

Title of example of practice: Upgrading CEFRL to include Competences in the Area of Culture and Literature

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Institution and initiating department/faculty

(i.e. where example of practice takes/took place):

ILCH Universidade do Minho.

Departments/faculties in which initiative is to be implemented:

Project discussed within the Departments of ILCH (Universidade do Minho) and with the Departments of other Portuguese Universities (Lisbon) as well as with National Associations of English, French, German and Spanish Studies.

Abstract

(QA question: What are you trying to do?)

Attempt to define competences (skills) specific for Culture and Literature not exclusively based on the competence of reading literary texts. This means the integration of other skills (listening; speaking; acting) and an extension to levels lower than B2.

Attempt to acquire more transparency in the definition of competences in Culture and Literature in FL-context. By doing this the main concern is comparability in competences for different FL-contexts, trying to overcome the discrepancy between quality parameters of Culture/Literature in *major* and *minor* curricular positions or in more (English, Spanish) or less (French, German) taught languages.

Background – contextual issues giving rise to the initiative

(QA questions: Why are/were you trying to do it? / What are/were the aims and objectives?)

I - Background

Due to the diversity of national realities it cannot be taken for granted that all culture and literature subjects in FL-contexts are delivered in the target language. According to our Mapping this is the case of Portugal, because of

- (1) the monoglottal situation of the country;
- (2) the FL most learned / taught at primary and secondary school is English, but language acquisition often does not go beyond the competence of B1.
- (3) strong national academic tradition in teaching FL-Culture and Literature in the source language (Portuguese) and rarely in the target language (even where English and Spanish are concerned), although sometimes there is switching between both.

HE students enrolling for study programmes containing FL-Culture and Literature (Undergraduate and Masters) are characterized by their heterogeneous backgrounds (Portuguese first language, living close to the university etc) and their diminishing numbers, The HEIs' need to attract these students onto their courses may be a contributing factor for the unclear identification in the course/subject descriptions of the use (level expected within CEFRL) of each FL (target language) as the language (1) of teaching / learning and (2) of assessment. The distinction between the two categories is considered important.

II - Starting Point: Reading the CEFRL and specific proposals for Culture / Literature

CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

1. According to the CEFRL, understanding lectures or seminars requires minimum competences at **B1** level (CEFRL).
For example, in the CEFRL there exist no descriptors for the A1 and A2 levels in the scaling of "Note-Taking (Lectures, Seminars, etc.)", this descriptor being on B1 level: "Can take notes as a list of key points during a straightforward lecture, provided the topic is familiar, and the talk is both formulated in simple language and delivered in clearly articulated standard speech."
2. Concerning active participation (oral and written production) and assessment, the minimum is B2 level (see CEFRL scaling).
3. Regarding the teaching of literature, the minimum competence contemplated for reading of the literary text in FL is also B2. The descriptor mentions "contemporary literary prose".

CEFRL descriptors:

B2: '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.'

C1: '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.'

C2: 'I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as articles and longer technical manuals, specialized articles and literary works.'

4. The CEFRL already has a broad definition of 'text' (see: texts and activities) and offers a range of illustrative scaling, not only in different types of reading but also, for example, of "Watching TV and Film", starting from an A2 level:
A2: 'Can follow changes of topic of factual TV news items, and form an idea of the main content.'
5. The CEFRL mentions among the oral production activities "reading a written text aloud", "acting out a rehearsed role" or "singing" without any reference to Culture or Literature.
6. The CEFRL refers to socio-cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness but does not offer scales or descriptors.

Specific proposals for Culture / Literature

» The catalogue of "literary competences" by Markus Steinbrenner (2002);

» The concept of the "Strangeness" of Literature (seven categories: "diskursiv; kulturell; systemisch;

funktional; strukturell; rezeptiv; situativ“) in the context of Teaching German as a Foreign Language (Šlibar 2009). With Steinbrenner (2002), basis for a framework of «literary competence».

