



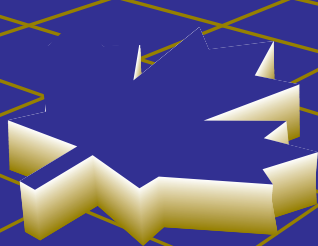
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# NEW CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES

Proposal for a Common Framework  
of Reference for Languages for Canada

May 2006



Canada 

# **NEW CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES**

## **PROPOSAL FOR A COMMON FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES FOR CANADA**

**May 2006**

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*Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada*

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## PREFACE

In 2004-2005, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH) launched the Official Languages Research and Dissemination Program. The purpose of this three year joint initiative is to promote research on policies and practices related to official languages and ensure that the results are disseminated. Four themes guide the selection of research projects: minority-language education; second-language learning; governance and community development; and linguistic duality. The funding mechanisms consist of research grants, workshop grants, conference grants and virtual scholar in residence.

Dr. Laurens Vandergrift was selected in 2005 as Virtual Scholar in Residence with the Official Languages Support Programs Branch of PCH. His proposal was developed in the wake of the Action Plan for Official Languages for Canada launched by the federal government in the spring of 2003 and aimed at exploring means of meeting the strategic objective set out in the Plan to double the proportion of graduates from Canadian high schools with a functional knowledge of their second official language by 2013.

In this discussion paper, Dr. Vandergrift examines how a common framework of reference for languages could provide provinces and territories with a transparent and coherent system for describing language proficiency and, based on the assessment of frameworks currently in existence, recommends that the provinces and territories explore the feasibility of adopting the *Common European Framework* as a framework of reference of languages in Canada.

Throughout his research and writing for this discussion paper, Dr. Vandergrift has benefited from the advice and feedback from an advisory committee composed of Dr. W. Lazaruk, Dr. A. MacFarlane and Prof. S. Rehorick. The Department would like to thank Dr. Vandergrift and the members of the Advisory Committee for the quality of their work.

Hubert Lussier  
Director General  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government of Canada recently renewed its commitment to linguistic duality with the adoption of a national action plan for official languages. One of the goals established by the action plan is to double the proportion of secondary school students graduating with a functional knowledge of their second official language by the year 2013. This goal can only be achieved with the cooperation of the provinces and territories because education is under their jurisdiction in Canada. At present, there is no common second language curriculum nor are there common tools to track progress toward this goal in an objective manner. A framework of reference for languages across Canada could provide a common basis for describing and measuring language proficiency, one that could be understood by all users.

A common framework of reference for languages could provide the provinces and territories with a transparent and coherent system for describing language proficiency. In addition to providing a measure for calibrating language proficiency for educational systems across Canada, a common **framework of reference for languages**<sup>1</sup> could foster a common understanding of what functional proficiency means. It could facilitate cooperation among ministries of education, provide a basis for mutual recognition of language qualifications, and track learner progress over time and in different jurisdictions. Such a framework could be used by each province and territory as a point of reference for language teaching and assessment, without imposing a particular curriculum, teaching methodology or standard for achievement. A common framework could provide a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions across Canada and beyond into the international arena.

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1. A glossary of terms which have specific technical meaning in the context of second language learning and assessment is found at the end of this document. Glossary words appear in bold where they first appear in the text.

This discussion paper will consider the need for a common framework of reference for languages and the value of such a framework for Canada. A number of language frameworks available in the public domain were examined for their validity and their suitability for use in a Canadian context. Criteria for evaluating the **validity** of a language framework and its usefulness were identified, based on a review of the literature on language frameworks. These criteria include:

- **construct validity**; i.e., the level descriptors must consistently reflect the theory of communicative competence that they are purported to describe and measure, and the levels must be empirically validated.
- **face validity**; i.e., the level descriptors must be congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners.
- **contextual validity**; i.e., it must meet the particular needs of Canada. The criteria relating to contextual validity require that the framework be:
  - sufficiently transparent to be understood by all Canadian students for purposes of self-assessment;
  - context-free in order to accommodate different curricula for learners of different ages and learners with different goals;
  - comprehensive enough to provide a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions;
  - flexible enough to allow each province and territory to link its program to the larger framework; and,
  - sufficiently discriminating at the lower end of the **scale** to accommodate learners in differing academic contexts.

The Common European Framework of reference for languages (CEFR) emerged as the framework that meets the criteria for validity and is best suited to meet the needs of the Canadian context for the following reasons:

- Grounded in the most widely-accepted theory of language **competence** and language use, the CEFR would provide the provinces and territories with a common understanding of and terminology to describe communication in another language.
- The CEFR scales have been empirically defined and ranked for a number of different languages, making them useful for all languages taught in the provinces and territories.

- The CEFR has a high degree of face validity with teachers since the descriptors of language proficiency are congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners.
- The CEFR descriptors are transparent, user-friendly, and meaningful to teachers and to learners. This is an important criterion for students, in particular, if the framework is to be used for self-assessment purposes.
- The CEFR level descriptors are context-free but context relevant, providing greater flexibility to accommodate the different curricula of the provinces and territories.
- Given that it was able to accommodate the needs of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe, the CEFR is sufficiently comprehensive for the provinces and territories to relate their descriptors and frameworks to it.
- The CEFR is open and flexible. It is not tied to a particular teaching methodology or a particular curriculum, making it an attractive option to accommodate the different needs and pedagogic cultures of the provinces and territories.
- The branching approach advocated by the CEFR offers flexibility so that the provinces and territories can establish sublevels relevant to their different language programs and still make reference to the common system.

The CEFR has been developed from more than thirty years of work on language teaching, learning and assessment by the Council of Europe; it has international currency and is available for use in other countries. It defines levels of language proficiency along three broad levels of language **performance**: Basic, Independent and Proficient. These broad bands are further broken down into six global levels of performance against which progress in language learning can be measured. Each global level can be further 'branched' into sublevels in order to suit local needs and yet still relate back to a common system.

The CEFR offers a variety of scales of language use along the six global levels, both holistic and highly detailed. Language performance is expressed in terms of 'can do' statements, so that, in addition to their use by teachers and testers, the scales lend themselves well to use by language learners for self-assessment purposes. Separate scales exist for each skill strand, along with more detailed scales for micro-functions within a skill strand.

In contrast to other frameworks available in the public domain, the CEFR **proficiency scales** have benefited from a rigorous validation process to ensure the fit of each descriptor with its level. Teachers played an important role in the validation process, ensuring that the language used was comprehensible, transparent and user-friendly.

The CEFR has been applied in a number of important European language assessment initiatives, most notably the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The ELP is both a reporting and a pedagogical tool used by learners to document proficiency in all languages learned and to reflect on, plan and assess their language learning and cultural experiences. The CEFR levels are integral to the use of the ELP in that they form the basis of the self-assessment and the point of reference for target-setting by language learners. Together, the CEFR and the ELP provide a comprehensive package that covers all aspects of language learning, teaching and assessment, yet is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the different needs and pedagogic cultures of the 46 member nations of the Council of Europe.

**Therefore, it is recommended that the provinces and territories explore the feasibility of adopting the Common European Framework as a framework of reference for languages in Canada.**

The report concludes by outlining a number of possible steps to act on this recommendation.

- Consultation with the provinces and territories on the potential of the CEFR and discussion at a Council of Ministers of Education, Canada meeting.
- Consultation with business and industry about using the CEFR to describe language proficiency for purposes of work and accreditation.
- Piloting, in different jurisdictions, a language portfolio referenced against the CEFR.
- Calibrating other frameworks currently in use in Canada with the CEFR to determine equivalencies.
- Examining existing assessment tools to support a common language framework for Canada, calibrating them with the CEFR.
- Exploring incorporation of the CEFR level descriptors into the census in order to allow Canadians to self-assess their level of bilingualism, referenced against a common framework.

Appendix A examines theoretical issues underlying language proficiency and explores a definition of ‘functional proficiency’. Functional proficiency is not a static construct; it can vary according to communication goals and context. Functional proficiency may be defined in several ways depending on who, to whom, which skills, or the circumstances of language use.

Appendix B examines other language frameworks in greater detail and discusses their strengths and weaknesses in light of the criteria of a valid framework of reference for languages.

Appendix C presents tables comparing the levels of each of the frameworks examined in Appendix B with the Common European Framework levels.



## 1. NEED FOR A COMMON FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES IN CANADA

### 1.1 Canada's commitment to linguistic duality

In 2003, the Government of Canada renewed its commitment to linguistic duality through an action plan entitled *The Next Act: New Momentum for Canada's Linguistic Duality – The Action Plan for Official Languages* (henceforth Action Plan) (PCO, 2003). Three factors motivated a reinvestment in the official languages policy. First, linguistic duality is part of Canada's heritage. Although Canadian society is more diverse today than it was when the Official Languages Act was adopted in 1969, both English and French have retained their special status as official languages. Second, linguistic duality is an advantage for Canada in the context of increasing globalization because both English and French have international stature. Third, new technologies are transforming the world of work, creating opportunities for direct contact and communication between linguistic groups in Canada and countries around the world.

Research has shown that Canadians believe it is important for their children to learn a second language (PCO, 2003, p. 23). Fully 86% of Canadians (82% of Anglophones) want their children to learn another language. Among Anglophones who want their children to be bilingual, 75% believe that this language should be French; similarly 90% of Francophones believe that English should be their second language. Given the public interest in language learning and its importance for Canada's future, the Government of Canada's Action Plan proposed to double, with the cooperation of the provinces and territories, the proportion of secondary school students graduating with a functional level of proficiency<sup>2</sup> in their second official language by the year 2013 (PCO, 2003, p. 27). In response to the importance of both

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2. An extended discussion of the concept of 'functional proficiency' is found in Appendix A.

languages for access to labour markets and global trade, the Action Plan also proposed that the ability to communicate in both English and French be one of the foundations of life-long learning for Canadians.

In Canada, education is a provincial and territorial responsibility. Each province and territory sets its own educational priorities and uses curriculum for language learning that reflects its own particular circumstances. As a consequence, there is no common Canadian curriculum for second language learning and there are no common tools for measuring progress towards the targeted goal of functional proficiency. Given this context, the Canadian Government could play a significant role in facilitating the development of common tools that would allow each province and territory to link its unique program to a common language framework that also has international currency.

This paper will explore the potential of one of those tools, a common framework of reference for languages in Canada, and consider the relevance of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the Canadian context. This framework could be used by each province and territory as a point of reference and could provide a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions across Canada and beyond into the international arena.

## 1.2 Language learning: A life-long task

The goal of all language learning is the attainment of language proficiency.<sup>3</sup> The Action Plan is focused primarily on increasing the number of high school graduates who attain a level of functional proficiency. However, language learning does not stop at graduation from secondary school or post-secondary study. In fact, the need for learning often becomes more relevant as adults face

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3 It should be noted that the discussion of language proficiency in this paper is mostly limited to the speaking skill. This does not imply that language proficiency entails oral production only; indeed, a language learner's proficiency can be established for listening, reading and writing as well. Because speaking almost always involves interaction with another speaker, descriptors of speaking proficiency usually make reference to understanding an **interlocutor** for purposes of seeking information, clarifying understanding and moving a conversation forward. In that sense, the speaking proficiency descriptors also describe and assess interactive listening. This is acknowledged in the CEFR scales where speaking is differentiated into 'spoken production' and 'spoken interaction'.

