – ideally based on the communicative approach – will always influence a teacher's approach towards assessing and testing, and vice versa. This was also confirmed by Dr. Landsiedler[13], who mentioned that when communicative language teaching was first introduced, many teachers took to teaching languages in a more communicative way, putting greater emphasis on contexts and usage of language, but that, on the other hand, they went on assessing and testing their pupils in a very traditional way, which is neither compatible nor sensible.

At the same time, Brumfit (cf. 1981: 183) observes that there were many teachers in the late 1970s who adopted a traditional approach and who still followed the pattern of presenting a structure, drilling it, practising it in context, and then moving on to presenting the next structure, etc. Hymes/Halliday make the following comment:

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[13] Dr. Isabel Landsiedler, who is the head of the *Treffpunkt Sprachen* Language Centre of the Karl-Franzens-University Graz, was so kind as to take the time for a discussion of aspects of the CEFR and connected issues, since *Treffpunkt Sprachen* has partly adopted the CEFR principles for the implementation in their courses, and also uses portfolio work as a method of language teaching.

> In this way [i.e. in drilling structures as described above] we gradually, and in Wilkins' term (1976:3) 'synthetically' build up the inventory of structural items our students can handle. And since we specify and execute our language teaching in such terms, it is natural that we should assess it in a similar way. We reward structural correctness and chastise structural inaccuracy. (Hymes/Halliday 1981: 1)

The above scenario is definitely a negative example of how assessment is affected by teaching methodology, but it shows well that if teachers apply a communicative approach in which language learners are encouraged to "communicate as far as possible with all available resources" (Brumfit 1981: 183), and are presented language items that have "shown to be necessary for effective communication" (ibid) which may be drilled only if necessary (cf. ibid), they should also adapt their tests and methods of assessment to their methodological approach.

1.2.1.1.3 The CEFR's potential for a fresh outlook on assessment

It is to be hoped, then, that the CEFR will have sufficient impact among teachers all over Europe and will find enough enthusiastic users who try to adapt their teaching and assessment to as many of its principles as feasible, since the document has many strengths and discusses important issues. Hence – and despite all its disadvantages, such as the fact that its "published versions are not exactly user-friendly" (Morrow 2004: 7) – the CEFR has clearly a very high potential

1) to bring communication back to the language classroom;

2) to turn assessment into something language learners are not afraid of but take as a chance to show what they are able to do in a language that is not their first language, and

3) to make them enjoy trying out things with language without being horrified of making mistakes, clinging to the thought in the back of their heads that anything they say or write is – at least mentally – noted and assessed by their teachers;

4) to create and train teachers who calmly accept mistakes and even errors as a natural side-effect to learning;

5) to take teachers through the process of developing a new understanding of testing and assessing;

6) to instruct teachers on how to develop tests, oral exams and group activities that reflect the action-oriented approach, even if it seems impossible to take into account, let alone put into practice all of the CEFR statements and principles;

7) to help teacher-assessors appreciate new assessment criteria that emphasise "positive achievement rather than negative deficiencies" (CEFR 2001: 6) as corresponding to the principle that *Can do*-descriptors be positively worded,

8) to assist them in stating these assessment criteria in a concrete way and as referring to the Common Reference Levels (cf. ibid, 16), and

9) to relate these criteria to continuous teacher-, peer- or self-assessment (cf. ibid, 19);

10) to enable comparisons across different (national) systems of qualifications by providing the means of description of already existing examinations and tests (cf. ibid);

11) to help teacher-assessors internalise that language has to be seen as a whole and that the differentiation of objectives is well possible even though in a language "everything is connected" (ibid, 10), i.e. it is feasible and useful to focus some tests or assessment procedures on one particular component, without simultaneously implying that one deviates from a communicative approach if the test basically still applies the CEFR main principles;

12) to help teacher-assessors recognise and pass on to their students an appreciation of the fact that language learning takes place also outside of the classroom, sometimes even incidentally – an aspect in which the CEFR is particularly helpful due to its provision of proficiency descriptors that go "beyond the scope of a particular syllabus" (ibid, 16)

13) to assist teacher-assessors in determining whether their students are working on the levels that suit their present level of proficiency in the various areas of language competence;

14) to serve as a flexible tool and pool of statements about foreign language proficiency, which can and indeed should be "exploited flexibly for the development of criterion-referenced assessment" (ibid, 30);

15) to provide a helpful overview of "observable language activities" and "communication strategies" (ibid, 57) as they are provided in the CEFR in Chapters Four and Five, which are certainly a reasonable basis for the assessment of language ability, even if for the purposes school implementation the descriptors need to be formulated more specifically;

16) to prompt teacher-assessors to reflect on their students' needs and on ways of imparting the knowledge to them of what is meant by the notions of language in context and communicative purpose (cf. ibid, 97).

These points are probably only some of the many avenues the CEFR opens up to assessors of language proficiency. Still, it needs to be stated at this point that despite its being an impressive compilation and discussion of important issues, ideas, and concepts, the CEFR is hard to apply. Especially for Austrian teacher-assessors, who have recently been confronted with a great deal of innovations in the school system and are therefore likely to be weary of innovations at present, more supplementary documents to the CEFR will probably be needed for the CEFR to have the pioneering effect it is intended and, indeed, able to create.

Because there is a certain amount of awareness that at some stages – but especially when it comes to assessment – the CEFR is too vague in order to be easily applied, a number of supplementary documents have already been developed so as to increase the user-friendliness and clarity of the CEFR. Three of these documents, the *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEF*[14], hereafter MREC, a *Reference Supplement* (Council of Europe 2004) which goes with it, and the document *Language examining and test development* (Council of Europe 2002) are concerned with assessment.

The MREC document was published "in order to assist member states, national and international providers of examinations in relating their certificates and diplomas to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (MREC 2003: ix), having the objective of helping users of the CEFR find the answer to the question "How do I know that my Level B1 is your Level B1?" (Charles Alderson, qtd. in ibid).

As is stated in the MREC, new developments on the CEFR levels, objectives, and descriptors have been initiated, the prototypes of which are *Profile Deutsch*[15] and *Un référentiel pour le français*.

Especially the hitherto relatively unknown[16] *Profile Deutsch* will, as far as can be predicted, have a great impact among practitioners of testing, assessing, and teaching, since it provides teacher-assessors with exceedingly useful, and – not least thanks to the CD-ROM that goes with the book – user-friendly material that will facilitate not only the implementation of the CEFR principles, levels, and communicative activities, but is also –

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[14] Council of Europe. 2003. *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEF). Manual. Preliminary Pilot Version.* Strasbourg: Language Policy Division.

[15] Manuela Glaboniat (et al.). 2005. *Profile deutsch. Lernzielbestimmungen. Kannbeschreibungen. Kommunikative Mittel. Niveau A1-A2-B1-B2-C1-C2.* Mit begleitender CD-Rom. Berlin (et al.): Langenscheidt.

[16] It might be objected that *Profile Deutsch* is not quite as unknown as is claimed above, or that it is little known only among teachers of languages other than German. However, the fact that the book is not even mentioned on the website of the course *German as a Foreign Language* at Graz Karl-Franzens University, which is known to be a qualitatively high-level course with very competent lecturers (for further information on the course cf. http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/uldaf/ [May 25, 2006]), shows that even experts who work in this very field and offer up-to-date courses and materials, have so far perhaps received too little information on the development and publishing of such an important tool.

and this seems to be of even greater importance currently – expected to stimulate teacher-assessors to deal firstly with *Profile Deutsch*, and secondly and maybe as a backwash effect, with the CEFR.

Indeed, *Profile Deutsch* embodies what the CEFR claims to embody, namely offering an open, practically oriented, and flexible system for the planning, execution, and evaluation of language teaching (cf. Glaboniat et al. 2005: 7) consisting of an explanatory book and a large data-base on CD-ROM of

- global as well as detailed *Can do*-descriptors for many important categories of linguistic competence, communicative strategies, etc., that are in accordance with the six levels of proficiency of the CEFR, as well as corresponding samples; the global *Can do*-descriptors are independent from specific situations, whereas the detailed *Can do*-descriptors are in-depth descriptors for specific situations (cf. Glaboniat et al. 2005: 15).
- a collection of topic-related vocabulary, in which even varieties of German (Austrian, German, Swiss) are pointed out (cf. ibid, 24 ff.), and word fields,
- information on cultural aspects,
- a systematic as well as a functional[17] grammar of German (cf. ibid, 40 ff.), both being connected to the CEFR global scale on grammatical accuracy and to the CEFR levels of proficiency,
- language activities (e.g. warning, instructing, asking sb. for help, guessing, etc.) (cf. ibid, 30 f.),
- text genres and text samples (cf. ibid, 46 ff.),
  with the possibility of
- adding words, information, details, etc.,
- defining learning goals via the *Can do*-descriptors that – as indeed the whole document – correspond to the action-based approach (cf. ibid, 20 f.),
- exporting tables, lists, and *Can do*-descriptors to one's word processing programme,
- flexible and individual handling of all the material available.

In short, *Profile Deutsch* is exactly what is needed by many teachers of languages since its level-headed, practical approach to the CEFR levels promises a good chance of convincing teacher-assessors that assessment can also take place without being a threat to students' self-confidence and joyful learning, while at the same time it is not a threat to an action-based

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[17] Here, grammatical phenomena are assigned as belonging to either of the following three categories: *Intentionen* (intentions), *Relationen* (relations), and *Besonderheiten im Dialog* (special strategies and routines in dialogues/interaction) (cf. Glaboniat et al. 2005: 44 f.)

communicative approach, and indeed does not require from the teachers themselves ultimate expertise in the CEFR in all its breadth and depth.

All the more pity, therefore, is that this illuminating supplement to the CEFR is so far only available for German and – naturally – is intended as an instrument for practitioners and learners of *DaF*/*DaZ*, i.e. *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a Foreign Language) and *Deutsch als Zweitsprache* (German as L2). Therefore, it should be the most urgent agenda of the Council of Europe to further encourage work groups all over Europe to develop similarly inspiring documents for all European languages which might then serve as the underlying instruments for

- the specification of learning goals for smaller as well as larger teaching units or cycles,
- the justification, objectivity, and facilitation of assessment and test development,
- systematic and curiosity-boosting vocabulary work.

In the preface to the MREC, Brian North announces a revised pilot version of the document for 2006, which, however, has not been published yet. This second version, it is hoped, will be accompanied by performance samples and test items for as wide a range of languages as possible (cf. ibid, ix f.), which, of course, would make the CEFR, its proficiency levels and objectives more concrete and which would make it possible for teachers to practise assessment according to the CEFR principles in order to make sure that in the near future teacher-assessors and assessors all over Europe will be able to internalise what criteria language learners are required to meet in order to be attested a certain level of language proficiency.

In fact, there are video tapes by the Cambridge ESOL association on which examples of oral exam situations are shown and which are intended to help teachers prepare their students for the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. These video samples give a foretaste of what is to be expected by the second MREC pilot version's supplementary test and performance samples, since the training of teachers and assessors in the whole of Europe using these practical examples would certainly have a great and positive impact on the acceptance of the CEFR as a basic instrument for teaching and assessing.[18]

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[18] Mag. Belinda Steinhuber, who works at the CEBS (Center für berufsbezogene Sprachen/Centre for business-oriented Language Teaching) in Salzburg and is also a practitioner, teaching English and French at the HLW Steyr, as well as a Cambridge ESOL assessor, was kind enough to take the time for a discussion of the CEFR and its implementation on May 9, 2006 in Steyr. Mag. Steinhuber confirmed that examples are indeed necessary so as to demonstrate in actual practice what in the CEFR is mere theory, and gave an account of how positive teacher-assessors tend to react towards practical work with video samples at teacher training sessions.

The three supplementary documents that were mentioned above, however, have the principal aim, so it seems, to address bigger organisations that offer officially recognised language tests rather than the 'teacher in the street'. Such teachers do not have the backing of a large institution but have to develop tests and assessment criteria individually and on a daily basis. Thus, they are certainly still in need of a supplementary document to the CEFR that is tailored to help them assess their students according to the CEFR principles. This supplementary document, however, needs to be well-structured and easy to use, in order to encourage and appeal both to young teachers who come fresh from their studies and to seasoned teachers who have been in their profession as practitioners for twenty or more years and who have got somewhat stuck in their early, traditional ways of teaching and assessing. Hence, the supplementary document which I am advocating should be

1) entirely user-friendly

2) enthusiastically worded and useful enough to stimulate well-established teachers and assessors to deal with the CEFR's innovations right from the start, because complex instruments like the CEFR are all too readily shrugged off as 'just another innovation that won't last long' if they are not convincing from the very beginning

3) published on a national basis and contain

   a. further sub-levels to the Common Reference Levels which have been decided on in national work groups, so as to make them better suited to application in schools

   b. further, and more detailed, *Can do*-descriptors and illustrative descriptors of language proficiency, similar to the descriptors that can be found in the so-called *checklists* of the *European Language Portfolio*, which will be discussed in Chapter 1.2.4; these descriptors, however, should include scales for more linguistic competences, such as grammar etc., since the development of specific statements concerning grammar is fairly easy to achieve as soon as a document does not claim to be universally applicable to all languages

4) based on a more realistic appreciation of everyday school assessment, since in actual practice no teacher-assessor can consider each and every aspect the CEFR suggests taking into account – since otherwise test and exam design for everyday school life would most certainly turn into a never-ending story that would discourage teachers from using the CEFR.

With regard to the fourth point it has to be acknowledged that the CEFR does not in fact ask its users to consider all of its aspects. However, it is extremely complex and packed with detail, besides listing a total of 13 distinctions of various aspects on language testing in the

Chapter on *Assessment* (cf. Figure 8 below). Moreover, this list is "by no means exhaustive" (CEFR 2001: 183). As a result, this might convey to many teacher-assessors the implicit message (whether actually intended or not) that all their previous tests and oral exams have been lacking in theoretical background, objectivity, fairness, diversion, context, communicative activities, aspects, strategies etc.

Types of Assessment

1	Achievement assessment	Proficiency Assessment
2	Norm-referencing (NR)	Criterion-referencing (CR)
3	Mastery learning CR	Continuum CR
4	Continuous assessment	Fixed assessment points
5	Formative assessment	Summative assessment
6	Direct assessment	Indirect assessment
7	Performance assessment	Knowledge assessment
8	Subjective assessment	Objective assessment
9	Checklist rating	Performance rating
10	Impression	Guides judgement
11	Holistic assessment	Analytic assessment
12	Series assessment	Category assessment
13	Assessment by others	Self-assessment

Figure 8: Types of Assessment (CEFR 2001: 183)

To put it mildly, it is conceivable that such subliminal thoughts will not exactly stimulate teacher-assessors to use the CEFR and all of its many supplements with conviction and joy.

From this, the fifth objective which a future supplementary document for assessors should fulfil, may be derived, namely

5) to step back from giving information on statistical data and modi operandi which will discourage teacher-assessors from, rather than encourage them, to take a close look at the CEFR, MREC or similar documents – however helpful and important they may really be (e.g. for other target groups, such as national authorities that carry out 'high stakes' tests and have both the financial and personal resources and the necessary knowledge of qualitative and psychometric approaches that are prerequisites when it comes to test validation [cf. MREC 2003: 5]).

In conclusion, it can be said that the Europe-wide national development of language-specific supplements to the CEFR, which might ideally follow the exemplary *Profile Deutsch*, would probably be the best solution to at least some of the many problems and questions that arise in

connection with an innovative, action- and communication-based approach to the assessment of language learners.

1.2.1.2 The CEFR: Questions related to assessment

A few questions that have to be posed regarding the situation of Austrian teacher-assessors who face the problem of being partly stuck in traditional methods of assessment and testing are the following:

1. How can the acceptance of and a basic familiarity with the CEFR be further facilitated and promoted on a national level?

2. Are the Austrian grades 1-5 (1 being the best grade, 5 being the fail grade) compatible with the CEFR levels?

3. What effect does the CEFR and the methods it suggests (e.g. self-assessment) have on the role of Austrian teachers who, though to a lesser extent than a few years ago, tend to see themselves as the 'sage on the stage' rather than 'the guide by the side' and tend to prefer the method of 'talk and chalk'/didactic teaching, whether it is useful for the acquisition of knowledge and skills or not?

4. How problematic is the CEFR's insufficient reference to the importance of grammar with regard to the reality of assessing language competence at (Austrian) schools?

1.2.2 ALTE: The framework of the Association of Language Testers in Europe

1.2.2.1 ALTE: A general introduction

1.2.2.1.1 ALTE: Objectives, the framework etc.

The *Association of Language Testers in Europe* (ALTE) is an association of European institutions, all of which develop language examinations for the language that is spoken as the first language in their respective country or region. Since its foundation in 1989 and their first meeting in 1990, when there were eight founder members of ALTE, the association has been able to expand into an organisation that represents 26 European languages through 31 members. ALTE – as has the Council of Europe – has recognised the need for European employers and employees alike

> to know what language qualifications gained in various countries mean – what the holder of a given certificate can actually be expected to be able to do – and how to make meaningful comparisons between qualifications gained in different states of the European Union. Employers need to know which particular language qualification it is realistic to demand when advertising a post, and

employees have an interest in being able to rate their own present level of expertise and future training needs. Since 1990 the members of ALTE have been working together to devise a means of describing and comparing their examinations. (ALTE 2006 a)

The first objective of ALTE is to set up **common levels of proficiency** which are intended to enable the transnational recognition and comparability of language certifications (cf. ibid). Currently, there are five ALTE levels of language proficiency in the ALTE Framework, which is a framework of 'key levels' of language performance, within which it should be possible to describe exams in an objective way (cf. ALTE 2002: 3). The five ALTE levels can be anchored to the CEFR because the validation of these levels confirmed that they "correspond broadly" to levels A2 to C2 of the CEFR. Additionally, there is ongoing work on an ALTE initial level, which will correspond to the CEFR A1 level. The relation, then, between the Council of Europe Framework and the ALTE Framework can be represented as follows (cf. ibid, 7):

CEFR Framework Proficiency Levels					
A *Basic User*		**B** *Independent User*		**C** *Proficient User*	
A1 *(Breakthrough)*	A2 *(Waystage)*	B1 *(Threshold)*	B2 *(Vantage)*	C1 *(Effective Operational Proficiency)*	C2 *(Mastery)*
ALTE **Breakthrough Level** *(Breakthrough User)*	**ALTE** **Level 1** *(Waystage User)*	**ALTE** **Level 2** *(Threshold User)*	**ALTE** **Level 3** *(Independent User)*	**ALTE** **Level 4** *(Competent User)*	**ALTE** **Level 5** *(Good User)*
ALTE Framework Proficiency Levels					

Figure 9: The relationship between the ALTE and CEFR Framework Levels of Proficiency

The second objective of ALTE is the development of **common standards for all stages of the language testing process**, i.e. "for test development, task and item writing, test administration, marking and grading, reporting of test results, test analysis and reporting of findings" (ALTE 2006 a), since it is not only important to provide a framework of levels on which examinations can be placed, but to provide the standards as well to which these examinations should be produced (cf. ibid).

Thirdly, ALTE aims to achieve the **collaboration of all members** on joint projects and in the exchange of know-how and ideas.

It is interesting that both the Council of Europe and ALTE began to develop a system of levels of language proficiency at approximately the same time (1997/1998), at which time

Neil Jones and Brian North seem to have been in touch with each other[19]. Given the fact that both institutions have almost the same objectives in terms of the facilitation of mobility in Europe and the comparability of language certifications and examinations, it might have been more reasonable to develop only one system of proficiency levels.

However, such a joint development of European levels of proficiency has not taken place[20], which is why it is not only useful but also necessary to relate the CEFR and the ALTE Framework to each other; hence, ALTE aligned its levels to the CEFR in 2001[21], which, in Jones' (2000: 19) words "involves the alignment of three scales", namely (1) the ALTE *Can do* scale which is defined through descriptors of linguistic abilities that are typical at each ALTE level, (2) the ALTE exam scale which is defined by performance in exams at each ALTE level[22], and (3) the CEFR.

The ALTE *Can do*-descriptors have also influenced the Council of Europe (through their positive wording), ALTE actually predating the publication of CEFR[23], and should be seen, according to the CEFR (2001: 22), as complementing the *Can do*-descriptors of the CEFR itself, "in that they are organised in relation to domains of use which are relevant to adults". In that the ALTE Framework has a slightly different tack than the CEFR with regard to domains, it is all the more useful as a complementary instrument both for teacher-assessors and for students of languages. The three ALTE domains, which are then further subdivided into more specific areas of language use, are:

1) Social and Tourist
2) Work
3) Study

Some examples of sub-areas in the domain of Social and Tourist are Shopping, Accommodation, Travel, etc., and for each of these sub-areas there exist altogether approximately 400 *Can do*-descriptors for up to five ALTE levels and for up to three skills of

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[19] This information was given by the ALTE secretariat in an e-mail from May 22, 2006.

[20] The reason for this may be that there was

> a gradual emergence of Common reference levels from various projects[,] not a 'competition' between ALTE levels and CEFR. Brian [North] has actually said the following recently[:]
>
> *The CEFR levels did not suddenly appear from nowhere. They have emerged in a gradual, collective recognition of what the late Peter Hargreaves(Cambridge ESOL) described during the 1991 Rüschlikon Symposium as "natural levels" in the sense of useful curriculum and examination levels. The process of defining these levels started in 1913 with the Cambridge Proficiency exam (CPE) that defines a practical mastery of the language as a non-native speaker. This level has become C2.* (North 2006)
>
> (E-mail from the ALTE secretariat of May 25, 2006).

[21] This was confirmed in the e-mail from the ALTE secretariat of May 25, 2006.

[22] In relating the *Can do*-scales and the exam scales to each other, ALTE makes it possible to predict language ability, and to tell language learners, that for example, "If you pass an ALTE exam at Level 3 you will typically be able to do *x,y* and *z*." (Jones 2000: 20)

[23] This was also confirmed by the ALTE secretariat (e-mail of May 25, 2006).

language ability, namely (1) listening/speaking, (2) reading, and (3) writing, as can be seen from the following exemplary table (Figure 10) from the domain Work:

Area:	Work
Activity	Requesting work-related services
Environment	Workplace (Office, factory etc)
Language skill	Listening/Speaking
1	CAN state simple requirements within own job area, for example 'I want to order 25 of ...'.
2	CAN ask questions of a fact-finding nature, for example establishing what is wrong with a machine, and understand simple replies.
3	CAN put her/his point across persuasively when talking, for example about a familiar product.
4	CAN give detailed information and state detailed requirements within familiar area of work.
5	CAN argue his/her case effectively, justifying, if necessary, a need for service and specifying needs precisely.

Table 1: Selected statements at Levels 1 – 5 from an example 'Can Do' scale

Figure 10

Indeed, the distinction in terms of domains which ALTE made a decision for, as well as the respective sub-domains, are very realistic and practically oriented categories, and the *Can do*-descriptors that specify abilities at the five ALTE levels provide a supportive set of performance-related and user-oriented scales not only for providers of national examinations, but also for teacher-assessors who either need

- to specify for their students the objectives or the areas of recommended exercises for an upcoming test or oral exam, or
- to define learning goals for a smaller or larger teaching cycle.

1.2.2.1.2 The ALTE Materials for the Guidance of Test Item Writers (MGT)

1.2.2.1.2.1 Purpose

Moreover, there is the ALTE Item-Writer Guidelines Project, the aim of which was to produce guidelines for the writers of test materials in order to facilitate the process of test development. In the meantime, these guidelines, hereafter MGT[24], have been translated into many languages of ALTE members and can also be used by teachers as the – recommendable – basis of a course, or otherwise be adapted as material for self-access study.
(cf. ALTE 2006 b)

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[24] ALTE. 2005. *ALTE Materials for the Guidance of Test Item Writers. (1995, Updated July 2005)*. [Online] http://www.alte.org/projects/item_writer_guidelines.pdf [May 22, 2006].

The ALTE MGT booklet is intended to

> help in training anyone who is involved in any part of the process of developing, writing, administering and reporting the results of tests of a language learned as a foreign language.
> In many cases where teachers need to devise progress tests in order to monitor students on the courses they teach, the same person is likely to be involved in every stage of the process, possibly without the involvement of any additional personnel. In other situations, where widely used state-accredited or commercially distributed proficiency or achievement tests are concerned, people may be involved in only a small part of the process, as item writers, perhaps, or examiners. These materials will be relevant in either case. (MGT 2005: 6)

In fact, the former scenario as it is outlined in the quotation above, applies exactly to the situation Austrian teachers find themselves in, which also justifies the introduction of the term teacher-assessor. It can further be said that many Austrian teachers leave university without having had the necessary training and education in the field of assessment, a field which – despite the many recent developments and changes in teaching methodology courses – is arguably still given insufficient treatment, despite the fact that Austrian teacher-assessors spend a considerable amount of time throughout their career on giving feedback, grading and correcting homework and other papers, evaluating and assessing oral utterances, writing and compiling tests, etc.

Therefore, the MGT, which is thus highly relevant for Austrian teacher-assessors, affords a marvellous overview of and guideline through important issues of testing and is of special relevance due to its all-embracing four-module system, which covers

1) important models of language ability (in Module 1),

2) the process of test production (in Module 2),

3) item types (in Module 3), and

4) issues in marking and scoring tests (in Module 4) (cf. ibid).

Each of these modules can – but are not necessarily intended to – be used independently of the other modules; however, ALTE suggests, very appropriately, that a self-imposed limitation of knowledge is not recommendable.

1.2.2.1.2.2 Models of language ability (as discussed in the ALTE MGT)

1.2.2.1.2.2.1 The psychometric-structural era

Module 1 discusses, first of all, the **psychometric-structural approach**[25] of the **1960s and 1970s**, which was characterised by its emphasis on the objectivity of grading, often using multiple choice test items, even for assessing productive skills such as writing, and thus

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[25] In his book *Communicative Language Testing*, Weir (1990) too gives an interesting overview of the approaches to language and language testing that are discussed in this chapter, and may give additional information that is of interest to the reader, even though the ALTE MGT is the more up-to-date version.

neglecting – as critics such as Carroll claimed – the requisite focus on the communicative effect of an utterance as well as reality-based language use (cf. MGT 2005: 9 f.). The so-called discrete-points component tests neglected questions such as what persons communicate in what setting and to what purpose, rather tending to isolate the linguistic aspects of language proficiency, since those were more easily tested in an objective way. The structural approach was heavily influenced by linguistics and especially the Chomskian[26] approach to language, which "placed its primary focus on the ideal speaker-listener" (ibid), which, however, does not exist in actual reality.

Lado (cf. 1961: n. p.), who, together with Valette, Harris and Heaton, is one of the main representatives of the structural approach, was aware that language is a means of communication; however, he argued that there is an infinite number of situations in which language is the means of communication. He argued, however, that not even native speakers of a language are able to use a language in all possible situations and in every possible context, so that the attempt to sample this great variety of situations is so problematic that it is probably doomed to failure right from the start.

Weir claims that "[…] most people would probably agree that testing a candidate's linguistic competence is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of a test battery" (1990: 2), and points out that people who assess a piece of music do so on the basis of the whole piece, and not only of part of it; likewise, people who take a driving test do not only have to show in a written test that they know the principles of driving, but are also required to demonstrate that they are able to perform the task of driving. Accordingly, the assessment of discrete linguistic points is not sufficient to test a language learner's capability of using a language, even though tests of this kind have the clear advantage that "they yield data which are easily quantifiable" (ibid) and allow a wide coverage of items (cf. ibid). Moreover, it has to be acknowledged that during this era of language testing important contributions were made in the fields of statistical analysis, reliability and validity of tests, as well as the development of multiple choice items and the planning of test content in relation to linguistic structures (cf. MGT 2005: 10).