» Attempt by Grossegeesse (2006) to define learning progression in the area of Literature by a scaling of reading competence, crossing this scaling with the issues of text genre (poetry, theatre, narrative – short, medium, long) and literary history.

III - Project

In the specific situation (Portugal) and in view of the existing descriptors within CEFRL, the project has to deal with the following challenges:

- » a definition of descriptors for competences in FL-related Culture and Literature for levels lower than B2;
- » descriptors and scaling not exclusively based on the competence of reading, but also of listening, watching TV and film or reading aloud, acting out a rehearsed role or singing;
- » a specific redefinition of the reading competence descriptors for literary texts different from general reading competences and texts (in CEFRL confined to “contemporary prose”; “long and complex”; “distinctions of style”; “abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts”);
- » a specific definition of descriptors for reading, talking and writing about Culture and Literature in FL-context.

Going beyond the main CEFRL-categories of Understanding (Listening / Reading), Speaking, Writing, the project proposes a **correlated autonomous scaling** within the main categories listed below. They can be understood as competences (skills) concerning Culture and Literature in an overall 'text' in a FL-context that may be activated not only by reading a (literary) text, but also by watching TV and film and other activities of a (more or less simulated) immersion in the FL-context:

- » *Orientation* (Space, Time)
- » *Communicability* (People)
- » *Meta-discourse* (thought and meta-language about orientation and communication in different theoretical and methodological contexts)

The latter category relates to the global learning outcomes of course units (syllabi) or entire study programmes in order to obtain socially relevant quality definitions. It has to be articulated with key competencies for a “Cultural Education” in HEIs, as defined by the *EUnicult* Project (www.eunicult.eu). (meeting with Prof. Alfred Opitz, member of this project on 26th March, 2009).

Description of activity or initiative

(QA question: How is/was the activity/initiative implemented?)

The project was discussed within the Departments of ILCH (Universidade do Minho) and with the Departments of other Portuguese Universities (Lisbon) as well as with National Associations of English, French, German and Spanish Studies.

Learning Outcomes

Some course units (syllabi) taught at Portuguese universities that try to combine knowledge-oriented learning outcomes with CEFRL-categories already have learning outcome definitions.

Learning Material

Some learning material already exists that attempts to combine CEFRL-categories with learning

outcomes within our three autonomous but correlated proposed categories. Dealing with Culture and Literature not only presupposes **but also stimulates** listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Examples:

German Culture: Schmidt / Schmidt (2007);

English Literature: Thaler (2008).

Spanish Culture: Consejería de Educación: Presentation Material for download, for example about contemporary cinema, the «Camino de Santiago», popular youth culture, etc.

<http://www.mepsyd.es/exterior/uk/es/consej/es/publicaciones/pptauxi.shtml>

Concrete Attempt of Scaling / Descriptors

Example

Monument to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller in Weimar by Ernst Rietschel, erected 1857.

Copies of this monument are in San Francisco, Milwaukee and Cleveland / USA.

Intentionally we have not chosen a literary text as example. But the three main categories can also be applied to the reading of a literary text.



Orientation (Space, Time) (all correlated to B1 except the last one to B2)

- » Can make a straightforward contextualization reasonably well (historical / cultural / literary) of the people that are represented.
- » Can follow the presentation in a TV program (for example, channel *Deutsche Welle*) on the monument within mental mapping (National Theatre; «Weimarer Klassik»; «Gründerzeit»).
- » Can write a brief report that contains basic information on the period when Goethe and Schiller lived and worked and on the time when the monument was erected (between 1848 and 1871).
- » Can make a mental mapping starting from these identifications: basic meanings of «Weimarer Klassik», «Nationaltheater», construction of German national literature as a political mission of political unity (from the romantic project up to the «Gründerzeit»).

Communicability (People) (correlated to B2 except the last one to C1)

- » Can participate in a conversation about what this monument evokes for Germans (presence / absence of national identity through literature).
- » Can talk about the concept of «Weimarer Klassik», represented by the two protagonists, that motivated the erection of this monument in a later historical context (1857).
- » Can discuss the problematic as well as the productivity of canon national culture («Weimarer Klassik») in contemporary culture, art and literature.