Speaking proficiency, however, is the most difficult and time-consuming dimension of language proficiency to develop and is most often the skill implied when people refer to knowledge of a language or the reason for wanting to learn another language. Indeed, it is speaking that is implied in the Action Plan's 'functional proficiency' target and is the current basis for determining the number of Canadians who are functionally proficient in their second language. This information is based on a 'yes' or 'no' response to the census question "Do you speak English or French well enough to conduct a conversation?"

new challenges and opportunities that require them to extend or upgrade second language skills, or to learn another language. The vision for linguistic duality in Canada is not limited to a level of functional proficiency at one point in time; it includes incremental improvement through a wide variety of learning opportunities.

For lifelong learning, a common framework with graduated skill levels may be helpful to track progress, to facilitate transfer of qualifications, and to allow for accreditation and collaboration across Canada between different educational sectors, institutions and jurisdictions. Language learning that occurs through special language classes, exchanges, on-the-job training and other means can be tied to more formal instruction through the use of a common framework. Incremental steps in language proficiency can be rewarded and acknowledged; **differential language competence** can be identified and acknowledged. Learners can use the framework to target growth at a more advanced level in a specific skill, e.g. speaking proficiency only, or to develop a particular profile of language proficiency; e.g., a unique focus on comprehension skills (reading and listening).

### 1.3 Measuring progress in language learning

Finding effective ways to achieve the 2013 goal and measure progress toward it is key to the success of the Action Plan. In response, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL), in partnership with Canadian Heritage (PCH) and Canadian Parents for French organized a symposium, ‘Vision and Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, to develop a viable strategy for realizing the 2013 target (OCOL, 2004). Stakeholders and leaders in the fields of education, business/economics and arts/culture/sport discussed challenges and developed strategies to renew second language programming in Canada. Prof. S. Rehorick (University of New Brunswick) was mandated to draft specific recommendations for meeting the 2013 goal. The committee report, *Plan Twenty-thirteen (2013): Strategies for a national approach to second language education*, (PCH, 2004) outlines 54 concrete recommendations for achieving the government target, including the need to measure progress against the targeted goal. Measuring progress entails defining what functional proficiency means, establishing clear **benchmarks** for progress, and identifying appropriate tools for measuring progress.

How can one objectively determine whether students have attained the targeted level of ‘functional language proficiency’? While most stakeholders have a vague idea of what functional proficiency represents, this **construct** needs to be defined in concrete terms. Most Canadian students, for example, are presently learning French in a Core French program. If there is to be a 50% increase in the number of students attaining functional proficiency, then clarity is needed about the level of proficiency students in Core French programs are able to attain, how progress toward this goal can be measured and what changes in programming may be necessary. Is functional proficiency a reasonable goal for Core French? Both parents and students could benefit from information about the second language program options available in their province or territory, including expected program outcomes and how progress will be measured. Some programs may not aim for functional proficiency.

Likewise, how can language skills acquired outside of the education system, such as *Explore* (formerly the Summer Language Bursary Program), study abroad or work experience in a second language context, be measured and acknowledged? In order to do this in an objective manner, it would be helpful to have a common framework for languages that can provide a coherent system for describing language proficiency. The framework needs to be sufficiently comprehensive to describe a broad range of performance from incipient to near mastery for any language, and sufficiently transparent to be understood by all users.

## 2. DEFINITION OF A FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

A framework<sup>4</sup> of reference for languages provides an objective system for:

- defining language proficiency at identified levels of communicative competence on a continuum across languages and contexts;
- comparing individual progress in language performance along a continuum (rather than against the language performance of others); and,
- measuring learner progress at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.

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4. This paper will use the term ‘framework’ to discuss proficiency scales even though it is acknowledged that a framework for languages is more comprehensive than the proficiency scales around which it is organized.

### 3. PURPOSE OF A COMMON FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES IN CANADA

A common framework of reference for languages could:

- provide a common basis for calibrating and recognizing language proficiency in any language across the country;
- provide a common understanding in Canada about what it means to possess functional proficiency in another language;
- facilitate communication about language proficiency and recognition of language qualifications among educators, business and industry, parents and cultural communities across the country;
- help learners plan language learning on a lifelong basis;
- facilitate cooperation among ministries of education in the provinces and territories;
- provide a tool to objectively track progress towards the 2013 goal;
- provide a point of reference for language teaching and assessment, without imposing a particular curriculum, teaching methodology or standard for achievement.

Having established the need for and value of a common framework of reference for languages, the next step is to consider the criteria for choosing a specific framework, the options available and the preferred choice. A careful review of the options available in the public domain (see Appendix B) suggests that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) best responds to the criteria for validity and addresses the particular needs in the Canadian context. However, before examining the CEFR more closely, it is important to identify the characteristics of a valid framework.

### 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF A VALID FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

A number of frameworks of reference for languages exist in the public domain. How does one evaluate their strengths and weaknesses? Language is probably the most complex of human abilities and, given its social dimension, the assessment of individual language performance is equally complex. Theoretical issues relating to language proficiency are discussed in Appendix A, and other language frameworks are reviewed and discussed in

Appendix B. Based on this review of the literature, the following criteria appear warranted in determining the validity and usefulness of a framework for a particular context. A language framework should be:

- theoretically grounded (Brindley, 2001; North, 1997)
- empirically validated (Brindley, 1991; North 2000)
- congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners (Brindley, 2001)

The first two characteristics are important because they reflect construct validity. The descriptors of the framework faithfully reflect the construct of communicative competence that they are purported to describe and measure, and the levels are grounded in a theory of measurement, having been empirically validated for a number of languages. The third characteristic reflects the face validity of the framework in that the level descriptors make sense to those who will need to use them. Furthermore, in order for a framework to serve its purposes well, it should also reflect contextual validity, in that it meets the particular needs of the context where it will be used. As outlined in the earlier section on the need for a language framework in Canada, a contextually valid framework must be:

- transparent and user-friendly; i.e., accessible to learners and teachers (North, 2000; Hudson, 2005) in order to be understood by Canadian learners of all ages for purposes of self-assessment;
- context-free but context-relevant (North, 2000; 2006) in order to accommodate different curricula for learners of different ages and learners with different goals;
- comprehensive so that different users can relate their own frameworks and descriptor levels to it (North, 2000; 2006), thereby providing a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions;
- flexible and open (North, 2000) enough to allow each province and territory to link its program to a larger framework; and,
- sufficiently discriminating of levels at the lower end of the framework to register progress in language proficiency in academic contexts (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984; North, 2000) in order to accommodate learners in academic contexts.

## 5. LANGUAGE FRAMEWORKS CURRENTLY IN EXISTENCE

The following frameworks, available in the public domain, were examined for their validity as a language framework and for their suitability for use in a Canadian context. They were chosen for closer scrutiny because of their currency, either in Canada or internationally. These frameworks are analyzed and described in greater detail in Appendix B.

- Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale

The ILR scale, developed by the United States Foreign Service Institute, describes language proficiency on a scale from 0 to 5 (no functional proficiency to educated native speaker). The ILR serves as the common yardstick in all US government agencies to verify language performance for job purposes. It is less suitable for school contexts; the lower end of the scale would need to be subdivided extensively to accommodate and describe small increments in proficiency. This is crucial for helping learners in Canadian schools to see progress in language learning and to sustain motivation.

- American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines were developed to expand the lower end of the ILR scale and make it more applicable to language learners in traditional academic contexts in the United States. The lower levels (0 – 2+) of the ILR scale were divided into eight sublevels in order to describe smaller increments in proficiency and the upper levels (3 and up) were collapsed into one level. While these guidelines have strong intuitive appeal, the sequencing of scale descriptors across proficiency levels makes assumptions about stages in second language development that may not be justified (jeopardizing their validity). They are also less suitable in a Canadian context since they are tied to a specific test (Oral Proficiency Interview).

- New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale

The New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale was modeled after the ILR scale for the purpose of evaluating the second language proficiency of New Brunswick high school graduates, as well as provincial public servants for positions classified as bilingual. Performance is rated on a range of nine levels, from

Novice to Superior. This scale is restricted to oral proficiency, limiting its usefulness for describing overall proficiency in a language.

- Public Service Commission of Canada Second Official Language Proficiency Levels

The Public Service Commission (PSC) language proficiency levels describe the general language skills required to accomplish the duties and responsibilities related to positions within the Canadian public service classified as bilingual, on a continuum from A (lowest) to C (highest). Given their focus on work contexts, the PSC levels would require adaptation for school contexts.

- Canadian Language Benchmarks

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), developed by Citizenship and Immigration, serve as a framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing of adult English as a Second Language in Canada. The CLB describe language ability at successive levels of language performance on a continuum from Basic (Benchmarks 1-4), to Intermediate (Benchmarks 5-8), to Advanced (Benchmarks 9-12). Since they were created for adult immigrants who are developing language skills for entry into the Canadian workforce, the CLB are not suitable to school contexts without significant adaptation.

- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The CEFR emerged as the language framework that meets the criteria for a valid framework and is best suited to meet the needs of the Canadian context. Therefore, it will be examined in greater detail in the following sections.

Table 1 presents a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each framework, including the Common European Framework. As can be seen, the Common European Framework comes closest to responding to all the criteria for a valid framework most suitable to the Canadian context.

**Table 1: Summary of strengths (✓) and weaknesses (X) of the language frameworks examined**

Criterion	ILR	ACTFL	NB OPS	PSC	CLB	CEFR
Theoretically grounded	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Empirically validated	X	X	X	X	X	✓
Face validity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transparent and user-friendly	X	X	X	✓	X	✓
Context-free/context relevant	X	X	✓	X	X	✓
Comprehensive	X	✓	X	X	X	✓
Flexible and open	X	✓	X	X	X	✓
Sufficiently discriminating of levels at lower end of framework	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X*

\* Some jurisdictions have subdivided the Basic levels (Breakthrough and Waystage).

ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable Scale)

ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines)

NB OPS (New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale)

PSC (Public Service Commission of Canada Second Official Language Proficiency Levels)

CLB (Canadian Language Benchmarks)

CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

## 6. COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

The Common European Framework (CEFR) has been developed from more than thirty years of work on language teaching, learning and assessment by the Council of Europe. It is intended to provide a common basis for defining language proficiency among the member countries of the Council of Europe, not a uniform system of language learning or teaching, nor a national curriculum. Content specifications will differ according to the target language and the context of the learning, and methodology will vary with pedagogic culture. The CEFR aims only to stimulate reflection and discussion on these issues (North, 2006). The framework has international currency and is available for use in other countries.<sup>5</sup>

5. A Japanese version has just been adopted (Trim, 2005) and Australia is seriously exploring the feasibility of adopting the CEFR as a framework for assessing English language proficiency for foreign students at the tertiary level (Read & Hirsh, 2005).

The CEFR defines levels of language proficiency along three broad levels of language performance: Basic, Independent and Proficient. These broad bands are further broken down into six global levels of performance against which to measure progress in language learning:

#### Basic:

- Breakthrough (A1): able to meet limited needs in highly predictable and easily recognizable transactional situations by relying on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organized repertoire of situation-specific phrases.
- Waystage (A2): able to communicate in simple and routine tasks relating to a limited range of common social situations, requiring a direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.

#### Independent:

- Threshold (B1): able to participate simply but effectively in the range of social situations necessary to normal everyday transactional and interactional needs in a range of contexts.
- Vantage (B2): able to hold more than one's own in social discourse, e.g. effective argument in discussions, and using one's greater awareness of the language for purposes of self-correction and planning.