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[26] Johnson (2001) also gives an interesting overview of the various approaches to language teaching and learning – cf. especially pp. 44-55, and 182-187, where the Chomskian approach, the 'sociolinguistic revolution', and notional/functional/communicative approaches are discussed.

1.2.2.1.2.2.2 The psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era

In the **1970s**, the "testing pendulum on the whole swung in favour of global tests" (Weir 1990: 3), thus initiating the so-called **psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic era**[27], during which there was increasing emphasis on language in use. This shift of focus was, again, influenced by linguistics, and "continued and modified by developments in related fields such as sociolinguistics. Hymes (1970) developed the notion of the speech event, a term used to refer to language activities that are governed by rules of use" (MGT 2005: 11). Hymes claimed that the structure of speech events "can be defined by breaking them down into constituent factors such as *participant*, *setting*, *purpose*, *topic*, *channel* etc." (ibid), which are exactly the constituent factors the CEFR and ALTE refer to – if under different names – when it comes to defining the context in which language-based communication is embedded. Moreover, he argues very appropriately that there is more to competent linguistic performance than mere linguistic knowledge (cf. ibid).

Munby's (1978) approach can be called the most fully elaborated translation of this theory into language teaching. Very progressively, he claims that the language to be taught ought to "be related as closely as possible to the learner's immediate and future needs, that the learner should be prepared for authentic communication, and that the language taught should have a high surrender value" (MGT 2005: 11), a view that was and is shared by many others – and perhaps most prominently, and with the most profound effect on the following decades of language teaching and testing methodology, in the seminal publication *Threshold Level.*

1.2.2.1.2.2.3 The Threshold Level

In its original version in 1975, the *Threshold Level*, hereafter T-Level, was a true "manifestation of the communicative approach" (MGT 2005: 11), since it was a first attempt to define and to specify how language learners "should be able to use a language" (cf. T-Level 1991: iii) so as to "act independently in a country in which that language was the vehicle of communication in everyday life, the language taken as an example being English" (ibid).

It is no wonder, then, that T-Level (representing as it does the expected communicative ability that learners at CEFR Level A2 might be thought to have developed) had such a deep impact on language teaching and assessment, since van Ek and Trim created

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[27] For supplementary information cf. Weir (1990: 3 ff.).

a properly thought-out catalogue of language **functions**[28] and language **notions**[29] that are related to what the CEFR would call *communicative activities*, including exemplary phrases, if not exhaustive lists of possible utterances/phrases, without, however, being simply a "course, a syllabus or a comprehensive list of the elements of language a learner at a certain level should know" (MGT 2005: 11). Rather, the emphasis is placed on language as a social instrument with which language users cannot only settle every day affairs but also communicate their likes and dislikes, talk about experiences they have had, and exchange information and opinions (cf. ibid, 11 f.).

T-Level 1990 includes four appendices, thus providing the user of the document with (1) information on pronunciation and intonation, (2) a grammatical summary, (3) a word index, and (4) an index of language functions and notions (subject index) (cf. T-Level 1991: 121 ff., 129 ff., 199 ff., 233 ff.).

T-Level has influenced testing in so far as it has helped to lead language teaching, and thus testing, away from discrete-points tasks into the direction of action-based tasks which use authentic – or at least semi-authentic or simulated – texts and materials, and which provide a reasonable background to language use (cf. MGT 2005: 12).

1.2.2.1.2.2.4 The era of communicative ability

Along with the recognition of language as a multi-faceted means of communication came the need to specify which abilities and skills are needed to give a language user her level of proficiency or communicative ability in a given language, which is the reason why, since the mid-1970s, experts in the field of language testing have increasingly concentrated on these questions (cf. ibid, 12 f.).

The research into this area has been divided into two categories of models. Cziko (1982: n. p.) distinguished between (1) *descriptive models* and (2) *working models* of communicative competence. Descriptive models (1), according to Cziko's definition, attempt

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[28] In T-Level, six broad categories of language functions, i.e. "what people do by means of language" (T-Level 1991: 22) are listed. These are (1) *imparting and seeking information*, (2) *expressing and finding out attitudes*, (3) *getting things done (suasion)*, (4) *socializing*, (5) *structuring discourse*, and (6) *communication repair*, each being capable of further sub-division. Sub-categories – which are a selective range of the most urgent and the most likely needs a language user may be confronted with – include for (1), e.g., identifying, reporting, narrating, correcting, asking, WH-questions, Please (can you) tell me + subordinate clause/+ NP, answering question, etc. (cf. ibid, 22 ff.).

[29] The eight general notions in T-Level are (1) *existential*, (2) *spatial*, (3) *temporal*, (4) *quantitative*, (5) *qualitative*, (6) *mental*, (7) *relational*, and (8) *deixis*, each being further sub-divided. (1) *Existential*, for instance, is broken down to sub-categories such as occurrence/non-occurrence, relative position, distance, direction, origin, size, etc.; (3) *temporal* has sub-categories such as points of time, divisions of time, duration, earliness, lateness, anteriority, posteriority, simultaneousness, past reference, present reference, future reference, etc. (cf. T-Level 1991: 48 ff.).

to describe "all the components of knowledge and skills that a person needs to communicate effectively and appropriately in a given language", whereas working models (2) "show how components of communicative competence are interrelated psychologically to form a set of independent factors" (ibid).

In the past three decades, the following important models of communicative competence[30] have been developed, each of which has profoundly affected the development of communicative language teaching and testing:

(1) Descriptive Models

    (a) **Canale and Swain** claimed, similar to the CEFR, that communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences. In developing this model they paved the way for new ways of describing competences related to language competence, which "had not been available before this time" (MGT 2005: 14), i.e. the 1980s, and thus provided a framework for language testers to refer to (cf. ibid) as well as the necessary terminology for defining the abilities that make up the competence to use a language communicatively (cf. Weir 1990: 8).

    (b) **Cummins**' model, too, had a strong influence on language test design and on the interpretation of results. His first major achievement was the distinction of CALP – cognitive/academic language proficiency – and BICS – basic interpersonal communication skills, the latter being at the disposal of everybody who uses any language in any form, while the former is closely connected with literacy and is, therefore, acquired through education. Secondly, Cummins argued that language proficiency can be "conceptualized along two continua" (MGT 2005: 14), namely the continuum *context-embedded – context-reduced* and *high cognitive demand – low cognitive demand*. These two continuums affect language testing in so far as they influence the selection of test items, firstly because it can be said that the less familiar a context is for a language user, the higher is the degree of difficulty of a test; and secondly, because testers have to consider to what degree a task is cognitively demanding. Test designers, therefore, have to consider the individual backgrounds of the people being tested, in order to use the cognitive and contextual dimensions of language test items. (Cf. ibid, 14 f.)

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[30] In the following section only the main effects on language teaching and testing of these models will be pointed out. For more detailed information, cf. the references given.

(2) Working Models

 (a) **Bachman**'s model of 1990 is a comprehensive view of communicative language ability in which it is aptly suggested that communicative language ability encompasses not only knowledge or competence, but also the demonstration of the ability to apply this competence in appropriate language use (cf. Weir 1990: 9, MGT 2005: 16), involving language competence[31], strategic competence[32], and psychophysiological mechanisms (cf. ibid). The Bachmanian model influences language testing in that it makes possible predictions about the strategies and competences a language user will need in order to deal with a (simulated examination) situation, also depending on whether the test item demands the person tested to produce an oral or a written text (cf. ibid).

 (b) In 1996, **Bachman**, together with **Palmer**, presented a modified model of language knowledge, which defines categories of knowledge that give language testers a clear idea of what is being tested (cf. ibid, 18):

<div align="center">

Language Knowledge

</div>

Organisational Knowledge		Pragmatic Knowledge		
Grammatical Knowledge	Textual Knowledge	Lexical Knowledge	Functional Knowledge	Sociolinguistic Knowledge
Syntax Morphology Graphology/ Phonology	Rhetorical organisation Cohesion	Semantic properties Denotation Connotation	Ideational Manipulative Heuristic Imaginative	Conventions of language use Dialect/Variety Register Naturalness

(Bachman & Palmer 1996)

<div align="center">

Figure 11

</div>

Apart from a few minor deviations with respect to terminology and grouping of categories, some categories from the Bachman/Palmer model are precisely what the CEFR and ALTE attempt to translate into potential real-life situations, giving *Can do*-descriptors or illustrative descriptors for each of these competences. For example, the CEFR descriptor scale for phonological control refers to the Bachmann/Palmer category of naturalness in the descriptors for C1 and B2:

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[31] Language competence is further broken down into (1) *organisational competence* that includes (a) grammatical competence (vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology/graphology) and (b) textual competence (cohesion, rhetorical organization of written or spoken discourse), and (2) *pragmatic competence* that includes (a) illocutionary competence (ideational, manipulative, heuristic, imaginative use of language functions), and (b) sociolinguistic competence (cf. MGT 2005: 16; Weir 1990: 8 f.).

[32] A similar concept has been called by a different name by others, e.g. van Ek/Trim 1991: *Compensation Strategies*, which rather describes the ability to deal with unexpected demands or with failures of recall, while Bachmann tends to emphasise the notion of planning ahead (cf. MGT 2005: 16).

C1: Can vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express
finer shades of meaning.
B2: Has acquired a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation.

In the MGT (cf. 15), **Morrow**'s (1979) approach is also mentioned, which, however, does not define communicative competence, but discusses important aspects of communication and test validity, which can be summarised as follows, and which, again, anticipate much of what has later become some of the most important points made in the CEFR in terms of what teachers and assessors of languages and language proficiency have to take into account:

Language in use is **interaction-based** in that it involves an addressee or an interlocutor respectively, who directly or indirectly affects the speaker or writer in what utterances she makes or in what she writes, through her expectations and/or her way of turn-taking. Secondly, language-based interaction is characterised through its **unpredictability**, which, naturally, influences the language user because she then needs the ability of processing unpredictable data (e.g. an interlocutor's answer) in real time.

Thirdly, communication takes place in a **context** of situation as well as a linguistic context, and it will have, fourthly, a **purpose** for which it is made, which demands from the language user the ability not only to recognise the purpose of a remark that is made to her, but also to formulate her own utterances in such a way as to enables them to achieve their own purpose. Another aspect of communication is that of **performance**, which includes all that was described by Chomsky as "such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic)" (1965: n. p.). However, as Morrow remarks, such conditions do exist, whether they are 'grammatically irrelevant' or not (cf. 1979: 150), and the CEFR explicitly refers to them as the mental context of the language user and her interlocutor(s) (cf. CEFR 2001: 50 f.), and even mentions additional situational conditions that may heavily influence a language user's performance (during an assessment situation). Hence, with regard to their effect on performance these points are not to be under-estimated by assessors in whatever assessment situation. Sixthly, Morrow argues that texts that are used for testing communicative ability need to be **authentic**, since authentic language is rarely simplified in order to adapt to the addressee's linguistic level. Lastly, language-based interaction is **behaviour-based** in that its success depends on its participants "on the basis of behavioural outcomes" (ibid). Furthermore, Morrow claims that more emphasis in testing should be put on what the candidate is actually able to achieve through language (ibid, 149 f.).

But let me continue my discussion of the MGT. Module 1 goes on to discuss in various aspects of validity in testing, such as (1) content validity, (2) criterion-related validity, (3) construct validity, (4) face validity, and (5) recent views of test validity (cf. MGT 2005: 19 ff.) as well as four Test Validation Frameworks by Weir. These frameworks as well as in-depth questions of validity, however, are of greater concern to developers of official, accredited language tests such as the Cambridge ESOL exams than to teacher-assessors in Austria or other countries who have similar school systems. Hence, merely brief mention of these issues is made at this point.

The same holds true for the contents of **Module 2**, which deals with the process of test production. In Module 2, more objectives and rules for test development are discussed than can be taken into account when it comes to developing a test for language learners at schools. Nevertheless, the points made and the information given are highly relevant and interesting, and even teachers who may not need these detailed guidelines may use them to deepen their knowledge in this field of assessment (cf. MGT 2005: 43-104).

Module 3 gives information on questions concerning

- terminology,
- authenticity,
- situational authenticity,
- interactional authenticity, and
- difficulty of texts (linguistic structure, the context in which the text is placed, the content of a text, difficulty of listening tasks, time reference and context, and language) (cf. MGT 2005: 105-112),

before turning to the discussion of various item types, such as

- multiple choice and other selection item types:
  - discrete point and text based multiple choice items
  - true/false items
  - gap-filling (cloze[33] passage) with multiple choice options
  - gap-filling with selection from bank
  - gap-filling at paragraph level
  - matching
  - multiple matching
  - extra word error detection (cf. ibid, 113-125)
- candidate-supplied response item types:
  - short answer item
  - sentence completion
  - open gap-filling (cloze)
  - transformation
  - word formation

---

[33] Cloze tests are tests in which gaps are created through the deletion of one or two words, which the person tested has to fill in. Assessors may either delete every sixth or seven word throughout the text or delete words at irregular intervals. (Cf. MGT 2005: 117)

- o transformation cloze
- o note expansion
- o error correction / proof reading
- o information transfer (cf. ibid, 125-134)
- non-item-based task types:
  - o writing
  - o speaking tasks (cf. ibid, 135-147)
- rubrics[34] (clarity, adequacy, relevance, consistency) (cf. ibid, 147), and
- keys, mark schemes, and rating scales (cf. ibid, 148 f.).

The MGT mentions the advantages and disadvantages of the various test item types, and gives examples of each as well as rules for the implementation of such tests, if necessary, which turns Module 3 – ideally taken together with **Module 4**[35], or at least parts of it – not only into a handbook of fair and valid assessment of language proficiency for teacher-assessors, but also provides teacher-assessors with possible new types of test items, which they may wish to consider to try out in class in order to emphasise the communicative aspects of their assessment.

In conclusion, it can be said that ALTE is indeed an important institution in Europe whose innovative ideas and work complement and influence the work of the Council of Europe.

1.2.2.2 ALTE: Questions relating to assessment

As was the case with the CEFR, questions arise in connection with ALTE and their *Can-Do* project and framework, such as

1. How can those aspects of ALTE that have been pointed out above as being of special relevance for teacher-assessors (such as descriptors and domains complementing the CEFR) be disseminated and promoted among teachers of languages?

2. How can the ALTE framework be incorporated into everyday school life in a fruitful way?

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[34] *Rubrics* are defined in the MGT (2005: 7) as "the instructions given to a candidate on how to respond to a particular input".
[35] As mentioned above, Module 4 considers issues in scoring tests and marking, such as how to provide a fair result, and gives examples from already existing tests (e.g. Cambridge ESOL tests) (cf. ibid, 158-199).

1.2.3 DIALANG

1.2.3.1 DIALANG: A general introduction

As discussed above, the CEFR has influenced the field of language teaching, learning and assessing all over Europe; accordingly, institutions and suppliers of accredited language tests try to adapt their test items and certificates to the Council of Europe's Framework.

Thus, the "first major language assessment system to be based on the Common European Framework of reference" (DIALANG a) is DIALANG, which provides language learners with electronic language tests so as to help them recognise their "strengths and weaknesses in a foreign language, and find out what level [they] are at" (DIALANG b). Language users who wish to gain information on their linguistic proficiency can do tests in the five skills areas (1) reading, (2) writing, (3) listening, (4) grammar, and (5) vocabulary, and can choose from 14 languages[36] their mastery of which they can test. Additionally, the same languages are available as the languages of instruction and feedback.

Naturally, the DIALANG system can only assess receptive skills, and can assess productive skills only to a fairly small degree, i.e. there is always a limited number of missing words in a text or sentence, and the number of possible correct answers also needs to be limited, because otherwise an answer cannot be counted wrong or right and the test result would become very vague or, at any rate, dependent on the language learner's self-assessment. However – and this has to be applauded – DIALANG indeed seems prepared to leave much of the assessment procedure to the candidate, since, as is stated on the DIALANG webpage, DIALANG is planning on incorporating new item types into their system (cf. Appendix 5), which should make possible "[i]nnovative ways of testing direct speaking and writing, i.e. skills that the current system lacks" and "[a]dditional or alternative types of feedback to the clients (especially at item level)" (DIALANG c). Since – as yet – there cannot be an assessor sitting at the other end of an internet or telephone line, the quality and level of her written or spoken production can only be estimated by the candidate herself, who, in such test items would be given sample answers on each of the six CEFR proficiency levels, which she would have to compare with her own answer so as to come to a result indicating the level of her answer text, regardless of whether it is written or spoken.

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[36] DIALANG's 14 languages are Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish (cf. DIALANG b).

1.2.3.2 Structure

1.2.3.2.1 The tests

Following the very easy and quick installation of the DIALANG programme on the computer and after selecting the language of instruction, the tests are preceded by the so-called **Placement Test**, in which the language user is shown 75 verbs that she is asked to identify as either authentic or invented words of the given language. This test, then, is intended to assess the extent of the candidate's word knowledge. The following figures (12 and 13) show a part of the Placement Test for English as well as an example of a high score:

Figure 12: DIALANG Placement Test for English
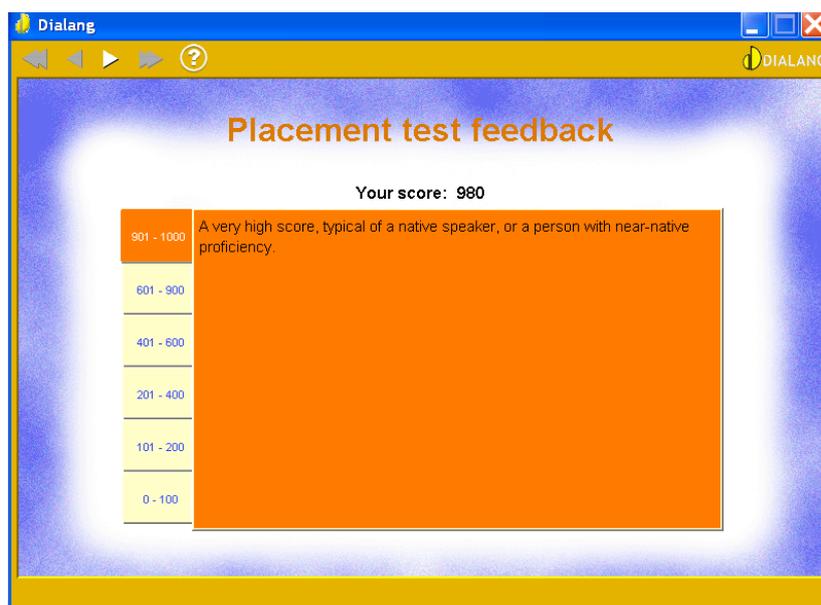
Figure 13: Exemplary DIALANG Placement test feedback for English

Especially as regards the Placement Test, Dr. Landsiedler of *Treffpunkt Sprachen* pointed out that DIALANG has in fact to be questioned in some respects, since quite a few users of the DIALANG assessment system may be discouraged from taking the real skill tests due to the fact that an average language user might feel overtaxed when confronted with a long list of partly unknown words.

The Placement Test is followed by a **Self-assessment Questionnaire** in which the person who takes the tests can evaluate her abilities in the skill concerned, i.e. there are five different self-assessment questionnaires for each of the 14 DIALANG languages, which are intended to pre-estimate the candidate's level of language proficiency so as to give each candidate a skills test which is suitable to the candidate's knowledge of the given language. Thus, provided that she answers the self-assessment questionnaire honestly, a candidate with a low level of language proficiency, e.g. A1, is very unlikely to be asked to do a skill test on a high level such as C1. In keeping with the CEFR principles, the items in the DIALANG Self-assessment Questionnaire are formulated as *I Can*-descriptors, the accuracy of which the candidate can confirm or deny. Afterwards, the candidate is given the suitable language test for the skill that she has chosen (for examples, cf. Appendix 4). These tests consist of 30 questions which include multiple choice and cloze test items.

1.2.3.2.2 The feedback

Having completed one test, the candidate then comes to the **Feedback Menu**, which is shown in Figure 13 below:
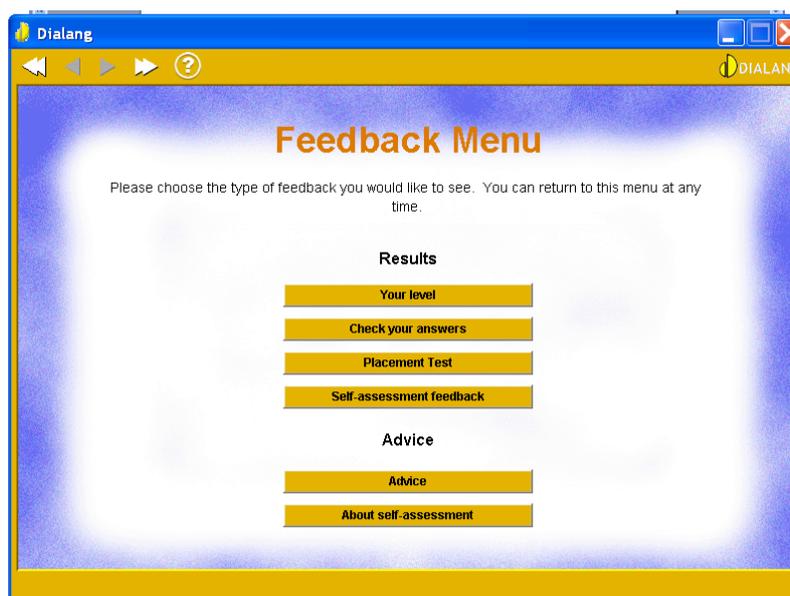

Figure 14: The DIALANG Feedback Menu

Under the heading *Your level*, the candidate is shown the CEFR six-proficiency-level scale, telling her which level of proficiency she is at, according to the answers s/he has given during the test. Here, the candidate can not only find out which level she is at, but is also given a short descriptor of what language users are normally able to do in the given skill at the given level. Moreover, the candidate can read a short descriptor of higher and lower levels of language proficiency in the tested skill, which is very helpful when it comes to understanding which abilities one still has to work on in order to reach the next level.
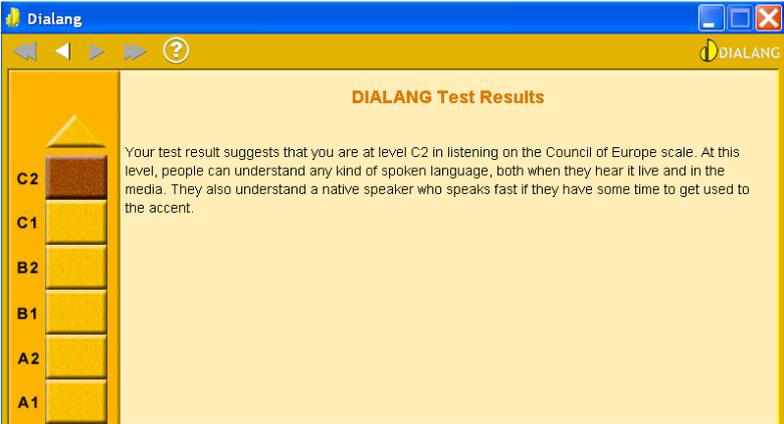
Figure 15: Exemplary DIALANG Test Results

Under the heading *Check your answers*, the candidate can navigate through all questions in order to find out which questions were answered incorrectly. Here, the questions are grouped under sub-skills or various linguistic aspects, for example, for the Language Structures-test they are: *Miscellaneous word grammar*, *Parts of speech*, *Pronouns*, *Adjectives and adverbs*, *Nouns*, *Punctuation*, *Numerals*, and *Verbs*. This item is especially useful if the candidate had the *immediate response*-option turned off during the test.
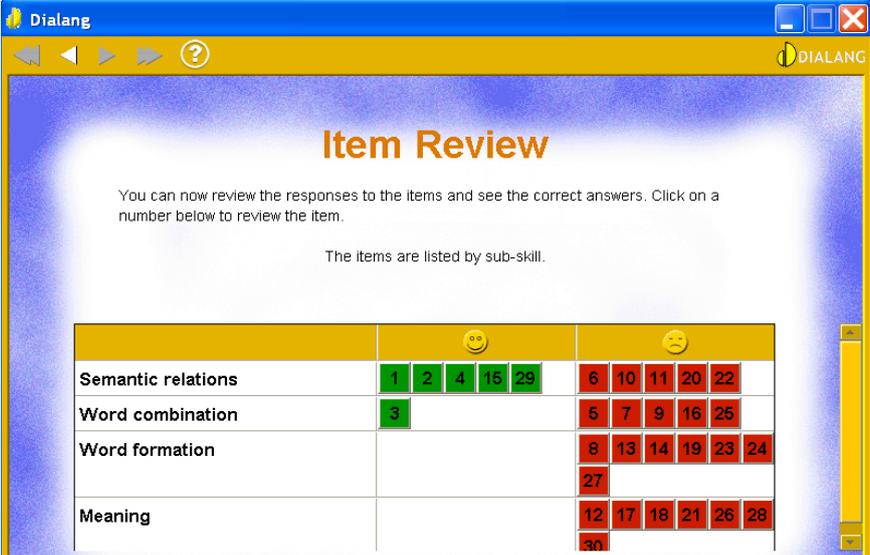

Figure 16: Exemplary DIALANG Item Review

The heading *Placement Test* shows once more the result of the DIALANG Placement Test, without, however, showing once again the – partly invented – verbs that the candidate was given as the first task. Yet precisely this would be interesting, even necessary, since some of the verbs that have to be really existent – as I assume from several attempts of my own to reach the top score – cannot be easily found in most dictionaries, some of them, perhaps, not even in the NODE or OED. Therefore, it might be considered to be only fair on the part of DIALANG to give some justification for their assignment of scores.