Meta-discourse (connections between areas of knowledge and competences; literary / cultural canon, romantic national identity vs. cross-culture; etc.)

- » Can explain the importance of the concept «Weimarer Klassik» for the construction of National Identity in the time between 1848 («Märzrevolution») and 1871 («Gründerzeit»).
- » Can discuss the 'contradiction' between the project of «Weimarer Klassik» and the concentration camp Buchenwald nearby (link to mapping: orientation), from a cross-culture perspective, e.g. from the reading of Jorge Semprún's *Le grand voyage* (if the learners' 'source culture' is within Spain).
- » Can assess its contemporary readings or interpretations (e.g. in publicity, art, as a national and international tourist attraction), including ironic and satirical readings.

Evaluative comments

(QA questions: What are/were the outcomes? What is/was the impact? Is/was the activity/initiative successful? How do you know whether or not it works/worked?)

There has been cooperation with the Associations of Higher Education Teachers / Researchers in German, Spanish and French Studies and positive feedback from the Faculties of two universities (Universidade Nova de Lisboa; Universidade Católica Portuguesa).

We did not succeed in reaching out to the majority of Higher Education Teachers because of the existing gap (above all in traditional universities) between lecturers (*leitores*) who are supposed to be teaching (only) "Language" and professors who are teaching (often in the source language = in Portuguese) the areas of Literature & Culture, Linguistics and Specific Teaching Methodology. This gap is increasing with the current crisis of public Higher Education in Portugal that means a dwindling position for the "leitores".

Although the "leitores" consider an integrative approach to Literature and Culture in an FL-context important, the majority of the professors have great reluctance about this (above all from traditional universities) and question the quality of teaching Literature in the target language to students on a level between B1 and B2, for instance. There persists the wide-spread opinion that a definition of learning outcomes in Culture and Literature that integrates FL-components is not doing justice to the complexity of the area.

Taking into account the magnitude of the overall project it is too early to make more evaluative comments (see *Reflection*).

Advice to others

Dialogue with National Associations of Higher Education Teachers / Researchers is helpful to get information and cooperation.

Comparison with documents concerning Literature and Culture at the Secondary Education Level (VVAA, 2002; Pieper *et al.*, 2007)

Reflection/any other comments

QA question: Is/was that the best way to do it? Why/why not? What improvements or adjustments are needed?

At this time, it is hardly possible to overcome the phase of

- » conscience-rising about the issue;
- » gathering, analyzing and discussing the existing integrative approach learning material
- » design of descriptors and scaling and its discussion through associations of Higher Education Teachers / Researchers;
- » pilot implementations to get feedback from teachers and students.

The large dimension of the project necessitates an international framework and should not be limited to Portugal.

Further details

e.g. web links; relevant references/publications; alternative contact names

Consejería de Educación. Websites with a wide range of documents (mostly power point presentations for teaching Cultural Issues in the context of Spanish as Foreign Language).

<http://www.mepsyd.es/exterior/uk/es/consej/es/publicaciones/pptauxi.shtml>

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Šlibar, Neva. „Die siebenfache Fremdheit der Literatur als Grundlage eines Referenzrahmens literarischer Kompetenzen (für den DaF-Literaturunterricht)“. In: *Estudios Filológicos Alemanes*, vol. 17 (2009), Sevilla: Grupo de Investigación Filología Alemana, 325-337.

Thaler, Engelbert. *Teaching English Literature*. Paderborn: Schöningh 2008.

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Irene Pieper (ed.), Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg, Germany [with Laila Aase, Nordisk institutt, Norway; Mike Fleming, University of Durham, UK; Florentina Sâmișăian, National Council for Curriculum, Romania. Dossier *Languages of schooling within a European framework for Languages of Education: learning, teaching, assessment*. EU Intergovernmental Conference, Prague 8-10 November 2007.