#### Proficient:

- Effective Operational Proficiency (C1): able to engage in fluent and spontaneous conversation, carry out complex work tasks and pursue university studies in the target language.
- Mastery (C2): able to speak with precision, appropriateness and ease.

Each global level can be further 'branched' into sublevels in order to "suit local needs and yet still relate back to a common system" (COE, 2001, p. 32). For example, in academic contexts where visible progress between levels is slow, Basic level A.2 could be further sub-divided to create a number of sub-levels (e.g., A.2.1, A.2.2 and A.2.3). Subdividing the lower levels will provide greater incentive for learners to not abandon language learning due to perceived lack of progress on the proficiency scale.

The CEFR has been applied in a number of important European language

assessment initiatives, most notably the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (COE, 2000). The ELP is both a reporting and a pedagogical tool used by learners to document proficiency in all languages learned (including their first) and to reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences. The ELP model includes 1) a language passport summarizing language experiences and qualifications referenced against the CEFR; 2) a language biography describing experiences in each language, designed to guide learners to plan, to reflect on their learning and to assess progress toward their goals; and, 3) a dossier containing a selection of work that best represents the learner's proficiency. In addition to this common core, the model can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular country (or jurisdiction within that country) or a particular age level. This makes the ELP particularly attractive for use in Canada where provinces and territories set their own educational priorities and develop second language curriculum based on their own particular circumstances.

The ELP, intended to be the property of the language learner, has two principal functions. In its pedagogical function, the ELP is designed to promote plurilingualism, raise cultural awareness, and foster the development of **learner autonomy**. In its reporting function, it documents the owner's various language learning experiences, inside and outside the formal education system, in a comprehensive and transparent manner. The two functions "merge in the ongoing process of self-assessment that is fundamental to effective ELP use" (Little, 2002, p. 182). Development of learner autonomy, an important goal of the ELP, also encourages lifelong language learning.

The CEFR levels are integral to the use of the ELP. They form the basis for self-assessment in the passport component, and then serve as the point of reference for goal-setting and further self-assessment of the biography component. Together, the CEFR and the ELP provide a total, common package that covers all aspects of language learning, teaching and assessment. It is sufficiently comprehensive and flexible to accommodate the different needs and pedagogic cultures of the 46 member nations of the Council of Europe.

## 7. NATURE OF THE CEFR PROFICIENCY SCALES

The validation process resulted in 54 different scales at each of the six levels. Two holistic summary scales are often used to introduce the CEFR. Table 2, the global scale, is the most succinct scale of descriptors, describing the different levels of proficiency in a holistic manner.<sup>6</sup> Table 3 presents the major categories of language use by skill strand (listening, reading, etc.) at each of the six levels. Level descriptors express language performance in terms of ‘can do’ statements. In addition to serving as reference points for the purposes of evaluation and curriculum planning, the level descriptors can be used by learners to determine their level of language competence by skill strand. Based on their self-assessment, learners can examine more detailed scales to more precisely self-assess their current level of proficiency and to establish further goals. Given its focus on self-assessment, this scale is closely associated with the ELP.

In addition to the global scales, the CEFR also offers a vast number of highly detailed scales on many different dimensions of language use along the six levels. Separate scales exist for each skill strand (with separate speaking scales for spoken production and spoken interaction) along with more detailed scales for micro-functions within a skill strand. For example, in listening comprehension, scales emerged for genre; e.g., understanding conversations, listening as part of a live audience, listening to announcements, listening to recordings. In the case of a broader scale such as **strategic competence**, scales emerged by type of strategy use; e.g., planning, compensating, monitoring and repair.

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6. More differentiated and detailed descriptors of oral proficiency are found in scales of different presentational modes (monologues, announcements, etc.), overall spoken interaction, different types of interaction (conversation, informal discussion, etc.) (COE, 2001, pp. 58-82).

Table 2: CEFR Common Reference Levels: Global Scale

<b>Proficient User</b>	<b>C2</b>	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.
	<b>C1</b>	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.
<b>Independent User</b>	<b>B2</b>	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.
	<b>B1</b>	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 while traveling 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.
<b>Basic User</b>	<b>A2</b>	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.
	<b>A1</b>	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.

**Table 3: CEFR Common Reference Levels: Self-assessment Grid**

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>						
<b>Listening</b>	I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar topics regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programs. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signaled explicitly. I can understand television programs and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided, I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
<b>Reading</b>	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	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.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialized articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
<b>Spoken Interaction</b>	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	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 myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, or personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	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 skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
<b>Spoken Production</b>	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
<b>Writing</b>	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters and descriptions of experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

## 8. VALIDATION OF THE CEFR PROFICIENCY SCALES

In contrast to other frameworks available in the public domain, the CEFR proficiency scales have benefited from a rigorous validation process (North, 1995, 1996). Most scales in the public domain have been developed through an intuitive approach, based on expert opinion or personal experience, and then subsequently ‘validated’ through consultation with teachers and other stakeholders and revised - a revision usually limited to the word level. Such scales have not been empirically validated to ensure the fit of each descriptor with its level. The CEFR validation process included the following steps:

1. The contents of over 30 scales of language proficiency in the public domain were deconstructed into individual ‘stand alone’ proficiency descriptors. After eliminating all negatively worded, redundant and **norm-referenced** statements, a pool of about 1000 items remained. All descriptors were reworded so that they could be answered with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no.’
2. Groups of teachers evaluated the descriptors, grouped them by language category (strategy use, listening, writing essays, etc.) and proficiency level (low, middle or high), and discarded descriptors deemed to be problematic.
3. Video recordings of teachers discussing and comparing recorded proficiency interviews were analyzed for the **metalanguage** teachers use to describe language performance. Descriptors were reviewed for use of this vocabulary and revised accordingly.
4. Descriptors judged by the teachers as most clear, focused and relevant were compiled into a series of five questionnaires to assess learner performance on selected descriptors; the teacher ratings were then analyzed using a sophisticated statistical procedure (Rasch scale modeling).
5. Results provided a mathematical, objective method for scaling the descriptors and establishing cut-off points between levels (North, 1997). This ensured that the framework was truly **criterion-referenced**.
6. The difficulty order of the resulting scale was verified in a pilot study with English, then replicated satisfactorily with French and German, and subsequently correlated with other self-assessment scales.

An important part of the validation process was the role played by teachers. Involving teachers through a series of workshops over a two-year period ensured that 1) the descriptors remained relevant for teachers and congruent with their experiences of language learner performance and 2) the language used was comprehensible, transparent and user-friendly.

## 9. STRENGTHS OF THE CEFR FOR THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

Earlier, the characteristics of a valid framework of reference for languages were identified. The following discussion demonstrates how the CEFR possesses these characteristics, and how they are applicable in the Canadian context.

- Theoretically grounded

The CEFR is grounded in a theory of language competence and language use (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996) which is clearly reflected in the descriptors and the numerous individual scales. This provides the provinces and territories, and other interested stakeholders, with a common understanding of what it means to communicate in another language and a common terminology to describe progress towards functional proficiency.

- Empirically validated

The CEFR proficiency scales have been empirically defined and ranked, using both a qualitative methodology and sophisticated statistical analyses. This was done for a number of different languages, providing provinces and territories with a valid framework for the range of languages taught.

- Face validity

The CEFR proficiency scales have a high degree of face validity because they are congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners. Initial feedback from teachers in Canada who have been introduced to the framework confirms that the CEFR level descriptors are meaningful representations of the language performance of their students.

- Transparent and user-friendly

The CEFR level descriptors are designed to be accessible and meaningful both to language teachers and to learners. Each descriptor is worded positively in terms of what the speaker can do (even at early stages of language learning) and makes no comparison with levels above or below it, making the framework free from internal contradictions. The descriptors do not use a ‘language-deficit’ model, nor do they make any references to perceptions by ‘native speakers.’ The descriptors are designed in terms of what a language learner can do and can be answered with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no,’ making them ideally suited for self-assessment. This is particularly important, given the current interest in a potential common language portfolio for Canada, similar to the European Language Portfolio. A transparent, user-friendly framework will facilitate the ability of learners at all age levels to assess their language proficiency for purposes of their portfolio.

- Context-free but context-relevant

In order to accommodate the range of situations which learners in different contexts might face, the CEFR descriptors are not tied to a particular task or communication theme. At the same time, these descriptors do reflect the realities of language use at different levels of proficiency (as verified in the validation process), making them relevant in different contexts. This characteristic of the CEFR provides greater flexibility for accommodating different curricula for a range of jurisdictions and age levels. This is an important feature for Canada where the provinces and territories have autonomy in education and where there is no common second language curriculum.

- Comprehensive

The CEFR is comprehensive because it was created to accommodate the needs and interests of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe. The framework describes a full range of language knowledge, skills and use; it provides a series of reference points (levels) by which progress in learning can be calibrated; and, it presents communicative proficiency as comprising a number of different competencies. This is important for Canada because jurisdictions that wish to do so could relate their own frameworks and descriptor levels to it.

- Flexible and open

The CEFR was designed to accommodate the diverse needs of its member states and yet allow for reference to a common system; therefore, it is adaptable for use in different circumstances and capable of further extension and refinement. The framework is not tied to a particular teaching methodology or a particular approach to assessment. This openness and flexibility makes the CEFR an attractive option for Canada, because it can easily accommodate the different needs and pedagogic cultures of the provinces and territories.

## 10. WEAKNESSES OF THE CEFR FOR THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

While the CEFR has many attractive features, its weaknesses also need to be considered.

With regard to the characteristics of a valid framework of reference for languages posited earlier, the following criterion will need to be addressed for the Canadian context:

- Sufficiently discriminating for levels at the lower end of the framework

The CEFR does not differentiate enough at the Basic levels to chart progress for beginning-level language learners. Language learners may become discouraged and abandon language learning if they do not see visible evidence of progress on the proficiency scale. However, the branching approach advocated by the CEFR offers flexibility to different jurisdictions and learning contexts to subdivide levels to chart progress and still make reference to the common system.<sup>7</sup> This flexibility would allow provinces and territories to establish sublevels relevant to their different language programs.

While the CEFR enjoys wide scale acceptance as a common framework “shared by language professionals across linguistic and cultural barriers” (North, 2006, p. 26), it is not without criticism in Europe. Although these particular criticisms do not touch on the criteria established for evaluating the validity of frameworks, they are worth mentioning at this point. Fulcher

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7. Finland has developed and empirically validated a scale for use in schools that further subdivides the lower levels of the CEFR (Hildén & Takala, 2005).

(2004a) suggests that, given the integral role of teacher rankings in the development of the CEFR, what is being scaled is not necessarily learner proficiency, but “teachers’ perception of that proficiency”. In response, North (1996) argues that the descriptors were validated in different languages with “surprisingly similar results”. Furthermore, Fulcher (2004b) highlights the danger that comes with the institutionalization of a commonly accepted framework. After working with a framework over time, he argues, teachers may begin to believe, incorrectly, that the levels represent an acquisitional hierarchy; i.e., the descriptors and levels represent the actual order in which language is acquired. This criticism, however, would likely be true of any framework that becomes institutionalized.

## 11. RECOMMENDATION

In sum, given the considerable strengths of the CEFR and its ability to accommodate the different needs and pedagogic cultures of the provinces and territories, it holds great promise as a coherent and transparent framework of languages for Canada.

