LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS IN THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

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Summary: *This paper focuses on the Europe-wide coordination of language learning, teaching and assessment. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was developed by international experts as one of the most influential documents in the field of language teaching in Europe. It measures learning progress by defining levels of competence and therefore explains what people need to learn to be able to communicate in one or several languages. The CEFR functions as a basis for the development of curricula throughout Europe and it works on the promotion of multiculturalism and multilingualism. A means to apply the CEFR is The European Language Portfolio. ELP informs about language proficiency and learning achievements in a clear and comprehensible way and also helps with language learning. It is an instrument to help promote the idea of learning languages for communicative purposes.*

Key words: *competence, teaching, learning, evaluation, language portfolio*

JEL Classification*: I 2*

THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment, abbreviated as CEFR, is a guideline used for describing achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe. Its main objective is to provide a method of learning, teaching and assessing which applies to all languages in Europe. The origins of this common framework can be traced back

to the early 1991when the Swiss Authorities held a Symposium on 'Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, Certification". As a result, 'European Language Portfolio' was set up as a certification in language ability that determines levels of proficiency. It can be used across Europe in about 40 countries.

CEFR can also be defined based on its three subheads:
- *Learning*: Common European Framework is established so as to determine common elements for all languages and all students to be achieved in the learning process. It enables a precise definition of learning goals and the level of competence to be acquired.
- *Teaching*: CEFR divides learners into three broad divisions that can be divided into six levels:

Basic user (A1-beginner or breakthrough; A2-elementary or waystage)

Independent User (A1-intermediate or threshold; B2-upper intermediate or vantage)

Proficient User (C1-advanced or effective operational proficiency; C2- mastery or proficiency)

This is a pivotal step because many imprecise terms used earlier in educational institutions and language courses are now being eliminated (such as complete beginner, zero beginner, intermediate, advanced level….) The CEFR describes what a learner is supposed to be able to do in reading, listening, speaking and writing at each level.
- *Assessment:* These levels also give opportunity to evaluate on many levels, in formative (diploma, certificate) and qualitative aspect of language use (interaction, coherence, scope of knowledge).

The Common European Framework overcomes the barriers to communication among professionals in the field of modern languages. These barriers previously appeared due to different educational systems in Europe. By providing objective criteria for describing language proficiency, recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts is facilitated. Furthermore, authors, publishers of language books, educators can find common ground they can refer to when they plan curriculum and textbooks; they compose them based on the levels established, no matter what the language in question is. The CEFR has been translated into eighteen languages and even more translations are underway.

The CEFR was put together by the Council of Europe that in all its programs works on the development of mutual understanding of languages and cultures. The aim of these efforts is to improve the relations between individuals, to establish the sense of belonging to the multilingual and multicultural community, to promote awareness of a European identity, to fight xenophobia and discrimination and above all, to encourage language learning as a means to preserve linguistic and cultural identity. Around 6000 languages are currently used worldwide and more than 100 in Europe. Such diversity is an invaluable fortune, and should not be an obstacle in communication. Languages should be learnt for communicative purposes. By putting together The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and defining six levels of language competence, the Council of Europe offers a coherent and transparent structure to educational institutions, in an effort to facilitate communication. Signatory countries have signed up numerous agreements so as to apply these principles.

The CEFR is not prescriptive: it imposes neither methodology nor any goals to be attained in the learning process and curriculum. It is not dogmatic: it gives no advantage to any theory in teaching method and it is not strictly attached to any specific system. Its main function is to help students and teachers bring clarity and coherence in the learning process, education and evaluation.

Research results of linguists Canale and Swaine (1981) and Bachman (1990) are accepted in the CEFR and 'action-oriented approach'-similar to communicative approach is proposed, even more pointed to the actions that learner can perform in a target language. Communicative language teaching rose to prominence in the 1970s and early 1980s. There was a general shift towards using techniques where students were more actively involved. Action-oriented approach not only assumes the concepts of communicative approach, it also brings the notion of task in different contexts that the learners will be faced with in real life situations. The learner is now being looked at as a 'social being' capable to mobilize its competence and potentials (strategic, cognitive, verbal and non verbal) to achieve the expected result: successful language communication.

Special attention is also given to the strategies that we use to accomplish a specific task or to achieve a successful communication. In our mother tongue we also use certain strategies to convey a specific message. There are many strategies for oral and written form of communication. The communicative activities are generally discussed in terms of production, reception, interaction, mediation. As such, the CEFR introduces the well-known foreign language skills as: rea-

ding and listening-the receptive skills, speaking and writing-the productive skills followed by mediation and interaction, two other skills that focus on the relationship between the two interlocutors necessary to initiate communication. Unlike the traditional methodologies, the CEFR brings forward the use of communicative strategies that should be practiced until the learning process becomes conscious. In earlier communicative approaches each learner had to be able to read, listen, speak and write in a foreign language. The new approach introduces new communicative competences in order to communicate whenever he has an interlocutor and wants to engage in the mediation between interlocutors. These are interaction and mediation. In mediation the user of the language acts as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other as speakers of different languages. The CEFR recognizes oral meditation (it can be simultaneous, consecutive and informal interpretation) and written meditation (it involves different forms of translations).