The *Advice*-section shows a more detailed descriptor of the proficiency level that the candidate reached, as well as the next higher and the next lower level, so that the language user can see what deficiencies she still has as regards the tested skill:

Figure 17: Exemplary DIALANG Advice Section

Finally, the *About self-assessment* item gives possible reasons for why the results of the self-assessment questionnaire did perhaps not match the final result of the actual DIALANG test, and gives advice on how to approach self-assessment in a fruitful and realistic way. Indeed, self-assessment – and this view has an increasing number of supporters – is an important part of language learning (cf. DIALANG a) since it is vital that language users should be able to judge what abilities they have in a language, what deficiencies there might be, and to become aware both of how these weaknesses could be improved and of "what it means to know a language" (ibid).
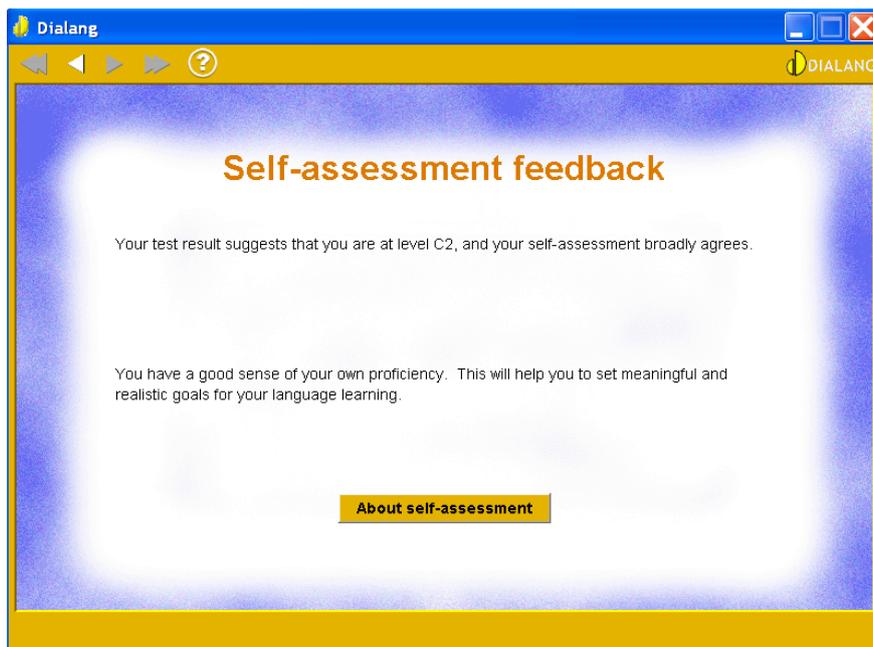
**Figure 18: Exemplary DIALANG Self-assessment feedback**
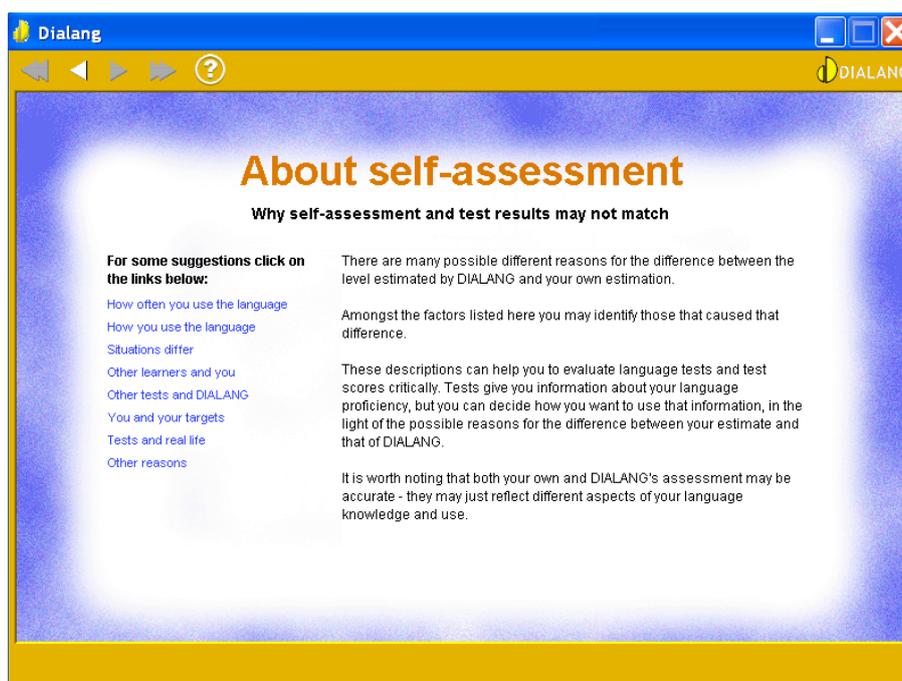
Figure 19: The DIALANG Section About self-assessment

One would hope for the development of an even more differentiated feedback menu for the DIALANG tests in which more specific advice is given on how to improve one's language skills, and what activities and exercises could help improve them.

1.2.3.3 DIALANG: Questions relating to assessment

The major questions that arise regarding the DIALANG testing system are the following:

1. What can be done to avoid DIALANG and similar instruments of assessment displacing communication and communicative assessment from the classroom rather than bringing them to it, considering the fact that the CEFR as well as tests that are based on it attempt to achieve greatest possible objectivity and comparability?

2. How communicative is the DIALANG assessment system, and how communicative can it actually be, given the fact that no real communication is involved in the tests on which the assessment is based?

3. Given the fact that self-assessment is becoming an increasingly important issue in modern language teaching and learning, and is emphasised in instruments such as the DIALANG system or the European Language Portfolio, which is discussed in the following chapter, the question arises to what extent self-assessment should be employed in school and whether the self-assessment of a language learner's language proficiency should find its way into school certificates.

4. How useful is it for teacher-assessors in Austria and elsewhere to make use of the DIALANG assessment system during their lessons or outside of school?

1.2.4 The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

1.2.4.1 The ELP: A general introduction

One of the Council of Europe's plans in terms of language policy was the "introduction of a *European Language Portfolio* with international currency" (CEFR 2001: 20), which "would make it possible for learners to document their progress towards plurilingual competence by recording learning experiences of all kinds over a wide range of languages, much of which would otherwise be unattested and unrecognised" (ibid). Moreover, the Council of Europe states in the CEFR that such a *European Language Portfolio*, hereafter ELP[37], provides a format in which language learners can document their intercultural experiences, learning experiences, as well as the contexts and domains in which their language learning takes place

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[37] ELP is one of the three most commonly used abbreviations for the *European Language Portfolio*. PEL (*Portfolio européen de langues*) and EPS (*Europäisches Portfolio der Sprachen*) are also internationally known acronyms, as Thürmann (2001: 1) points out. However, especially in Austria, the ELP is mostly abbreviated ESP (*Europäisches Sprachenportfolio*) rather than EPS. These acronyms may only be used for language portfolios which correspond to the *Principles and Guidelines* (e.g. Lenz/Schneider: n. d.; CoE: 2004 b) that were set by the Council of Europe for the development of an ELP.

(cf. ibid, 5), and can also take stock of their language proficiency levels and "inform others in a detailed and internationally comparable manner" (CoE 2006) about the levels they have reached.

By allowing its users to record any kind of language experience, the ELP should be able to motivate language learners to become aware of their plurilingualism, with their abilities in every language they have ever acquired, learned, or used in a holiday or other situations, as well as with the wide range of European languages and the rich cultural heritage in Europe (cf. ibid; Matzer 2001: 6).

As Lenz (cf. 2004: 22) points out, the ELP was developed simultaneously with the CEFR between 1991 and 2001. As a result, the two projects had a profound and continuous influence on each other, as well as sharing the common reference levels "as a core element" (ibid). Both the CEFR and the ELP were launched after the Symposium in Rüschlikon in 1991, and have contributed considerably to the Council of Europe's objectives of "coherence and transparency in language certification from member states" (MREC 2003: 3). Most member states have already developed and implemented ELPs or are at least in the piloting phase (cf. ibid), and even though there is a wide range of portfolios that have been developed for a wide range of contexts, all ELPs share five fundamental principles (cf. Lenz 2004: 22), which can, on the one hand, facilitate the process of teaching and assessing language proficiency, but on the other hand make great demands on teacher-assessors. These principles are the following:

1) The ELP belongs to the language learner, who is considered the owner of the portfolio under all circumstances (cf. ibid; Abuja et al. 2004: 9; CoE 2004 b: 3).

2) The ELP serves as an instrument for the documentation of "all language and (inter-) cultural competences and experiences" (Lenz 2004: 22) and "values the full range of the learner's language and intercultural competence and experience regardless of whether acquired within or outside formal education" (CoE 2004 b: 3).

3) The ELP is a tool for the promotion of pluriculturalism and plurilingualism (cf. ibid; Lenz 2004: 22).

4) The ELP helps language learners to develop learner autonomy (cf. ibid; CoE 2004 b: 3).

5) The ELP has two functions, namely (a) the *pedagogic function* of increasing language learners' motivation to learn new languages and improve their communicative competence in languages they have already learned or used, to seek intercultural contact and experience, to reflect on and plan their learning, to learn autonomously,

and to enhance their plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, and (b) the *documentation and reporting function* (cf. CoE 2006).

1.2.4.2 The structure of the ELP

Apart from being based on these principles, each accredited[38] ELP has to consist of three parts, namely

    A) the *Language Passport*,

    B) the *Language Biography*, and

    C) the *Dossier* (cf. ibid).

The *Language Passport* may be called the 'official summary' of its owner's language proficiencies, pluriculturalism and plurilingualism in that it consists of small holistic grids in which the owner of the Language Passport can fill in

- her levels of proficiency (A1-C2) for the five CEFR language skills – listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing – for up to six[39] languages (these grids are followed by the CEFR self-assessment grid)

- which language courses she has attended, and for which duration, and on what other occasions (e.g. at the workplace) she has used languages

- all language certificates and diplomas she has received during her or his career as a language learner.

The full Language Passport document can be seen in Appendix 6.

    In the *Language Biography*, the language learner finds support in her self-assessment of and reflection upon her language learning. This part of the ELP also facilitates the learners' planning of further steps in their learning process (cf. Stefan 2003: 13). Various kinds of grids are provided in which the owner of the ELP can make statements on her language abilities and (sociocultural) knowledge.

    With the help of the so-called *Language Checklists*, the learner can state what she *can* do in the various languages that are documented in her ELP. These checklists are principally based on the CEFR *Can do*-descriptors and illustrative scales but were recast in an *I can*-format and further sub-divided, cut apart, or simplified (cf. Lenz 2004: 25) as is suggested in

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[38] Accreditation is the process of official recognition of an ELP through the Council of Europe's validation committee. An ELP needs to have been developed in accordance with the Council of Europe principles and guidelines in order to be accredited. After the examination and approval of an ELP in terms of the realisation of these principles, the applicant receives an accreditation number and is awarded the right to use both the Council of Europe's logo and the official term European Language Portfolio for the instrument s/he has developed. (Cf. Thürmann 2001: 1)

[39] Grids for six languages are suggested in the Council of Europe's Standard Passport for young adults.

the CEFR (cf. 2001: 32 f.) by national expert working groups for different portfolios that are implemented in different contexts, so that the language learners have at hand descriptors that are detailed enough to show some progress in learning even within one broad CEFR level of proficiency (A1-C2). The checklists offer a very handy pool of descriptors of language competences and communicative competences which teacher-assessors can and should use in class to specify to their students what they are going to work on together within one lesson, or teaching cycle; the duration of a whole project; one term, or indeed one whole year of language learning. Furthermore, teachers will probably succeed more easily in encouraging students to deal with their learning progress and process with relish if they work with the ELP, since the ELP format is clearly a user-friendly one, which makes learner autonomy develop and grow naturally, which stands out from school books and other language learning instruments due to its easy-to-handle folder system.

The third constituent part of each accredited ELP, the *Dossier*, is what is by definition meant by the term 'portfolio', namely a collection and selection of the ELP owner's (favourite) texts and other works that best illustrate her achievements as well as language and cultural experiences as they are recorded in the Language Passport and the Language Biography. Some ELPs distinguish between a Working Dossier which accompanies everyday language learning, and a Showcase Dossier which illustrates the ELP holder's present level of proficiency in languages.

1.2.4.3 The ELP in Austria

As is emphasised by the Council of Europe (2006),

> [t]here are many occasions to present a Language Portfolio which is up to date, for example a transfer to another school, change to a higher educational sector, the beginning of a language course, a meeting with a career advisor, or an application for a new post. In these cases the ELP is addressed to persons who have a role in decisions which are important for the owner of the Language Portfolio. A learner may also be interested in having such documentation for him-/ herself.

At first glance, the reason for keeping an ELP that is last given in the quotation above might seem to be least pertinent to developing and using a national ELP. In fact, however, it is the development of such a very personal interest in one's own language learning that should be the highest goal of teacher-assessors, because if disjointed language drills or learning and the assessment of the knowledge thus achieved are no longer considered a major part and aim of everyday language lessons by teachers and students alike, the fear of both assessment and learning, which indeed do exist, would be diminished to a considerable degree.

Whatever primary reason a nation, school, or private person might have for working with the ELP, this work is strongly promoted by the Council of Europe, who officially recommends that "[t]he Governments of member states, in harmony with their education policies[,][…] implement or create conditions favorable for the implementation and wide use of the ELP" (CoE 2006) – measures which have already been taken in quite a number of European countries, Austria among them[40].

The second accredited Austrian ELP[41], the *ELP for Lower Secondary Level*[42] (*Mittelstufe*: 10-15 years), is being implemented in schools all over Austria and is available in the so-called *Schulbuchaktion* (*schoolbooks initiative*[43]). It has trilingual headlines, namely in German, English, and French; the instructions and advice sections are in German, but there are many sample entries in the sample grids in other European languages such as Croatian, which in itself would appear to work towards raising plurilingual awareness among the users of the ELP. This ELP has had a rather successful piloting phase with predominantly positive feedback, on the part of both teacher-assessors and students. The Austrian *ELP 15+*[44] (*Upper Secondary Level: Sekundarstufe II*: 15 years +) is currently in its piloting phase, being discussed and tried out by approximately 1000 students in 49 Austrian upper secondary schools (cf. ELP 15+ 2005: Editorial).

Especially the ELP for lower secondary level, and this is of vital importance, is an instrument which would definitely appear to influence language learning and work on language mastery in a highly positive and motivating way, not least by including only the three 'classical parts' of an ELP (cf. Nezbeda 2004). However, there are also a few additional sections that are of high interest to both language learners and teacher-assessors:

Among verious details that would tend to increase the motivational factor in working with the ELP, there is, for instance, the '*Portfoliphant*' (*Portfoliant*, cf. Figure 20), which is the cutely designed Austrian ELP mascot and which functions as a learning companion and

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[40] As early as 1997, contributors from various member states had developed proposals for ELP development, some of which were published in the Council of Europe's document CC-Lang (97) 1: Council for Cultural Cooperation. *European Language Portfolio. Proposals for Development*. Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Cooperation, Education Committee.

[41] The first accredited Austrian ELP was the ELP for commercial colleges (*Handelsakademien*), which was developed during an 'experimental phase' between 1997 and 2000, when "several Council of Europe member states developed and piloted national models" of the ELP (Keiper/Abuja/Moser 2003: 2).

[42] *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio. Mittelstufe (10-15 Jahre)*. 2004. Ed. Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum. Graz: Leykam. ISBN: 3-7011-1444-7. Appendix to Schoolbooks List, school book number 116.316. Accreditation number 58.2004.

[43] The *Schulbuchaktion* is an initiative by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture; the Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection; the Federal Computer Centre, and the *Buch- und Medienwirtschaft der Wirtschaftskammer Österreich*, which makes sure that pupils receive their school books at a considerably cheaper price than at the bookseller's (cf. Schulbuchaktion 2006).

[44] *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio für junge Erwachsene. Sekundarstufe II: 15+. Pilotversion*. 2005. Eds. Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum and Center für Berufsbezogene Sprachen.

The 'Portfoliphant'
© ÖSZ/Leykam
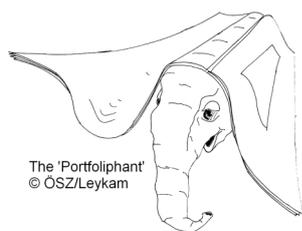
Figure 20

introduces students into how to put the ELP to good use, to the three parts of the ELP, and also gives the ELP users learning tips that will help them improve their learning strategies and are formulated in a comprehensible way that is appropriate to the target group of 10- to-15-year-old language learners. If a learning tip has proved helpful, the ELP holder can draw smileys (☺) ino boxes provided.

1.2.4.4 The ELP in language education

Due to the far-reaching changes in language teaching and assessment it may entail, the ELP might develop in implementation into "a treasure chest for some people and a Trojan horse for others", as Lenz (2004: 30) very pointedly puts it. Experienced teacher-assessors in Austria who have worked with the ELP repeatedly claim that working with an ELP is only satisfactory and successful if it is the determinant attitude-shaping base of language learning and teaching in the classroom. This is due to the danger that the insufficient or half-hearted implementation of an ELP might entail just more work for teacher-assessors (and students) without the attainment of the expected and desired outcomes (cf. Keiper/Nezbeda 2006: 42), such as greater learner autonomy, the ability of self-reflection and appropriate self-assessment, plurilingual and pluricultural competences, etc.

For the facilitation of the ELP implementation in Austria, an ELP manual[45] for language teachers was published, in which the parts of the ELP for Lower secondary level[46] are explained and suggestions, recommendations and examples are given as to how classroom work with the portfolio could procede. This guide was published by the *Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum* (ÖSZ: Austrian Centre for Language Competence) in Graz, whose experts continually work on and provide supplementary brochures and services in order to encourage teacher-assessors to deal and work with the ELP. The ÖSZ was entrusted with the development of national models of the ELP by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture in 2001 (cf. Nezbeda 2004) and ever since have conducted teacher training and information events around the ELP. A similar guide to the ELP was published by the Council of Europe Language Policy Division (Little/Perclová 2001), yet, of course, this

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[45] Gunther Abuja (et al.). 2004. *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio als Lernbegleiter in Österreich (Mittelstufe, 10-15 Jahre). Leitfaden für Lehrerinnen und Lehrer*. Leykam: Graz.
[46] Another pilot manual for the Austrian ELP 15+ was also developed.

instrument is not tailor-made for Austrian teacher-assessors, since it gives only general information on the ELP without considering national ELP models.

Both guides recognise that it is highly propable that the introduction of the ELP will "make additional demands on teachers' time in the short run" (Little/Perclová 2001: 25), as every innovation or change entails some extra time and extra effort to get started (cf. Keiper/Nezbeda 2006: 28; ibid). In the long run, however, and this is what quite a number of practitioners and ELP guides argue very legitimately, the ELP has high potential to bring about a "reorientation in learners that is very beneficial to teachers" (ibid), and to shake to its very foundations the entrenched Austrian view on language teaching and, above all, assessment, which is still rather traditional in many respects. Thus, even though the ELP is an instrument intended for self-assessment and documentation but not for teacher assessment, it is likely to bring about the change in the approach towards assessment both of teacher-assessors and of students that is desperately needed in Austria in order to overcome dated assessment methods such as the mere counting of errors to determine a grade between 1 (A) and 5 (fail). Although such methods are easy to justify and provide teachers, students and parents with seemingly objective results, they are, in the final analysis, totally inadequate approaches to assessment, especially in an age given to promoting concepts such as communicative language learning, action-oriented language teaching, pluriculturalism, and plurilingualism.

1.2.4.5 The ELP: Questions relating to assessment

When it comes to the effects the ELP can potentially have on the Austrian assessment culture, the following questions arise:

1. What is the link between the terms *European Language Portfolio* and *assessment*? Is there a link at all?

2. How can the work with the ELP become an accepted part of everyday school life, given the fact that teacher-assessors basically have no right at all to check on their students' portfolio work, since one incontrovertible ELP principle is that the instrument belongs exclusively to its holder? Is the ELP a – welcome – threat to teacher-assessors' power or simply a welcome companion to students which merely facilitates a reduction of the teacher-assessors' power (and responsibility)?

3. To what extent is self-assessment likely to relegate assessment by teacher-assessors to the background within the next few years? How objective can self-assessment really be and

how objective and fair can assessment by teacher-assessors actually be? Is there objectivity when human beings are involved?

4. Is the ELP likely to take away pressure from students who use the instrument for test and exam preparation, or does the fact that teacher-assessors are now able to define so very specifically what they expect impose even more pressure on students, or even on both sides?

5. How can intercultural and pluricultural awareness and competence be assessed, which, after all, are given so much emphasis both in the CEFR and in the ELP? Should they be assessed at all, and if so, what would appropriate checklists or descriptors look like?

1.2.5 The EAQUALS-ALTE Portfolio

1.2.5.1 The EAQUALS-ALTE Portfolio: A general introduction

The first electronic ELP (cf. Chapter 1.2.4) which was accredited by the Council of Europe is the *EAQUALS-ALTE ePortfolio*, hereafter E-ALP. It is an ELP that can be used in the same way as the various national versions of the ELP, even if the developers of the Portfolio (i.e. the organisation EAQUALS and ALTE) have 'slimmed down' the original ELP that is promoted by the Council of Europe, by removing from their instrument those aspects that have to do with national curricula, traditions in teaching and learning, pedagogical aspects that do occur in national versions of the ELP, etc. Thus, the E-ALP can be used by language users and language learners all over the world, independently from cultural backgrounds and national and specific school systems.

On the one hand, this is a very positive aspect of the E-ALP. For it can thus also be used in countries which cannot afford the development of a national ELP, as can also be supported from recent statistical data which show (cf. Peter Brown, Thessaloniki, May 2006[47]) that in many countries there is indeed considerable interest in this instrument, but especially so since the Portfolio has been available on the internet in its electronic version, the *EAQUALS-ALTE ePortfolio*[48] (cf. ibid). On the other hand, it has to be said that the lack of a few details, but particularly the ones that have been mentioned in the chapter on the Austrian ELP for Lower secondary level (Portfoliphant, age-appropriateness, etc.) turns the E-ALP into a comparatively sober, toned-down instrument that may, perhaps, fail to sufficiently motivate its users – especially younger ones – to work with it as efficiently and effectively as with a

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[47] Plenary debate at the International EuroIntegrELP Project Meeting, May 4-6, 2006, Thessaloniki. Information given by Anita Keiper, Austrian member of the Meeting.
[48] The EAQUALS-ALTE ePortfolio can be downloaded from http://www.eelp.org/eportfolio/index.html.

national version of the ELP, which includes learning tips and grids for intercultural experiences, and which has a mascot, or motivates the learner in other ways. Other features, such as the three obligatory parts of an ELP, the language checklists, etc. are also to be found in the E-ALP, which, despite potential drawbacks, turns the instrument into a useful tool for self-assessment and (autonomous) language learning.

1.2.5.2 The Europass

The *Europass Language Passport* part of the Europass is an electronic Language Passport, which is partly based on the ELP Language Passport and was developed in close cooperation by the Council of Europe and the European Union. It can be edited online and, if one wishes to do so, then be downloaded, saved and printed out by users who wish to have an electronic 1-2 page compilation of their language skills, certificates, and diplomas. There is also a *Europass CV* available[49], which can be edited similarly to the E-ALP and the Europass Language Passport.

The interesting innovation introduced by the possibility of creating a CV or language passport online is the officially recognised and standardised format of the document, the clear instructions that can easily be followed even by people who are not computer specialists, and the fact that language competences for all languages the CV holder wishes to mention are described in the CEFR format, which has international currency, namely the language proficiency levels A1-C2 in the five CEFR skills.

1.2.5.3 The E-ALP: Questions relating to assessment

Since the E-ALP and the ELP tally in their basic parts and principles – though the ELP is certainly more likely to be officially implemented in the school context –, the effects of the E-ALP on language teaching and assessment as well as the questions that have to be raised with respect to these effects remain the same as in Chapter 1.2.4.5.

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[49] Both, Europass CV and Europass Language Passport, are available for editing and downloading on http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/preview.action, where information is also available on three additional documents that are intended to facilitate the comparability of certificates and diplomas (especially for institutions and employers outside the country where the certificate is awarded), and to facilitate mobility in Europe; these three instruments are *Europass Mobility*, *Europass Certificate Supplement*, and *Europass Diploma Supplement* and cannot be set up by their holders themselves but are awarded by special institutions whose contact data can also be found on the Europass Homepage (cf. Europass 2006).

1.2.6 Educational Standards for English in Austria

1.2.6.1 Educational Standards for English: A general introduction

In a document of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (bm:bwk), it is said that the Austrian education system has become more international since Austria joined the European Union. Moreover, the scientific comparison of the education systems of various countries has shown that in those countries where educational institutions are accountable to the public in terms of their achievements, and where a systematic reporting and controlling of their results takes place, the level of achievement is altogether higher than in countries where no such reporting takes place. Therefore, over the past few years, the Ministry has promoted the development and implementation of the so-called *Bildungs-standards* or Educational Standards[50]. (Cf. bm:bwk 2004: 3)

At present, these Educational Standards exist for the Austrian core subjects German, mathematics, and English[51], which is taught as the first foreign language at most Austrian schools. They are considered by the Ministry to contribute to the increase of quality, transparency, and efficiency in the Austrian educational system. The Standards determine which sustained competences students should have developed when they reach the so-called *Nahtstellen*, i.e. the 'seams' of school education, which are, in Austria, at the end of primary school (year 4, age 10) and at the end of the fourth year of secondary school I (Lower Academic Secondary School[52] or General Secondary School[53]: year 8, age 14/15). The Standards were developed by working groups consisting of experts of teaching methodology and practitioners, with the support of a 'steering group' consisting of members of the Ministry and the education authority, academics, school practitioners, and members of the Centre for School Development. (Cf. Lucyshyn 2006: 3) It is planned that the attainment of the competences these standards describe be continually examined in order to provide for the intended quality-assuring effect of the Educational Standards (cf. bm:bwk 2004: 3) in what I render in this paper as the 'Standards Check Tests'.

Thanks to the Educational Standards, it should become possible to show whether schools fulfil their major task, which is the development of competences that are commonly deemed to be necessary later in life and for students' future careers. Nevertheless, the

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[50] Educational Standards are also being developed in a number of other European countries.
[51] bm:bwk. 2005. *Bildungsstandards in Österreich. Fremdsprachen. Englisch 8. Schulstufe*. Vienna: bm:bwk.
[52] Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen (AHS).
[53] Allgemeinbildende Pflichtschulen (APS). In this school type, students are grouped into three ability groups according to their levels of ability.

Educational Standards should leave room for school autonomy and teacher autonomy and provide a frame in which autonomy can still 'survive'. In other words, what is defined in the national curricula as *supplementary or extensive areas* (*Erweiterungsbereiche*) is left untouched by the Standards, which merely refer to the *core areas* (*Kernbereiche*) of the curricula. Thus, the Standards do not or at least should not define what good language classes are, nor should they become a limitation on the teachers' free choice of teaching methods and individual lesson planning (cf. bm:bwk 2005: 9 f.). The Educational Standards for English as the first foreign language (L2) are currently being piloted (piloting phase II) for the seam between years 8 and 9 (cf. bm:bwk 2004: 4). Those schools that take part in the piloting phase II have been invited to apply the Standards in the classroom and to deliver structured feedback as regards the appropriateness (*Passung*) of the standards and the prototypical exercises (cf. ibid, 4).

The Educational Standards are intended to facilitate teachers' work in that they provide a tool of reference and increase teachers' self-confidence and certainty in their educational work (cf. ibid).

1.2.6.2 What form the Standards take

The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture has produced an introduction to the Standards in which the contributions of the various subjects (German, mathematics, English) to the education of young people as well as the specific peculiarities of that subject are defined.

The Ministry claims that competences are defined for students and teacher-assessors so concretely in the Standards that they can be converted into exercise tasks which, then, can be used in class to prepare for the Standards Check Tests (cf. ibid, 7). Sample exercises that differ in their levels of complexity illustrate what the Standards descriptors mean, which can always be cross-references to the national curricula. However, the Ministry explicitly states:

> Die Aufgabenbeispiele sind nicht als Testformate für Abschlussprüfungen oder Berechtigungen gedacht, sondern dienen zur Unterstützung der konkreten, praktischen Unterrichtsarbeit der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer. Spätere Tests zur Überprüfung der Bildungsstandards werden auf der Basis der Aufgabenbeispiele erstellt. (Ibid, 7 f.)

This means that teacher-assessors are not supposed to take the sample exercises and use a selection of them to accelerate and simplify their own test development; rather, they are expected only to use the Standards Sample Exercises in order to facilitate the preparation for the Standards Check Tests, which are intended to be based on these samples. Moreover, the Standards Sample Exercises are intended to interpret selectively the national curricula,

facilitate both the planning of single language lessons and the long-term planning of language education, to serve as a means of evaluating the outcomes of language learning, to trigger teachers' reflection on the quality of their teaching, and to perceive the students as a whole person. (Cf. Lucyshyn 2006: 14) Also, they are supposed to show what competences are necessary for reaching a particular educational standard (cf. ibid).

Basically, the Educational Standards for English, year 8, are based on the CEFR and do not only use the CEFR Levels of proficiency, but also the CEFR descriptors. Where necessary, these descriptors have once again been specified, cut apart, or reformulated in order to develop appropriate Standards descriptors which are referable to the Austrian curricula for Academic Secondary Schools and General Secondary School (cf. bm:bwk 2005: 24), similarly to the *I Can*-descriptors that are used in the ELP. Thirdly, the Educational Standards have been developed for the five CEFR skills, i.e. listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing[54].