**Therefore, it is recommended that the provinces and territories explore the feasibility of adopting the Common European Framework as a framework of reference for languages in Canada.**

## 12. POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

- Consult with the provinces and territories

The CEFR can serve as an important bridge among provinces and territories by providing common terminology and a framework for describing language proficiency. It provides common benchmarks to chart progress while allowing each jurisdiction to set its own graduation targets and decide on its own curriculum. Ministries of Education in each province and territory are encouraged to consider the merits of the CEFR and discuss its potential as a language framework for Canada at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

- Consult with business and industry

The CEFR can also serve as a bridge between the formal education system and the world of business and industry by providing common terminology and a framework for describing language proficiency for purposes of work and accreditation. A common framework allows for mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts. It would allow the business and industry sector to determine the language profile for a specific position, including different levels of competence by skill, using a commonly understood framework. The same framework could be applied to employment in the public sector, facilitating mobility between the sectors. Interested stakeholders might be, for instance, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the Alliance of Manufacturers and Exporters of Canada, and the Canadian Council on Learning.

- Pilot a language portfolio referenced against the CEFR

Prof. S. Rehorick, who has been participating as Canadian observer in the European Language Portfolio (ELP) project with the Council of Europe, organized a workshop in October 2005 to consider the potential of the ELP for Canada. Since then, a number of provinces and territories have indicated their support for further discussion of a language portfolio at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. The ELP model, referenced against the CEFR, is being considered for pilot projects by some jurisdictions. A pilot of the portfolio, along with the CEFR, would provide provinces and territories with an opportunity to explore these two tools within their own pedagogical contexts.

In the same vein as the ELP, the use of a language portfolio could have important repercussions for language learning and teaching in Canada. By providing a clear, commonly understood profile of learners' language skills, a portfolio could facilitate mobility between provinces and territories, different levels of government and the workplace. It could contribute to mutual understanding within Canada by promoting bilingualism and validating other languages that learners may possess. A portfolio, such as the ELP, could encourage lifelong learning of other languages to any level of proficiency and make the learning process more transparent. Finally, it could develop learners' ability to assess their own competence and become more autonomous language learners.

- Calibrate frameworks currently in use in Canada with the CEFR

If the CEFR is adopted, it would be useful for purposes of mobility and accreditation, to calibrate the frameworks currently in use in Canada with the CEFR in order to determine equivalencies. This would allow jurisdictions that wish to do so to retain their own framework. A preliminary attempt to calibrate some of the existing frameworks with the CEFR is found in the tables in Appendix C.

- Examine existing assessment tools to support a common framework for Canada

A common language framework could address assessment and provide examples of tests for the provinces and territories that decide to use the CEFR. Various international tests/diplomas could be reviewed and piloted in the Canadian context. Provincial/territorial Grade 12 second language diploma tests, or other tests of interest, could also be calibrated with the CEFR, using the manual developed by the Council of Europe (see COE, 2003).

- Explore incorporation of the CEFR level descriptors into the census

The Government of Canada, in its quinquennial census, may wish to present Canadians with the six global descriptors, similar to those posited by the CEFR, but rephrased as ‘can do’ statements, in order to allow Canadians to self-assess their level of bilingualism. This would provide evidence of progress along a continuum of proficiency in the second language, referenced against a common framework, rather than a simple dichotomous ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response to a general question.

## 13. CONCLUSION

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages best responds to the criteria for a valid framework of reference for languages and addresses the particular needs of the Canadian context. It is based on solid research, has a long history of use on language learning in Europe and is available for use in other countries. Such a framework, along with a Canadian version of the European Language Portfolio, could provide the provinces and territories with common tools for documenting and tracking progress in language learning that would have currency in Canada and beyond into the international arena.

## GLOSSARY

- benchmark:** A standard by which something can be measured or judged.
- cloze test:** A test that asks students to reconstruct a passage from which words have been deleted randomly or systematically (usually every seventh word).
- competence:** A broad, general term to describe the most abstract dimension of proficiency; i.e., the inner, mental representation of language. Competence, the underlying language system, is inferred from language performance.
- construct:** An essential aspect of a theory on which certain scales, tests and or observations are based.
- construct validity:** The validity of the constructs measured by a test. See construct.
- contextual validity:** The degree to which a scale or a test meets the needs of the context and is suitable to the culture in which it will be used.
- criterion-referenced:** Determining success on basis of ability to perform specific tasks or behaviours and not in relationship to the performance of others (see norm-referenced).
- differential language competence:** Language proficiency at different levels of competence by skill; e.g., development of a high level of reading proficiency for purposes of reading reports and not focussing on an equal level of speaking proficiency.
- discourse competence:** The ability to connect sentences in discourse (speaking or writing) and form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances.
- face validity:** Subjective impression (by teacher or student) of the degree to which a scale or a test is representative of what it is purported to evaluate.

**interlocutor:** One who enters into conversation with another.

**framework of reference for languages:** Defines the levels of language performance by describing what language learners need to be able to do at each proficiency level; it can also become a reference for curriculum.

**learner autonomy:** The ability of learners to direct, monitor, evaluate their learning and, consequently, to accept responsibility for their own learning.

**metacognitive and cognitive strategies:** Metacognitive strategies are processes, such as planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluating, which learners use to direct their learning. Cognitive strategies, such as inferencing, involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself.

**metalanguage:** Language used to talk about language; e.g., specialized terminology used to talk about grammar.

**norm-referenced:** Determining successful performance on the basis of a standard of mean or the performance of a group rather than mastery of a specific behaviour or task (see criterion-referenced).

**operationalize:** Defining a construct so that it can be tested.

**performance:** the outward manifestation of competence; i.e., the ability to put language competence to use.

**proficiency test:** A test measuring a general ability or skill as opposed to achievement which measures learning of specific material.

**proficiency scale:** A progressive classification and description of language ability, usually representing a continuum from no ability to near-mastery.

**reliability:** The degree to which a test can give consistent and dependable results.

**scale:** See proficiency scale.

**schemata:** Representation of knowledge structures in long-term memory; e.g., events, concepts, routines.

**strategic competence:** The ability to sustain communication through the use of various strategies, in spite of imperfect linguistic knowledge.

**trait:** In testing theory, the ability or attribute one is measuring.

**validity:** The extent to which a something, e.g., a test or a scale, measures/represents what it is purported to test/represent.

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## APPENDIX A

# THEORETICAL ISSUES AND DEFINITIONS

A framework of reference for languages provides an objective system for defining language proficiency on a continuum across languages and contexts. Individual progress is measured through comparison with identified levels of communicative competence along this continuum, rather than against the language performance of others. This section of the discussion paper will examine some of the theoretical questions underlying language frameworks. It will also address the viability of functional proficiency as the policy objective targeted by the Action Plan.

### 1. The target benchmark: Can it be defined?

In order to measure progress toward the goal of doubling the proportion of secondary students graduating with a functional knowledge of their second official language by 2013, the targeted benchmark of ‘functional proficiency’ needs to be **operationalized**. References to functional language proficiency are ubiquitous. A web search of the terms ‘functional bilingualism’ and ‘functional proficiency’ yielded hundreds of hits, mostly websites of school boards, course syllabuses of language teachers, and other language programs. The term is used to outline the goals/expected outcomes of French immersion programs, government departments, or university language curricula. This widespread use of the term demonstrates its currency; yet, most people have only a ‘fuzzy’ idea of what ‘functional’ represents. A transparent definition would be useful.

### 2. Defining language proficiency

What is proficiency? What does it mean to know how to use a language? What does one have to know and demonstrate in order to establish one’s proficiency in a language? In a survey of a number of leading American second

language educators, answers to the question of what constitutes proficiency (given the move towards proficiency and **proficiency testing** in the United States) proved to be imprecise and varied (Chastain, 1989). In general, responses emphasized an ability to communicate, with references to level, context and real-life situations. The *Language Testing Dictionary* (Davis, et al., 1999) offers a more precise explanation. It defines proficiency as 1) a general type of knowledge of, or competence in using a language (or any other skill) regardless of how, where and when it was learned; 2) the ability to do something specific in a language such as working as a French immersion teacher, a tour guide, etc. or, 3) performance as measured by a particular testing procedure. These definitions suggest that proficiency includes knowledge (competence) and ability (performance), and it can be expressed in terms of degrees.

Competence, or language knowledge, represents the most abstract dimension of proficiency. Competence, a term originating with Chomsky (1965), describes the mental representation of language; i.e., knowledge of the abstract rule system. This is usually implied when referring to someone ‘knowing’ a language: the speaker can intuitively manipulate the language code to express meaning without bringing the rule system to consciousness. Not only can speakers do this correctly (in the linguistic sense), they can also do this appropriately; that is, they draw on another abstract rule system governing what is socially appropriate in human interaction. These competencies, or knowledge components, are ‘inside the head,’ however. They cannot be accessed directly and can only be observed through the language output of the speaker (or writer).

The visible manifestation of proficiency is revealed in the ability or performance component; it is the outward manifestation of competence.<sup>8</sup> Speakers (or writers) provide evidence of their underlying language knowledge/competence through their performance of a particular task within a particular context. This is the ‘outside the head’ dimension of proficiency and represents the skill or ability to use language. Following Taylor (1988, p. 166), who defines proficiency as “the ability to make use of competence”, performance is what happens when “proficiency is put to use”.

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8. Performance and competence need to be differentiated from achievement. The latter refers to the outcome of formal instruction and evaluates the skills or content of a defined curriculum.

Proficiency can be expressed in terms of degrees, in a series of hierarchical stages on a continuum (from basic to advanced, for example). These level descriptors, or scales, attempt to give a picture of what the language learner can do in the real world. It is this ‘real world’ behavior that the different levels on a scale postulate and that proficiency tests measure. Proficiency tests cannot measure underlying language competence, which may be compromised by the demands of the task and/or performance conditions/context. For this reason, one needs to be cautious about deducing a language learners’ level of proficiency on the basis of only one language sample at one moment in time. A reliable proficiency assessment should be repeated under varying conditions, specifying the context. However, given the time and expense involved, this is rarely done.

In sum, proficiency is competence measured through performance; it involves language knowledge and language use in real-life contexts. Performance (language use) can be referenced to a particular framework of descriptors to determine a speaker’s current level of language proficiency (in speaking). In order to further elucidate a definition of proficiency and to situate this definition within a theory of language competence, a number of models of language proficiency will be briefly examined.

### 3. Models of language proficiency

Although no well developed theoretical conception of proficiency currently exists<sup>9</sup>, it is generally agreed that proficiency is not a unitary ability. Oller (1976) originally conceptualized language proficiency as a singular **trait** (known as the unitary competence hypothesis), an expectancy grammar, which could be measured through a **cloze test**. For Oller, proficiency (language competence) was largely ‘inside the head,’ with performance constituting the ability to predict linguistic elements in writing; this activity, however, had very little face validity for language learners. He later conceded that this conception of proficiency was too simplistic.

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9. An attempt to develop an empirically-founded theory of language proficiency is currently underway at the University of Amsterdam (Hulstijn & Schoonen, 2004), examining the separate and combined roles of language knowledge (architecture), language control (processing) and communicative setting (context).