Non verbal communication is also described and its usage and meaning vary in different countries or communities. It should not be studied out of context, but some of its elements can be taken into consideration. The CEFR describes gestures and movements, demonstration, paralinguistic behavior as well as textual elements in written documents.

The CEFR insists on the fact that not all levels are established once and for all. Its great advantage lies in the fact that in every level it is possible to make some further divisions, based on the target group and its needs. For instance, in France level A1 is divided into A 1.1 and A.1 for immigrants' needs. There is a contact that applies to the immigrants and it prescribes a specific number of French classes.

Partial competence is also taken into consideration and it does not mean being partially competent, but having one or some other competence. For instance, a lawyer that focuses only on legal terms in French and has a rare chance to speak, pays more attention to the understanding of written texts (passive competence) instead of oral production (active competence). An immigrant that does not know written language and quickly needs to be able to speak to find a job will focus on oral French. Formal types of evaluation of partial competences, such as diplomas and certificates are not numerous because institutions prefer to test all the competences together. Based on the average points in a test you can get a diploma or not. Conversely, if a lawyer or an immigrant had European language portfolio, they would be able to state the level of partial competence that in such a way becomes officially recognized.

When a student starts learning a foreign language, he/she already has a set of competencies that can be triggered in the learning process. These include: knowledge of the culture of the target language, students' attitude towards learning, students' capability to learn. The CEFR uses the following competencies:

- *Lexical competence*: competence to use fixed phrases (e.g. Good afternoon, How are you?), sayings (e.g. No problem), individual words (nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs), individual grammatical elements (prepositions, articles, pronouns, quantifiers).
- *Grammatical competence*: competence to build sentences according to grammar principles (internal word structures and putting words into sentences).
- *Semantic competence:* competence to express meaning with respect to form. This brings us to double articulation of language: organization of form and meaning. In a traditional approach, form was given priority over meaning until an approach that favors notions and language functions took over.
- *Phonological competence*: competence to recognize phonemes (a basic unit of language's phonology) and to produce them.
- *Orthographical competence:* competence to recognize and apply various types of script (italics, big letters), to write words and use punctuation in a correct way.
- *Orthoepic competence*: competence to correctly pronounce written texts.
- *Sociolinguistic competence* deals with socio cultural elements when learning a foreign language. It includes linguistic features of social relations, rules of courtesy, proverb usage, differences in register (official, formal, informal, spoken, intimate), dialects.
- *Pragmatic competence* is competence in speech realization. It includes discourse competence; sentences should be put in a coherent structure, to structure speech.
- *Functional competence:* competence to form statements based on language functions. In CEFR there are microfunctions (simple and short statements, to ask or give information) and macrofunction that consists of a set of sentences according to defined scheme of interaction between interlocutors. Conversation is usually in the form of questions/answers, agreeing/disagreeing, accepting/refusing.

CEFR also deals with four broad domains in which language is used: personal, public, occupational and educational. In basic levels from A1 to B1 everyday tasks from personal and public domain will be stressed. As a learner moves on to higher levels from B2 to C2 educational and occupational domain will be put to the fore. It would be appropriate to summarize the set of Common Reference Levels in sin-

gle paragraphs. Such basic description is easier to communicate to non-specialists, and it also provides teachers and curriculum planners with useful points:

Basic User
A1 - Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases. 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 provides the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

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.

Independent 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 and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

B2 - Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. 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.

Proficient user
C1 - Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize 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 organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

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C2 - Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize 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.

THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

The principles and guidelines of Portfolio have been approved by the Council of Europe. Portfolios are documents in the form of a booklet where the learners collect together certificates, attestations and good pieces of work (of any language) acquired in an educational institution or out of it to inform others about their learning achievements. There are three components of the ELP:

The Language Passport summarizes the owner's linguistic identity and the experience of using second/foreign languages; it is defined in terms of skills and the common reference levels. The form of passport is identical in all European portfolios and the learner is free to fill the passport gradually in the school or out of it. In addition to formal qualifications and language competencies, it also allows the owner to record self-assessment of language proficiency, teacher assessment and assessment by educational institutions. Skills, i.e. five communicative activities encompass Understanding (listening and reading), Speaking (spoken interaction and production) and Writing.

The Language biography facilitates the learners' involvement in planning and assessing his/her language and cultural competence in the learning process, and includes also cultural experiences out of formal educational contexts.

The Dossier is where the owner collects evidence of second language proficiency, such as his/her own works, diplomas gained during years of studying.

