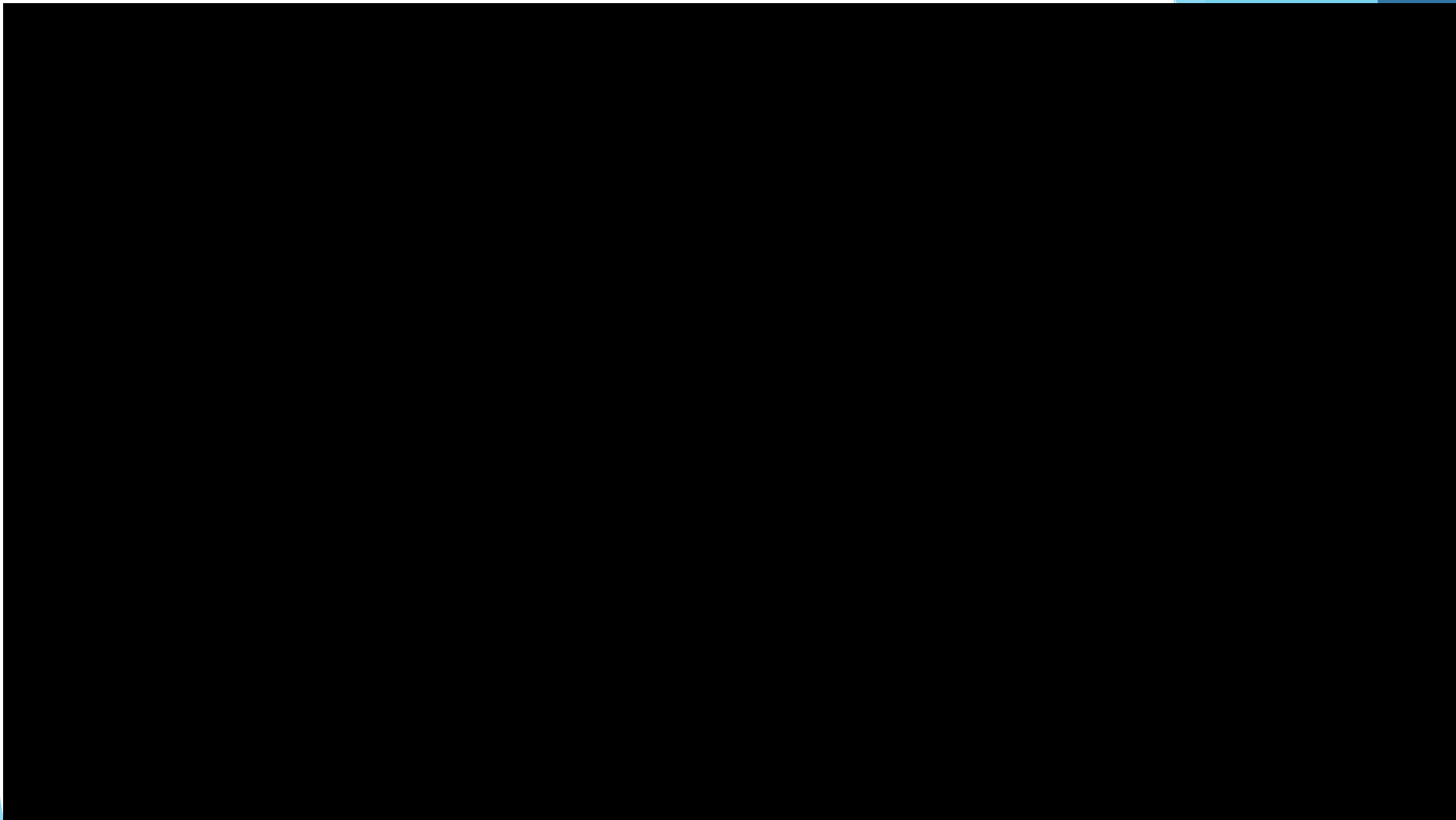# Session 5: Language levels and the CEFR

Objectives of the session:

By the end of this lecture you will:

► understand the language levels identified by the CEFR, who uses them and why

► be able to match levels to Can-Do statements and to learner performance

► learn how to put the scales into teaching and assessment

Common European Framework of Reference

► Framework - a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/framework
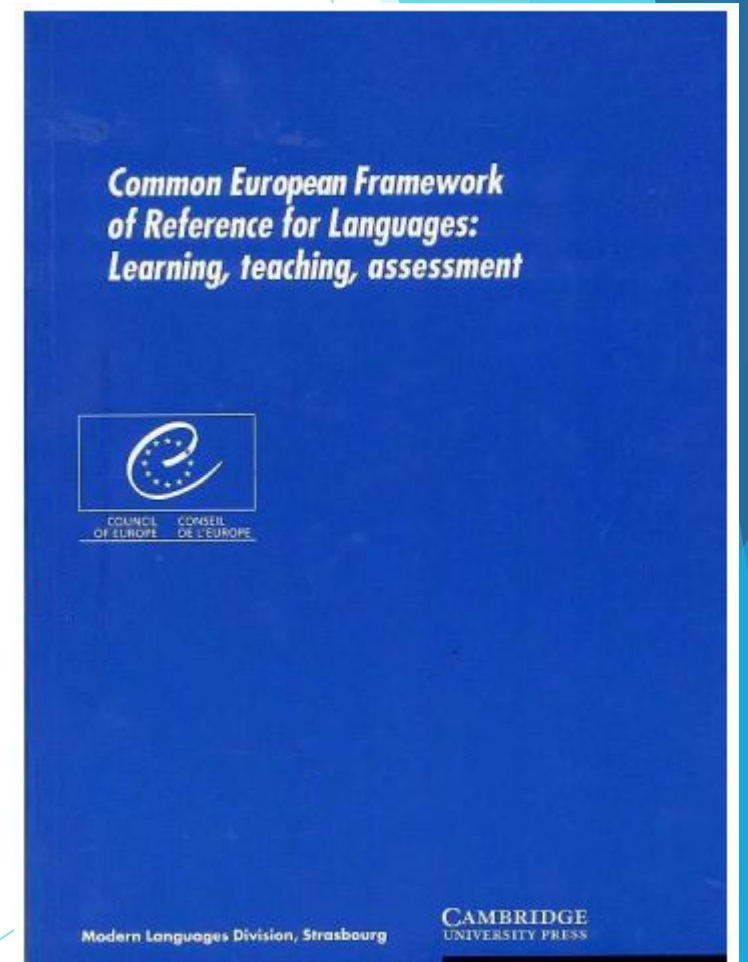
Common European Framework of Reference

► Framework - a set of ideas, conditions, or assumptions that determine how something will be approached, perceived, or understood

► Reference - a source of information (such as a book or passage) to which a reader or consulter is referred; a work (such as a dictionary or encyclopedia) containing useful facts or information