Cummins (1979) proposed a dual concept of proficiency: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to the communicative capacity that language learners acquire in order to function effectively in everyday interpersonal exchanges. These are the skills required for oral fluency and sociolinguistic appropriateness. CALP, on the other hand, refers to the language knowledge and literacy skills used in the classroom and on tests. CALP is more cognitive in nature ('inside the head'), as it is mostly related to subject matter learning; and it is more difficult to acquire than BICS. Because of its emphasis on oral fluency, contextualized conversation and everyday interaction, the concept of BICS is of interest for our exploration of the meaning of functional language proficiency.

One widely recognized framework for conceptualizing language proficiency is the theory of communicative competence posited by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983). This framework posits four principal competencies. First of all, it acknowledges the importance of grammatical competence (mastery of forms and meanings) to language proficiency. Grammatical competence is not sufficient, however. Building on work by Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain argue that grammatical competence needs to be complemented by sociolinguistic competence (ability to communicate in socio-culturally appropriate ways) and discourse competence (ability to communicate coherently). In addition to these cognitive ('inside the head') components, communicative competence also includes a psychological or performance ('outside the head') component called strategic competence. This is the ability to put to use what is known and compensate for what is not known. The Canale and Swain model has been criticized for its inability to empirically demonstrate whether or how the four competencies are inter-related (Baker, 2001).

Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) further develop the Canale & Swain model by expanding the role of strategic competence. Moving beyond a compensatory role for strategies, Bachman includes all the **metacognitive and cognitive strategies** involved in planning, execution and evaluation to achieve communicative goals. In this model, strategic competence acts on two cognitive ('inside the head') knowledge sources: knowledge of language (including six types of knowledge: grammatical, organizational, textual, functional, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence) and knowledge of the world (**schemata** or knowledge structures in long-term memory). Strategic knowledge (the performance or 'outside the head' component) within this conceptualization of language proficiency, plays a separate role in helping language learners to effectively use the abilities available to them in a given communicative task or context.

North (1997) and Chalhoub-Deville (1997) conclude that there is considerable consensus on the components of a theoretical model of communicative competence, even if it is not universally accepted or empirically validated. The components include elements related to both competence ('inside the head' factors) and performance ('outside the head' factors). Elements related to competence include linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary and memorized prefabricated language 'chunks') and socio-cultural competence (all that is related to appropriateness in interaction). Elements related to performance ('outside the head' factors) include strategic competence (in the broader sense proposed by Bachman) and pragmatic competence (effective use of language, including fluency). A detailed and testable model of language proficiency, as conceptualized by Bachman and Palmer (1996) provides considerable optimism for operationalizing the construct of communicative language proficiency. It is the most widely accepted model of language proficiency among language testers today (Buck, 2001).

#### 4. Clarifying the term 'functional'

The Action Plan (PCO, 2003) specifies the level of proficiency to be attained as 'functional.' What does this mean? The Interagency Language Roundtable (see Appendix C) descriptor for Speaking 1 (Elementary Proficiency) describes the speaker as having a 'functional but limited' proficiency. However, the speaker profile described (e.g., satisfy minimum courtesy requirements; maintain very simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics; misunderstandings are frequent; unable to produce continuous discourse except with rehearsed material) certainly does not represent the level of language performance envisioned by the Action Plan. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines a functional illiterate as one who is "capable of living and possibly working in society but cannot read or write". Various references in the literature have attempted to define 'functional'. Lazaruk's (2003, p. 3) definition, "the ability to communicate in basic social, travel and non-specialized work situations", defines functional proficiency in the context of BICS. Tikunoff 's (1985) definition, "competent participation in completing classroom tasks with a high degree of accuracy", defines the term in the context of CALP, suggesting that the term may be understood differently, depending on the context. Baker's (2001) definition of 'functional bilingualism' as an individual's use of bilingualism, moves the term beyond school success and academic performance to "language production across an encyclopedia of everyday events...[the] when, where and with whom people use their two languages" (p. 13).

All of the above definitions prove to be less than satisfactory, since they do not identify what level of functional proficiency is adequate. Does even the most rudimentary message by which a speaker is able to attain communicative goals qualify as satisfactory? What level of functional is satisfactory and for what? This realization may have prompted the International Centre for Language Studies (ICLS, 2006) to demarcate their (ILR-based) scale levels, using qualifiers such as minimal, limited, general, and full functional proficiency. It is clear that, in addition to stating ‘what’ the speaker can do (content descriptor), an adequate definition of ‘functional language proficiency’ also needs to indicate ‘how well’ speakers can do this (performance descriptor).

## 5. Functional language proficiency: a floating target

There are three ways of defining a construct (Chapelle, 1998): 1) define the competence - knowledge, skills and abilities - language learners should have (trait approach), 2) define the tasks language learners should be able to perform (behaviorist approach), or 3) combine both (interactionist approach). In order to arrive at a definition of language proficiency, it is possible to adopt the trait approach only, using the four knowledge sources stipulated by the Bachman (1990) model as our definition. In adopting this approach, the assumption is made that language competence, independent of context, determines the performance. However, given that proficiency has been qualified by the word ‘functional’, it will be necessary to specify the ‘real world’ context in which the language learner can be successful, implying that language and context interact in determining performance. This suggests opting for the interactionist approach, defining the construct using both trait and task(s).

In an interactionist approach to defining functional proficiency, trait, task and context need to be considered. This makes a definition more elusive. Functional for which task and in which context? That can vary by our goals for communication, and these will relate to a specific context. Baker (2001) confronts the same conundrum in his discussion of the use of bilingualism; i.e., when and where bilinguals decide to use one language in favor of the other. ‘Language is enacted in changing dramas’, says Baker (p. 12). One may be able to communicate successfully on topics relating to the domain of home and family life and yet have very limited linguistic skills when it comes to executing tasks related to understanding print media. An airline attendant may be able to manage basic communicative tasks with only passable comprehension skills, using a repertoire of functional phrases and basic language relating to passenger comfort and security. On the other hand, a pilot will need to understand

a highly specific vocabulary, with 100% accuracy, in order to communicate with air traffic controllers under varying conditions of comprehensibility. As Baker (2001) concludes, communication involves much more than grammar and vocabulary; it involves “who is saying what, to whom, in what circumstances” (p. 12).

Functional proficiency for the tourist, for the ‘independent’ language learner or for the student studying in the target language has different meanings. A language framework for Canada could provide the provinces and territories with a common understanding of what it means to communicate in a second language and commonly understood levels and terminology to describe different levels against which to reference functional proficiency for different purposes. Using the global descriptors of the Common European Framework (see Table 2), functional proficiency for the tourist can likely be placed at the A2 (Waystage) level:

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.

However, the functional proficiency target for the independent language user, i.e., someone who is capable of using the language for basic social, travel and non-specialized work situations would need to be set at the B1 (Threshold) level:

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 traveling 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.

Finally, the target for the functionally proficient student, i.e., someone who will be able to successfully study in the target language without any language support, would have to be set at a higher level again; i.e., the B2 (Vantage) level:

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.

In conclusion, after examining various situations of language use by learners with different communication needs, it is evident that the construct of functional proficiency is not static. Given that language use will depend on who, to whom, which skills, or what circumstances, different patterns are possible. A common framework of reference for languages such as the CEFR, however, could provide Canadians with a commonly understood, objective system for registering progress along a continuum of language proficiency and for setting graduation targets. Furthermore, a common framework provides provinces and territories with a flexible tool to set their own target proficiency levels according to their context and needs within a nationally understood set of proficiency descriptors.

## APPENDIX B

# LANGUAGE FRAMEWORKS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Language frameworks tend to be of two types (Brindley, 1998a). The first type specifies the abilities that make up language proficiency (e.g., vocabulary, fluency), based on a theoretical model of language proficiency, and defines levels of proficiency for each of the targeted language abilities, independent of content and context. A second type of language framework is based on language behaviour. Descriptors capture ‘real life’ language performance in specific contexts of language use and delineate levels of language performance by skill area (speaking, listening, etc.) along a continuum of increasing ability. This type of language framework is more prevalent and widely used. Types of tasks and degrees of skill at achieving associated communicative goals are differentiated and, based on test performance, these types of frameworks attempt to generalize performance on similar ‘real life’ tasks. The frameworks discussed below are examples of the second type.

A number of language frameworks exist in the public domain. How does one evaluate their strengths and weaknesses? Based on a review of the literature on language frameworks, the following criteria appear warranted to determine the validity and usefulness of a framework for a particular context. A language framework should be:

- theoretically grounded (Brindley, 2001; North, 1997)

This reflects the construct validity of a framework. The descriptors of the framework faithfully reflect the construct of communicative competence (or other theory of language learning) that they are purported to describe and measure.

- empirically validated (Brindley, 1991; North 2000)

The descriptor levels of the framework must be grounded in a theory of measurement and empirically validated for a number of languages, without making reference to native speaker performance or perceptions of native speakers.

- congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners (Brindley, 2001)

A framework has face validity when the level descriptors make sense to those who will need to use them.

- transparent and user-friendly (North, 2000; Hudson, 2005)

In order for a framework to be accessible and useful learners and teachers, it must be sufficiently transparent to be understood by all stakeholders.

- context-free but context-relevant (North, 2000)

A framework must be context-free in order to accommodate different curricula for learners of different ages and learners with different goals and still be relevant to the learning contexts of a range of language learners.

- comprehensive so that different users can relate their own frameworks and descriptor levels to it (North, 2000)

In order to accommodate the needs of a range of learning contexts, a language framework must be comprehensive enough to provide a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions.

- flexible and open (North, 2000)

The framework must be flexible enough to allow different jurisdictions to link their programs and/or frameworks to this larger framework.

- sufficiently discriminating of levels at the lower end of the framework (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984; North, 2000).

The framework must be sufficiently discriminating of levels at the lower end of the scale to register incremental learning in academic contexts where learners need to see progress in order to sustain motivation for language learning.

This section of the paper will examine a number of language frameworks available in the public domain. A brief overview of each framework will be provided and then strengths and weakness will be discussed in light of the criteria presented above. The frameworks to be examined include:

- Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale
- American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines
- New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale (NB OPS)
- Public Service Commission of Canada Second Official Language Proficiency Levels (PSC)
- Canadian Language Benchmarks (2000) (CLB)

## 1. Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale

The ILR scale is the ‘grandfather’ of language proficiency scales (see Appendix C). The United States Foreign Service Institute (FSI) developed this framework (initially called the FSI scale) in order to meet the postwar need to objectively classify foreign language proficiency without reference to a particular curriculum. The scale ranges from 0 to 5 (no functional proficiency to educated native speaker) and is applicable to all languages and all civil service positions. After some initial difficulty in consistently applying the scales across different language testers, a structured interview was developed – a precursor to the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) – along with standardized scoring criteria. This made inter-rater **reliability** possible, resulting in a high degree of consistency in scoring across language testers. After many government agencies adopted the scale (and interview), it came under the auspices of the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) and was further refined by incorporating ‘plus’ levels (when proficiency substantially exceeds one level but does not fully meet the criteria of the next level) into the rating system. The ILR scale is now accepted as the common yardstick in the US for government agencies and other organizations that need to verify language performance (speaking competence in particular) for job purposes.

This model has had a strong influence on the design and development of other language frameworks in the academic community: the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines, the New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale and the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (Australia). The Oral Proficiency Interview Scale used by Foreign Affairs Canada also mirrors the ILR scale (see footnote 14).