Since the Standards aim to describe on an average level those competences that students are expected to have internalised by the end of the seam years (4 and 8[55]), they refer to CEFR levels A2 and B1 only. First of all, there is a Standards global scale in which short descriptors for the standard competences in the five skills are given on CEFR levels A2, A2+ (strong A2), and B1.

For listening, for example, the Standards global descriptor on level B1 is:

> Kann die Hauptpunkte verstehen, wenn in deutlich artikulierter Standardsprache über *vertraute Themen* [my italics] gesprochen wird, denen man normalerweise in der Schule, der Freizeit usw. begegnet; kann auch kurze Erzählungen verstehen.[56] (B1) (Ibid, 28)

The Standards global descriptor for reading on level A2 is:

> Kann kurze, *einfache* [my italics] persönliche Briefe verstehen.[57] (A2) (Ibid)

What is meant in various descriptors by *vertraute Themenbereiche* (familiar topics) are the topics that are expected to be dealt with in school in the respective curricula (cf. ibid, 29). These topics[58] are (1) family and friends, (2) living, accommodation, neighbours, and

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[54] In German these skills are called *Hören, Lesen, An Gesprächen teilnehmen, Zusammenhängend sprechen,* and *Schreiben*.

[55] Since most pupils (apart from playful English lessons in year 3/4) start learning English only in year 5, the Standards for English have, until now, only been developed for the seam after year 8.

[56] This descriptor can be translated as follows: Can understand the main points of a conversation that is lead in clearly articulated standard language about familiar topics that are typically encountered in school, leisure time, etc.; can also understand short narrations or accounts.

[57] This descriptor can be translated as follows: Can understand short, simple personal letters.

[58] In German, these topics are (1) Familie und Freunde, (2) Wohnen und Umgebung, (3) Essen und Trinken, (4) Kleidung, (5) Körper und Gesundheit, (6) Jahres- und Tagesablauf, (7) Feste und Feiern, (8) Kindheit und Erwachsenwerden, (9) Schule und Arbeitswelt, (10) Hobbys und Interessen, (11) Umgang mit Geld, (12) Erlebnisse und Fantasiewelt, (13) Gedanken, Empfindungen und Gefühle, (14) Einstellungen und Werte, (15)

surroundings, (3) eating and drinking, (4) clothing, (5) body and health, (6) years, days, and their passing, (7) parties and celebrations, (8) childhood and growing up, (9) school and the working world, (10) hobbies and interests, (11) money and how to deal with it, (12) experiences, adventures, and the world of fantasy, (13) thoughts, feelings, and emotions, (14) attitudes and values, (15) environment and society, (16) culture, media, and literature, (17) intercultural aspects and cultural studies. (Cf. ibid, 41; curricula for General Secondary School and Academic Secondary School [grade 1-4]: bm:bwk 2000 a and b).

What is meant by *einfach* (simple) is made clearer through the more concrete descriptors in the area *Spektrum sprachlicher Mittel* (range of linguistic devices) and are supposed to lie on a level somewhere between A2 and B1 in sub-areas that are included in the Educational Standards for English, such as *vocabulary range*, *grammar*, *orthographic accuracy*, *coherence*, etc. (cf. ibid, 29).

It is explicitly stated in the bm:bwk document that communicative competence should be given special emphasis with regard to the productive skills spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing, but that it is not to be separated from the question of whether a text produced by a student is linguistically correct, i.e. what level of vocabulary range, grammatical competence, pronunciation accuracy, and orthographical accuracy the student has achieved. Hence, students' results for sample exercises for these three productive skills are intended to be assessed in a differentiated way: firstly assessment should be made as to whether a student text is accurate in terms of its form and contents and whether the communicative purpose is attained through the respective text, and secondly, the linguistic correctness of the students' performance is to be assessed with the help of the Standards descriptors. (Cf. ibid, 35)

With respect to the wording of the Educational Standards, it might be claimed that it would have been more reasonable to use the same wording for them as for the ELP descriptors, since this would strengthen and clarify the relation between the Standards and the ELP. An example of how different the wording of the descriptors from the ELP is from the Standards' wording can be seen from the following comparison:

Umwelt und Gesellschaft, (16) Kultur, Medien und Literatur, (17) Interkulturelle und landeskundliche Aspekte (ibid, 41).

ELP for Lower Secondary Level	Educational Standards
Ich kann Zahlen, Preisangaben und einfache Zeitangaben verstehen, wenn sehr langsam gesprochen wird. Ich muss das Gesagte öfter hören können.[59] (A1)	*(H6) Kann Wörter, die buchstabiert werden, sowie Zahlen und Mengenangaben, die diktiert werden, notieren.[60] (A1)*

Moreover, the ELP is of course a valuable instrument with a high potential to facilitate and support the preparation for the Standards Check Tests, and this potential would be further increased if teacher-assessors and students found the same descriptors in both documents. The working group of experts who are currently developing Educational Standards for English, year 13, however, will consider this issue, and they intend to use the ELP wording for these Standards (information given via telephone by Franz Mittendorfer, who is a member of the working group Standards, year 13, at CEBS Salzburg).

When it comes to the question of how appropriate the Standards are in terms of describing relevant competences that are specifically related to the respective subject, a poll among teacher-assessors of both school types has shown that about two thirds of the teacher-assessors who took part in the poll considered the Standards to be generally very appropriate. As regards single items, however, 54 per cent of the teacher-assessors asked were of the opinion that important areas of their respective subject were not included, nor even touched upon in the Standards, whereas about a third of the teacher-assessors thought that the Standards were too detailed, given the fact that the Standards are intended to cover the necessary basic competences of the subjects English, German, and mathematics. (Cf. Freudenthaler/Specht 2005: 38). Basically, however, most teacher-assessors seem to be relatively open to the introduction of Educational Standards, although there appears to be a certain lack of clarity about how to use the Standards in school: only about one seventh of teacher-assessors already work with the Standards on a regular and intensive basis, and about half of them try to work with them occasionally (cf. ibid, 31), which might be due to the fact that the documents that are meant to give an introduction to working with the Standards are considered too vague as regards (1) possibilities of integrating the Standards into school work[61], (2) the ways of applying the sample exercises in school[62], and (3) the handling of differences in terms of competence levels[63].

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[59] This descriptor can be translated as follows: *I can understand numbers, prices, and information relating to date and time if the speaker speaks very slowly. I have to be given the chance to listen more than once.*

[60] This descriptor can be translated as follows: *Can understand and jot down words that are spelt and numbers and quantities that are dictated.*

[61] 66 per cent of the teacher-assessors questioned assessed the Standards documents to be unclear regarding this aspect (cf. ibid, 36).

[62] 49 per cent of the teacher-assessors questioned assessed the Standards documents to be unclear regarding this aspect (cf. ibid, 36).

[63] 66 per cent of the teacher-assessors questioned assessed the Standards documents to be unclear regarding this aspect (cf. ibid, 36).

As has already been mentioned, uncertainties among teacher-assessors might also result from a fear of further innovations – over the past few years, they have been inundated by a flood of reforms in the Austrian education system, which might contribute to the fear of many teacher-assessors that innovative instruments such as the CEFR, the ELP, and the Educational Standards are instruments, each of which needs to be dealt with separately and implemented in school. In truth, however, all of these instruments are closely tied together and *together* have the potential to bring about a radical change in the Austrian school system as well as in the basic Austrian attitude towards teaching and assessment. This, to the present writer's mind, is better than any half-hearted attempts to impose on teacher-assessors and students panic-driven but ill-considered reforms, as immediate responses to a PISA Study. This issue is dealt with in greater depth below (cf. Chapter 1.3).

Regarding the question of how to assess the students' general achievement at the end of a term or school year, a significantly high percentage of the teacher-assessors questioned, namely 46 per cent of the teachers asked (and even 65 per cent of the teachers of English) came to the conclusion that the Standards do not in fact facilitate the process of giving students suitable grades (cf. ibid, 52).

1.2.6.3 The Standards Sample Exercises

Three supplementary documents[64] with more than 200 sample exercises have so far been published, which are intended to facilitate the implementation of the Educational Standards and the preparation for the Standards Check Tests. A fourth document with such sample exercises is due in autumn 2006.

These sample exercises, which were developed by an expert working group and other external experts at the ÖSZ (Austrian Centre for Language Competence) in Graz, specify in more hands-on ways what the Standards descriptors mean, and aim at enabling teacher-assessors to prepare their students for the annual nation-wide assessment through the Standards Check Tests.

The sample exercises for foreign languages (English) are grouped according to the CEFR skills (listening, reading, spoken interaction, speaking, and writing) which are trained in the respective exercise. The structure of the sample exercises brochures is very well-conceived: each exercise is preceded by a table listing bibliographical data such as the name of the author of the activity and resources, and also the relevant

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[64] bm:bwk. 2005/2006. *Bildungsstandards in Österreich. Fremdsprachen. Englisch 8. Schulstufe. Aufgabenbeispiele I-III*. Vienna: bm:bwk.

- topic (e.g. family and friends),
- skill (e.g. listening),
- Standards descriptor (e.g. "Deskriptor 6: Kann Wörter, die buchstabiert werden, sowie Zahlen, die diktiert werden, notieren.[65] (A1)";

moreover, information is given on

- how much time the complete activity is supposed to take (e.g. 12 minutes),
- what materials and media are needed for the activity (e.g. CD and CD player, writing materials),

as well as on

- additional aspects of the activity.

(Examples are taken from sample exercise 1 for Listening in the *Aufgabenbeispiele I* brochure [cf. bm:bwk 2005/2006 I: 12 ff.])

These information panels are followed by (1) materials for teacher-assessors (e.g. a tape script), (2) materials for students (e.g. ready-made worksheets on which boxes for ticking off the correct answers or spaces for filling in answers are provided), and (3) a solution sheet. (Cf. ibid) For other Standards exercises, all sorts of different student materials are provided, such as prompt cards, fill-in grids, text and text-matching handouts, multiple choice handouts, etc.

1.2.6.4 The Standards Check Tests

As has been mentioned above, it is stipulated that an assessment of whether Austrian students have reached the required Educational Standards is planned to take place on a regular basis in order to check on the achievement of schools and teacher-assessors. In these annual tests, 30 per cent of all Austrian school classes in the seam years (4 and 8) are going to be tested. In year 4, 15 per cent of the classes will have to do Standards Check Tests for German, while the other 15 per cent will have to do Check Tests for mathematics. In year 8, 10 per cent of all classes of that year are going to be tested in each of the above-mentioned subjects, i.e. in English, German, and mathematics. The tests will take place on two successive days with one session each day, which may last no longer than 60 minutes (year 4) or 90 minutes (year 8). (Cf. bm:bwk 2005: 13)

The data obtained from these tests will be processed by the Pedagogical Institute in Linz and will be available to students (individually), and to teacher-assessors and school

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[65] This descriptor can be translated as follows: *Can understand and write down words that are spelt and numbers that are dictated.*

principals (for their own classes); the school administration, however, will only be provided with anonymous and encoded data (cf. ibid).

The bm:bwk insists that the results of the Standards Check Tests will not be the basis of any national or regional school rankings but are rather intended to serve as a basis for taking certain pedagogical measures in the areas of school development and improvement (cf. bm:bwk 2005: 13). Starting with the school year 2007/08, teacher-assessors are expected to do continual work with the Standards; the official Check Tests are planned to start in the same year (cf. gemeinsamlernen 2006). However, a sample of approximately 8000 students in grade 8 were already tested in May 2006 in the receptive skills listening and reading (cf. LTC 2006 b); this sample test project will be extended to the productive skill writing in the school year 2006/2007, and, finally, to speaking in 2007/2008. From then, the Standards Check Tests will constitute a major field of work at the Language Testing Centre (LTC) in Klagenfurt, Carinthia, where the tests are being developed by "a team of experts with the support of a team of item writers, who are all practicing teachers teaching pupils at grade 8 in AHS and APS [allgemeinbildende Pflichtschulen/Hauptschulen]" (ibid).

As regards the level of difficulty of the test items, these – as are the Standards – are located on CEFR levels A2 to B1. However, since students of both Academic Secondary School and General Secondary School will take part in the Check Tests, two versions of the test are being developed in order to meet the needs of students of higher ability as well as of lower-achieving students, such as students in 3rd ability groups in General Secondary Schools. (cf. Gassner/Mewald/Sigott a: 1).

In the LCT documents *E8 Reading Test Specifications Version 02* (Gassner/ Mewald/Sigott a) and *E8 Listening Test Specifications Version 02* (Gassner/Mewald/Sigott b) it is specified what text types and strategies should be included in the Check Test items; moreover, item prototypes are given that are taken from (1) the brochure *Aufgabenbeispiele I* (bm:bwk 2005/2006) and from (2) the DIALANG project as described on the Council of Europe CD *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Reading and Listening Items and Tasks: Pilot Samples (2005)*. The Standards Check Test item writers have the task to "emulate these item types" (ibid, 4; Gassner/Mewald/Sigott b: 5) and to ensure that "there are items for at least three strategies" (ibid), which, however, is not the case as yet in each and every sample item in the two documents (cf. ibid).

Ultimately, finding a fair format for testing the students' achievement in relation to the Standards levels is an extremely difficult task and it seems that the final Check Test items are

currently still work in progress, which, of course, makes it difficult to pinpoint the possible advantages or disadvantages one may expect from them. Nevertheless, what can at present be deduced from recent publications on the subject, however, prompts several questions with regard to the effect of such tests on teaching and assessment.

1.2.6.5 The Standards: Questions relating to assessment

As regards the planned implementation of the Educational Standards and the annual Check Tests as well as their influence on the Austrian assessment culture, one might ask the following questions:

1. If the Educational Standards are expected to stimulate a change in the Austrian educational system, will this change point Austrian teacher-assessors and, indeed, all their students, in the 'right' direction, i.e. are the Standards really the sort of reorientation we need at the present moment?

2. Both the CEFR and the ELP promote individualisation, which in many respects is a very commendable aspect of the two instruments. Will the Standards tend to reverse this trend for the sake of objectivity and control?

3. Is it to be feared that the Educational Standards and especially the Standards Check Tests will have a negative backwash effect on language teaching because teacher-assessors and students know that they have to work with the Standards in order to achieve positive results in the Standards Check Tests?

4. Given the fact that the Standards are a very carefully designed compilation of descriptors of language competence, and that, in combination with the essential sample exercises booklets, they are quite useful, the question arises why the Standards, according to teacher-assessors who have worked with them, do not ultimately facilitate grading. Could it be that this difficulty is rooted in an incompatibility between the CEFR Levels which the Standards are based on and the Austrian five-grade grading system?

5. Even if it cannot yet be predicted what the Standard Check Test items will be, it seems somewhat surprising that, in order to meet the needs of all students tested, there are two test types being developed. If the Ministry strives for tests in order to gain comparable results about the level of competence of language learners, how, then, can this comparability be simultaneously endangered by designing two forms of tests in the first place?

1.2.7 Austrian Curricula

1.2.7.1 Curricula: A general introduction

In Austria, there have been new curricula for Academic Secondary Schools since the school year 2004/2005, which currently run parallel to the old curricula dating from 1989/1990. The old curricula are being phased out while the new curricula are gradually coming into full force, as those students whose Upper Secondary Education started in 2004, will soon have passed their school leaving exams (*Matura*); thus, the old curricula are going to be fully supplanted by the new ones in the school year 2007/2008 (cf. bm:bwk 2006 a).

Basically, the curricula for all Secondary Schools share a general curriculum, which was developed when the curricula for Lower Academic Secondary Education were renewed in 2000. Those consist of three principal parts, which apply to Academic Secondary Schools as well as to General Secondary Schools. These parts are

1. *General educational objectives* (*Allgemeines Bildungsziel*),
2. *General didactic principles* (*Allgemeine didaktische Grundsätze*), and
3. *School administration and planning of teaching* (*Schul- und Unterrichtsplanung*)

The above-mentioned general curriculum with its three parts provided an important background to the development of the new curricula when a reform of Upper Secondary Education took place. In that process, the old general curriculum was extended at some points by incorporating statements that are of particular relevance to Upper Academic Secondary Education. In the present form it is used for both Lower and Upper Academic Secondary Education (cf. ibid), and – with a number of minor differences – General Secondary Schools.

In the new generation of curricula, which represent a general framework, remarkably innovative tendencies can be found, touching on issues such as the modern pluricultural society, inter-European communication and mobility, subject knowledge and self-competence, etc. This should suffice to encourage at least those teacher-assessors who take the time to study the curricula to base their teaching on a communicative approach, and to pass on to their students, and help them develop and increase, intercultural awareness, self-competence, helpful strategies, and learner autonomy. Thus, the curricula continue to serve as a legitimate and useful, even if somewhat vague, basis for anchoring the Educational Standards and instruments such as the ELP.

Conversely, it is to be hoped that the Educational Standards, the ELP, and all their supplementary documents will facilitate the work with the new curricula by putting into practice the aims of the curricula with the help of descriptors and sample exercises.

The Educational Standards for English are explicitly dovetailed with the curricula for Lower Academic and General Secondary Schools, in particular with the parts *Educational Tasks of Language Teaching* (*Bildungs- und Lehraufgabe des Fremdsprachenunterrichts*) and with the core area of the curriculum for English (cf. bm:bwk 2005: 22).

Similarly, there are quite a number of basic principles and objectives that the curricula share with the ELP, such as

- the promotion of an increase of (inter)cultural awareness and the mixed education of students with different cultural backgrounds and roots,
- the promotion of developing self-competence and the ability of self-assessment,
- the promotion of differentiated and individualised language education,
- the claim that topics should be taught that are relevant to students,
- the promotion of the concept of life-long learning,
- the promotion of the development of the four/five[66] communicative language skills,
- the promotion of successful rather than mistake-free communication, and
- the promotion of learner autonomy, etc. (cf. Keiper/Nezbeda 2006: 19 ff.).[67]

Whereas no explicit mention of the CEFR is made in the new curricula for Lower Secondary Academic and General Schools since the CEFR had not yet been published, the new curricula for Upper Secondary Academic Schools do include references to the CEFR (cf. Meister 2005: 105). Some of the CEFR principles and objectives that are mentioned in the curricula are the following:

- the enhancement of inter-European mobility and of the European dimension in language education (cf. ibid, 106; curriculum for Foreign Languages/L2/L3: bm:bwk 2006 b: 1)
- a promotion of action-oriented competence, intercultural competence, and the competence of life-long, autonomous learning (cf. ibid,1)
- a division of language competence into (1) linguistic competence, (2) pragmatic competence, and (3) socio-linguistic competence (cf. ibid, 3)
- the implementation of the six CEFR proficiency levels (A1-C2), with a German adaptation of the relevant *Can do*-descriptors from the CEFR Global Scale (especially

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[66] The curricula, unfortunately, only differentiate between *Listening, Reading, Speaking* and *Writing*, whereas the CEFR, and hence the ELP and the Educational Standards, further differentiate between *Spoken Interaction* and *Spoken Production* in the skill *Speaking*. It is only in the curriculum section *Didactic Principles* that the CEFR distinction between *Spoken production* and *Spoken interaction* is made.

[67] A more detailed comparison of the curricula with the aims of the ELP (10-15 years), listing the relevant passages in the curricula, can be found in the forthcoming ELP supplementary brochure of Keiper/Nezbeda (2006).

on levels A1-B2, B2 being the level students should have reached in year 12/13, i.e. until they take their school leaving exams) (cf. ibid, 4-6).

As regards assessment, it is stated in the general curriculum that teacher-assessors have to present in an appropriate form their overall assessment and feedback concept to students and their parent(s) or legal guardian at the beginning of each school year.

Apart from the number of tests that are to be taken per school year, no further regulations in terms of assessment are made in the curricula, which may perhaps be seen as insufficient in a time of pioneering innovations that might seem confusing or even as a threat, to some teacher-assessors at least.

1.2.7.2 Curricula: Questions relating to assessment

The questions then arise,

1. whether the curricula should not contain more specific regulations as regards assessment, since one could claim that nowadays methods such as the counting of mistakes in order to determine a test grade are dated in language teaching. Thus, the Ministry might, indeed, have taken a step farther to preventing teacher-assessors from using outdated methods and criteria for assessment.

2. whether in an era of innovation and communication in language teaching and assessment, it would not be in better accord with the *zeitgeist* if an assessment and certificate system for language teaching were developed and implemented which is entirely new and tries to incorporate at least some of the CEFR principles. A suggestion of what such a future certificate system might look like is made in Chapter 2.

1.2.8 Austrian School Books

1.2.8.1 School Books: A general introduction

At first glance it would seem that school books do not have anything to do with the way teacher-assessors evaluate and assess their students' achievement, knowledge, or performance. However, it is a fact, even if a regrettable one, that many teacher-assessors tend to base their teaching and methodology entirely on the text and work books they use. Due to the fact that teacher-assessors often have two, three, or even more language classes – depending on whether their second subject is a language too – in each of which they teach three or four lessons a week – actual everyday teaching reality shows that communicative activities are a rare occurrence. The tasks a teacher-assessor of languages has to fulfil, then,

do not end with just preparing the lessons, activities, and drawing up teaching or learning goals respectively, but in addition there is also homework to correct, as well as tests and other materials to be developed and graded.

Thus, it seems inevitable that teacher-assessors tend to rely more or less exclusively on the broad range of activities, vocabulary sections, and grammar boxes in their textbooks, which are on the whole pedagogically well-founded and in keeping with the latest developments in the fields of language learning and teaching. Regrettably, however, quite a number of teacher-assessors appear to be ready to accept – in the interest of saving time – even those school books which are not fully or even approximately up-to-date, and which are not committed to the communicative approach, much less to action-oriented activities.

School books, naturally, tend to promote a particular approach towards language learning, teaching, and assessing, and thus have a strong influence on the way teacher-assessors deal with their students' spoken or written texts and achievements, but ultimately also on the way these texts are assessed.

1.2.8.1.1 The school book series *Ticket to Britain*

As early as 1982, a school book series was published in Austria which was both pioneering and innovative in its approach towards the teaching of English, and which anticipated methods of teaching and even of (self-)assessment with which the CEFR came to public attention only years later. This school book series was called *Ticket to Britain* (Heindler et al. 1982) and was conceived as a graded series of four school books which were based exclusively on communicative principles.

Ticket to Britain, moreover, was the first school book which promoted what in the CEFR is termed an **action-oriented approach** towards language teaching. Therefore, not only the activities but also the tests connected with this work attempted to reflect the purposefulness and practicality of language use. Secondly, the sub-division of language competence into – at that time – **four language skills** was an early precursor of the CEFR distinction into five language skills – the only difference being the afore-mentioned further sub-division in the CFER of the skill speaking into spoken production and spoken interaction. Thirdly, the series even addressed issues such as **learning to learn** and **self-assessment** (even *I can do*-checklists were already a substantial part of the *Ticket*-schoolbooks!), and lastly, it offered **communicative exercises** which differed in complexity.

1.2.8.1.2 The school book series *English to go*

Today, more than twenty years later, we have the CEFR as an instrument that is quickly gaining ground all over Europe, thus helping to initiate considerable changes in a number of European education systems.

Especially in Austria it would seem, however, that many teacher-assessors tend to react in a rather dismissive way towards the CEFR and all the innovations that it has brought about so far – partly, perhaps, as a result of the above-mentioned, and in many respects quite understandable w(e)ariness of reforms. Therefore, one might argue that a positive and, ultimately, CEFR-initiated change in the attitude of teacher-assessors towards language teaching and assessing could be more easily achieved through the official introduction of several 'sugar-coated pills'.

To begin with, school books are the very tools of trade of almost every language teacher, whereas the ELP – useful and motivating though it might be – is considered by many a teacher-assessor as an additional burden in the teaching profession that needs to be implemented in addition to school books. This, one might conclude, would seem to necessitate the introduction of an entirely new generation of school books.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the first of these 'sugar-coated pills' that was published in Austria is the new school books series *English to go*[68], which quite obviously is strongly influenced by both the CEFR and the Austrian *ELP for Lower Secondary Level*[69], and which will definitely encourage teacher-assessors to adopt a (more) pronounced communicative approach towards assessment by inviting them to reconsider a whole range of questions connected with their assessment strategies and teaching principles.

Each of the four complete *English to go* packages, i.e. the packages for years 1-4 in Lower Academic Secondary Schools and General Secondary Schools, consists of

- two/three books – a course book and a *workbook regular* (+ a *workbook bonus* for students).

Additionally, there are

- three CDs – CD 1 includes input for Units 1-10, CD 2 for Units 11-20, whereas CD 3 provides the *English to go*-radio programme *The Treehouse Kids*, which is intended

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[68] Tanja Westfall and Charlie Weber. 2004-2006. *English to go 1-4*. Vienna: öbv&hpt. Additional information, materials, and master copies are available on English to go Online: http://www.etg4me.com.
[69] *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio. Mittelstufe (10-15 Jahre)*. 2004. Ed. Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum. Graz: Leykam. ISBN: 3-7011-1444-7. Appendix to Schoolbooks List, school book number 116.316. Accreditation number 58.2004.

for entertainment, for the consolidation of newly acquired language (chunks), and for the support and development of literacy skills after each part, i.e. after every fifth Unit (cf. Westfall/Weber 2004: 3-5),

- the SbX[70] service online,
- a *Learning Journal* for students,
- a booklet *Revising and testing* with master copies as well as a fourth CD which includes additional texts for listening comprehension.

As was mentioned above, *English to go* is very likely to help teacher-assessors accept the main messages of the CEFR and the ELP, and perhaps this little detour is indeed necessary to make them recognise what great potential there is in these two instruments – a process which quite a few teacher-assessors refuse to take upon them on their own accord, i.e. by 'simply' dealing directly with the CEFR, the ELP, or their supplementary documents.

However, the ELP and *English to go* are certainly no pills that actually need any sugar-coating – which, unfortunately, can hardly be said for the CEFR – and neither are their contents. On the contrary, they are very attractive and useful once one has dealt with them in greater depth and has learnt how to use them flexibly. It is to be hoped, therefore, that *English to go* will live up to the expectation that it will serve to increase the acceptance of the ELP as a flexible tool which facilitates teaching and assessment, even among teacher-assessors who are still very critical of it.