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/frame%20of%20reference

Common European Framework of Reference in Russian

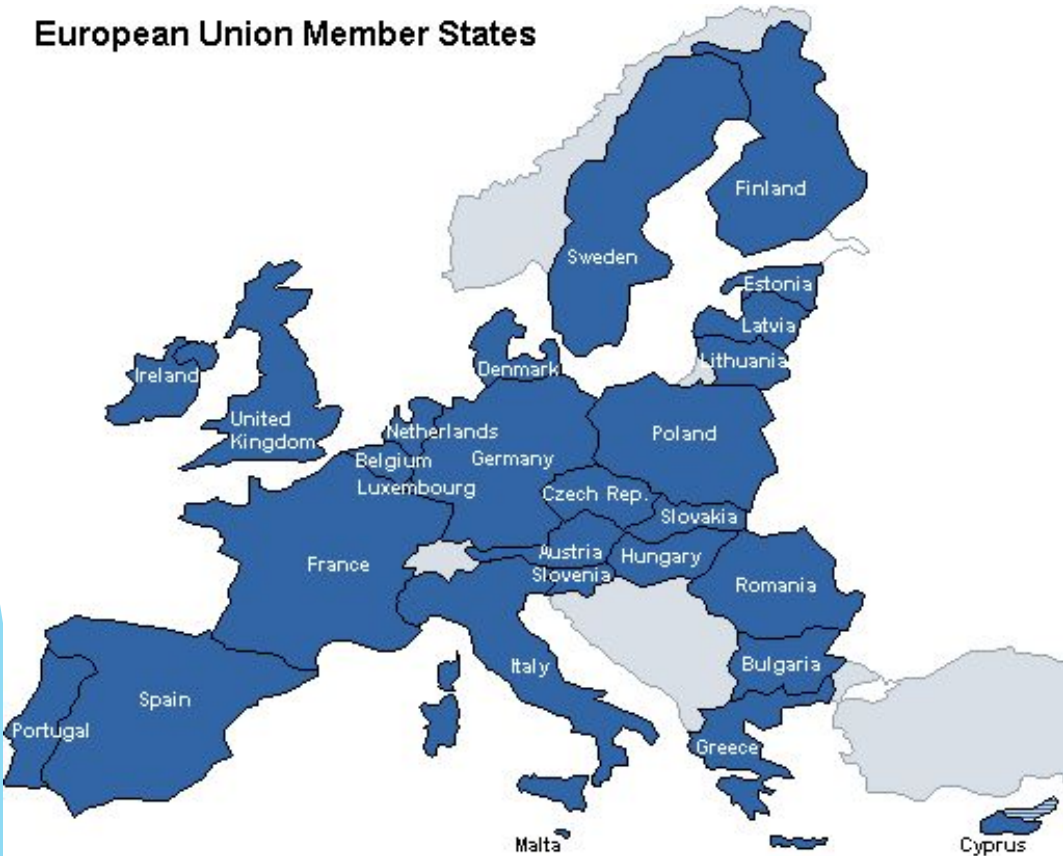- «Общеевропейские компетенции владения иностранным языком: Изучение, преподавание, оценка»

Common European Framework of Reference

► An international standard for describing language ability

► Language and context neutral

► Also called CEFR, CEF, CFR

► Widely used by teachers, educational authorities, examination boards, publishers and employers

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

COUNCIL CONSEIL
OF EUROPE DE L'EUROPE

Modern Languages Division, Strasbourg

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

European Union: 28 countries, a diversity of languages

European Union Member States

- Languages are one of the key features of cultural identity

- Language skills are crucial for economic growth, jobs and mobility

- Standardization will help EU labour market to develop

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDksAt_dk30

Milestones of the CEFR development

- **1960s and 1970s** – shift from grammar-translation method to functional/notional approach
  - The Council of Europe's Modern Languages projects starts
  - Concept of a 'threshold' (B1) and 'waystage' (A2) levels first arise, first for French, then – for German and English
- **1980 – Communicative approach**
  - productive skills and innovative assessment, language levels

Milestones of the CEFR development (cont.)

- 1991 - Rüschlikon intergovernmental symposium 'Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe' (Joe Shiels, John Trim, Brian North and Daniel Coste)

- Key aims:

  - to establish a useful tool for communication for language practitioners in many diverse contexts to talk about objectives and language levels in a more coherent way

  - to improve language teaching and assessment across countries

- 2001 – CEF published in English and French

CEFR uses and users:

- The overarching goal: increase transparency of language education

- Uses

  - setting targets for particular groups of learners;

  - determine the language ability needed to do an activity;

  - designing language tests;

  - comparing language qualifications;

  - reflecting on and describing teaching practice

CEFR: structure of the document

► The document as available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

► The CEFR states that the aim is 'not to prescribe or even recommend a particular method, but to present options'.

Chapter 2:

"Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies, which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences".