## *Discussion*

The ILR framework (and, by virtue, the ACTFL framework and others modeled after it) did not emerge from any particular theory of language learning. As pointed out by Omaggio-Hadley (1993, p. 13), these frameworks “came about primarily as a result of the perceived needs of practitioners in both government and academic settings who wanted to make a difference in the way languages were taught and communicate more effectively about the results of that instruction”. In its earlier form, the ILR scale underscored five (primarily linguistic) traits: accent, comprehension, fluency, grammar and vocabulary. Later task (language functions), topic (content), and accuracy (on the five traits) became the three main criteria, and sociolinguistic ability was added to the traits to be assessed. A careful examination of the descriptors now reveals a close affinity with a theoretically-derived model of communicative language use such as the Canale & Swain (1980) model, with a particular emphasis on functional competence. While this context-embeddedness gives the ILR, ACTFL and similar frameworks a high degree of face validity, it also makes them very task specific.

The ILR framework is often critiqued for using the norm of educated native speaker as the ultimate criterion for mastery.<sup>10</sup> Given that an idealized native speaker is the targeted goal and that work-related tasks figure prominently in the scale descriptors, this framework is less useful for schools and other academic institutions where language courses rarely fine-tune language learner skills to the level of educated native speaker. This makes the ILR less flexible and open, and not adequately comprehensive for other jurisdictions to relate their frameworks to it. Although this framework, and others modeled after it (e.g., the ACTFL proficiency guidelines), claim to be criterion-referenced, they are regarded as “proficiency-referenced frameworks with task criteria selected to reflect proficiency levels in a norm-referenced manner” (Hudson, 2005, p. 224). In other words, these frameworks often define a level of performance making reference to characteristics of the level above or below, which limits comprehensiveness and flexibility. Furthermore, level descriptors often compare performance with a native speaker norm or describe performance as perceived by a native speaker. This makes the framework less transparent and user-friendly.

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10. The notion of a monolithic native speaker criterion is problematic since native speaker performance samples indicate a range of performance on different tasks, suggesting that there is no one native-speaker norm (Chalhoub-Deville & Fulcher, 2003; Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002).

The ILR scale is not fine-grained enough to register the modest increments in progress that can be expected during one semester or over a year of language study in high school or university. Consequently, in response to the unique needs and purposes of the academic community, the ACTFL proficiency guidelines were created.

Finally, the levels have not been empirically validated. In spite of its widespread acceptance, the ILR scale (as well as the ACTFL Guidelines) has not benefited from a coherent research agenda about its underlying assumptions about language use and language development (Chalhoub-Deville & Fulcher, 2003).

## 2. American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines were developed in response to the need to expand the low end of the ILR scale to make it more applicable to language learners in traditional academic environments. When the Foreign Service Institute interview results established that even the most proficient university foreign language graduates were only able to reach a 2/2+ level, it became clear that the ILR framework did not discriminate enough below that level to register the progress students could make over the course of a semester or an academic year. Consequently, Levels 0 – 2+ of the ILR scale were further divided into nine sublevels in order to describe smaller increments in proficiency and register student progress in the beginning stages of language learning. While the lower levels of the ILR scale were expanded, the upper levels (3 and up) were collapsed to one level (Superior). The IRL levels were renamed and verbal descriptors for each of these levels were produced and validated, becoming the basis for the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (see Appendix C).<sup>11</sup> The ACTFL guidelines, and the subsequent ‘proficiency movement,’ have had a major impact on second/foreign language teaching in the United States. They have been instrumental in shifting attention to oral production in language learning by assessing proficiency based on actual performance on the accompanying assessment instrument, the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), not number of courses or classroom hours (Liskin-Gasparro, 2003).

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11. Revised 1999 (Breiner-Sanders, et al., 2000).

## *Discussion*

The ACTFL framework has immediate intuitive appeal because the guidelines describe language performance in real-life contexts and tasks. This framework is grounded in communicative language use and it enjoys a high degree of face validity since the level descriptors were operationally validated by teachers (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984). The level ranges are small enough to register progress in the early stages of language learning. This is important for motivating language learners and, therefore, makes this framework more useful in academic contexts. The ACTFL framework appears to be adequately open, flexible and comprehensive to bridge different language learning contexts and to accommodate other frameworks. Furthermore, this framework, and its descriptor levels, already enjoys wide currency in North America, because of prevalent use in the United States.

On the other hand, in spite of their face validity, the ACTFL framework and the accompanying OPI have been widely criticized. First, critics allege that the guidelines were developed intuitively and have no empirical basis (Salaberry, 2000). They contend that the sequencing of scale descriptors across proficiency levels makes assumptions about stages in second language development that may not be justified. Although defenders of the framework claim that the levels have empirical validity (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984), critics allege that “no information is made publicly available as to how the data were collected, analyzed and turned into performance descriptors” (Brindley, 1991, p. 124). Second, as pointed out with reference to the ILR descriptor levels, the ACTFL descriptors are not really criterion-referenced, but covertly norm-referenced (Brindley, 1991; Hudson 2005). The logic of how levels are arrived at is essentially circular because there is no external standard against which performance can be compared; “the criteria are the levels and vice versa” (Lantolf & Frawley, 1985, p. 340). Third, although the ACTFL framework does not use the native speaker as the ultimate criterion, the levels often describe speaker performance in terms of the perceptions of the native-speaker.<sup>12</sup> This, along with the use of metalanguage related to grammatical competence, makes the framework less transparent and user-friendly. Finally, since this framework was created for use in a foreign language teaching context (not second language) and it is closely tied to the OPI, it is less suitable for a Canadian context.

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12. Chalhoub-Deville (1997) points out that references to native-speaker proficiency are problematic, citing empirical evidence that native speakers, depending on their experience and education, vary in their perceptions of learner proficiency.

### 3. New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale

The New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale (NB OPS)<sup>13</sup> was built on the ILR scale for purposes of evaluating the second language proficiency level of New Brunswick (NB) high school graduates. At the end of Grade 12, students may choose to have their second language proficiency - in both or either one of the official languages - assessed through an oral proficiency interview similar to the OPI. Student performance is rated with reference to a range of nine levels, from Novice to Superior (see Appendix C). The NB OPS levels are built much like the ILR scale in that they incorporate 'plus' levels to each level, but use terminology such as Novice, Basic, Intermediate, etc., similar to the ACTFL guidelines (rather than numeric identifiers). Another major difference is that the educated native speaker is not the ultimate criterion; the top level (Superior) describes language proficiency similar to the comparable level in the ACTFL guidelines. The NB OPS, and the accompanying interview, have currency in NB and are also used in assessing the language proficiency of its public service for positions classified as bilingual.

#### *Discussion*

Given its roots in the ILR and ACTFL frameworks, the NBOPS framework is marked by the same strengths and weaknesses as those language frameworks. In addition, it is only used for assessing speaking proficiency and tied to a particular test, making it less open, flexible and comprehensive. This is a serious limitation of this framework for acknowledging differential language competence.

### 4. Public Service Commission (PSC) of Canada Second Official Language Proficiency Levels

The Canadian federal government developed second official language proficiency levels (PSC) to describe the general language skills required to accomplish the duties and responsibilities related to positions within the Public Service<sup>14</sup> classified as bilingual. The level descriptors were developed from lists of duties and responsibilities prepared by managers responsible for

13. Also referred to as the New Brunswick Second Language Levels of Proficiency.

14. The language competence of Canadians working in the diplomatic corps, under the auspices of Foreign Affairs, is assessed with reference to another framework, the Oral Proficiency Rating Scale, which mirrors the ILR proficiency scale. The number of levels, level identifiers and basic level descriptors are identical. It is only in the details of the level descriptors where different wording is found, the ILR descriptor being more detailed.

positions classified as ‘bilingual’ (PSC, 2005). These descriptors were then grouped by levels, ordered from A (lowest) to C (highest) and organized by skill strand (reading, writing and oral interaction) (see Appendix C). The level descriptors for each skill strand delineate the functions and types of tasks the candidate can be expected to perform successfully in the second language to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the position. Examples of characteristics of performance have also been developed under three broad criteria: ability to converse (strategic competence), ease in using the language (fluency) and clarity of communication (accuracy, vocabulary and **discourse competence**).

## *Discussion*

Documentation regarding the validation of the PSC levels and the particular theory of language learning underlying the framework is not available.<sup>15</sup> However, an examination of the level descriptors leaves no doubt that this framework is thoroughly grounded in the notions of communicative competence and language use, with a focus on the functional competencies required to accomplish the work-related tasks. This characteristic of the level descriptors makes them highly context-bound and, therefore, of less interest to academic contexts and other contexts interested in the tracking the development of general functional proficiency.<sup>16</sup> The combination of listening and speaking into one strand, classified as oral interaction, reflects more of a real-life approach to language use, particularly in a working environment where there is very little one way listening. On the other hand, this is also a limitation of the framework in that the development of listening as a receptive skill (with reading) cannot be tracked separately. This framework is also limited by the lack of sublevels, at the A level in particular, to describe smaller increments in proficiency and register student progress during the early years of language learning. Although the native speaker is not the ultimate model, references to ‘native-like’ performance occasionally find their way into the descriptors. Overall, the specific work focus of this framework makes it less comprehensive, flexible and open.

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15. The PSCL “were developed professionally but, to the best of our knowledge, their history and underlying theoretical framework were not preserved in any archives that we are aware of” (Henry Edwards, personal communication, January 16, 2006).

16. This framework and the accompanying oral interview have been used with some success by the Edmonton Public School Board as a criterion-referenced evaluation instrument to determine ‘real life’ language performance of French as a Second Language high school graduates (PSC 2004).

## 5. Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)

In order to successfully integrate adult newcomers into Canadian society and enhance their language training, Citizenship and Immigration Canada developed the Canadian Language Benchmarks (revised in 2000) to describe a person's ability to accomplish a set of tasks in English. More specifically, the CLB are:

- a set of descriptive statements about successive levels of achievement on a continuum of English as a Second Language performance;
- statements of communicative competencies and performance tasks in which the learner demonstrates application of language knowledge and skill;
- a framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing adult ESL in Canada, providing a common professional foundation of shared philosophical and theoretical views on language education;
- a national standard for planning ESL curricula for a variety of contexts; and,
- a common yardstick for assessing outcomes (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002, p. viii).

The CLB are divided into three levels of language proficiency: Basic (Benchmarks 1-4), Intermediate (Benchmarks 5-8) and Advanced (Benchmarks 9-12). As indicated, each stage is divided into four separate benchmarks of developing competence - Initial, Developing, Adequate and Fluent - resulting in twelve benchmarks in total (see Appendix C). Each benchmark contains 1) a global performance descriptor briefly describing the performance expected on speaking, listening, reading and writing tasks at that level; 2) the performance conditions specifying things such as purpose, audience, topic, etc. and, 3) the competency outcomes and standards, with examples of tasks and texts, to be demonstrated to achieve the benchmark.

### *Discussion*

The CLB framework is an example of a Canadian framework accepted at the national level, under the auspices of Canadian Citizenship and Immigration. The benchmarks use an intuitive approach, based on a functional view of language, language use and language proficiency (Hudson, 2005).

