

Can descriptors do the job?

Die Vermessung der Sprachen, Vienna, 19.02.2011

2011 UK Census for England and Wales

The following questions are for people living in Wales

- Can you understand, speak, read or write Welsh?
(followed by tick boxes for each of the four skills and one for none)
- What is your main language?
 - English or Welsh
 - other (to be written in, including BSL)
- How well can you speak English?
 - very well
 - well
 - not well
 - not at all

Criteria for transparent testing

- clarity of objectives (what are we assessing?)
- examples of tasks or actions that can demonstrate proficiency
- specification of possible contexts
- specification of the skills involved
- specification of the strategies involved
- standards of performance
- generalisation from the examples

CEFR and ELP

A2 Spoken interaction

- 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.

Checklist descriptors

- I can make simple transactions (e.g., in shops, post offices, railway stations) and order something to eat or drink
- I can ask and answer simple questions about familiar topics (e.g., weather, hobbies, social life, music, sport)
- I can make and respond to invitations, suggestions, apologies and requests for permission

“Open Sesame”

Face-to-face interaction

- Can carry out simple and routine exchanges of information.

Examples

- Can ask for basic things at work, or relay simple oral messages to colleagues.
- Can describe what one's company produces or does, or what one's part of a group is responsible for to a visitor/inspector.

Portuguese ELP for young learners

A1 Spoken interaction

If people speak to me slowly and clearly, I can

- ask and respond to greetings
- introduce someone and myself (ask and say: name, age, nationality)

When talking to someone (e.g. in the classroom), I can

- ask permission (to go out, come in, etc.)
- ask for something and respond (e.g. a pen)
- ask and tell the time
- ...

Dutch online ELP

A2- spoken interaction

Descriptor

- I can use simple day to day polite forms of address and greetings

Example

- You have lost your way in a town in another country and you ask an older person to help you.

Explanation

- You know how to address an older person in that particular country. You know that the way you do this also determines the reaction

The issues?

- Learners can't understand the descriptors
- Descriptors don't take account of grammar, vocabulary, etc. (language quality)
- The tasks described in descriptors can be performed at different levels. (language quality again)

C2 Spoken interaction

- 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.

Web addresses

www.coe.int/portfolio

(look under Material illustrating the CEFR levels)

There is information here about all the material that has been produced for or with the support of the Council of Europe. The German and French publishers of the CEFR are now including a DVD with the book.

www.ciep.fr/publi_evalcert/

The samples from the multilingual rating conference at CIEP can also be viewed online or downloaded at this address. Don't forget to also download the pdf with the commentary, which is the key to the whole exercise.