Language use as described in the CEFR
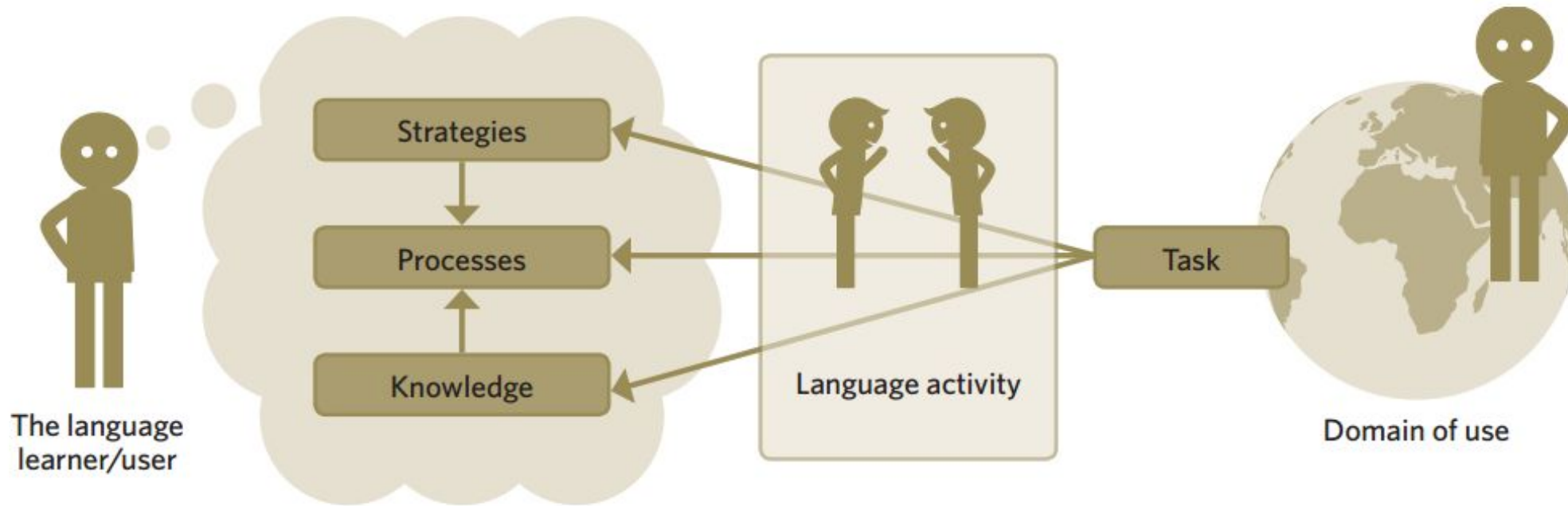
CEFR Chapter 3: Reference levels
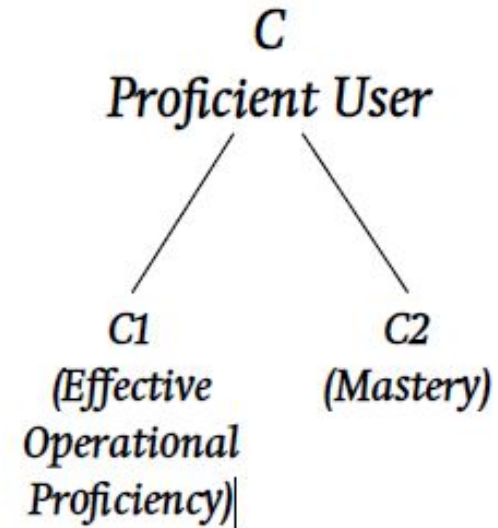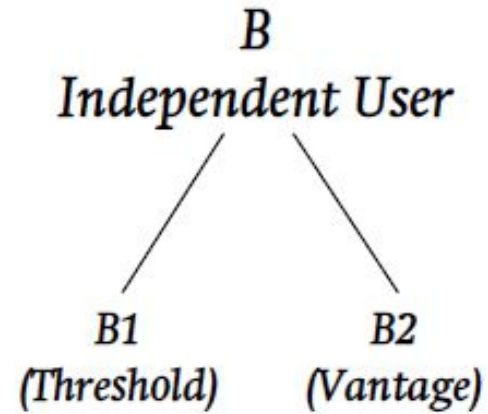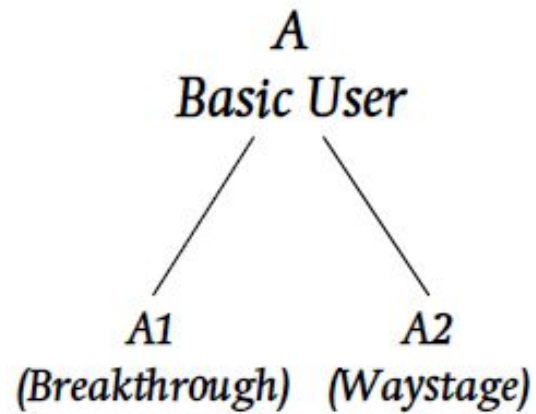
Context dependent reference levels
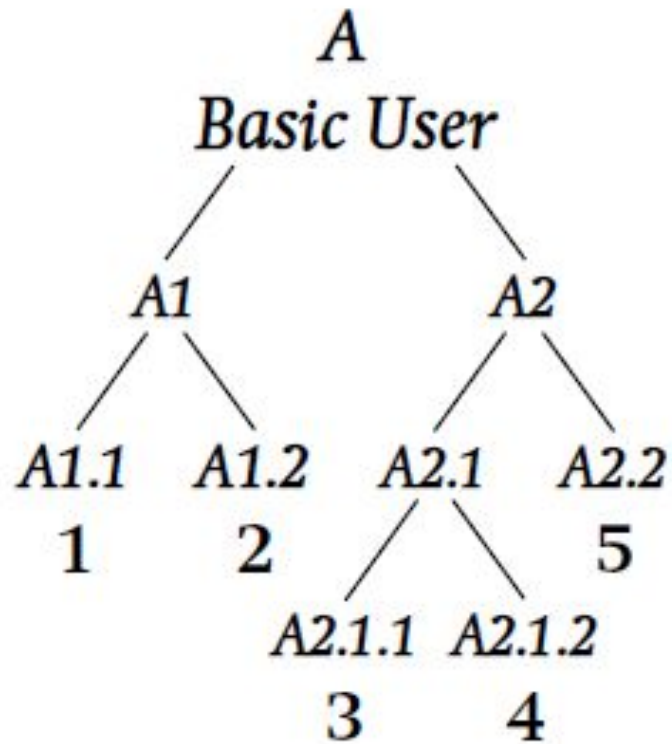
► When progress is minimal or unobserved, it is possible to break down the reference levels even further