ELP serves two complementary functions. The first is pedagogical: it makes the language learning process more transparent to learners and therefore creates commitment to learner autonomy that is a prerequisite for lifelong learning. Portfolios always contain results of positive self-evaluation. To become aware of the things that need to be learnt makes possible for the learning process to be planned in advance and to consider the level of competence to be achieved. The second function is reporting language learning achievement and provision of concrete evidence of communicative proficiency and intercultural experience.

Časopis za ekonomiju i tržišne komunikacije/ Economy and Market Communication Review
God./Vol. 4 ● Br./No. 1 ● Banja Luka, Jun/June 2014 ● pp. 94-103

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Portfolios have at least two end users: educational institutions and future employers. Data given in portfolios serve as a proof of the students' level in the first case, and in the latter they gain the role of a curriculum.

There are various ways to introduce ELP'S components. A Dossier may be introduced at the beginning, and then a biography-to help learners start setting their own targets, and later passport-to show them how to develop their linguistic identity. The process may be reversed. Starting from the passport they proceed to the biography until they collect learning outcomes in the dossier.

The aim of this document is to enable Europeans that from the earliest childhood they become multilingual citizens with intercultural competences. This general aim should strengthen the multilingualism of European citizens with respect to different cultures and ways of life; life-long learning; developing of autonomy in foreign language learning; increasing of transparency of language curriculums; clear description of qualifications to increase mobility.

There are many goals of ELP and its positive influence on language learning. Some of them are as follows: to encourage multilingualism, intercultural awareness and competence from the earliest childhood, boost motivation of learners, increase their self confidence- they actually start thinking about their language abilities and become more active and creative; relations are improved between learners and learners/teacher. The ELP provides an excellent means of communicating information about a child's progress to his/her parents. The ELP also supports the mobility of pupils between schools. If a student changes school the ELP should be sent to the new school to make sure the learning process continues from where it ended.

Central to the ELP's pedagogical function is learner autonomy. In order to promote learner autonomy language teachers should use principles of learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate target language use. First, a teacher must involve learners in their own learning. Second, they must get them to reflect about the learning process, not least the target language. In the end teacher must engage their students to use target language appropriately. These three principles are equally important and interdependent.

In order to increase learner autonomy here are some ideas based on the use of the ELP: 1) to develop listening skills the students can be asked to listen and draw what they hear, listen and mime, listen and predict what will happen next,

listen and recognize words that repeat in a certain text 2) to develop reading skills they can be presented with flashcards with key vocabulary, they need to match pictures to words, use cut up sentences to build a story, use picture dictionary 3) to develop speaking skills they use masks, puppets, role play, chain games, 'tell us about..' stories 4) to develop writing skills they make class newspaper, write date every day, make crosswords….

Let us now look at how governments apply the Common European framework. In The United States TOEFL is mandatory as an entrance exam for non-English speakers. TOEFL can be a computer based test or can be printed on paper. Certificate in TOEFL lasts for two years. In Great Britain IELTS (International English Language testing Service) is governed by Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of another Language), British Council and International development Program of Australian universities and colleges. TestDaF is a German language exam). It does not evaluate levels from the Common European Framework, it tests only levels between B2.1 and C1.2.

CONCLUSION

The CEFR was developed to provide "a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe" (Council of Europe 2001, p.1). As these words suggest, the CEFR is founded on the conviction that language learning outcomes are likely to benefit internationally if syllabuses and curricula, textbooks and examinations are shaped by a common understanding. This is another proof that the Council of Europe cuts across different cultures, focuses on communication and mutual understanding, and puts forward the idea of learning languages for communicative purposes.

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JEZIČKE KOMPETENCIJE, DOSTIGNUĆA I KVALIFIKACIJE U ZAJEDNIČKOM EVROPSKOM REFERENTNOM OKVIRU ZA JEZIKE

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Rezime: *Ovaj rad se bavi koordinacijom u učenju jezika, predavanju i evaluaciji širom Evrope. Međunarodni stručnjaci su razvili Zajednički evropski referentni okvir zaj ezike kao jedan od naj uticajnijih dokumenata na polju predavanja engleskog jezika u Evropi. On meri napredak u učenju tako što definiše nivo ekompetencije i samim tim objašnjava šta je to što ljudi moraju da nauče da bi uspešno komunicirali. On je osnova za razvoj nastavnih programa širom Evrope i radi na tome da unapredi multikulturalnost i višejezičnost. Njega u praksi primenjuje Evropski jezički portfolio. Uloga portfolia je da informiše o jezičkim veštinama i dostignućima na jasan i razumljiv način kao i da pomogne pri učenju jezika. To je instrument pomoću kojeg se usvaja ideja o učenju jezika zarad komunikacije.*

Ključnereči: *kompetencija, predavanje, učenje, evaluacija, jezički portfolio*

JEL Klasifikacija*: I2*