They were operationally validated through an extensive process of consultation with learners, teachers, administrators, a cultural advisory group and assessors (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002). However, the benchmarks (levels) have not been empirically validated to ensure the fit of each descriptor with its level. The CLB are performance-oriented; a great deal of detail is provided for teachers, curriculum developers and assessors regarding performance conditions, tasks and competency outcomes. Although this feature makes the CLB very useful in the context for which they were created, it makes the framework less user-friendly for the language learner and less comprehensive, open and flexible for use in other academic contexts or for others to relate their framework to it. The CLB offer a wide range of levels for greater precision in describing progress at early stages of language learning. However, the fact that the CLB are oriented to adults and that the tasks mostly oriented to work contexts make them less suitable for academic contexts.

## APPENDIX C

# PRELIMINARY ALIGNMENT TABLES OF OTHER LANGUAGE FRAMEWORKS WITH THE CEFR

### ACRONYMS USED:

**ILR** (Interagency Language Roundtable Scale)

**ACTFL** (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages  
Proficiency Guidelines)

**NB OPS** (New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale)

**PSC** (Public Service Commission of Canada Second Official  
Language Proficiency Levels)

**CLB** (Canadian Language Benchmarks)

**CEFR** (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

Table C1: Preliminary alignment of other frameworks with CEFR Level A1 (Breakthrough)

<p><b>CEFR</b></p>	<p><b>Breakthrough (A1):</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>Speaking 0+ (Memorized Proficiency):</b> Able to satisfy immediate needs using rehearsed utterances; shows little real autonomy of expression, flexibility, or spontaneity; can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only with memorized utterances or formulae; attempts at creating speech are usually unsuccessful.</p>	<p><b>Speaking 1 (Elementary Proficiency):</b> Able to satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics; a native speaker must often use slowed speech, repetition, paraphrase, or a combination of these to be understood; similarly, the native speaker must strain and employ real-world knowledge to understand even simple statements/questions; a functional, but limited proficiency; misunderstandings are frequent; is able to ask for help and to verify comprehension of native speech in face-to-face interaction; is unable to produce continuous discourse except with rehearsed material.</p>
<p><b>ILR</b></p>	<p><b>Speaking 0 (No Proficiency):</b> Unable to function in the spoken language; oral production is limited to occasional isolated words; has essentially no communicative ability.</p>	<p><b>Speaking 0+ (Memorized Proficiency):</b> Able to satisfy immediate needs using rehearsed utterances; shows little real autonomy of expression, flexibility, or spontaneity; can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only with memorized utterances or formulae; attempts at creating speech are usually unsuccessful.</p>	<p><b>Speaking 1 (Elementary Proficiency):</b> Able to satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics; a native speaker must often use slowed speech, repetition, paraphrase, or a combination of these to be understood; similarly, the native speaker must strain and employ real-world knowledge to understand even simple statements/questions; a functional, but limited proficiency; misunderstandings are frequent; is able to ask for help and to verify comprehension of native speech in face-to-face interaction; is unable to produce continuous discourse except with rehearsed material.</p>
<p><b>ACTFL</b></p>	<p><b>Low Novice:</b> No real functional ability and, because of their pronunciation, they may be unintelligible; given adequate time and familiar cues, they may be able to exchange greetings, give their identity, and name a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment; cannot therefore participate in a true conversational exchange.</p>	<p><b>Novice Mid:</b> Communicate minimally and with difficulty by using a number of isolated words and memorized phrases limited by the particular context in which the language has been learned; when responding to direct questions, they may utter only two or three words at a time or an occasional stock answer. They pause frequently as they search for simple vocabulary or attempt to recycle their own and their interlocutor's words. Because of hesitations, lack of vocabulary, inaccuracy, or failure to respond appropriately, may be understood with great difficulty even by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.</p>	<p><b>Novice High:</b> Able to handle a variety of tasks pertaining to the Intermediate level, but are unable to sustain performance at that level; able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations; conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects and a limited number of activities, preferences and immediate needs; respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information; they are able to ask only a very few formulaic questions when asked to do so.</p>

<b>NB OPS</b>	<p><b>Unrated:</b> No functional ability in the language.</p>	<p><b>Novice:</b> Able to satisfy immediate needs using rehearsed phrases; no real autonomy of expression, flexibility, or spontaneity. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy but only with memorized phrases; vocabulary is very limited.</p>	<p><b>Basic:</b> Able to create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements; can satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple face-to-face interaction with native speakers accustomed to dealing with second language learners; almost every utterance contains fractured syntax and grammatical errors; vocabulary is adequate to express very elementary needs.</p>
<b>CLB</b>	<p><b>Initial Basic Proficiency:</b> Can speak very little, responding to basic questions about personal information; speaks in isolated words or strings of two or three words; demonstrate almost no control of basic grammar structures and tenses; demonstrates very little vocabulary; no evidence of connected discourse; makes long pauses, often repeats the words spoken. Depends on gestures. May switch to first language at times; pronunciation difficulties may significantly impede communication; needs considerable assistance.</p>	<p><b>Developing Basic Proficiency:</b> Can communicate in a limited way some immediate and personal needs; asks and responds to simple, routine, predictable questions about personal information; demonstrates little control of basic grammar structures and tenses; demonstrates limited vocabulary and a few simple phrases; no evidence of connected discourse; make long pauses and depends on gestures in expressing meaning; pronunciation difficulties may significantly impede communication; needs frequent assistance.</p>	<p><b>Developing Basic Proficiency:</b> Can communicate in a limited way some immediate and personal needs; asks and responds to simple, routine, predictable questions about personal information; demonstrates little control of basic grammar structures and tenses; demonstrates limited vocabulary and a few simple phrases; no evidence of connected discourse; make long pauses and depends on gestures in expressing meaning; pronunciation difficulties may significantly impede communication; needs frequent assistance.</p>
<b>PSC</b>	<p><b>A:</b> Can ask and answer simple questions and give simple instructions or uncomplicated directions relating to routine work situations; communication may be difficult because a person speaking at this level makes many errors and has deficiencies in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency; may have problems in understanding speech spoken at a normal rate and repetitions may be required to understand what is being said.</p>		

Table C2: Preliminary alignment of other frameworks with CEFR Level A2 (Waystage)

<b>CEFR</b>	<b>Waystage (A2):</b> 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.
<b>ILR</b>	<b>Speaking 1+ (Elementary Proficiency, Plus):</b> Can initiate and maintain predictable face-to-face conversations and satisfy limited social demands; has little understanding of the social conventions of conversation; interlocutor is generally required to strain and employ real-world knowledge to understand even some simple speech; the speaker at this level may hesitate and may have to change subjects due to lack of language resources. Range and control of the language are limited; speech largely consists of a series of short, discrete utterances.
<b>ACTFL</b>	<p><b>Intermediate Low:</b> Able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks by creating with the language in straightforward social situations; conversation is restricted to some of the concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture; these topics relate to basic personal information covering, for example, self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences, as well as to some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases; are primarily reactive and struggle to answer direct questions or requests for information, but they are also able to ask a few appropriate questions.</p> <p><b>Intermediate Mid:</b> Able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is generally limited to those predictable and concrete exchanges necessary for survival in the target culture; these include personal information covering self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel and lodging.</p> <p><b>Intermediate High:</b> Able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with most routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level; able to handle successfully many uncompleted tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, particular interests and areas of competence, though hesitation and errors may be evident.</p>

**Basic Plus:** Able to initiate and maintain predictable face-to-face conversation and satisfy limited social demands; shows some spontaneity in language production, but fluency is very uneven; there is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description, but range and control of language structures are limited.

**NB  
OPS**

**Intermediate:** Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited requirements in school/work settings; can provide information and give explanations with some degree of accuracy, but language is awkward; can handle most social situations, including introductions and casual conversations about events in school and community; able to provide autobiographical information in some detail; can give directions from one place to another; can give accurate instructions in a field of personal expertise; has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to convey simple with paraphrasing. Accent, though often faulty, is intelligible; uses high frequency language structures accurately, but does not have a thorough or confident control of grammar; in certain situations, dictation would probably distract a native speaker.

**Adequate Basic Proficiency:** Can communicate with some difficulty basic needs in informal conversation; asks and responds to simple familiar questions, including WH questions, uses single words in short sentences; demonstrate some control of very basic grammar (basic structures and tenses). Many structures are reduced; uses basic time expressions (e.g., yesterday); the correct past tense is used only with some common verbs. Demonstrates use of vocabulary, which is still somewhat limited; evidence of some connected discourse (and, but); pronunciation difficulties may often impede communication; sometimes needs assistance.

**CLB**

**Fluent Basic Proficiency:** Can take part in short routine conversations; can communicate basic needs, can ask and respond to simple familiar questions, can describe a situation, or tell a simple story. Uses a variety of short sentences; demonstrates control of basic grammar; uses correct past tense with common verbs; demonstrates adequate vocabulary for basic routine everyday communication; clear evidence of connected discourse (and, but, first, next, then, because); pronunciation difficulties may impede communication. Needs only a little assistance; can use the phone only for very short, simple, predictable exchanges.

**B:** Can sustain a conversation on concrete topics, report on actions taken, give straightforward instructions to employees, and provide factual descriptions and explanation; while many errors and deficiencies in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency may occur, these do not seriously interfere with communication; should not be expected to cope with situations that are sensitive or that require the understanding or expression of subtle or abstract ideas; ability to deal with situations involving hypothetical ideas and the use of persuasion is also limited.

**PSC**

Table C3: Preliminary alignment of other frameworks with CEFR Level B1 (Threshold)

<b>CEFR</b>	<p><b>Threshold (B1):</b> 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 traveling 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.</p>
<b>ILR</b>	<p><b>Speaking 2 (Limited Working Proficiency):</b> Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements; can handle routine work-related interactions that are limited in scope; in more complex and sophisticated work-related tasks, language usage generally disturbs the native speaker; can handle with confidence, but not with facility, most normal, high-frequency social conversational situations including extensive, but casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information; can get the gist of most everyday conversations but has some difficulty understanding native speakers in situations that require specialized or sophisticated knowledge; utterances are minimally cohesive; linguistic structure is usually not very elaborate and not thoroughly controlled; errors are frequent; vocabulary use is appropriate for high-frequency utterances, but unusual or imprecise elsewhere.</p>
<b>ACTFL</b>	<p><b>Advanced Low:</b> Able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times; participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home, and leisure activities and, to a lesser degree, those related to events of work, current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.</p>
<b>NB OPS</b>	<p><b>Intermediate Plus:</b> Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday school and work situations; can discuss concrete topics relating to special fields of competence as well as subjects of current public interest. Normally does not have to grope for words; often shows a significant degree of fluency and ease in speaking, and yet, under pressure may experience language breakdown; may exhibit good control of language structures, but be limited in language production; or, conversely, may demonstrate ample speech production, but have uneven control of language structures; some misunderstandings still will occur.</p>
<b>CLB</b>	<p><b>Initial Intermediate Proficiency:</b> Learner can participate with some effort in routine social conversations and can talk about needs and familiar topics of personal relevance; can use a variety of simple structures and some complex ones, with occasional reductions. Grammar and pronunciation errors are frequent and sometimes impede communication; can demonstrate a range of common everyday vocabulary and a limited number of idioms. May avoid topics with unfamiliar vocabulary; can demonstrate discourse that is connected (and, but, first, next, then, because) and reasonably fluent, but hesitations and pauses are frequent; can use the phone to communicate simple personal information; communication without the visual support is still very difficult.</p> <p><b>Developing Intermediate Proficiency:</b> Can communicate with some confidence in casual social conversations and in some less routine situations on familiar topics of personal relevance; can communicate facts and ideas in some detail; can describe report and provide a simple narration; can use a variety of structures with some omission/reduction of elements (e.g., articles, past tense); grammar and pronunciation errors are frequent and may sometimes impede communication; can demonstrate a range of everyday vocabulary, some common phrases and idioms; can demonstrate discourse that is reasonably fluent, with frequent normal hesitations; can use the phone to communicate on familiar matters, but some exchanges with strangers are stressful.</p>
<b>PSC</b>	<p><b>C:</b> Can support opinions or understand and express hypothetical and conditional ideas; ease and fluency of a native speaker is not required or expected; there may be errors and deficiencies in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary but such errors would rarely interfere with communication.</p>