► Set smaller goals for learners

► Provide detailed reference descriptions of what happens in between

CEFR: a set of scales

- ► A global scale

- ► A self-assessment grid

- ► Grids for each skill, which are subdivided into subcategories

- ► Grids for language strategies

- ► Grids for communicative competences

Global scale

Table 1. *Common Reference Levels: global scale*

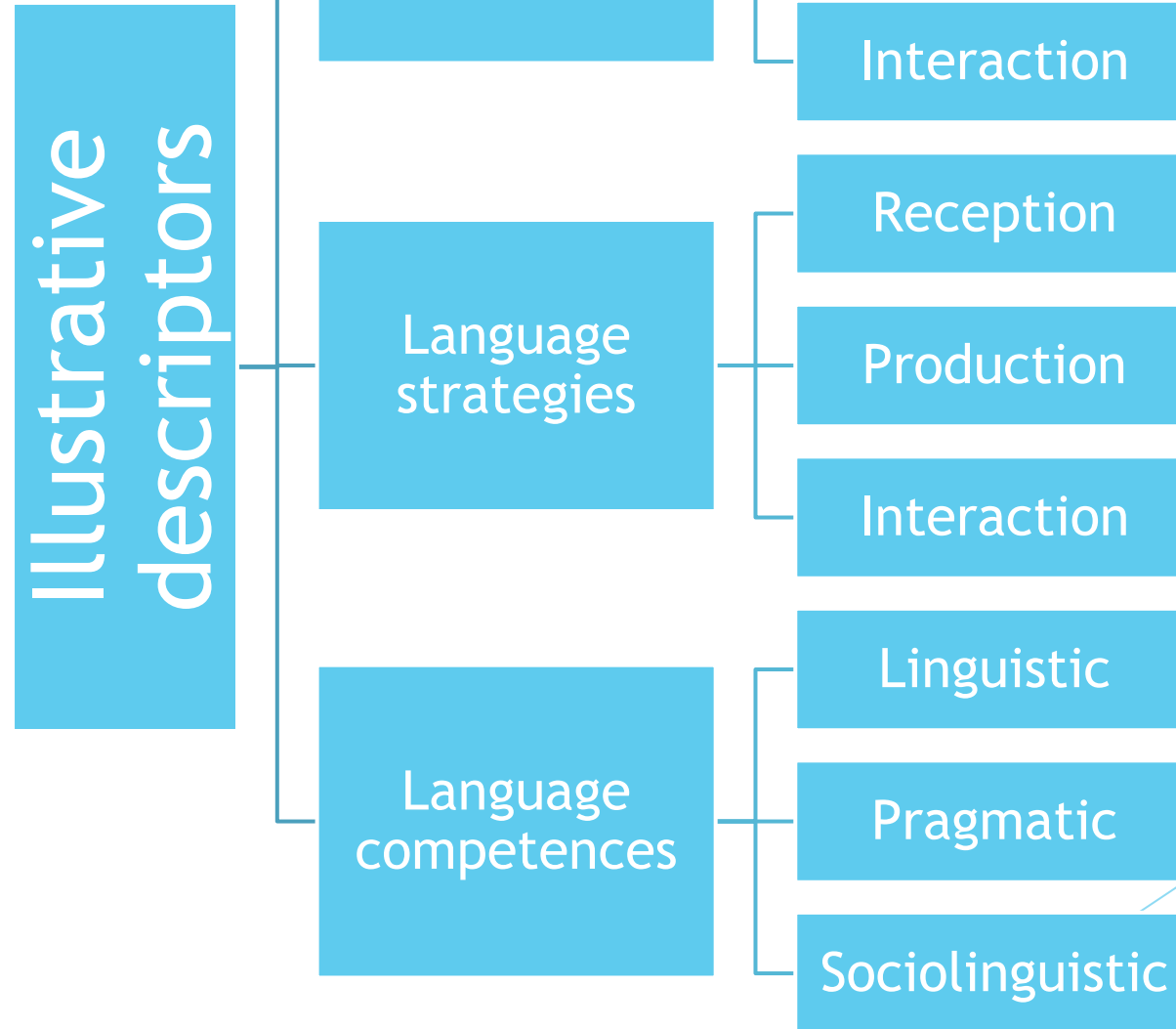|		
Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	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 User	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.
	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.
Basic User	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.
	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.