With respect to the contents, activity prompts, and exercises which the *English to go* course- and workbooks offer to students, one might object that the choice of topics is in itself not altogether new. However, the topics that are traditionally dealt with in lower secondary education are in the first place anchored to the curricula and secondly, are largely dependent on vocabulary that can be considered basic, i.e. vocabulary one really has to be familiar with, which, apart from having to consider the age of students, justifies the choice of topics. In fact, when it comes to the presentation of vocabulary or grammar, the book does not offer totally innovative ideas either – (school) books such as *Grammar for Communication* (Newby 2001 a and b), the school book series *Friends* (Katzböck et al. 2004-2005), as well as the schoolbooks series *Meanings in Use* (Doff et al. 2003-2005) already worked with communicative activities, vocabulary in context, and even with vocabulary mind maps years ago, as can be seen from Figure 21 below:

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[70] SbX is the abbreviation for *Schulbuch Extra* (schoolbook extra) and is an extension of Austrian school books. On http://www.oebvhpt.at, under the heading *SbX*, supplementary exercises at different levels of difficulty are available for each Unit of those schoolbooks for which SbX is available.
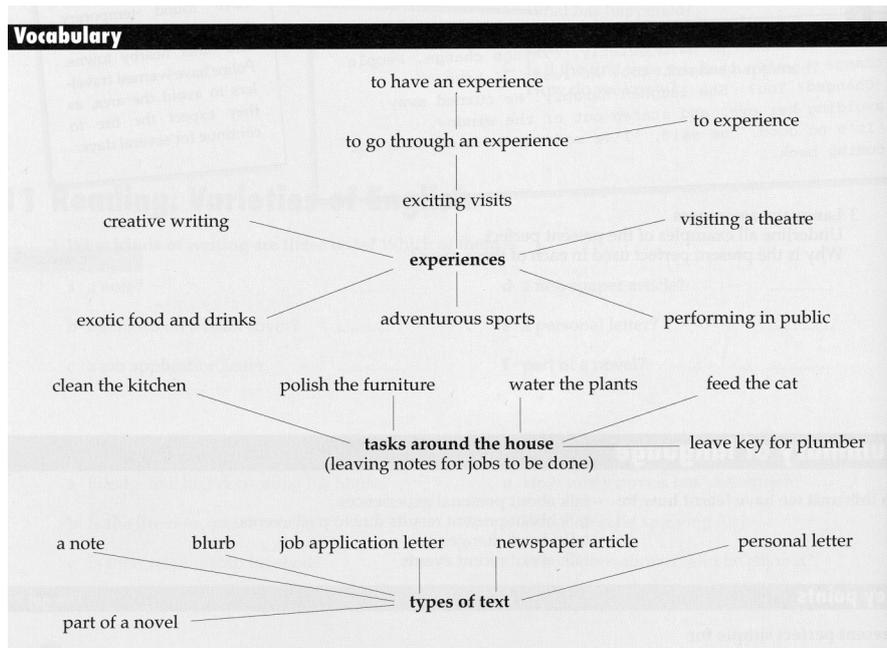
Figure 21: Vocabulary mind map (*Meanings in Use, Coursebook 1*: 66)

However, these observations are not intended to debunk the fundamentally useful conception of *English to go*, especially since the book is innovative in being the first school book that is partly based on the ELP and the CEFR in terms of content, but particularly in the statements it makes on assessment.

For a start, there are *self-checks* at the end of each unit which, in their basic outlook and ideology are based on the CEFR as well as on the ELP checklists, even if these *self-check* boxes are differently structured. Each box includes a small – and therefore easily manageable – number of *I can*-statements under up to seven of the following headlines, each of which stands for an important skill or field of language learning: (1) listening, (2) reading, (3) speaking[71], (4) writing, (5) vocabulary, (6) grammar, (7) learning to learn[72]. Each of the *self-check* boxes is cross-referenced to the preceding unit in the books and are thus obviously intended to make students evaluate whether they have achieved the learning goals of the unit they have just finished:

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[71] Unfortunately, in the self-checks that follow each unit, no distinction is made between spoken production and spoken interaction. This distinction is only made in those self-checks that follow each part, i.e. after every 5th unit.

[72] In the books, the self-check boxes are in German; the headlines/skills/areas are the following: (1) Hören, (2) Lesen, (3) Sprechen, (4) Schreiben), (5) Wortschatz, (6) Grammatik, (7) Lernen lernen.

Self-check unit 2

Datum ....

Ich kann ...

Hören

☐ Informationen über Themen und Aufgaben im Englischunterricht verstehen.

Lesen

☐ E-Mails und Briefe über Pläne verstehen.

Sprechen

☐ jemanden fragen, was sie oder er in diesem Schuljahr machen will oder sich erwartet.

☐ erzählen, was ich in diesem Schuljahr machen will oder mir erwarte.

Schreiben

☐ ein Formular ausfüllen.

☐ einen Brief über meine Pläne für dieses Schuljahr schreiben.

Wortschatz

☐ meine Schulfächer auf Englisch benennen

☐ mindestens sieben verschiedene Themen und Aufgaben im Englischunterricht benennen.

Grammatik

☐ mich an die *future* mit *will* und *going to* erinnern und diese richtig verwenden.

Lernen lernen

☐ das Wörterbuch verwenden.

Figure 22: Self-check unit 2 (*English to go*, Workbook regular 3: 16)

As can be seen from the above figure, such *self-check* statements include competences which students are realistically able to acquire in the course of two or three lessons, provided they are allowed enough time to use these newly acquired competences and practise with the help of reasonable, communicative exercises – which, however, are also provided by the authors.

Unfortunately, though, and this comes down to much the same drawback as has been mentioned in connection with the wording of the Educational Standards for Languages, the authors seem to have paid very little attention to the exact wording the ELP uses. Given the fact that the *English to go* books are mainly characterised through their picking up on ELP intentions and principles (cf. Westfall/Weber 2004: 5), it would have been entirely reasonable to use the exact ELP wording where feasible in order to increase and facilitate the implementation of the ELP as well as to encourage students to spot the ELP *I can do*-descriptors that they have been able to tick off in their *English to go* school books. In this way, they might be able to establish the direct link to the ELP we are in so urgent need of. However, and this much can be said with certainty, the ELP cannot be replaced or substituted by a school book that has neither the handy folder format nor offers the opportunity of documenting language and cultural experiences for more than one language in an officially and internationally recognised format.

The predominantly minute divergences of the *self-check* descriptors from the ELP descriptors, some of which seems hardly justified in terms of contents, can be seen from the following comparison of *English to go* (Etg) *self-check* descriptors and *checklist* descriptors,

apart from being, at times, not very good German or phrased with sufficient clarity (my emphasis through bold letters).

	self-check I can-descriptors (Etg)	*checklist I can*-descriptors (ELP)
	Hören/Listening	
H1	*Ich kann Informationen **über Themen** und Aufgaben im Englischunterricht verstehen.**	*Ich kann Anweisungen, Fragen und Auskünfte in Schulsituationen meistens verstehen. (A2)*
H2	*Ich kann den Sinn eines Textes (Geschichte, Lied, Sketch) erfassen**[,]** auch wenn ich nicht alle Wörter kenne.****	*Ich kann den Sinn einer einfachen Geschichte, eines einfachen Liedertextes, eines Sketches erfassen, auch wenn ich nicht alle Wörter oder Sätze verstehe. (A2)*
	Lesen/Reading	
L1	*Ich kann E-Mails und Briefe **über Pläne** verstehen.**	*Ich kann kurze einfache persönliche Briefe, Karten oder E-Mails verstehen. (A2)*
L2	*Ich kann persönliche Texte wie Tagebücher und Chats verstehen, in denen Gefühle, Wünsche und Erlebnisse beschrieben werden.****	*Ich kann private Briefe, Karten und E-Mails verstehen, in denen Gefühle, Wünsche und Erlebnisse beschrieben werden. (B1)*
L3	*Ich kann aus dem Textzusammenhang die Bedeutung einzelner Wörter und Äußerungen **großteils erschließen, wenn mir das Thema vertraut ist**.****	*Ich kann aus dem Textzusammenhang die Bedeutung einzelner Wörter und Äußerungen erschließen, wenn mir die Thematik vertraut ist. (B1)*
	Sprechen/Speaking	
S1	*Ich kann erzählen, was ich in diesem Schuljahr machen will oder mir erwarte.**	*Ich kann meine Absichten, Pläne und Ziele darlegen und einfach begründen. (Spoken production B1)*
S2	*Ich kann eine Rolle in einem Rollenspiel übernehmen oder **aus einer Geschichte**/einem Sketch **spielen**. (Spoken interaction)****	*Ich kann eine Rolle aus einer Geschichte/einem Sketch spielen. (A2)*
S3	*Ich kann sagen, ob ich mit etwas einverstanden bin oder nicht und, wenn nötig, einen anderen Vorschlag machen. (Spoken interaction)****	*Ich kann sagen, ob ich mit etwas einverstanden bin oder nicht, und wenn nötig einen anderen Vorschlag machen. (A2)*
	Writing/Schreiben	
Sch3	***Ich kann einen Sketch schreiben**.***	*Ich kann eine kurze, einfache Rollenspielszene allein oder mit anderen gemeinsam schreiben (z.B. Spielvorschläge machen, einkaufen gehen). (A2)*

*) These descriptors are taken from self-check unit 2 in *English to go*, Workbook regular: 16.
**) These descriptors are taken from self-check unit 3 in *English to go 3*, Workbook regular: 21.
***) These descriptors are taken from self-check part 2 in *English to go 3*, Workbook regular: 57.

As can be seen from the above table the authors of *English to go* tend to use a wording that is slightly different from the ELP descriptors' wording. However, such a procedure is useful only where the school book's *self-check* descriptor refers to a skill that is too specific to have been included in the ELP, because, after all, it cannot be expected to include all text types and situations that might occur in the classroom. Such descriptors, where a more specific type of wording seems justified, are found in examples L1 and S1 in my table.

Examples H1, L2, S1, and Sch3 are in fact borderline cases, because in these cases it could be argued that the respective descriptors are still more specific, or touch upon a slightly different skill, than the ELP descriptors. However, given the fact that students do their self-checks after they have finished a Unit, they are very likely to link the descriptors to the text

type or topic they have just dealt with, which would fully justify the usage of the ELP descriptors in the interest of linking the ELP with school books and classroom work.

Thirdly, there are quite a number of descriptors in the *English to go* series the meanings of which are entirely identical with the ELP descriptors. It is especially in such cases – cf., for example, H2, L3, and S2 – that confusion might be created for both students and teacher-assessors who look for descriptors in the ELP, and who will have a hard time seeing why the wording has been changed in the school books; changing just the positions of or inserting commas in the original text, as in S3, moreover, is without any discernible purpose.

In the teacher's book the authors of *English to go* mention the ELP twice. To begin with, they point out „[dass] die *self-checks* […] sich an der vom Ministerium approbierten österreichischen Ausgabe des Europäischen Sprachenportfolios orientieren" (*English to go*, *Teacher's book 3*: 4), and secondly they state, with regard to portfolio work:

> Obwohl beide Autoren seit 1996 mit Portfolios im eigenen Unterricht arbeiten, wird Portfolioarbeit nicht zur Leistungsbeurteilung integriert, um den Lehrer/innen die Entscheidung bei der Auswahl der Evaluierungsmodi zu überlassen. Trotzdem ist das Lehrwerk von den Grundgedanken der Europäischen Sprachenportfolios geprägt. (Ibid, 5)

In the above quotation, the authors explicitly state, although both of them have been working with portfolios in their own teaching, portfolio work is not integrated in these books with the intention of assessing students' achievements, since teacher-assessors should have a free choice of their methods of assessment. Nevertheless, they claim that the books are influenced by the basic ideas of the ELP.

With regard to this statement, the question arises whether the authors have in fact grasped the "Grundgedanken" (basic ideas) of the ELP, since as has been discussed above, one of the ELP's fundamental tenets is that it belongs to its holder and is under no circumstances whatsoever intended as a means of assessment by others. Therefore, linking the ELP to *English to go* as a means of assessment would have constituted a major violation of the instrument's principles. Hence, it is to be seen as rather a blessing that the books are not linked to the ELP, assuming that I read the above quotation correctly.

It seems somewhat peculiar, though, that the ELP is mentioned in the teacher's book only in passing, since even if the ELP should not intended to be anchored to any school books as a tool of assessment, it is indeed meant to be linked to every (future) school book by creating an awareness of it not only in the teachers' but also in the students' books. Regrettably, however, the authors of *English to go* have consistently avoided adhering to this strategy.

It is not my intention at this point to urge that school books should use only ELP descriptors, because for reasons discussed above this is not always feasible. However, one would have wished for frequent links to the ELP throughout all of the *English to go* books and journals, which would certainly have been in keeping with the common European goal of introducing ELPs all over Europe. Moreover, this would also have been reasonable with regard to an easy access to and start with the ELP.

In fact, one could think of easy but effective ways of cross-referencing *English to go* to the ELP and of thus stimulating work with the ELP in the classroom. Here are a few suggestions of how future editions of the series could and, indeed, should be improved in that direction:

1. Those descriptors whose meaning corresponds to or are nearly identical in meaning with certain ELP descriptors should be replaced by the respective ELP descriptors.

2. After each descriptor that is taken from the ELP, there should be an asterisk, and a footnote pointing the reader to the ELP. Thus, for example, such a note might state something like the following: *Dear learner, Now that you have been able to tick off this* I can-*statement, you can also tick it off in your ELP. You can find the statement in the ELP checklist* Listening Level A2. *You can also try to find similar descriptors of connected skills, maybe even on a higher level. Maybe you can even add a second tick on a lower level descriptor because you have become better in some skill!* Comments of this type would be vital for three reasons: Firstly, because a school book that is conceived to promote ELP principles should make clear references to the instrument whose principles it is influenced by or even based on. Secondly, because we are in desperate need of books which help to pave the way of the ELP into the classroom and to help students and teacher-assessors to become familiar with this instrument; and thirdly, because at some points the unacknowledged use of ELP contents and descriptors with only minute changes, could in fact be rightly seen as plagiarism. In order to avoid such possible criticism in the future, explicit reference to the ELP is not only a question of fair use but also to be demanded from an academic point of view.

3. After each *Learning tip* box, one might insert a link to the ELP in an appropriate comment, for example: *Dear learner, if you find this learning tip useful, you can copy it to the learning tip grid that is provided in the learning tip section of your ELP. In your ELP, there are also many additional useful tips as to how you can make your learning more efficient. You can also ask your fellow students to tell you about some learning strategies which they have found useful – perhaps you might take a glance at*

their learning tips grid in order to increase your own pool of learning tips! Such a reference would be a natural way to remind or even introduce students to the well-structured and very appealing collection of learning tips which the ELP offers. Another possible link to the ELP might be established by introducing the *Portfoliphant* to *English to go*. If the *Portfoliphant* occurred in *learning tip* boxes and functioned as the learning companion and mascot of both the school books and the ELP, the interplay of both instruments would be increased considerably; moreover, the recognition of the common mascot would establish a basic familiarity with both instruments from the very beginning.

4. When it comes to portfolio work, such as in *English to go 3*, Unit 16, reference should also be made to the ELP. In the respective unit, students are expected to put together a portfolio including information and sample texts for various fields of work and learning, such as *your best work*, *how you learn*, *how you improved*, *your language biography*, *your learning goals*, *extra work*, and *how you use English outside of class*. In order to link such portfolio work – which is probably assessed at least in terms of participation and enthusiasm – to the ELP, in which texts have mere documentation and reporting value, I would suggest that a comment be inserted such as: *Dear student, After the presentation of your portfolio, you might want to keep those pieces of work that you are most proud of in the* Dossier *part of your ELP. Maybe you are so proud of or interested in a certain text of yours that you would like to save it in your ELP, and perhaps you would even like to resume work on your text in a couple of months' time!*

5. In some Units, such as in *English to go 3*, Unit 2, the students should be made to set themselves goals concerning their language learning. Here, students are supposed to talk and write about how they would go about improving their proficiency in English. At such points in the school books, comments such as the following would certainly be useful: *Dear learner, Your ELP has a section that is called '*More specifically language learning: things you do habitually. Any plans for near future?' *In this part of your ELP, there are very helpful grids in which you can enter your plans and aims for the next few weeks or months, concerning the improvement of your English. With the help of these well-structured grids, it is certainly easier for you to keep track of which aims you have already reached and what things you still should or want to work on!*

6. Where issues such as intercultural awareness and attitudes or traditions in other cultures are addressed, reference to the ELP section on Intercultural experiences

should be added, such as *Dear learner, You have just learned about Christmas in Britain and in the US. Your ELP has a section on intercultural experiences, where you might want to list the most striking differences and similarities between British, US-American, and Austrian (your own) traditions of celebrating Christmas!*

Linking the *English to go* series to the ELP in the ways described above would not only increase or create in the first place, the students' interest in the ELP but would also have the effect of facilitating the development of learner autonomy. For this would help to familiarise students with the instrument step by step and to move from a smaller area of autonomous language learning and self-assessment in the context of school books and immediate learner needs to a larger context of language learning and learner autonomy that is related to more general aims and skills in language proficiency and to the European context.

Facilitating work with the ELP, self-assessment and the familiarisation with the ELP descriptors, would also affect assessment in positive ways: Firstly, students' ability to reflect on their own language skills, and of thus being able to carry out self-assessment in a realistic and accurate manner, would diminish the pressure and fear of testing and would even make it possible for teacher-assessors to hand out very specific self-assessment grids and checklists before tests, presentations, project work, or other situations in which specific skills are needed. Secondly, familiarity with ELP checklists would facilitate the preparation for the Standards Check Tests, and thirdly, familiarity with the CEFR levels A1-C2 – which, unfortunately, are not mentioned in *English to go* either – would perhaps be an important step away from the current grades 1-5, and at the same time a step towards an approach towards assessment and grading that is based on the CEFR six level system.

1.2.8.2 School Books: Questions relating to assessment

With regard to an approaching new generation of school books, the following question arises:

1. Would not be the linking of school books to instruments such as the CEFR, the ELP, and the Educational Standards increase the potential in Austria to move away from pressure through grading and towards the introduction of the CEFR common reference levels as a basis for assessment? The question that follows of how such a new grading system could be like will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.3 The House of Innovative Language Learning

As has been frequently pointed out in the present Chapter, all instruments discussed above are closely interwoven with each other. In order to show in a clear and concise way how the CEFR, the ELP, the national curriculum, etc. influence and interact with each other, and to relate them to each other in a short and graphic overview, Figure 23 – *The House of Innovative Language Learning* – was developed, which will be explained below:
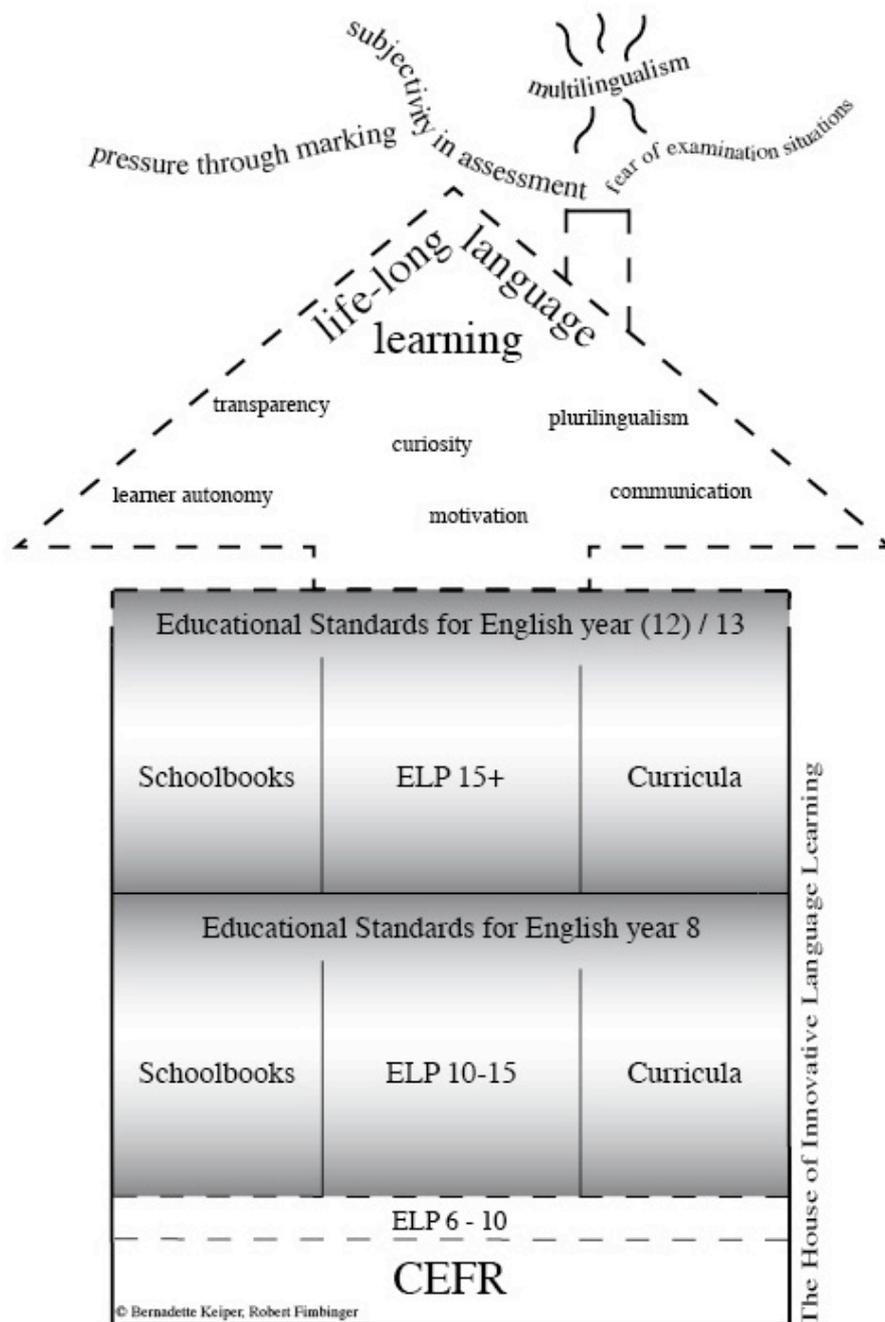

Figure 23

The **CEFR**, being the 'cellar' and providing the foundation of the *House of Innovative Language Learning*, forms the common basis for all other current projects in that it provides and promotes on a European level guidelines, principles, and innovative concepts that have to do with language learning, teaching, and assessment. The most important concepts, which have been explained in greater depth above, are:

- the facilitation of the international comparability of language lessons, courses, certificates and diplomas;
- the promotion of pluriculturalism and plurilingualism;
- the introduction of the Common Reference Levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2;
- the specification of these Common Reference Levels through illustrative descriptors and *Can do-* descriptors that are positively worded;
- the promotion of an action-oriented, communicative approach towards language teaching, learning, and assessment;
- an emphasis on situational aspects of communicative language use.

Also on a European Level, the CEFR initiated the development of national **ELP**s in a number of countries all over Europe, Austria among them. The ELPs, then, are tools which

- direct students as well as teacher-assessors to the internalisation of the above-mentioned CEFR principles;
- provide language learners and teachers with helpful additional information and with grids as well as descriptors which are more detailed than the CEFR descriptors and which are intended to help students to develop learner autonomy and the ability of self-reflection.

An **ELP for 6 to 10 year-old children**, which accompanies Primary Education is currently being developed. Similarly, an expert group has been formed to develop **Educational Standards for English in year 13** (i.e. the school-leaving year at Vocational Schools). It is to be hoped, moreover, that the bm:bwk will soon order the development of **Educational Standards for English in year 12**, which is the school leaving year at Upper Academic Secondary Schools. However, since these instruments have not been published yet, they are framed by dotted lines in figure 23.

The **ELP 6-10** is going to be – at least in the near future – the only official instrument in Europe to accompany CEFR-based language learning in Primary Education, since present didactic materials and curricula for Primary School do not refer to the CEFR or its principles with regard to language learning or assessment. Of course, the curriculum does emphasise important concepts that can also be found in the CEFR, such as the importance of the

development of intercultural competence, motivation, etc. (cf. bm:bwk 2003 a: 3; bm:bwk 2003 b: 1-7). Still, language learning in Primary Education is presently not a compulsory independent subject – the curriculum states the following:

> Die verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache ist auf der 1. und 2. Schulstufe der Grundstufe I integrativ zu führen (in kürzeren Einheiten fächerübergreifend). Auf der Grundstufe II kann die verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache im Rahmen der in der Stundentafel vorgesehenen Wochenstunden in längeren Einheiten bzw. integrativ geführt werden. (bm:bwk 2003 c: 4)

In the above quotation, it is stipulated that language teaching and learning in years 1 and 2 are to be integrated into classroom work, if possible also in a cross-curricular way. In years 3 and 4, language learning might still continue to be integrated in 'ordinary' classroom work, but alternatively a compulsory supplementary language course of the type *verbindliche Übung* might be offered, for which semester hours are provided in the timetable laid down by the Ministry. For this compulsory course, an extra curriculum is provided, which lists the main goals of such a course, which are intercultural awareness, aural comprehension of information on a few selected, relevant every-day topics, as well as talking about these topics (cf. bm:bwk 2003 d: 1-6). Ideally, the development of these skills could be improved, increased, and accompanied by an ELP, which would, moreover, from the very beginning considerably facilitate working with the ELP 10-15. In the House model, the ground floor only consists of the ELP 6-10, since it is going to be the sole instrument in Austria that is intended to accompany Primary Education if the CEFR is taken as the basis for language learning, teaching, and assessment.

The **ELP 10-15** is a learning companion throughout all four years of language learning at Lower Secondary Schools. It is placed at the centre of the House, due to the fact that it is meant to help develop pluricultural and plurilingual competence, as well as learning strategies, the ability to self-reflect, etc., which are skills that should not be limited to one subject or language but which should accompany and increase language learning and learning in general throughout a person's life.

The 'wall' on the left hand side, then, is formed by **school books** which, even if they are not a keystone of language learning for all teacher-assessors, are necessary and useful tools for the facilitation of the teaching, assessment, and acquisition of specific languages. In the present paper, the exemplary school book series is *English to go*.

The 'wall' on the right hand side of the House is formed by the **national curricula for Lower Secondary Education**, which reflect principles and ideas from the CEFR in their general parts, and, in their specific parts, principles and instructions as to what major topics students and teacher-assessors should deal with in school.

Whereas the curricula represent guidelines, school books help to put these guidelines into practice, which turns them into 'load-bearing walls': Without even one of those the House would lose its balance and collapse.

During year 4 of Secondary Education, students and teacher-assessors are supposed to work in class with the **Educational Standards for English year 8**, which serves as a preparation for the Standards Check Tests. Thus, the Standards can be called the 'ceiling of floor one', and the Check Tests that are held at the end of the school year represent the 'master builder' who makes sure that the ceiling has the load-bearing capacity of being the 'base of floor two', i.e. of Upper Secondary Education.

The second floor is structured similarly to the first floor but represents Upper Secondary Education (years 9-12/13). The only difference is that the Educational Standards as well as the Standards Check Tests for this level have not been developed yet. However, one can really look forward to the introduction of the Standards year 13, which are due soon, even though we will still have to wait for the Check Tests in order to tell what they will be.

In fact, the **Educational Standards (12)/13** should make sure that students who take their school leaving exams have acquired language skills and communicative competences which form so solid a basis for their future language learning that the 'roof' of the *House of Innovative Language Learning* can fully rest on it.

The 'roof', which has the form of an arrow that points into the direction of **life-long language learning** as the House's 'gable', is made up of some of the most important concepts that students should have internalised at this point, such as plurilingualism[73], a curiosity about languages and cultures, learner autonomy, etc. The roof is presented in broken lines so as to indicate two aspects: Firstly, such a sheltering roof of positive attitudes towards language learning and assessment will not exist in students' and teacher-assessors' minds from the very start, i.e. it is only after one has ascended the stairs from the cellar to the attic that all these concepts will have been internalised. Secondly, the fact that there is some measure of permeability in the roof indicates that we should not reject all traditional concepts. For instance, didactic teaching might sometimes (!) be preferred to project or group work, or subjectivity in assessment should be allowed when objectivity tends to interfere with

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[73] "Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism, which is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society. […] Beyond this, the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural context expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples […], 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: 4) Hence, the development and promoting of plurilingualism might be seen as preferable to the development of multilingualism.

motivational aspects, as might be the case with the Standards Check Tests, DIALANG tests, or similar instruments, etc.

The concepts that escape from the 'chimney' in the form of drifts of smoke and which 'go pop' in the air are such concepts and approaches towards language learning, teaching, and assessment as should, at this point at the latest, have been substituted by the positive concepts that fill the roof.

It has been shown in the present Chapter that what might appear to many teacher-assessors to constitute an ever greater variety of new projects, each of which means an extra work load, in actual fact aims to implement the basic instrument – the CEFR – in schools so as to ensure an approach towards language learning, teaching, and assessment that has been due for a long time. Ultimately, the development of the ELP, the ALTE Framework, the DIALANG Assessment System, the Educational Standards for Languages as well as upcoming and recently published school books series such as *English to go*, are measures that have been taken both on a European and on a national level in order to improve the quality of language education.