Table C4: Preliminary alignment of other frameworks with CEFR Level B2 (Vantage)

<b>CEFR</b>	<b>Vantage (B2):</b> 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.
<b>ILR</b>	<b>Speaking 2+ (Limited Working Proficiency, Plus):</b> Able to satisfy most work requirements with language usage that is often, but not always, acceptable and effective; shows considerable ability to communicate effectively on topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence; often shows a high degree of fluency and ease of speech, yet when under tension or pressure, the ability to use the language effectively may deteriorate; comprehension of normal native speech is typically nearly complete; may miss cultural and local references and may require a native speaker to adjust to his/her limitations in some ways; native speakers often perceive speech to contain awkward or inaccurate phrasing of ideas, mistaken time, space, and person references, or to be in some way inappropriate, if not strictly incorrect.
<b>ACTFL</b>	<b>Advanced Mid:</b> Able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks; participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to work, school, home, and leisure activities, as well as to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.
<b>NB OPS</b>	<b>Advanced:</b> Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal, and in all informal conversations, on practical, social, and academic, or work-related topics; can describe in detail and name accurately; can discuss abstract topics and ideas as well as events; can support opinions and hypothesize. Accent may be obvious but never interferes with understanding; control of grammar is good and speech is fluent; sporadic errors will still occur, but they would not distract a native speaker or interfere with communication.
<b>CLB</b>	<p><b>Adequate Intermediate Proficiency:</b> Learner can communicate comfortably in most common daily situations; can participate in formal and informal conversations, involving problem solving and decision making; can speak on familiar concrete topics at a descriptive level (5 to 10 minutes). Can present a detailed analysis or comparison; can use a variety of sentence structures (including compound and complex sentences) and expanded inventory of concrete and common idiomatic language; grammar and pronunciation errors are still frequent, but rarely impede communication. Discourse is reasonably fluent, with frequent self-corrections and/or rephrasing; can use the phone on familiar and routine matters. Clarifying unknown details may still present communication problems.</p> <p><b>Fluent Intermediate Proficiency:</b> Can communicate effectively in most daily practical and social situations, and in familiar routine work situations; can participate in conversation with confidence; can speak on familiar topics at both concrete and abstract levels (10 to 15 minutes); can provide descriptions, opinions and explanations; can synthesize abstract complex ideas; can hypothesize; in social interaction, demonstrates and increased ability to respond appropriately to the familiarity level of the situation; can use a variety of sentence structures, including embedded/report structures, and an expanded inventory of concrete, idiomatic and conceptual language; grammar and pronunciation errors rarely impede communication; is reasonably fluent in discourse; can use the phone on less familiar and some non-routine matters.</p>

Table C5: Preliminary alignment of other frameworks with CEFR Level C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency)

CEFR	<p><b>Effective Operational Proficiency (C1):</b> 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.</p>
ILR	<p><b>Speaking 3 (General Professional Proficiency):</b> Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics; generally restrict the professional contexts of language use to matters of shared knowledge and/or international convention; discourse is cohesive; uses the language acceptably, but with some noticeable imperfections; yet, errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker; can effectively combine structure and vocabulary to convey meaning accurately; speaks readily and fills pauses suitably; in face-to-face conversation with natives speaking the standard dialect at a normal rate of speech, comprehension is quite complete; although cultural references, proverbs, and the implications of nuances and idiom may not be fully understood, can easily repair the conversation; pronunciation may be obviously foreign; individual sounds are accurate; but stress, intonation, and pitch control may be faulty.</p>
ACTFL	<p><b>Advanced High:</b> Able to consistently explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames; handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics; provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear; discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.</p>
NB OPS	<p><b>Advanced Plus:</b> Able to speak the language with sufficient structural and lexical accuracy that participation in conversations in all areas poses no problem; accent may not be noticeable and the speaker occasionally exhibits hesitancy which indicates some uncertainty in vocabulary and structure.</p>

## CLB

**Initial Advanced Proficiency:** Learner can independently, through oral discourse, obtain, provide and exchange key information for important tasks (work, academic, personal) in complex routine and a few non-routine situations in some demanding contexts of language use; can actively and effectively participate in 30-minute formal exchanges about complex, abstract, conceptual and detailed information and ideas to analyze, problem-solve and make decisions; can make 15- to 30-minute prepared formal presentations; can interact to coordinate tasks with others, to advise or persuade (e.g., to sell or recommend a product or service), to reassure others and to deal with complaints in one-on-one situations; grammar vocabulary, or pronunciation errors very rarely impede communication; prepared discourse is mostly accurate in form, but may often be rigid in its structure/organization and delivery style.

**Developing Advanced Proficiency:** Can, through oral discourse, obtain, exchange and present information, ideas and opinions for important tasks (work, academic, personal) in complex, routine and some non-routine situations in many demanding contexts of language use; can actively participate in formal meetings, interviews or seminars about complex, abstract, conceptual, and detailed topics; can lead routine meetings and manage interaction in small familiar cooperating group; can make 20- to 40-minute prepared formal presentations; can communicate to present and analyze information and ideas, to argue a point, to problem-solve and to make decisions, to advise/inform, or persuade, to give complex directions and instructions, and to socialize/entertain in a formal one-on-one business situation; grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation errors very rarely impede communication; prepared discourse is almost always grammatically accurate and complex, but may lack flexibility in the structure of information, organization, and style of delivery in view of purpose and audience.

Table C6: Preliminary alignment of other frameworks with CEFR Level C2 (Mastery)

<p><b>CEFR</b></p>	<p><b>Mastery (C2):</b> 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.</p>
<p><b>ILR</b></p>	<p><b>Speaking 4 (Advanced Professional Proficiency):</b> Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs; language usage and ability to function are fully successful; organizes discourse well, using appropriate rhetorical speech devices, native cultural references, and understanding; language ability only rarely hinders him/her in performing any task requiring language; yet, would seldom be perceived as a native; speaks effortlessly and smoothly and is able to use the language with a high degree of effectiveness, reliability, and precision for all representational purposes within the range of personal and professional experience and scope of responsibilities; can serve as an informal interpreter in a range of unpredictable circumstances; can perform extensive, sophisticated language tasks, encompassing most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers, including tasks which do not bear directly on a professional specialty.</p>
<p><b>ACTFL</b></p>	<p><b>Superior:</b> Able to communicate in the language with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They explain their opinions on a number of topics of importance to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured argument to support their opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities. When appropriate, they use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by the Superior speakers' own language patterns, rather than those of the target language.</p>
<p><b>NB OPS</b></p>	<p><b>Superior:</b> Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to personal situation (academic, social, work-related); can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of personal experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary; accent is good, but the speaker is not necessarily taken for a native speaker.</p>
<p><b>CLB</b></p>	<p><b>Adequate Advanced Proficiency:</b> Can, through oral discourse, obtain, exchange and present information, ideas and opinions for complex tasks (work, academic, personal); can satisfy many social, academic or work-related expectations for competent communication; can contribute to expanded authentic exchanges (over 60 minutes) over complex, abstract, conceptual and detailed topics, in large formal and unfamiliar groups; can lead routine meetings and manage interaction in large familiar and cooperative groups, and deliver prepared presentations; can skillfully communicate to persuade, to provide basic counseling (e.g., about products, services, programs), assess needs or evaluate detailed or complex information in a one-on-one routine situation; grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation errors do not impede communication; can demonstrate complex, accurate language form in presentations with good flexibility in the structure of information, organization and delivery style in view of purpose and audience.</p> <p><b>Fluent Advanced Proficiency:</b> Can create and co-create oral discourse, formal and informal, general or technical, in own field of study or work, in a broad range of complex situations; satisfy most academic and work related expectations for competent communication; can deliver public presentations to audiences; can lead formal group discussions, meetings and workshops; can communicate to explain complex ideas to diverse groups; to debate arguments on complex matters, to teach, negotiate, and resolve conflict in a variety of situations; discourse is fluent with native-like idiomaticity; uses language that is complex, accurate and flexible in the manipulation of structure of the information in clauses to express emphasis, comment, attitude; content, organization, format, delivery, tone and conversational style of discussion or presentation are appropriate to purpose and audience.</p>

## ORDER FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Official Languages Support Programs

#### Canadian Heritage

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M5

Telephone : (819) 994-2224 - Fax: (819) 994-3697

Internet : <http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/offlangoff/perspectives/>

### Please indicate the desired texts and the language in which you wish to receive them

English  French  Both

- Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada (bilingual format)  
Proposition d'un cadre commun de référence pour les langues pour le Canada (format bilingue)
- The Canadian Heritage Approach to Official Languages Support (1970-2003) (bilingual format)  
Appui aux langues officielles - Approche du ministère du Patrimoine canadien (1970-2003) (format bilingue)
- Community Vitality, Community Confidence - Official Languages Research Forum  
An initiative of the Department of Canadian Heritage with the Réseau de recherche sur la francophonie canadienne (bilingual format)  
Vitalité des communautés, confiance des communautés - Forum de recherche sur les langues officielles - Une collaboration du ministère du Patrimoine canadien et du Réseau de recherche sur la francophonie canadienne (format bilingue)
- Languages in Canada - 2001 Census (bilingual format)  
Les langues au Canada - Recensement de 2001 (format bilingue)
- Francophone Minorities: Assimilation and Community Vitality (bilingual format) - 2nd edition  
Minorités francophones : assimilation et vitalité des communautés (format bilingue) - 2<sup>e</sup> édition
- A Profile of the Providers of Training in English or French as a Second Language (bilingual format)  
Un profil des fournisseurs de formation en anglais ou en français langue seconde (format bilingue)
- Languages in Canada - 1996 Census (bilingual format)  
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- Exploring the Economics of Language / Explorer l'économie linguistique
- Economic Approaches to Language and Bilingualism  
Langue et bilinguisme : les approches économiques
- Official Languages in Canada: Changing the Language Landscape (bilingual format)  
Langues officielles au Canada : transformer le paysage linguistique (format bilingue)
- Annotated Language Laws of Canada (Constitutional, Federal, Provincial and Territorial)  
Lois linguistiques du Canada annotées (Lois constitutionnelles, fédérales, provinciales et territoriales)
- The Socio-Economic Vitality of Official Language Communities (Internet only)  
Le dynamisme socio-économique des communautés de langue officielle (Internet seulement)
- Official Languages and the Economy / Langues officielles et économie  
(Internet only / Internet seulement)
- Status Report: Minority-Language Educational Rights (bilingual format)  
Droits à l'instruction dans la langue de la minorité : état de la situation (format bilingue)
- Francophones in Canada: A Community of Interests (bilingual format)  
Les liens dans la francophonie canadienne (format bilingue)