Chapter 4 of the CEFR

Illustrative descriptors

- Language activities
  - Reception
  - Production
  - Interaction
- Language strategies
  - Reception
  - Production
  - Interaction
- Language competences
  - Linguistic
  - Pragmatic
  - Sociolinguistic

Language activities

Production
- Speaking
- Writing

Reception
- Reading
- Listening

Interaction
- All 4 skills

Productive scales: Speaking

Overall oral production

Sustained monologue describing experience

Sustained monologue (putting up a case or a debate)

Public announcements

Addressing the audience

Overall oral production

C2	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
C1	Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.
B2	Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.
	Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.
B1	Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of a subject within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.
A2	Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences.
A1	Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.

Public announcements

C2	No descriptor available
C1	Can deliver announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely
B2	Can deliver announcements on the most general topics with a degree of clarity, fluency and spontaneity which causes no strain or inconvenience to the listener
B1	Can deliver short rehearsed announcement on topics pertinent to everyday occurrences of his/her field, which despite possible very foreign stress and intonation are nevertheless clearly intelligible
A2	Can deliver very short, rehearsed announcements of predictable learned content which are intelligible to listeners who are prepared to concentrate
A1	No descriptor available

Productive scales: Writing

Overall written production

Creative writing

Reports and essays

Receptive scales

Listening

- Overall listening comprehension
- Understanding interaction between native speakers
- Listening as a member of a live audience
- Listening to announcements and instructions
- Listening to audio, media and recording