One can only applaud the fact, therefore, that institutions and working groups all over Austria that have been and will be involved in the development of all these innovative instruments intend to work together more closely in the future when it comes to implementing and promoting these instruments. This includes publishers, the developers of the Educational Standards for Languages, and the developers of the Austrian versions of the ELP (private information, given by Anita Keiper).

Incidentally, the acronym of the House of Innovative Language Learning is HILL, and indeed, language learning can be compared to climbing a hill, which might not always be easy and convenient. However, once one has reached the top, i.e. the level of language mastery one has defined as one's personal aim, the view down into the valley and back on the route one has taken looks all the more impressive and will produce feelings of pride. Thus, it is to be hoped that people, and especially teacher-assessors, will soon come to recognise the documents' great value as 'climbing irons' rather than be left behind in a dark valley of refusal and anger.

2 A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

2.1 AC2525 – Presentation of a new certificate form

One of the major outcomes of the present paper is that the current Austrian school system, and especially its assessment system, is by no means ideal, but that there are also recent and pioneering instruments could help to bring about the bottom-up change in our assessment and certificating culture that – as has repeatedly been pointed out above – we urgently need.

However, it is easy to criticise deficiencies without suggesting, at the same time, what sort of concrete changes in the existing system could lead towards a more balanced and fair assessment culture, which is the reason why the present Chapter 2 is an attempt to develop and suggest a new form of certificate for use in the future. Even the mere use of a new certificate form, though it might seem just a minor change, would necessarily entail a few radical re-orientations of assessment, which would turn in a bottom-up way, as it were, the Austrian school system into a performance-based system that puts greater emphasis on differentiated and specific assessment and feedback, one, moreover, in which also the students' own evaluation of their achievements finds a place as well. In more concrete terms, the *Achievement Certificate 2525* (AC2525), as I propose to call it, would entail the following three major changes in the present system, all of which are discussed after the presentation of a full-fledged AC2525 prototype:

1. The five-grade grading system would be abolished and replaced by descriptor-based, area-related assessment.
2. *Sitzenbleiben* would be done away with.
3. Self-assessment would have a fixed place in certificates.

The reader might wonder why the present writer chooses to call her certificate for the future AC2525. To begin with, the number 2525 was chosen with an eye to the fact that major changes tend to take a fair number of years to become established until they are fully accepted, Thus, a more optimistic designation for my project might have been AC2007. However, the year 2525 might be a more realistic deadline by which one may hope that pioneering reforms in the Austrian school system will have successfully been put into practice – perhaps even ones using certificates similar in nature to the prototype AC2525 suggested here. Secondly, the year 2525 might in some readers' minds be associated with the somewhat melancholic song *In the year 2525* by Zager and Evans, which contains a series of dystopian scenarios about the future results of mankind's negative, self-destructive use of progress and

technology. Being the name of a very optimistic project, however, AC2525 stands for quite the reverse situation, namely the (at present still) utopian scenario that students love to go to school and study (languages) with pleasure, since they no longer fear assessment. Thus, AC2525 is a project title that combines a realistic outlook with the sort of utopian idealism needed to initiate any sort of productive change.

Achievement Certificate for English, Year 9, Year of English 5

Name	ENTER NAME	School	ENTER SCHOOL
Date of Birth	ENTER DATE OF BIRTH	English Teacher	ENTER NAME OF ENGLISH TEACHER

Teacher's Assessment of Student's Communicative and Linguistic Competence

Student's Self-Assessment of Her Communicative and Linguistic Competence

Listening (Teacher)

Can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

Can use her linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

*	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA>	ooo	ooo
SC		
PC		
Og	ooo	ooo
Oe	ooo	ooo

Listening (Student)

I can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

I can use my linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA	ooo	ooo
SC		
PC		
Og	ooo	ooo
Oe	ooo	ooo

Reading (Teacher)

Can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

Can use her linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA	ooo	ooo
SC		
PC	ooo	ooo
Og		
Oe	ooo	ooo

Reading (Student)

I can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

I can use my linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA	ooo	ooo
SC		
PC	ooo	ooo
Og		
Oe	ooo	ooo

Spoken Production (Teacher)

Can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

Can use her linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA		
SC		
PC		
Og	ooo	ooo
Oe		

Spoken Production (Student)

I can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

I can use my linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA		
SC		
PC		
Og	ooo	ooo
Oe		

Spoken Interaction (Teacher)

Can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

Can use her linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA		
SC		
PC		
Og	ooo	ooo
Oe		

Spoken Interaction (Student)

I can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

I can use my linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA		
SC		
PC		
Og	ooo	ooo
Oe		

Writing (Teacher)

Can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

Can use her linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA		
SC		
PC	ooo	ooo
Og		
Oe		

Writing (Student)

I can communicate effectively on the following Level of competence — ENTER LEVEL

I can use my linguistic competence in the following fields so as to communicate in a linguistically correct way

	Y	N
VR		
VC		
GA		
SC		
PC	ooo	ooo
Og		
Oe		

> Since not every linguistic skill is needed for each of the five language skills, some of the following fields are 'deactivated', which in the present form is indicated by striking out the respective linguistic competence.

*)

VR =	Vocabulary Range	VC =	Vocabulary Control	GA =	Grammatical Accuracy
SC =	Semantic Competence	PC =	Phonological Control	Og =	Orthographic Control
Oe =	Orthoepic Competence	Y =	Rather yes	N =	Rather no

The *Can do*-descriptors for the above-entered Levels of Competence can be found in the enclosed *Certificate Reference Grid for Language Skills in English, year 5 (school year 9)*

Teacher's Assessment of Student's (In-Class) Work, Participation, Engagement, and Social Competence						Student's Self-Assessment of Her (In-Class) Work, Participation, Engagement, and Social Competence				

Participation in in-class work, activities, projects, and group work

	°	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Can work together productively with her classmates.						I can work together productively with my classmates.				
Participates actively in exercises, group work, and projects.						I participate actively in exercises, group work, and projects.				
Is willing to bring in new ideas.						I am willing to bring in new ideas.				
Brings along all materials that are central to ongoing work.						I bring along all materials that are central to ongoing work.				
Is not afraid of talking English despite running the risk of making mistakes.						I am not afraid of talking English despite running the risk of making mistakes.				
Is a reliable group member in group work and projects and meets deadlines.						I am a reliable group member in group work and projects and I meet deadlines.				

Homework

Does homework on a regular basis.						I do homework on a regular basis.				
Does homework carefully and with an obvious effort to improve her language and communicative skills.						I do homework carefully and with an effort to improve my language and communicative skills.				
Corrects homework on a regular basis.						I correct homework on a regular basis.				
Considers major homework texts as work in progress, tries to improve and correct them, and resumes work on them after some days' or months' time.						I consider major homework texts as work in progress, try to improve and correct them, and resume work on them after some days' or months' time.				
Keeps a well-structured homework folder.						I keep a well-structured homework folder.				

Work with the ELP

Works with her ELP on a regular basis.						I work with my ELP on a regular basis.				
Uses her ELP as an all-round language learning companion and makes selective and thoughtful use of at least certain parts of it.						I use my ELP as an all-round language learning companion and make selective and thoughtful use of at least certain parts of it.				
Is aware of her strengths and tries to work on her weaknesses or aims.						I am aware of my strengths and try to work on my weaknesses or aims.				
Knows what she can do, say, and express in English, and is able to accurately fill in clearly worded self-assessment grids.						I know what I can do, say, and express in English, and am able to accurately fill in clearly worded self-assessment grids.				
Is willing to help classmates with their ELP work, i.e. passes on helpful learning tips, acts as a peer-assessor in the language checklists part, and helps others improve texts for their ELPs which they are proud of.						I am willing to help classmates with their ELP work, i.e. I pass on helpful learning tips, act as a peer-assessor in the language checklists part, and help others improve texts for their ELPs which they are proud of.				

Intercultural Awareness

Shows general awareness that people from different cultures might have different habits and attitudes towards certain things.						I am generally aware that people from different cultures might have different habits and attitudes towards certain things.				
Shows general interest in cultural differences and similarities.						I am generally interested in cultural differences and similarities.				
In the course of the school year, she has dealt with racist or anti-Semitic issues or movements by means of reading books or articles, watching films, participating in discussions, etc.						In the course of the school year, I have dealt with racist or anti-Semitic issues or movements by means of reading books or articles, watching films, participating in discussions, etc.				
In the course of the school year, she has dealt with the following three cultural aspects, differences, questions, or phenomena in greater depth:						In the course of the school year, I have dealt with the following three cultural aspects, differences, questions, or phenomena in greater depth:				

ENTER TOPIC 1	ENTER TOPIC 2	ENTER TOPIC 3	ENTER TOPIC 1	ENTER TOPIC 2	ENTER TOPIC 3
ENTER FORM OF DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION	ENTER FORM OF DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION	ENTER FORM OF DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION	ENTER FORM OF DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION	ENTER FORM OF DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION	ENTER FORM OF DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION

General characteristics

Arrives for classes on time.						I arrive for classes on time.				
Knows what is going on in class when asked spontaneously.						I know what is going on in class when asked spontaneously.				
Always brings along her own school books.						I always bring along my own school books.				
Appears to be a balanced person who behaves friendly most of the time.						I think I am a balanced person who behaves friendly most of the time.				
Is interested in good social contacts.						I am interested in good social contacts.				

°)

1 = very much	2 = much	3 = not so much	4 = scarcely

Reflexive assessment discussion held on	ENTER DATE OF REFLEXIVE ASSESSMENT DISCUSSION	
Date	ENTER DATE	ENTER SCHOOL STAMP
School	ENTER NAME OF SCHOOL	
Teacher's personal signature	ENTER NAME IN PRINTED LETTERS	Student's personal signature	ENTER NAME IN PRINTED LETTERS
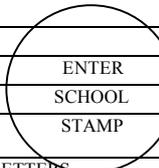
Certificate Reference Grid for Language Skills*
English, year 5 (school year 9)
Expected Average Level of Proficiency: CEFR Level B1

| | Understanding | | Speaking | | Writing |
	Listening	Reading	Spoken Production	Spoken Interaction	Writing
B1++	Can understand the main points of speeches and presentations that are a little complex in terms of language and contents, provided clearly articulated standard speech is used and the topic is familiar and to her personal interest. Can understand standard speech conversations between native speakers about familiar topics and topics of personal interest. Can understand TV and radio programmes, plots of films, announcements, and telephone calls in standard speech, provided there is no disturbing noise in the background.	Can read articles and reports that are concerned with contemporary and familiar topics or problems, e.g. in youth magazines, and find out which particular attitudes or viewpoints the writers adopt. Can scan longer, more complex texts for the most important information (in order to find out whether close reading is relevant to her purpose). Can understand simpler contemporary literary texts or texts that are not highly complex in their original form, provided she can consult a dictionary from time to time. Can read all private correspondence without effort.	Can present clear, detailed descriptions on subjects related to her field of interest. Can explain a viewpoint on a topical or familiar issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of some options. Can relate experiences, events, ideas, plans, and ambitions quite fluently and in detail. Can present pre-prepared presentations in a vivid and interesting way and point listeners towards important aspects of the topic. Can conclude a presentation in a suitable way. Can relate quite spontaneously the main point of a text, film, interview, or documentary.	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes interaction with native speakers quite possible, provided things she does not understand immediately are repeated. Can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, expressing her intentions and emotions, and accounting for and sustaining her views. Such conversations and discussions can be about a wide range of everyday topics or topics of personal interest. Can take over a role in role plays or other simulations in which she has to take a viewpoint that does not correspond to her own viewpoint.	Can write clear, detailed texts on subjects related to her interests. Can write a short, simple, and coherent essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. Can write private letters or e-mails describing experiences or events and highlighting the personal significance of these events and experiences, and can react towards other people's reports, narrations, and viewpoints. Can summarise what she has heard, read, or experienced so clearly that readers can grasp the main points. Can accept the view that writing more demanding texts is a process that might take longer than a few hours.
B1+	Can understand clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can understand slow standard speech conversations between native speakers about familiar topics and topics of personal interest. Can understand TV and radio programmes, announcements, and telephone calls in clear and slow standard speech, provided there is no disturbing noise in the background. Can easily understand instructions, questions, and information in school situations.	Can read simple articles and reports in youth magazines that are concerned with familiar topics or problems and understand the main points. Can scan longer texts for the most important information. Can understand simple contemporary literary texts or texts that are not linguistically complex in their original form, provided she can consult a dictionary. Can read private letters, e-mails, and notes without undue effort.	Can explain why something is a problem, summarise and give her opinion about a short story, article, discussion, interview, or documentary. Can describe how to do something, giving detailed instructions. Can present clear descriptions of a small range of subjects related to her field of interest. Can explain a viewpoint on a familiar issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of some options.	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes interaction with native speakers quite possible, provided her interlocutors talk slowly and things she does not understand immediately are repeated. Can spontaneously take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, expressing her intentions and emotions, and accounting for and sustaining her views. Such conversations and discussions can be about important everyday topics or topics of personal interest. Can take over a role in simple role plays or other simple simulations in which she has to take a viewpoint that does not correspond to her own viewpoint.	Can write clear, connected texts on subjects related to her interests. Can write a short, simple, and coherent essay or report, passing on information or describing her point of view. Can write private letters or e-mails describing experiences or events and can react towards other people's narrations and viewpoints. Can summarise what she has heard, read, or experienced simply but so clearly that readers can grasp the main points. Can make up questions for a questionnaire that are relevant to the subject matter and summarise the results in a short report. Can write poems prompted by an impulse text, picture, song, etc.

B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on topics of personal interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear and provided she can listen to them more than once. Can understand the main points of stories, interviews, documentaries, sketches etc. that are dealt with in school, even if she does not understand every word or phrase. Can understand instructions, questions, and information in school situations without effort. Can understand clearly articulated utterances in conversations about everyday topics.	Can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday language or language that is related to topics dealt with in school. Can understand the main messages in simply and well-structured newspaper articles or texts in magazines that contain pictures. Can understand forms well enough to fill them in. Can conclude from a familiar context the meaning of unfamiliar words. Can read simple but lengthy literary texts with joy, e.g. simplified versions of classical novels or plays.	Can talk about familiar things, topics, or events she has heard, read about, or seen, in a simple but coherent way, connecting phrases in a simple way. Can present pre-prepared presentations in an interesting and easy-to-follow way. Can (take pictures and keywords as a prompt to) narrate simple but coherent stories. Can relate the plot of a book or film. Can talk about and give reasons for her intentions, plans, dreams, hopes, and ambitions. Can describe pictures, daily routines, and situations that have to do with familiar or everyday topics.	Can initiate, maintain, and close without undue effort conversations about familiar topics and express feelings such as surprise or joy. Can also spontaneously enter conversations about topics that are of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life, such as family, hobbies, travel, and current events. Can give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends. Can make a complaint. Can deal with most everyday situations likely to arise whilst travelling, eating out, or taking part in public events.	Can write simple connected texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can use a dictionary for correcting and proofreading texts. Can write texts (e.g. personal letters) describing experiences, impressions, or stories. Can write role plays about familiar topics or topics of personal interest, such as planning a holiday. Can use the new media (internet forms, e-mails, chats) for personal communication. Can write a CV and a simple covering letter. Can write simple poems following a given pattern, e.g. Haikus. Can write short summaries of what she has heard, read, or experienced.
A2++	Can understand phrases and much of the vocabulary related to areas of personal relevance (e.g. basic personal and family information, shopping). Can understand the main point of radio or TV programmes on topics of personal interest when the delivery is quite slow and clear and provided she can listen to them more than once. Can understand the main points of conversations, stories, interviews, documentaries, sketches etc. that are dealt with in school, even if she does not understand every word or phrase. Can understand most instructions, questions, and information in school situations without effort.	Can understand without effort virtually all working instructions in school books as well as written comments by her teacher on texts she has written. Can understand with some effort texts that consist mainly of highest frequency everyday language or language that is related to topics dealt with in school. Can scan well-structured, simple texts for the most important facts and information, e.g. timetables, operating instructions, brochures, and instructions on the internet. Can understand without undue effort the main messages in simply and well-structured newspaper texts in youth magazines, provided they contain pictures. Can understand longer, well-structured stories, dialogues, and poems, about everyday topics. Can with some effort read simple literary texts with joy, e.g. simplified versions of classical novels or plays.	Can use a series of phrases to talk about familiar things, topics, or events she has heard, read about, or seen. Can give an extended description of her environment, e.g. people and places, living conditions, her educational background, habits and routine. Can describe pictures, past and present situations that have to do with familiar topics, such as the weather, housing, school, leisure, and work. Can narrate simple stories and link phrases in simple ways.	Can initiate, maintain, and close with some effort simple conversations about familiar topics and express feelings such as surprise or joy. Can also take part in shorter conversations about topics that are of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life, such as family, hobbies, travel, and current events. Can give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends. Can make a complaint. Can deal with most everyday situations likely to arise whilst travelling, eating out, or taking part in public events.	Can write simple connected texts on topics which are familiar or of immediate personal interest. Can write texts (e.g. personal letters) describing experiences, impressions, or stories. Can write a longer personal letter, for example thanking someone for something, apologising for something, explaining reasons for what she did (not do), or answering questions. Can write short, simple role plays about familiar topics or topics of personal interest. Can make up questions for a questionnaire and summarise the results in a short report. Can write a CV. Can write various kinds of simple texts on her own or together with others. Can write a text describing her room, other people, her pet, and other places and things in a detailed, vivid, and interesting way.

A2+	Can understand phrases and high frequency vocabulary related to areas of immediate personal relevance (e.g. basic personal and family information, shopping). Can catch the main point in clear and simply structured messages, announcements, stories, song lyrics, and sketches, even if she may not understand every word or phrase. Can understand most instructions, questions, and information in school situations without undue effort. Can understand conversations about familiar topics or topics of current interest, provided speech is clear and slow. Can understand details in simply structured TV or radio programmes, provided she is familiar with the topic and can listen to the text more than once.	Can understand without undue effort most working instructions in school books as well as written comments by her teacher on texts she has written. Can grasp the most important information from everyday texts (e.g. brochures, advertisements, menu cards, posters). Can understand simple, personal letters, postcards, or e-mails. Can understand simple stories, dialogues, poems, and nursery rhymes about familiar or everyday topics and guess unknown words from the context. Can understand simple on-screen messages and online help-texts in computer programmes and computer games.	Can describe in simple terms herself, her family, friends, and other people, daily routines, habits, and familiar places in simple ways. Can (take words and pictures as prompts to prepare and) narrate simple stories. Can talk about a situation or event if she is allowed time for preparation. Can summarise short passages of texts she has read in a few simple sentences.	Can communicate well in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. Can handle short social exchanges and show interest in what her interlocutors say. Can keep a conversation going if the interlocutor also takes an active part in the conversation and helps maintain it. Can manage simple conversations without undue effort. Can easily take over a role in a dialogue, story, role play, or sketch on familiar or relevant topics such as family, eating out, shopping, or leisure and holiday.	Can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate or everyday need, e.g. informing someone about where she is, what she needs, or when she comes back. Can write a simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something, apologising for something, or answering questions. Can write a short, simple scene for a role play on her own or together with others. Can write a longer but simply structured picture story. Can describe her room, other people, her pet, and other places and things in simple but detailed sentences. Can write a text and connect sentences with linking devices such as *and*, *or*, *because*, or express succession by using *then*, *afterwards*, etc.

*) This Reference Grid is based on the CEFR Self-Assessment Grid (CEFR 2001: 26 f.), CEFR section 3.6, *Content coherence in Common Reference Levels* (ibid, 33 ff.), and the *I can*-descriptors from the Language Checklists in the Austrian ELP 10-15.

2.2 AC2525: Explanation and discussion

As can be seen from the certificate form above, grading in the future – according to project AC2525 – will no more be reduced to one single grade (1-5) for each subject, since the differentiated assessment of the students' achievements foreclose the possibility that achievements in various areas such as participation, social competence, and subject competence are reduced to one grade that is, in fact, meaningless and grants no insight into the teachers' reasons for awarding this grade.

There are, for instance, students who struggle hard in order to improve their grade – they do all their homework carefully and on a regular basis; they learn the vocabulary they are supposed to learn, but, in their teachers' opinion, their English is still not good enough for them to receive a better grade. Such students, even if they participate actively and are engaged in ongoing work, are likely to receive the same grade – for example, C – as students who already have a good command of the language but are too lazy to do their homework properly

or participate in classroom work. Thus, no single, numerical grade, whether it is a good or a bad one, will ever give fair evidence of which areas of competence the student is good at.

An adequate assessment of students' actual achievements over a year can only be attained, therefore, by introducing descriptor-based assessment in the Austrian school system. In order to make such a system work effectively, the following steps should be taken: First of all, sub-levels to the six CEFR Levels will need to be introduced, since students are not likely to reach CEFR Level C2 until they take their school leaving exams at the age of 18 or 19[74]. That means that there are not enough levels yet which teacher-assessors can refer to in order to demonstrate progress in a realistic way. The introduction of just two or three sub-levels within each main level, however, would be enough to provide teacher-assessors with realistic and motivating year's teaching and learning goals.

2.2.1 Abolishing *Sitzenbleiben*: *Trampolining*

Therefore, on a national or, ideally, European level, working groups of experts should develop **Can do-descriptors for all five CEFR skills on all new sub-levels**. Teachers would agree on an average level which most students are likely to be able to reach by the end of each school year, which does not mean, however, that students who do not reach this agreed average level receive fail grades. In order to cater for low- as well as high-achievers, which are found in every language class, students should be allowed to stay two levels behind the average level. Of course, staying behind would, over the years, make some students fall more and more behind, which is the reason why *Sitzenbleiben* should be replaced by *Trampolining*[75].

The **Trampolining System** incorporates two possibilities for students. Firstly, students who (continuously) tend be below average class goals should attend so-called trampoline courses until they have safely reached the next level. Conversely, students who tend to feel bored in their base-class and are ambitious enough to want to reach the next higher level, can attend trampoline courses as well, and stay there until they feel they have reached the level they aspired to reach. Such trampoline courses should be offered at each school and for each level, throughout the whole school year. They should always be held on a fixed afternoon, at a time when no class has regular lessons, at all schools nationwide. This

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[74] The Austrian Curriculum for Upper Secondary Academic Schools stipulates that students have to achieve CEFR Level B2 in L2, which in Austria is English at most schools (cf. bm:bwk 2006 b: 4 f.).

[75] The concept of *Trampolining* was developed by the present writer. The Austrian *Zukunftkommission* ('*Committee Future*') has presented suggestions as to abolishing *Sitzenbleiben* and introducing a course system. However, low-achievers with two or more *Nicht genügend*s would still have to repeat a year in this system. Furthermore, the *Zukunftskommission* does not intend, as yet, to abolish grades, nor do they plan on keeping core classes for all subjects. (cf. Haider et al. 2003: 76).

day also needs to be announced before the beginning of the school year in order to allow the students and their parents to plan ahead their leisure time, i.e. to fix private music, instrument, or sports lessons and courses, to arrange their babysitters, nannies, grandparents, etc. Thus, all students will have the opportunity of attending trampoline courses whenever they – or their teacher-assessors – fell they need special challenges or support. It needs to be stressed at this point that regular classes should still take place in core classes, which stay the same from year 1 until year 8/9 of Secondary Education, for two main reasons: First of all, students should have the chance to make friends and to stay with them throughout their secondary education, which is not the case with the *Sitzenbleiben* system. Next, it can be claimed that classes in which there are students of mixed levels of competence and ability tend to develop a positive learning atmosphere in as much as weaker students are to a certain extent carried along by the competence and motivation of good students, whereas high-achievers have the chance to increase their social competence by explaining things to others, and by having to consider the needs of those classmates that do not learn so easily or quickly (information given by Belinda Steinhuber in our interview). Ultimately, the term Trampolining reflects ideally what this system is about, namely to catch lower-achieving students before they 'hit the ground', before they fall irredeemably behind their year's goals, while at the same time boosting high-achievers' power and motivation so that they might jump to a higher level. Since students, both of high and of lower ability and motivation would attend such trampoline courses, a stimulating and balanced learning atmosphere would also be created in trampoline lessons, quite contrary to the tense atmosphere that is at times likely to arise in private tuition lessons – especially in the summer – when students are reluctant to study and do their homework while their friends go swimming and enjoy their holidays.

2.2.2 Descriptor-based certificates

As has been shown above, the current five grades are not very meaningful in and of themselves, which justifies their being substituted by descriptor-based and area-related assessment. The descriptors needed for that purpose, which should be developed for each sub-level by working groups of experts, are obviously too lengthy to be incorporated directly in the *Year Achievement Certificate*, as can be seen from the form I present above. A better overview of a student's achievement would be granted by attaching what I choose to call *Certificate Reference Grids for Language Skills* to the certificates themselves, which should be developed for the language certificates for each school year and each language, depending on whether the language concerned is learned as language 2, 3, or 4, as well as depending on

the age group, i.e. school year. The distinction between 'year of schooling' and 'year of learning a language' is made in consideration of the fact that a child who has been learning English for three years starting at age 7 is likely to have developed quite a different type and depth of linguistic and communicative competence from a child who started learning a language at age 10. The present writer's *Certificate Reference Grid for Language Skills in English, year 5 (school year 9)* is suggested as a prototype for possible sub-levels and their respective *Can do*-descriptors for the five CEFR language skills for school year 9. The prototype grid corresponds to the specific abilities students of that age group might be expected to have developed, provided that they have been learning English as their second language for five years.

In the CA2525 system, assessment of language competence is divided into the assessment of

1. **communicative effectiveness** and
2. **linguistic correctness**.

This distinction gives the freedom to teacher-assessors to assess a student's performance in terms of communicative effectiveness, since it allows them to assess, in the first place, on which level the student is able to fulfil the descriptor's communicative side. As a second step, however, it can be stated in CA2525 whether the respective level of proficiency has also been reached in terms of linguistic awareness and correctness in the following seven areas: (1) vocabulary range, (2) vocabulary control, (3) grammatical accuracy, (4) semantic competence, (5) phonological control, (6) orthographic competence, (7) orthoepic competence. In the present CA2525 prototype, it is suggested to decide whether the assessee rather tends (Y) or rather tends not to (N) communicate effectively as well as in a linguistically correct way. Another suggestion might be to incorporate *Can do*-descriptors for these seven areas into the Certificate Reference Grid, too. Such descriptors would need to be developed by groups of experts, since the CEFR does not provide (sufficiently detailed) descriptor scales for all of these areas. Grids are provided only for (1), (2), (3), (5), and (6) (cf. CEFR 2001: 112 ff.); the scale for grammatical accuracy, however, should not be used for reasons discussed in Chapter 1.2.1.

Naturally, an assessment system which is based on the CEFR principles and on specific descriptors would entail that teacher-assessors become well-acquainted with the CEFR, which might be considered by many a waste of time, or at any rate an additional burden they are not willing to take upon themselves. However, and this point needs to be stressed in particular, from time to time people in all professions have to deal with

innovations in their field of work – managers need to attend special leadership seminars; craftsmen need to take in-service training courses. Why, then, we might ask ourselves, are many teacher-assessors not easily motivated to acquaint themselves with recent innovations, even though their level of expertise in those areas will have a considerable influence on young people's future, their knowledge and personal development? In my view, teacher-assessors should make it their duty to reserve three or four afternoons for working through the CEFR and one or two additional helpful supplementary documents. Moreover, they could and should make use of the in-service teacher training seminars on the CEFR, the ELP, etc. which are offered at Pedagogical Institutes and other institutions all over Austria.

