

## THE COMMON FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

There seems to be, in fact, a pretty broad (though not universal) consensus regarding the number and nature of the levels required for organising the process of studying foreign languages, as well as for publicly acknowledging its results. All this leads us to believe that a common framework of reference comprising six levels can fully cover the space of the learning process, pertinent for Europeans who study foreign languages.

### **A Six-Level Framework of Reference**

- **The Introductory or Discovery Level** (*Le Niveau introductif ou découverte; Breakthrough Level*) corresponds to what Wilkins, in his 1978 proposal, referred to by “Formulaic Proficiency” (*Compétence formule*), as well as to what Trim, in the homonym publication, called “Introductory Competence” (*Compétence introductive*).

- **The Pre-Intermediate or Survival Level** (*Le niveau intermédiaire ou de survie; Waystage Level*) reflects the characteristic of the content required at present by the Council of Europe, under the same level.

- **The Intermediate Level** (*Le niveau seuil; Threshold*) reflects the characteristic of the content required at present by the Council of Europe, under the same level.

- **The Advanced Level** (*Le niveau avancé; Vantage*), superior to the Threshold Level, supposes a certain independence of the foreign language user and has been referred to by Wilkins as “Limited Operational Proficiency” (*Compétence opérationnelle limitée*), whereas Trim referred to it as an “Adequate response to situations normally encountered” (*Réponse appropriée dans des situations courantes*).

- **The Autonomous or Effective Proficiency Level**, referred to by Trim as “Effective Proficiency” (*Compétence efficace*), and by Wilkins as “Adequate Operational Proficiency” (*Compétence opérationnelle adéquate*), corresponds to a more advanced proficiency level, adequate for accomplishing more complex tasks and studies.

- **The Mastery or Perfection Level** (Trim: *Maîtrise globale, Comprehensive Mastery*; Wilkins: *Compétence opérationnelle globale, Comprehensive Operational Proficiency*) corresponds to the highest examination level on the ALTE scale. One could also include here an even higher proficiency level, achieved by numerous foreign languages professionals who also possess various intercultural skills.

### **A Threefold General Division**

If we focus on these six levels, we can notice that they are either superior or inferior varieties of the levels acknowledged by the classic division (Basic Level, Intermediate Level and Advanced Level). Furthermore, the categories

proposed by the Council of Europe are hard to translate in many other languages. This is why the system presented here proposes a “hypertext” division, starting from the initial threefold general division (Levels A, B, C):

<b>A. Elementary Level User</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>Introductory or Discovery Level</b>
	<b>A2</b>	<b>Intermediary or Survival Level</b>
<b>B. Independent User</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>Threshold or Independent Level</b>
	<b>B2</b>	<b>Advanced or Independent Level</b>
<b>C. Experienced User</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>Autonomous Level</b>
	<b>C2</b>	<b>Mastery or Perfection Level</b>

**TABLE 1**  
**PRESENTATION OF THE COMMON FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE**

The elaboration of a general, common framework of reference in does by no means limit the spectrum of various options that different institutions, belonging to different pedagogical cultures, may take, in order to organise and describe their respective level system. One can also hope that the precise delimitation of the general, common framework of reference, the stabilisation of the descriptors will all evolve as time passes and as the experience of the member states, as well as that of the competent institutions integrate the corresponding descriptions. It is also desirable that the common framework of reference be presented in different manners, when the purposes are different. For certain purposes, it would be appropriate to present an abstract of the reference levels as a whole, as proposed in a synthesising document. Such a

“global”, simplified presentation, will facilitate the communication with the “lay-users”, on matters regarding the system, and will also offer a general outlook for teachers and for curriculum writers.

<b>EXPERIENCED USER</b>	<b>C2</b>	The user is able to understand, practically without any effort, everything he or she reads or hears. He or she can render certain facts and arguments experienced through various oral or written sources, summarising them in a coherent manner. The user can spontaneously express him- or herself very fluently and precisely, and is able to distinguish between different subtle meaning nuances in texts pertaining to complex topics.
	<b>C1</b>	The user is able to understand a wide range of long and complex texts, as well as to notice their implicit meanings. He or she can spontaneously and fluently express him- or herself, without appearing to be searching for the right words. He or she can efficiently and easily use the language in social, professional and academic life contexts. The user is able to express him- or herself on complex topics, in a structured and clear manner, thus demonstrating that he or she masters the instruments needed in order to engage in a coherent, structured and organised discourse.
<b>INDEPENDENT USER</b>	<b>B2</b>	The user can understand the main ideas expressed in complex texts, be they concrete or abstract, including

		<p>technical discussions in his or her specialty field. He or she can communicate showing a certain fluency, so that a conversation with a native speaker should not require efforts being made on either of the two sides. The user can clearly express him- or herself in detail on a wide range of topics, can present his or her opinion on a current debate topic, analysing the advantages and disadvantages of the various options available.</p>
	<b>B1</b>	<p>The user is able to understand the essential elements of a discourse, when a clear, standard language is used in order to discuss familiar, usual topics, pertaining to school, work or leisure. He or she can cope with most of the situations he or she is confronted with when travelling to a country or region where the language is spoken. He or she can engage in a simple or coherent discourse on familiar topics pertaining to his or her interest fields. The user can render an event, an experience or a dream, can express a hope or an aim, and can briefly present the arguments or explanations for a project or an idea.</p>
<b>ELEMENTARY LEVEL USER</b>	<b>A2</b>	<p>The user is able to understand isolated sentences and standard phrases frequently used on topics of immediate interest (for example, simple personal and family information, items of language used when shopping, when describing one's immediate</p>

		<p>environment or one's professional activity). He or she is able to communicate in simple and usual situations, which only necessitate a simple and direct information exchange on familiar and usual topics. Using simple means, the user can describe his or her professional formation, can talk about the immediate environment and to evoke topics pertaining to his or her immediate needs.</p>
	<b>A1</b>	<p>The user is able to understand and use familiar and everyday life phrases, as well as very simple utterances pertaining to one's concrete needs. He or she can introduce him- or herself, as well as others, can phrase and answer to questions referring to personal details such as one's address, persons one knows, objects one possesses, etc. The user can communicate in a simple manner, provided that the cooperating interlocutor speak slowly and clearly.</p>

**TABLE 3**

**COMMON COMPETENCE LEVELS – THE GLOBAL SCALE**

In order to guide the course attendant, the teacher and the other users through the education system, toward a concrete, practical aim, a more detailed general insight would nevertheless be needed. Such an insight can be rendered as a table showing the main categories of language use, on each of the six levels.

The example given in Table 2 sketches a self-evaluation instrument based on the six skill levels. Its aim is to help students get an outline view of their basic communication competences, as well as find the appropriate level on the check list, where more detailed descriptors should be sought for in order to undertake the evaluation of their own competence levels.

For a totally different aim, it could be advisable to focus on a spectrum of levels and a class of given categories.

By reducing the spectrum of levels and categories to the number needed for a certain purpose, we shall be able to add more detail: the levels and categories will be presented in a more elaborate manner. Once this much detail has been achieved, we shall be able to compare the guiding lines of one module division with those of others, situating them all within a framework of reference.

On the other hand, instead of outlining the various categories of communicative activities, we could choose to evaluate somebody's abilities based on the different aspects of communicative competence, by easily deductible linguistic means. Table 3 has been conceived in order to evaluate abilities pertaining to oral expression. It is based on various qualitative aspects of language use.