Receptive scales

Reading

- Overall reading comprehension
- Reading correspondence
- Reading for orientation
- Reading for information and argument
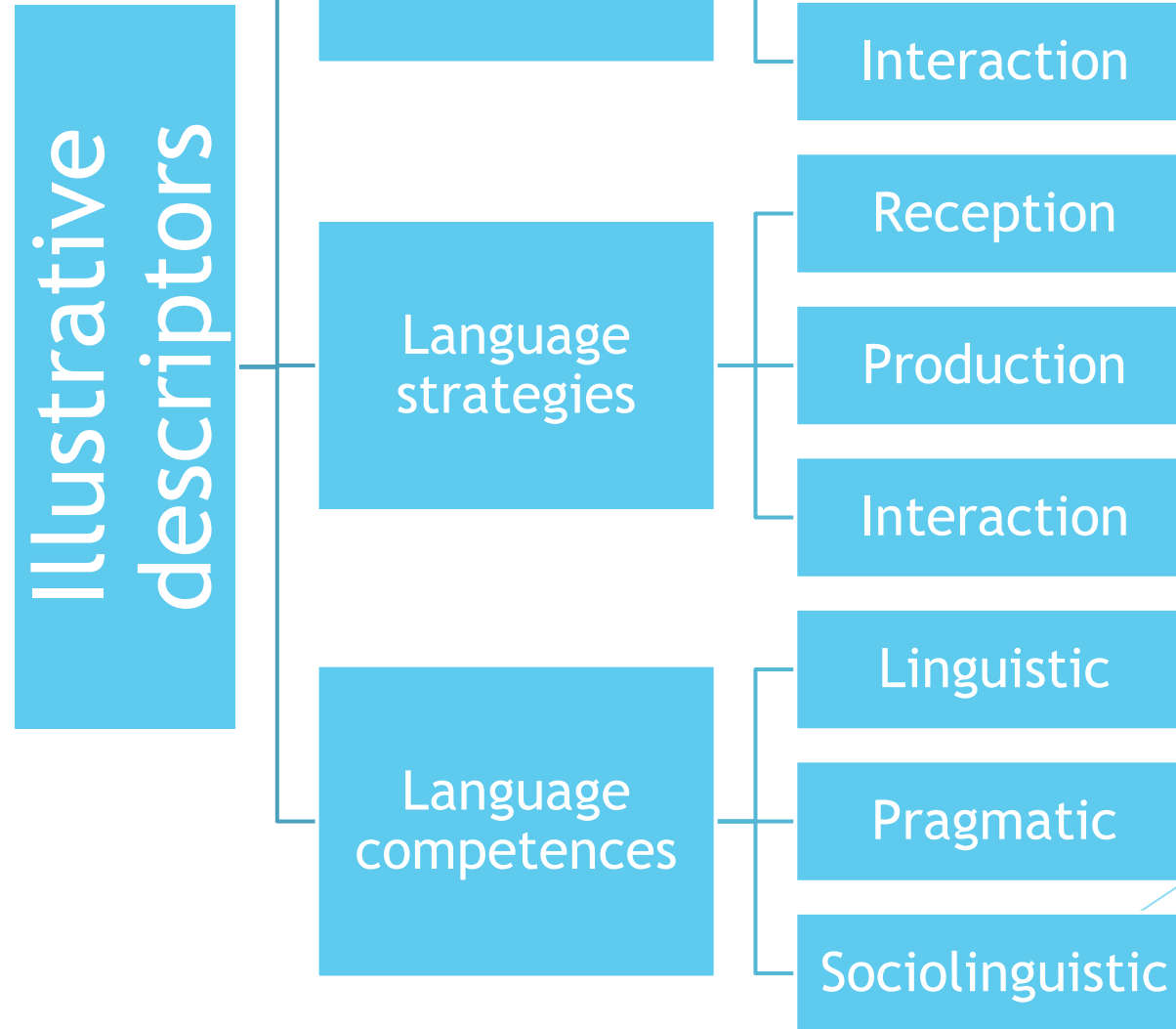- Reading instructions

WATCHING TV AND FILM

C2	No descriptor available
C1	Can follow films employing a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage.
B2	Can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. Can understand documentaries, live interviews, talk shows, plays and the majority of films in standard dialect.
B1	Can follow many films in which visuals and action carry much of the storyline, and which are delivered clearly in straightforward language. Can catch the main points in TV programmes on familiar topics when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.
A2	• Can identify the main point of TV news items reporting events, accidents etc. where the visual supports the commentary. • Can follow changes of topic of factual TV news items, and form an idea of the main content.
A1	No descriptor available

Interactive scales

- ► Overall spoken interaction
- ► Understanding a native speaker interlocutor
- ► Conversation
- ► Informal discussion (with a friend)
- ► Formal discussion and meetings
- ► Goal-oriented co-operation (Repairing a car, discussing a document, organizing an event)
- ► Transactions to obtain goods and services
- ► Information exchange
- ► Interviewing and being interviewed