Furthermore, if one decides to assess not only the general achievement of students but to assess in a differentiated way the five CEFR language skills plus in-class work etc., a positive backwash effect would be that more communicative activities, (spontaneous) presentations, and listening comprehension exercises – ideally with authentic texts – will be needed in order to grant teacher-assessors as well as their students an insight into students' abilities that is deep enough for a fair assessment in all five skills. Thus, the implementation of CA2525 would indeed help to create communicative language classrooms in a more or less natural way.

As regards the choice of aspects and descriptors for the assessment of a student's in-class work, participation, engagement, and social competence, AC2525 comprises the following five general aspects of a student's behaviour, attitudes, and social and intercultural awareness, which, however, do not immediately influence her level of effective communicative competence: (1) Participation in in-class work, activities, projects, and group work, (2) Homework, (3) Work with the ELP, (4) Intercultural awareness, (5) General characteristics.

The descriptors for *Participation* (1) are related to how involved and creative a student is in terms of in-class activities, and whether she tries out new things with the language she learns without being afraid of making mistakes, which of course has a positive influence on classroom work.

Homework (2) can be a perfect means of internalising new vocabulary or structures, provided that the tasks and texts to be written are useful and thoughtfully designed. However, the most useful homework task will necessarily be totally useless if the student does it without any serious effort to employ and revise new vocabulary, or to think about the task at hand in greater depth. As a result, teachers receive lots of carelessly written homework that is full of mistakes, errors, and all too familiar, easy-to-use vocabulary and language structures, which

makes the teachers ill-disposed towards such students. As a consequence, such texts are full of red-ink corrections and even ill-considered remarks by the teacher-assessor which demotivate a student. Such homework scenarios cause frustration on both sides and end up in a vicious circle. Thus, it seems entirely justified to offer specific descriptors for homework, which may help to assess the degree to which a student uses her homework as a profitable means of revision and making progress.

In about twenty years, it is to be hoped that the *ELP and working with it* (3) will have become part of every teacher-assessor's language classes without using the ELP as a 'Bible' of language learning but by making (selective) use of it for purposes of documentation, recording intercultural differences, experiences, and similarities, and of self-assessing one's language skills.

Intercultural awareness (4) is admittedly a delicate topic if it is dealt with in the wrong way. In our time, some sixty years after the Holocaust, it would seem that young people will have developed a sophisticated and quite rational attitude with regard to racism and anti-Semitism which would make it superfluous to include questions of the type *Does she make/abhor racist remarks?* in certificates and, indeed, the curricula. Ideally, students might be expected to grow up in a multi- or pluricultural world which they simply enjoy and accept as it is. Sadly, however, in actual reality we are still confronted with neo-Nazi tendencies and groups; racism is still, or rather once again, a burning issue, and young people still need to be guided towards the full acceptance of groups and people with different religious and cultural backgrounds. Given this background, it is not only justified but even necessary to include in AC2525 some sort of evaluation of students' intercultural awareness and attitudes, at least in general terms. However, the question one might ask is whether descriptors for intercultural awareness are a suitable solution to the above-mentioned problems, or whether it would not suffice to include a section in the certificate in which cultural topics are entered which the student has dealt with during the school year. It might well be that there is no ultimately satisfactory solution to this question. The reader might wish to re-consider this issue on her own terms, or take a look at the INCA (*Intercultural Competence Assessment*) project website, on which assessment grids for intercultural competence can be found under the button *framework* (cf. INCA 2006). The English version of the assessor-grid can also be found in Appendix 6.

2.2.3 Self-assessment in future certificates

Finally, AC2525 includes grids for all areas which are intended for students' self-assessment of their working morale, their communicative and linguistic competence. The objection might be raised that it is the teacher-assessors whose task it is to assess and grade achievements in Austria and that students do not have the competence or the experience to self-assess what abilities they have. Moreover, a certificate should rather contain entries that are of an objective nature and contain professional assessments. Such arguments or claims might be refuted by asking

- *Why does this have to be so?*
- *What guarantees do we have that grades are professional and 'objective' in nature, given the fact that teacher-assessors also have emotions of their own and might prefer certain students to others?*
- *Who guarantees that the presuppositions of all teacher-assessors are identical with regard to the level of achievement they expect students to reach in their students?*, and lastly,
- *Why should students not be able to assess themselves what they are able to do, especially if they are trained to do so from an early age?*

The CEFR as well as the ELP promote learner self-assessment, since, as is pointed out by Little, "making self-assessment an integral part of evaluation procedures not only encourages learners and teachers to regard assessment as a shared responsibility, but it also opens up wider perspectives on the learning process" (Little 2005: 322). Ideally, therefore, students should "be fully involved in the setting of learning targets and the selection of learning activities and materials" (ibid). This entails, however, that they actually need to develop the ability of accurate self-assessment (cf. ibid): for "unless they know what tasks they can already perform in their target language – and with approximately what linguistic range, fluency, and accuracy – their decisions will be random, even worthless" (ibid).

Given the fact that students' evaluation of their own achievements is going to constitute a major part of assessment procedures due to the implementation of self-assessment-based instruments such as the ELP and concomitant new school book series (such as *English to go*), it would only be fair, moreover, to reward the students' efforts by giving self-assessment the place it deserves in the final certificate.

In the concluding administrative grid of my sample certificate AC2525, space is provided for entering the date of what I call the **reflexive assessment discussion**. In Austria,

the final two weeks of the school year are not always well-used but are frequently 'wasted' with the mere watching of films or going to the cinema, or hanging out in the school garden. Of course, some schools make better use of at least part of this time and organise excursions and field trips in order to end the school year on a positive social note. Nevertheless, there is at least one week that is often just filled with token events, going swimming, etc., namely the week which immediately follows the deadline for teacher-assessors to hold tests or examinations.

I would suggest that better use could be made of these days by giving both students and teacher-assessors the opportunity to have a face-to-face discussion of the students' achievements over a year. More precisely, each teacher would hand out certificate self-assessment grids and reference grids for students to fill out over the weekend. From Monday until Friday in the last but one week of the school year, students would enter their names in a list offering twenty-minute time slots and meet all their teachers one after the other in order to discuss their assessments as well as the reasons for their decisions. This would offer teacher-assessors the opportunity to look at their students' achievements from their points of view; conversely, students would hear reasons for why their achievements have been assessed differently by their teacher-assessor. In fact, there is a good chance in the end that both parties might re-consider their opinion and find a compromise, or convince the other party of their own evaluation, at any rate they would at least be able to understand the other party's reasons for deciding for a certain level.

The greatest benefit from such a reflexive discussion is that self-assessment might come to be seen by teacher-assessors as a welcome reduction of pressure instead of a threat to their power, since the fixed inclusion of self-assessment in certificates would make students and teacher-assessors share responsibility rather than constantly putting the blame for unsatisfactory assessment on each other.

Even though AC2525 is perhaps not a perfect model of what future certificates might look like and might certainly be improved in a number of ways, the present writer hopes to have offered at least some innovative ideas and suggestions as to how a CEFR-based bottom-up change of the Austrian assessment culture and school system might be achieved.

3 IN CONCLUSION: TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

In the course of Chapter 1, a number of questions arose with respect to the innovations that were discussed above. Obviously, some of these questions are rather meant to be taken as rhetorical questions, while other questions are primarily intended to stimulate readers to think about the issues they touch upon, and arrive at their very personal answers or solutions to such problems. To other questions there might not be any clear-cut answer or solution at all. Still, it seems important to create a certain measure of awareness as to some major difficulties that might arise in connection with the present paper's topic – all the more so because assessment is a highly delicate issue in itself. Moreover, innovations such as the Standards Check Tests might even tend to further increase the delicacy of the issue, if possible negative effects it might have on language assessment and teaching are not adequately taken into account. Finally, a number of further questions have been answered in the course of succeeding sub-chapters but also in Chapter 2.

Some questions, however, would seem to call for further discussion. The aim of the present Chapter 3, then, is to 'tie up loose ends', i.e. to relate open questions to each other and to try to find solutions and to make suggestions as to what changes might improve the current or future situation, where this appears feasible and necessary.

The first question that still remains unanswered despite the above suggestion of abolishing *Sitzenbleiben* and substituting grades with CEFR (sub-)Levels, is whether the CEFR Levels and grades are basically compatible. Basically, the Common Reference Levels are compatible with grades in the way it is suggested and described in detail in the CEFR (cf. 2001: 41). This rather complex system of relating grades to levels of proficiency and/or particular objectives might work well with accredited and well-established examinations. It seems doubtful, however, whether such a system would work well in the area of school assessment. Even more importantly, it would appear neither to be encouraging nor useful in that context for the following reasons:

If the year's goal of a class is defined as the attainment of, say, Level B1++, and teacher-assessors give grade 4 to a student who does not quite reach this objective, the ultimate result would in actual fact be the same as if the student received a 4 without knowing beforehand that the goal she is expected to reach is Level B1++. So this would again amount in the categorisation of achievements into five meaningless grades. Considering the fact that a high percentage of students are afraid of grades, the question still remains whether the future

awarding of grades with their described concomitant effects is really desirable. The usual argument in favour of grades is that they are said to create a positive climate of competition among students, particularly since students allegedly like to see how well they are doing, and where their achievement ranks in the context of their class. However, the truth is that it is mostly the high-achievers who are fond of receiving and comparing grades, and it is they – quite understandably – who enjoy seeing themselves on top of the class ranking. Other students, whose achievements lie between a 3 and a 5, will rather tend to feel humiliated and will not feel encouraged to compete with their star-pupil classmates.

Another argument by advocates of grades is that they motivate students by spuring them on to try and reach the next better grade. This type of argument is equally unfounded and easy to refute by arguing that students might also set themselves goals without the pressure of grades behind them, and that reaching the next better CEFR (sub-)Level might be just as motivating as wanting to obtain a better grade. Moreover, to improve one's language competence and try to reach a higher level in that area might be experienced as just as stimulating if it is done for its own sake. Thus, if a grade-less school system were to be introduced in Austria, this would automatically function to endow students with entirely different values and objectives than a grade-based school system.

The next question that needs further consideration is the question why two types of Standards Check Tests are being developed. As mentioned in Chapter 1.2.6.5, the Ministry promotes the parallel development of two such tests in order to be able to obtain comparable results about Austrian language learners' language competence. In actual fact, however, the designing of two different tests, the easier of which should also be suitable to the needs of students of Lower General Secondary Schools, runs counter to the attempt of achieving comparability. Besides, as has been said, it cannot be excluded in advance, and indeed must be termed a deplorable prejudice that students of Lower General Secondary Education will necessarily reach only lower levels of achievement than students of Lower Secondary Academic Schools will.

In addition, one might argue that the attempt to attain too high a degree of objectivity and comparability might, on the contrary, have a negative backwash effect on teaching in general, since examinations which are designed for testing a high number of students at the same time will still need to be feasible, i.e. electronic evaluation, for example, would entail the fixing of a certain number of possible correct answers – a list which can hardly be exhaustive. Furthermore, electronic assessment excludes even the attempt of an adequate

assessment of productive skills; therefore, the only way of eliminating this reduction of communicative test items would be items which include the assessees' self-assessment, as is the case with the DIALANG experimental items. When it comes to the objectivity and fairness of the Standards Check Tests, it is to be expected that the assessors' workload needs to be kept as low as possible, which, however, makes potential test item types as well as answers quite predictable. If teacher-assessors and students can predict what item types assessees will have to answer, this will also allow the development of certain methods to prepare for and 'beat' these tests, in a similar way as to what, in effect, happened with the Cambridge ESOL Tests, for which there are even special exercise books in which answers of a certain type can be trained. This sort of preparation is, then, very likely to have a negative backwash effect on teaching due to the very real possibility that teacher-assessors would perhaps rather tend to train quick and automatised answering of Check Test tasks instead of supporting their students in training their communicative skills.

With respect to communicative skills, the issue of the status of grammar in language education needs to be discussed in greater depth as well. In the present paper, the CEFR's specifications in terms of grammar have repeatedly been called insufficient and problematic, which in fact they are.

As has been mentioned in Chapter 1.2.1.2, the CEFR suggests that grammar is not a primary issue in terms of language proficiency, especially at lower levels. However, *Threshold Level* as well as other (Austrian) seminal publications such as *Grammar for Communication* (Newby 2001 a and b) have dealt with grammatical functions and notions in greater depth and with good results, which suggests that it does not really play such a minor role in language learning and assessment as is often claimed. After all, grammar is an important (functional) tool for a language user which helps her to communicate comprehensibly what she wants to communicate, and even if it is possible that an utterance comes across as intended, even though it is grammatically incorrect or inaccurate, language teacher-assessors cannot and should not be expected to accept an utterance as perfectly acceptable at a low(er) level of proficiency just because the communicational aim has been reached. However, the CEFR provides only one descriptor scale for grammatical accuracy (cf. CEFR 2001: 114), which "should be seen in relation to the scale for general linguistic range" (ibid, 113; for the scale for general linguistic range, cf. ibid, 110). From this, one might conclude that an utterance such as *Me is like swim!* instead of *I like swimming!* would have to be considered a perfectly acceptable Level A1 utterance, according to the CEFR principles,

since most interlocutors would interpret this utterance correctly, especially in its given context (e.g. a conversation about hobbies).

Thus, even though some teacher-assessors tend to over-emphasise grammatical correctness, and often simply allow their students too little time to practise new structures, the quite natural use of grammatical functions is certainly among the major aims of language teaching. There is even a paragraph in the guidelines on assessment by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture in which they state that the assessment of written language tests should be based on the consideration of the following aspects: (1) idiomatic expression, (2) grammatical correctness, (3) vocabulary range, (4) contents, with reference to (a) correctness of facts, (b) cohesion and coherence, (c) and structure, (5) spelling, (6) appropriateness of style and expression, and (7) following formal requirements (cf. bm:bwk 2000 c: 22). Similarly, the curriculum for Upper Secondary Academic Schools stipulated that it is a desirable aim to achieve linguistic (including grammatical) correctness in the target language (cf. bmbwk 2006 b: 2). These guidelines might certainly be seen as helpful, provided that teacher-assessors do not turn grammatical correctness into the one and only (or major) objective of their language teaching but leave sufficient room for their students to communicate without mainly focusing on grammatical structures throughout an activity.

A student's linguistic competence is, in fact, only one part of her overall language and communicative competence. As has been shown in the present paper, there are indeed a number of ways in which a modern and innovative attitude towards assessment could be achieved, and how the Austrian school system might be changed so as to arrive at an assessment culture that is both differentiated and fair and which gives sufficient attention to the self-confidence of students.

The changes that have been suggested might seem neither sweeping nor innovative to readers from other European countries, but they might be perceived as such in Austria, where teacher-assessors seem to be firmly dedicated to the present grading system, including all of its implications as discussed above. This situation could, to the present writer's mind, best be remedied through a major bottom-up reform in our school system, which could be attained with comparative ease by introducing concepts such as proficiency levels, descriptor-based assessment, self-assessment, and *Trampolining* (cf. Chapter 2.2.1).

In the long run, and this can be said with some measure of certainty, the most important competence we can help our students to develop is the ability to assess their own

achievements and potential from an early age and in appropriate ways, which might be seen as the most fundamental, convincing justification for incorporating self-assessment in certificates. Therefore, I would like to conclude my thesis by presenting the Austrian Centre for Language Competence's ELP 'motivation poster' (Figure 24), which includes a fitting as well as witty visual summary of the issue:

Figure 24

B ZUSAMMENFASSUNG – GERMAN SUMMARY

Seit der Publikation des *Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens für Sprachen: lernen, lehren, beurteilen* (GERS/engl. CEFR) des Europarates wurde die Mehrheit der europäischen Staaten von einer Welle der Innovation, des Umschwungs und Umdenkens auf dem Sektor des Sprachunterrichts erfasst. Insbesondere der letztgenannte Aspekt, nämlich die Beurteilung sprachlicher Kompetenz von Sprachenlernern, ist zunächst eine höchst interessante, bei näherer Betrachtung zugleich jedoch auch heikle und brisante Thematik, da die Entwicklung verbindlicher Richtlinien zu fairer und differenzierter Leistungsbeurteilung im Moment schwerlich im Bereich des Möglichen zu liegen scheint, viel weniger aber noch eine oberflächliche sowie unbefriedigende Abhandlung des Themas zulässt.

Wenn in ganz Europa das meiner Arbeit zugrunde liegende Thema ganze Reihen von höchst qualifizierten Experten ratlos erscheinen lässt, so kommt dies nicht von ungefähr – gilt es doch bei der Beurteilung sprachlicher Kompetenz eine Vielzahl wichtiger Aspekte zu berücksichtigen: angefangen von der Auswahl, Beschreibung und Gewichtung in die Beurteilung einfließender Kriterien, über die Auswahl und Begründung eines geeigneten Notensystems bis hin zur Behandlung von Fragen, die das aktuelle Thema der Lernerautonomie und Selbsteinschätzung betreffen.

Auch Österreich blieb von der oben angesprochenen Innovationswelle keineswegs unberührt. Bedingt durch eher enttäuschende Ergebnisse nach der Teilnahme an der PISA Studie im Jahr 2000, wodurch immer diese auch entstanden sein mögen, wurden vom Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur unter Bundesministerin Elisabeth Gehrer einige Reformen, wie z.B. die Lehrplanreform aller Sekundarschulen, ausgearbeitet, jedoch im Schnellverfahren implementiert. Wie man leider eingestehen muss, sind manche LehrerInnen also durchaus im Recht, zumindest aber kann ihnen Verständnis entgegen gebracht werden, wenn sie weiteren Reformen und Innovationen mit mehr oder weniger vehementer Ablehnung bzw. Skepsis begegnen, wenngleich sie damit jenen Innovationsbestrebungen Unrecht tun, die erst nach sorgfältigen Überlegungen und jahrelangen Pilotierungsphasen nun europaweit, und daher auch in Österreich, eingeführt wurden oder werden sollen.

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit behandelt nun in drei Hauptkapiteln die folgenden Schwerpunkte:

In **Kapitel 1** wird zunächst die vom Europarat publizierte Grundlage all der im Folgenden behandelten ‚neuartigen' Sprachlehr- und -beurteilungsinstrumente, nämlich der *Gemeinsame europäische Referenzrahmen für Sprachen* diskutiert. Darauf folgt die Diskussion einiger auf den wichtigsten Grundlagen und Prinzipien des GERS (1) basierender Instrumente und Beurteilungssysteme. Diese sind der Referenzrahmen der ALTE-Organisation (Association of Language Testers in Europe) (2), das DIALANG Sprachbeurteilungssystem (3), das *Europäische Sprachenportfolio* (4) und Onlineversionen desselbigen (5), sowie auf nationaler Ebene stattfindende Entwicklungen. Dazu gehören einerseits die in Österreich in ihrer Entwicklungs- bzw. Pilotierungsphase befindlichen Bildungsstandards Fremdsprachen, Englisch, 8. und 13. Schulstufe (6), sowie auch die Lehrpläne der Sekundarstufen I und II (7), und schlussendlich die kürzlich erschienene Schulbuchserie *English to go* (8), die sich inhaltlich sowie methodisch stark am *Europäischen Sprachenportfolio* orientiert.

Mein Vorgehen in diesen acht Unterkapiteln zu Kapitel 1 ist stets dasselbe: Die allgemeine Einführung in die jeweiligen Instrumente, Beurteilungssysteme oder Publikationen wird mit jenen den Instrumenten zugrunde liegenden Gesichtspunkten verwoben, welche sich positiv auf eine faire und differenzierte Beurteilung sprachlicher sowie kommunikativer Kompetenz auswirken, oder aber diesbezügliche potenzielle Schwierigkeiten oder Nachteile in sich bergen. In einem kurzen Abschluss jedes dieser Unterkapitel werden wichtig erscheinende Fragen aufgeworfen, die sich in der vorhergehenden Diskussion ergaben, aufdrängten, oder nennenswert schienen.

Den Abschluss des ersten Hauptkapitels bildet die Zusammenführung der – für viele LehrerInnen sowie andere mit den behandelten Instrumenten konfrontierte Personen – ‚sich lose und unabhängig durch Europa ziehenden Fäden der Innovation'. Diese abschließende Verknüpfung der grundlegendsten (behandelten) Instrumente wird durch eine von mir entwickelte Grafik, das *Haus innovativen Sprachenlernens*, veranschaulicht, die in metaphorisierter Form deutlich macht, welches Instrument welche Rolle im Schul- und Beurteilungsalltag erfüllt und wie die Beziehung der Instrumente zueinander zu sehen ist. Ziel dieser Diskussion ist es, LehrerInnen und anderen interessierten bzw. involvierten Personen die Scheu vor diesen Neuheiten zu nehmen, indem ihr (potenziell) positives Zusammenspiel im Schulsystem betont und herausgearbeitet wird.

Kapitel 2 widmet sich der Präsentation eines Schul- und Beurteilungskonzepts für die Zukunft, das einer fairen, differenzierten und motivationsfördernden Beurteilung der kommunikativen und sprachlichen Kompetenz österreichischer Sprachenlerner Rechnung

tragen soll. Dabei wird zunächst ein Prototyp für ein mögliches zukünftiges Zeugnis präsentiert und im Anschluss diskutiert, das die eigentliche Performanz der SchülerInnen ins Zentrum rückt und Fakten- und Datenwissen in den Hintergrund stellt. Leistungsbeurteilung findet nach diesem Konzept auf der Basis von *Kann*-Deskriptoren statt, welche zu Sub-Levels der im GERS beschriebenen Gemeinsamen Referenzniveaus (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, und C2) entwickelt werden sollen und für den Zeugnisprototypen der Verfasserin bereits entwickelt wurden – wenn auch, bedingt durch ihre Unerfahrenheit im Bereich der Deskriptorenentwicklung, auf wohl unvollkommene Weise. Darüber hinaus werden mit positiv formulierten Deskriptoren zu den Bereichen *Mitarbeit*, *Hausübung*, *Arbeit mit dem Europäischen Sprachenportfolio*, *Interkulturelles Bewusstsein*, sowie *Verlässlichkeit im Unterricht*, die Arbeitshaltung und Einstellungen der SchülerInnen eingeschätzt. Die vielleicht größte Neuerung stellt jedoch das Einbinden der Selbstbeurteilung der SchülerInnen als fixen Bestandteil des offiziellen Zeugnisformulars dar, das Beurteilung zu einer geteilten Verantwortung von SchülerInnen und LehrerInnen werden lässt.

Ein anderer Vorschlag zur längst fälligen Umstrukturierung des österreichischen Schul- und Beurteilungssystems ist weiters die Abschaffung des Sitzenbleibens, dem sich der blühende Geschäftszweig Nachhilfe verdankt, der unter SchülerInnen jedoch nichts als Verwirrung, Schulangst, Notendruck und Stress stiftet. Dem Zurückfallen von schwächeren SprachenlernerInnen hinter das Klassenziel sowie der Unterforderung ausgezeichneter SprachschülerInnen soll durch das von der Verfasserin entwickelte *Trampolinsystem* frühzeitig entgegen gewirkt werden, in dem österreichweit zeitgleich angesetzte Kurse auf jedem Leistungsniveau für eine angemessene Förderung bzw. Forderung aller SchülerInnen sorgen sollen.

In anderen europäischen Staaten mögen derlei Vorschläge nicht weiter irritierend und unter Umständen auch wenig revolutionär erscheinen; sie sind es aber sehr wohl vor dem Hintergrund der österreichischen Beurteilungskultur, die sich traurigerweise – so scheint es jedenfalls oft – der Ausübung von Notendruck, dem Aussprechen von notenbezogenen Drohungen und der Anstachelung zu einem ungesunden Konkurrenzkampf verschrieben hat, und die lediglich durch ein grundlegendes Umdenken nicht nur seitens der LehrerInnen und SchülerInnen, sondern der Gesamtbevölkerung, herbeigeführt durch eine weit reichende *Bottom-up*-Reform, zum Positiven gewendet werden kann.

Das **Kapitel 3** schließlich dient der Aufarbeitung und Diskussion jener im ersten Kapitel aufgeworfenen Fragen, die im Verlauf der Arbeit keine Beantwortung oder nähere

Behandlung fanden. Dabei scheint es wichtig, festzuhalten, dass eine befriedigende Beantwortung aller Fragen, wie auch die Lösung aller sich stellenden potenziellen Probleme bezüglich der Leistungsbeurteilung nicht möglich ist, weswegen auch Kapitel 3 sich stellenweise mit bloßen Besserungsvorschlägen oder auch mit dem Anreißen weiterführender Fragen begnügen muss. Der letzte Abschnitt dieses Kapitels bildet die Zusammenfassung, den eigentlichen Schluss meiner Diplomarbeit, da Kapitel 1.3 und 2 gemeinsam bereits eine Zusammenschau der Hauptergebnisse und –entwicklungen der vorliegenden Arbeit bilden.

Abschließend bleibt zu sagen, dass die vorliegende Diplomarbeit keinesfalls den Anspruch erhebt, europaweit sich mit ähnlichen Fragestellungen beschäftigenden Experten Antworten auf ihre Fragen zu liefern und sich als zukünftiger Neuling in der Lehrergemeinschaft anzumaßen, Lösungen für Probleme zu finden, die bisher nicht zufriedenstellend gelöst werden konnten. Vielmehr schien es an der Zeit und sinnvoll, ausgehend von europaweiten Entwicklungen zur Diskussion nationaler Innovationen zu gelangen und, um nicht bloß in der Auflistung von Fragen, Problemen, und Defiziten zu verbleiben, Vorschläge dafür zu bringen, wie speziell in Österreich manchen Problemen im Sinne eines befriedigenderen Beurteilungssystems begegnet werden könnte.

Dies war – gerade mangels jahrelanger Berufserfahrung der Verfasserin – vielleicht mit einem hohen Ausmaß an Idealismus, Unbedarftheit und Unvoreingenommenheit möglich; nichtsdestotrotz wurde nie der Rahmen des tatsächlich Machbaren überschritten, der Boden der Realität nie verlassen.

Die Beschäftigung mit dem Thema und das Verfassen der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit war nicht nur aufgrund der Aktualität des Themas, sondern auch hinsichtlich meiner eigenen zukünftigen Laufbahn als ‚Praktikerin' höchst interessant und aufschlussreich. Darüber hinaus machte insbesondere das Ausarbeiten meiner Grafik das *Haus innovativen Sprachenlernens* sowie die Entwicklung eigener Vorschläge für ein Zeugnismodell für die Zukunft – diese abschließende Bemerkung sei auch in einer wissenschaftlichen Arbeit erlaubt – großen Spaß.

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D TABLE OF FIGURES

E APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The CEFR Self-assessment grid
From: CEFR 2001: 26 f.

Table 2. *Common Reference Levels: self-assessment grid*

		A1	A2	B1
UNDERSTANDING	Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.
SPEAKING	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.
WRITING	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.

B2	C1	C2
I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

Appendix 2,

CEFR grid for Qualitative aspects of spoken language use
From: CEFR 2001: 28.

Table 3. *Common Reference Levels: qualitative aspects of spoken language use*

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intona-tional cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making, etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropri-ate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/ herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2+					
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause mis-understanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions. There are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.

Appendix 3

CEFR Grid for External context of use: descriptive categories

From: CEFR 2001: 48 f.

Domain	Locations	Institutions	Persons
Personal	Home: house, rooms, garden own of family of friends of strangers Own space in hostel, hotel The countryside, seaside	The family Social networks	(Grand)Parents, offspring, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, spouses, intimates, friends, acquaintances
Public	Public spaces: street, square, park Public transport Shops (super)markets Hospitals, surgeries, clinics Sports stadia, fields, halls Theatre, cinema, entertainment Restaurant, pub, hotel Places of worship	Public authorities Political bodies The law Public health Services clubs Societies Political parties Denominations	Members of the public Officials Shop personnel Police, army, security Drivers, conductors Passengers Players, fans, spectators Actors, audiences Waiters, barpersons Receptionists Priests, congregation
Occupational	Offices Factories Workshops Ports, railways Farms Airports Stores, shops Service industries Hotels Civil Service	Firms Multinational corporations Nationalised industries Trade unions	Employers/ees Managers Colleagues Subordinates Workmates Clients Customers Receptionists, secretaries Cleaners
Educational	Schools: hall classrooms, playground, Sports fields, corridors Colleges Universities Lecture theatres Seminar rooms Student Union Halls of residence Laboratories Canteen	School College University Learned societies Professional Institutions Adult education bodies	Class teachers Teaching staff Caretakers Assistant staff Parents Classmates Professors, lecturers (Fellow) students Library and laboratory staff Refectory staff, cleaners Porters, secretaries

Objects	Events	Operations	Texts
Furnishing and furniture Clothing Household equipment Toys, tools, personal hygiene Objets d'art, books, Wild/domestic animals, pets Trees, plants, lawn, ponds Household goods Handbags Leisure/sports equipment	Family occasions Encounters Incidents, accidents Natural phenomena Parties, visits Walking, cycling motoring Holidays, excursions Sports events	Living routines: dressing, undressing cooking, eating, washing DIY, gardening Reading, radio and TV Entertaining Hobbies Games and sports	Teletext Guarantees Recipes Instructional material Novels, magazines Newspapers Junk mail Brochures Personal letters Broadcast and recorded spoken texts
Money, purse, wallet Forms Goods Weapons Rucksacks Cases, grips Balls Programmes Meals, drinks, snacks Passports, licences	Incidents Accidents, illnesses Public meetings Law-suits, court trials Rag-days, fines, arrests Matches, contests Performances Weddings, funerals	Buying and obtaining public services Using medical services Journeys by road/ rails/ship/air Public entertainment and leisure activities Religious services	Public announcements and notices Labels and packaging Leaflets, graffiti Tickets, timetables Notices, regulations Programmes Contracts Menus Sacred texts, sermons, hymns
Business machinery Industrial machinery Industrial and craft tools	Meetings Interviews Receptions Conferences Trade fairs Consultations Seasonal sales Industrial accidents Industrial disputes	Business admin. Industrial management Production operations Office procedures Trucking Sales operations Selling, marketing Computer operation Office maintenance	Business letter Report memorandum Life and safety notices Instructional manuals Regulations Advertising material Labelling and packaging Job description Sign posting Visiting cards
Writing material School uniforms Games equipment and clothing Food Audio-visual equipment Blackboard & chalk Computers Briefcases and school bags	Return to school / entry Breaking up Visits and exchanges Parents' days / evenings Sports days, matches Disciplinary problems	Assembly Lessons Games Playtime Clubs and societies Lectures, essay writing Laboratory work Library work Seminars and tutorials Homework Debates and discussions	Authentic texts (as above) Textbooks, readers Reference books Blackboard text OP text Computer screen text Videotext Exercise materials Journal articles Abstracts Dictionaries

Appendix 4

Exemplary DIALANG screenshots:
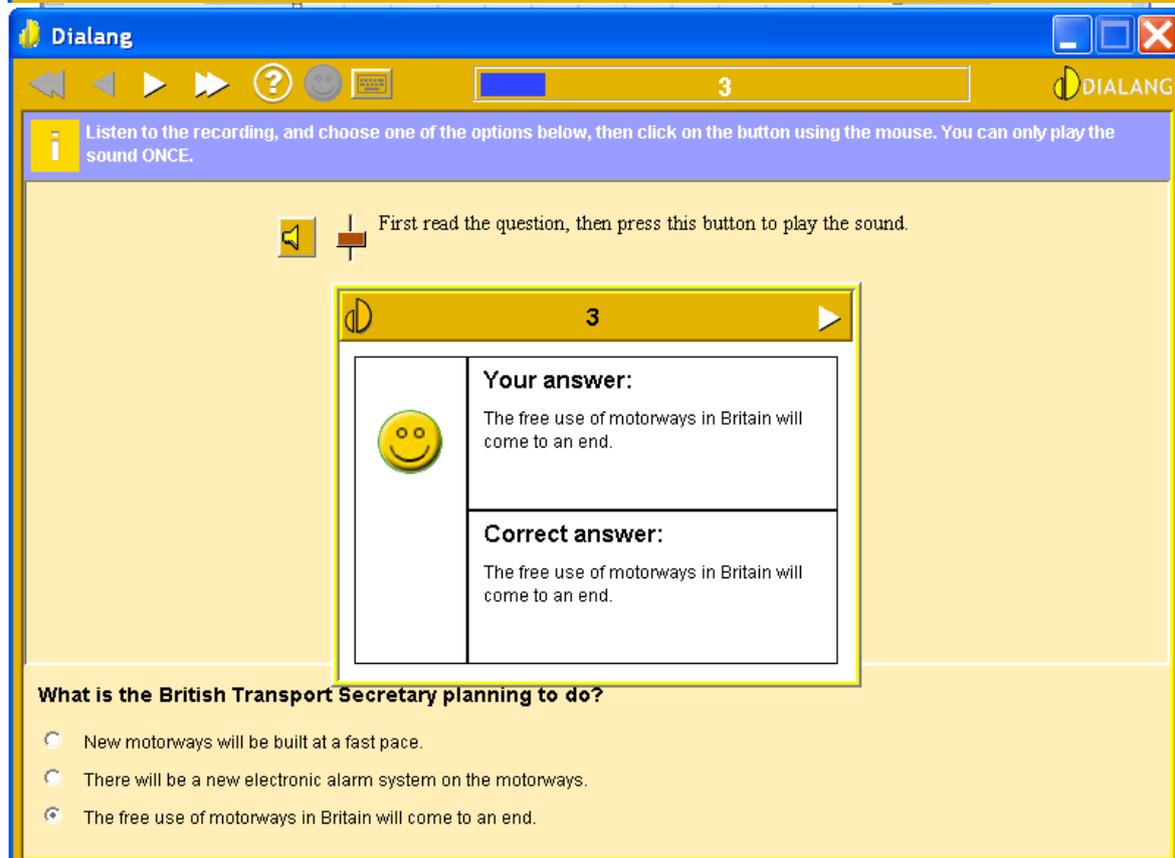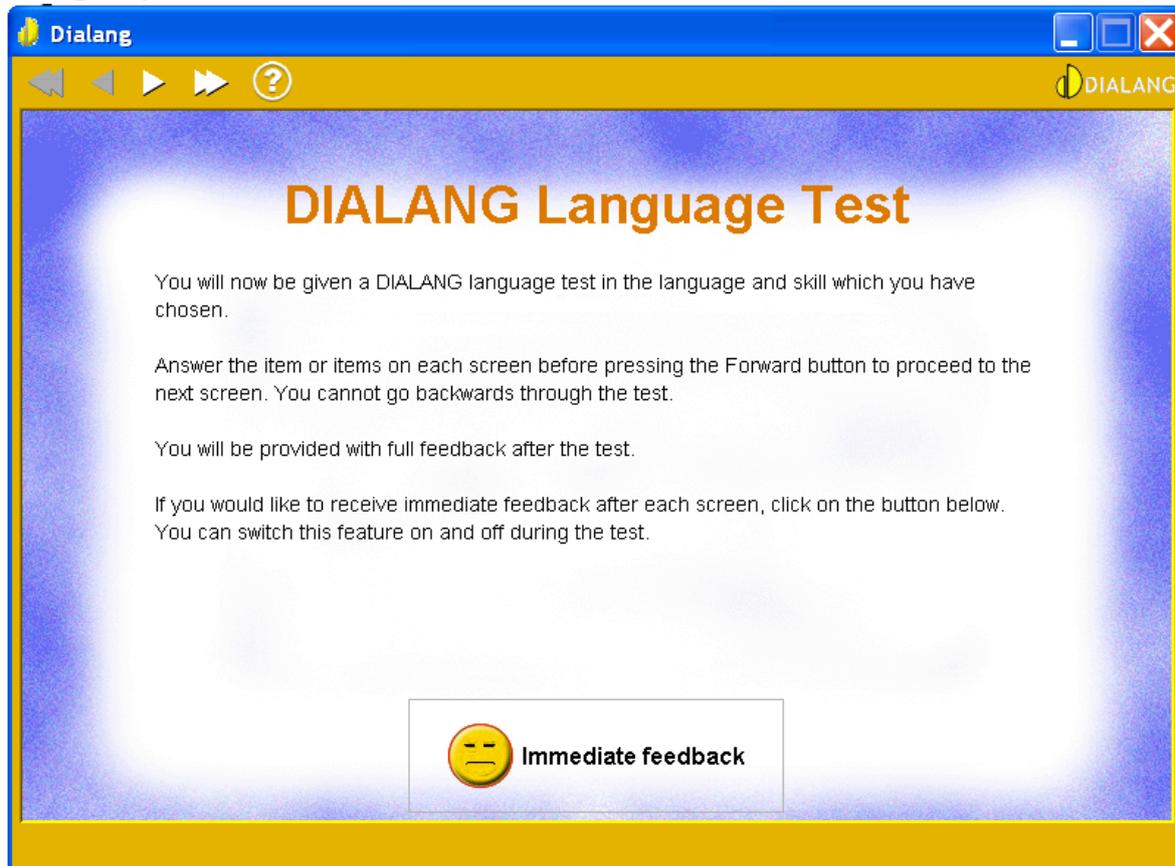
13

Listen to the recording, and type your answer(s) into the box(es) provided. Check your spelling! You can only play the sound ONCE.

First read the question, then press this button to play the sound.

13

Your answer:

closed

Correct answers:

closed
not be open
not open
shut

What is the best word for the gap (...) in the sentence below? Write it in the box.

The woman who is interviewed in a street Gallup poll thinks the shops should be ... on Sundays.

closed

End of DIALANG language test

You have now finished the DIALANG Test.

Press the Forward button to find out how you got on. The program will report on your score, and allow you to see which items you got right or wrong.

It will offer you advice on how to interpret your score and on how to develop your language learning.

You will be offered a chance to take another test.

DIALANG experimental item types

From: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/experimental/new/expmenu.htm.

Drag and Drop Activity

DIALANG

Listen to the recording by pressing PLAY and carry out the task by clicking and dragging the objects to arrange them on the table. You may only listen to the recording ONCE. You may also get a clue by pressing the CLUE button, if required.

▶ Play

Done   Clue

Well done! You got them all correct!

Benchmarking in Direct Writing

In this task, you are asked to write a text in Finnish. The prompt for the text is below. When you have written your text, click the Done button. In the next screen, you can view a range of sample texts, and you are asked to compare your text with them.

You are going to talk to a Finnish audience about your culture. To let the organisers know what kinds of things you are going to talk about, you have been asked to write a short text to them, mentioning a few important things about your culture. Write this text in the box below. Mention 2-3 things which you think might be interesting for a Finn. Describe the examples you have chosen. Explain why these examples are interesting.

Done

Indirect Speaking with Audio clips as alternatives

DIALA

You are having problems with your Cable TV reception. You telephone the Service Desk on 713 05 29 and hear the following recorded message:

▶ ⏸ ⏹

Which of the following four messages would you leave on the answering machine?

Listen, and then...   ... Make your choice!   How did you do?

A ▶ ⏸ ⏹   ○ Version A
B ▶ ⏸ ⏹   ● Version B
C ▶ ⏸ ⏹   ○ Version C   Done
D ▶ ⏸ ⏹   ○ Version D

Yes, that would do nicely   **Correct**

ect Writing

Click the buttons below to see the different sample texts. These texts represent different levels of writing skills (A1-C2). Compare your text to these samples.

○ View answer A1
○ View answer A2
○ View answer B1
○ View answer B2
○ View answer C1
○ View answer C2

From the list below, choose the text which you feel was closest to your level.

[answer A1 ▼] [Tips]

Your Answer:

I cannot speak Finnish. Nor can I write it. But I am curious of how DIALANG intends to .

Sample answer A1   [ADVICE]

Suomissa on epäkohta siksi ulkomallanen pakunut imereta kulttuurista suomia ja suomillainen erillainen kulttuurillainen maailamallainen

em type   📖 Go to item types menu   G

Self-assessment in Speaking

○ DI

A tourist asks which places you would recommend visiting on a sightseeing tour of your local town or village. What would you say?

Think about your possible answer and then push the button Start.

You will then hear a series of speech samples. Compare your possible answer with each one of them and say whether you can do it better or not.

[Start]

is item type   📖 Go to item types menu   Go to next item ➡

Confidence in chosen response

○ DIALA

Choose the word that best fits the context. Say also how sure you are about your choice.

The budget has been cut severely, _____ the government is facing serious financial difficulties.   [Done]

○ except
○ seemingly
○ since
○ whatsoever

How sure are you that you have chosen the right answer?

○ very sure
○ fairly sure
○ unsure
○ not sure at all (I am just guessing)

ℹ About this item type   ⬇ See a similar item   📖 Go to item types menu

Appendix 5

The Council of Europe's Language Passport

From: http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/documents/Pass_2spr.pdf.

Profil linguistique
Profile of Language Skills

Nom
Name _____

Langue(s) maternelle(s)
Mother-tongue(s) _____

Autres langues
Other languages _____

Auto-évaluation
Self-assessment

- →🎧 Ecouter *Listening*
- 🎧→🗣 Prendre part à une conversation *Spoken interaction*
- ✍ Ecrire *Writing*
- 👁→📖 Lire *Reading*
- 🗣→ S'exprimer oralement en continu *Spoken production*

Langue *Language* _____

Auto-évaluation
Self-assessment

- →🎧 Ecouter *Listening*
- 🎧→🗣 Prendre part à une conversation *Spoken interaction*
- ✍ Ecrire *Writing*
- 👁→📖 Lire *Reading*
- 🗣→ S'exprimer oralement en continu *Spoken production*

Langue *Language* *langue language*

	A₁	A₂	B₁	B₂	C₁	C₂
→🎧	▓	▓	▓			
👁→	▓	▓	▓			
🎧→🗣	▓	▓	▓			
🗣→	▓	▓	▓			
✍	▓	▓	▓			

Exemple Example

Langue *Language* _____

	A₁	A₂	B₁	B₂	C₁	C₂
→🎧						
👁→						
🎧→🗣						
🗣→						
✍						

Langue *Language* _____

	A₁	A₂	B₁	B₂	C₁	C₂
→🎧						
👁→						
🎧→🗣						
🗣→						
✍						

Langue *Language* _____

	A₁	A₂	B₁	B₂	C₁	C₂
→🎧						
👁→						
🎧→🗣						
🗣→						
✍						

Langue *Language* _____

	A₁	A₂	B₁	B₂	C₁	C₂
→🎧						
👁→						
🎧→🗣						
🗣→						
✍						

Langue *Language* _____

	A₁	A₂	B₁	B₂	C₁	C₂
→🎧						
👁→						
🎧→🗣						
🗣→						
✍						

Grille pour l'auto-évaluation

	A₁	**A₂**	**B₁**	**B₂**	**C₁**	**C₂**
Comprendre — Ecouter	Je peux comprendre des mots familiers et des expressions très courantes au sujet de moi-même, de ma famille et de l'environnement concret et immédiat, si les gens parlent lentement et distinctement.	Je peux comprendre des expressions et un vocabulaire très fréquent relatifs à ce qui me concerne de très près (par ex. moi-même, ma famille, les achats, l'environnement proche, le travail). Je peux saisir l'essentiel d'annonces et de messages simples et clairs.	Je peux comprendre les points essentiels quand un langage clair et standard est utilisé et s'il s'agit de sujets familiers concernant le travail, l'école, les loisirs, etc. Je peux comprendre l'essentiel de nombreuses émissions de radio ou de télévision sur l'actualité ou sur des sujets qui m'intéressent à titre personnel ou professionnel si l'on parle d'une façon relativement lente et distincte.	Je peux comprendre des conférences et des discours assez longs et même suivre une argumentation complexe si le sujet m'en est relativement familier. Je peux comprendre la plupart des émissions de télévision sur l'actualité et les informations. Je peux comprendre la plupart des films en langue standard.	Je peux comprendre un long discours même s'il n'est pas clairement structuré et que les articulations sont seulement implicites. Je peux comprendre les émissions de télévision et les films sans trop d'effort.	Je n'ai aucune difficulté à comprendre le langage oral, que ce soit dans les conditions du direct ou dans les médias et quand on parle vite, à condition d'avoir du temps pour me familiariser avec un accent particulier.
Comprendre — Lire	Je peux comprendre des noms familiers, des mots ainsi que des phrases très simples, par exemple dans des annonces, des affiches ou des catalogues.	Je peux lire des textes courts très simples. Je peux trouver une information particulière prévisible dans des documents courants comme les petites publicités, les prospectus, les menus et les horaires et je peux comprendre des lettres personnelles courtes et simples.	Je peux comprendre des textes rédigés essentiellement dans une langue courante ou relative à mon travail. Je peux comprendre la description d'événements, l'expression de sentiments et de souhaits dans des lettres personnelles.	Je peux lire des articles et des rapports sur des questions contemporaines dans lesquels les auteurs adoptent une attitude particulière ou un certain point de vue. Je peux comprendre un texte littéraire contemporain en prose.	Je peux comprendre des textes factuels ou littéraires longs et complexes et en apprécier les différences de style. Je peux comprendre des articles spécialisés et de longues instructions techniques même lorsqu'ils ne sont pas en relation avec mon domaine.	Je peux lire sans effort tout type de texte, même abstrait ou complexe quant au fond ou à la forme, par exemple un manuel, un article spécialisé ou une œuvre littéraire.
Parler — Prendre part à une conversation	Je peux communiquer, de façon simple, à condition que l'interlocuteur soit disposé à répéter ou à reformuler ses phrases plus lentement et à m'aider à formuler ce que j'essaie de dire. Je peux poser des questions simples sur des sujets familiers ou sur ce dont j'ai immédiatement besoin, ainsi que répondre à de telles questions.	Je peux communiquer lors de tâches simples et habituelles ne demandant qu'un échange d'informations simple et direct sur des sujets et des activités familiers. Je peux avoir des échanges très brefs même si, en règle générale, je ne comprends pas assez pour poursuivre une conversation.	Je peux faire face à la majorité des situations que l'on peut rencontrer au cours d'un voyage dans une région où la langue est parlée. Je peux prendre part sans préparation à une conversation sur des sujets familiers ou d'intérêt personnel ou qui concernent la vie quotidienne (par exemple famille, loisirs, travail, voyage et actualité).	Je peux communiquer avec un degré de spontanéité et d'aisance qui rende possible une interaction normale avec un locuteur natif. Je peux participer activement à une conversation dans des situations familières, présenter et défendre mes opinions.	Je peux m'exprimer spontanément et couramment sans trop apparemment devoir chercher mes mots. Je peux utiliser la langue de manière souple et efficace pour des relations sociales ou professionnelles. Je peux exprimer mes idées et opinions avec précision et lier mes interventions à celles de mes interlocuteurs.	Je peux participer sans effort à toute conversation ou discussion et je suis aussi très à l'aise avec les expressions idiomatiques et les tournures courantes. Je peux m'exprimer couramment et exprimer avec précision de fines nuances de sens. En cas de difficulté, je peux faire marche arrière pour y remédier avec assez d'habileté et pour qu'elle passe presque inaperçue.
Parler — S'exprimer oralement en continu	Je peux utiliser des expressions et des phrases simples pour décrire mon lieu d'habitation et les gens que je connais.	Je peux utiliser une série de phrases ou d'expressions pour décrire en termes simples ma famille et d'autres gens, mes conditions de vie, ma formation et mon activité professionnelle actuelle ou récente.	Je peux articuler des expressions de manière simple afin de raconter des expériences et des événements, mes rêves, mes espoirs ou mes buts. Je peux brièvement donner les raisons et explications de mes opinions ou projets. Je peux raconter une histoire ou l'intrigue d'un livre ou d'un film et exprimer mes réactions.	Je peux m'exprimer de façon claire et détaillée sur une grande gamme de sujets relatifs à mes centres d'intérêt. Je peux développer un point de vue sur un sujet d'actualité et expliquer les avantages et les inconvénients de différentes possibilités.	Je peux présenter des descriptions claires et détaillées de sujets complexes, en intégrant des thèmes qui leur sont liés, en développant certains points et en terminant mon intervention de façon appropriée.	Je peux présenter une description ou une argumentation claire et fluide dans un style adapté au contexte, construire une présentation de façon logique et aider mon auditeur à remarquer et à se rappeler les points importants.
Ecrire — Ecrire	Je peux écrire une courte carte postale simple, par exemple de vacances. Je peux porter des détails personnels dans un questionnaire, inscrire par exemple mon nom, ma nationalité et mon adresse sur une fiche d'hôtel.	Je peux écrire des notes et messages simples et courts. Je peux écrire une lettre personnelle très simple, par exemple de remerciements.	Je peux écrire un texte simple et cohérent sur des sujets familiers ou qui m'intéressent personnellement. Je peux écrire des lettres personnelles pour décrire expériences et impressions.	Je peux écrire des textes clairs et détaillés sur une grande gamme de sujets relatifs à mes intérêts. Je peux écrire un essai ou un rapport en transmettant une information ou en exposant des raisons pour ou contre une opinion donnée. Je peux écrire des lettres qui mettent en valeur le sens que j'attribue personnellement aux événements et aux expériences.	Je peux m'exprimer dans un texte clair et bien structuré et développer mon point de vue. Je peux écrire sur des sujets complexes dans une lettre, un essai ou un rapport, en soulignant les points que je juge importants. Je peux adopter un style adapté au destinataire.	Je peux écrire un texte clair, fluide et stylistiquement adapté aux circonstances. Je peux rédiger des lettres, rapports ou articles complexes, avec une construction claire permettant au lecteur d'en saisir et de mémoriser les points importants. Je peux résumer et critiquer par écrit un ouvrage professionnel ou une œuvre littéraire.

Self-assessment grid

	A1	**A2**	**B1**	**B2**	**C1**	**C2**
Understanding — Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
Understanding — Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Speaking — Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
Speaking — Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing — Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

Résumé des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles
Summary of language learning and intercultural experiences

Nom
Name _____

→1 Jusqu'à 1 an / Up to 1 year   →3 Jusqu'à 3 ans / Up to 3 years   →5 Jusqu'à 5 ans / Up to 5 years   5→ Plus de 5 ans / Over 5 years

Langue: / Language:																								
Apprentissage et utilisation de la langue dans le pays/la région où la langue n'est pas utilisée: / *Language learning and use in country/region where the language is not spoken:*	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→
Enseignement primaire / secondaire / professionnel / *Primary/secondary/vocational education*																								
Enseignement supérieur / *Higher education*																								
Education des adultes / *Adult education*																								
Autres cours / *Other courses*																								
Utilisation régulière sur le lieu de travail / *Regular use in the workplace*																								
Contacts réguliers avec des locuteurs de cette langue / *Regular contact with speakers of the language*																								
Autre / *Other*																								
Informations complémentaires concernant des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles / *Further information on language and intercultural experiences*																								

Certificats et diplômes
Certificates and diplomas

Nom
Name _____

European Language Portfolio
Portfolio européen des langues

Langue *Language*	Niveau *Level*						Intitulé *Title*	Délivré par *Awarded by*	Année *Year*
	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2			

Appendix 6

The INCA Framework for Assessors

From:http://www.incaproject.org/en_downloads/2_INCA_Framework_Assessor_version_eng
.pdf.

Level ⇨ Competence ⇩	1 'Basic'	2 'Intermediate'	3 'Full'
General profile	The candidate at this level is on the ladder of progression. They will be disposed to deal positively with the situation. Their responses to it will be piecemeal and improvised rather than principled, even though mostly successful in avoiding short term difficulties. These will be based on fragmentary information.	The candidate at this level has begun to induce simple principles to apply to the situation, rather than improvise reactively in response to isolated features of it. There will be evidence of a basic strategy and some coherent knowledge for dealing with situations.	The candidate at this level will combine a strategic and principled approach to a situation to take the role of a mediator seeking to bring about the most favourable outcome. Knowledge of their own culture and that of others, including work parameters, will be both coherent and sophisticated.
i) Tolerance of ambiguity	1T Deals with ambiguity on a one-off basis, responding to items as they arise. May be overwhelmed by ambiguous situations which imply high involvement.	2T Has begun to acquire a repertoire of approaches to cope with ambiguities in low-involvement situations. Begins to accept ambiguity as a challenge.	3T Is constantly aware of the possibility of ambiguity. When it occurs, he/she tolerates and manages it.
ii) Behavioural flexibility	1B Adopts a reactive/defensive approach to situations. Learns from isolated experiences in a rather unsystematic way.	2B Previous experience of required behaviour begins to influence behaviour in everyday parallel situations. Sometimes takes the initiative in adopting/conforming to other cultures' behaviour patterns.	3B Is ready and able to adopt appropriate behaviour in job-specific situations from a broad and well-understood repertoire
iii) Communicative awareness	1C Attempts to relate problems of intercultural interaction to different communicative conventions, but lacks the necessary knowledge for identifying differences; tends to hold on to his own conventions and expects adaptation from others; is aware of difficulties in interaction with non-native-speakers, but has not yet evolved principles to guide the choice of (metacommunication, clarification or simplification) strategies.	2C Begins to relate problems of intercultural interaction to conflicting communicative conventions and attempts to clarify his own or to adapt to the conventions of others. Uses a limited repertoire of strategies (metacommunication, clarification, simplification) to solve and prevent problems when interacting with a non-native-speaker.	3C Is able to relate problems of intercultural interaction to conflicting communicative conventions and is aware of their effects on the communication process; is able to identify and ready to adapt to different communicative conventions, or to negotiate new discourse rules in order to prevent or clarify misunderstandings; uses a variety of strategies (metacommunication, clarification, simplification) to prevent, to solve, and to mediate problems when interacting with a non-native-speaker.

	1	2	3
iv) Knowledge discovery	1K Draws on random general knowledge and minimal factual research about other cultures. Learns by discovery and is willing to modify perceptions but not yet systematic.	2K Has recourse to some information sources in anticipation of everyday encounters with the other cultures, and modifies and builds on information so acquired, in the light of actual experience. Is motivated by curiosity to develop his knowledge of his own culture as perceived by others.	3K Has a deep knowledge of other cultures. Develops his knowledge through systematic research-like activities and direct questioning and can, where this is sought, offer advice and support to others in work situations.
v) Respect for otherness	1R Is not always aware of difference and, when it is recognised, may not be able to defer evaluative judgement as good or bad. Where it is fully appreciated, adopts a tolerant stance and tries to adapt to low-involving demands of the foreign culture.	2R Accepts the other´s values, norms and behaviours in everyday situations as neither good nor bad, provided that basic assumptions of his own culture have not been violated. Is motivated to put others at ease and avoid giving offence.	3R Out of respect for diversity in value systems, applies critical knowledge of such systems to ensure equal treatment of people in the workplace. Is able to cope tactfully with the ethical problems raised by personally unacceptable features of otherness.
vi) Empathy	1E Tends to see the cultural foreigner's differences as curious, and remains confused about the seemingly strange behaviours and their antecedents. Nonetheless tries to 'make allowances'.	2E Has the beginnings of a mental checklist of how others may perceive, feel and respond differently to, a range of routine circumstances. Tends increasingly to see things intuitively from the other's point of view.	3E Accepts the other as a coherent individual. Enlists role-taking and de-centring skills and awareness of different perspectives in optimising job-related communication/interaction with the cultural foreigner.