Chapter 4 of the CEFR

Illustrative descriptors

- Language activities
  - Reception
  - Production
  - Interaction
- Language strategies
  - Reception
  - Production
  - Interaction
- Language competences
  - Linguistic
  - Pragmatic
  - Sociolinguistic

Scales for language competences

Linguistic competences

- General linguistic range
- Vocabulary range and control
- Grammatical range and control
- Phonological control
- Orthographic control

Scales for language competences

Pragmatic competences

- Flexibility to circumstances
- Turn-taking
- Thematic development
- Coherence and cohesion
- Spoken fluency
- Proposition precision

Scales for language competences

Sociolinguistic competences

- Linguistic markers of social relations
- Politeness conventions
- Expressions of folk-wisdom
- Register differences
- Dialect and accent

Self-Assessment Grids

► Allow learners to assess themselves across levels and skills using the I-Can-Do format

► They give a clear indication of learner progress if used overtime

► They allow Ts and SSs to monitor problem areas

► They give an sense of achievement and can be used a learning resource

► Available in many languages at http://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/self-assessment-grid

Self-assessment exercise

► Think of a second or third language that you know.

► On a scale from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient user), decide what level you think you are in that language.

► Then, using the CEFR Self-assessment grid check whether the level you guessed best describes your ability.

Ideas for use of CEFR scales in the classroom

Reading - A2

I can read very short, simple texts.

I can understand short simple personal letters.

I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables.

Reading – A2

Can Do statement	Can Do	Can Do
I can read very short, simple texts.	☺ ✔	✔
I can understand short simple personal letters.	☐ April, 14th	✔
I can find specific, information in simple advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables.		

Reading – A2

Can Do statement	My learning target	I can do this	Someone else confirms that I can do this
I can read very short, simple texts.			
I can understand short simple personal letters.			
…			

Reading – A2

Can Do statement	With a lot of help	With a little help	Without help
I can read very short, simple texts.	17 February 2017	1 March 2017	25 March 2017
I can understand short simple personal letters.	3 March 2017	23 March 2017	4 April 2017
…			

Critique of the CEFR

► CEFR descriptors are not exclusive: no description is provided for

  ► All possible levels, Young learners, CLIL

► Tend to describe outcomes of learning rather than what precisely is to be learned – e.g. *"Can follow most lectures, discussions and debates with relative ease"* does not indicate:

  ► What language forms, vocabulary, and rhetorical conventions need to be mastered

  ► how the ease of listening is to be achieved

► Many descriptors are not immediately useable because of vague language

Critique of the CEFR

- CEFR descriptors are not necessary or sufficient specifications of what should be taught at each level.
  - A2 descriptor in the Correspondence scale – *"Can write very simple personal letters expressing thanks and apology"* - is not all to be taught in this area at A2 level
- When actions, strategies, competencies are described in words, a lot of ambiguity can occur.

English Profile

- ► A long-term research program to extend the CEFR
- ► It translates CEFR into the English language by:
  - ► producing resources for the development of curricula, wordlists, course materials and teaching guides
  - ► delivering materials of practical use for learners, teachers and any professionals involved in language learning
- ► Project Website: http://www.englishprofile.org/

Where do I proceed from here?

- ► Define your teaching context and your learners
- ► Become familiar with the scales
- ► Select the scales relevant for your curricula
- ► Adapt, refine and extend descriptors to fit your context
- ► Refer to the scales when developing lessons or assessing your learners
- ► Put the scales into your teaching practice

What CEFR is and is not

- ► CEFR scales are used to describe, not prescribe
- ► CEFR scales are all-inclusive and describe all levels of language use.
- ► CEFR scales can be used as a tool for comparing levels of ability amongst learners of foreign languages.
- ► CEFR scales are not language and context specific
- ► CEFR imposes approaches to teaching and teaching methodologies.
- ► CEFR conveys basic communicative, action-oriented approach.

Watch the video clip and choose the correct CEFR level for each learner

- ► What skill is assessed? What is the test format?

- ► What scales do you find most useful for this assessment?

- ► If you were to use Table 3 for assessment, where will you place these learners on the scale form A1 to C1?

A, B or C?

► 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.

► Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

► Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.