

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE AJŠ ČR (CZECH ASSOCIATION OF LANGUAGE SCHOOLS) TO *CEFR* UNDERSTANDING AMONG ADULT LEARNERS

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The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* in the Czech Republic is commonly known, used, promoted etc., nevertheless, we still feel that users might find it difficult to clearly and confidently correlate *CEFR* descriptors with “realistic” competences of speakers.

Our Association, therefore, decided to develop a project whose main objective was to stimulate understanding (mainly among adults involved in life-long learning) of the *CEFR* and help to extend the practical use of the *CEFR* in their daily life. Our first “action point” was distributing a quick check system to map out among stakeholders involved (mainly HRs from 18 multinational and local companies and state authorities representing roughly 2000 students) whether they find *CEFR* useful to define their current language competencies, required competences and course objectives. The main outcome was that most stakeholders related the *CEFR* to popular language exams but they were often unable to see any other use of the *CEFR*.

We decided to record a user-friendly DVD for presentation to Czech adult students, HR departments, experts in life-long learning, etc. showing samples of (initially) the 6 different levels of the global scale in CZECH being used by adults, so that students, teachers and HR staff in the Czech Republic can see the different levels in Czech in order to be able to quickly understand the difference between the language competences demonstrated and, thus, be able to relate those competences to the target language for the language training required.

All speakers’ levels were calibrated by Marie Hadkova (an expert in Czech as a Foreign language and Council of Europe consultant). Initially the Czech oral competences of 16 non-Czech speakers were assessed via individual interviews of up to 20 minutes and 13 of them were recorded. All speakers are adults based in the CR, either temporally or permanently, have their job careers. They come from various walks of lives (teachers,

bartender, tourist guide, journalist, electrician, cook, sales specialist), most of them take regular Czech classes, but not all of them, and all of them use Czech on a daily basis, though some of them just part of the day. They were informed prior the recording that they would be asked first to speak about their jobs and then react to questions related to the subject covered.

We produced a DVD where they demonstrate (in short 3 to 4 minute sequences) each level of the *CEFR*. Interviews were done using a short presentation on a topic chosen by the interviewee, but based on their work, (all speakers talk first about their jobs giving as much detail as they are able to), followed by a continuation of this theme via conversation in the form of a Q+A session with an off-screen native-speaker interlocutor. The use of a native-speaker interlocutor was deliberate as this would show how a non-native at each level could react to a native in a real ‘use of language’ situation. A simple commentary and level description is also provided with each the series so that the results help make transparent to the student, the company, the teacher and the centre what is required from the individual’s course, and also serve as a reminder to student and teacher what competences are to be covered. The use of can-do statements also supports reporting which often tends to be limited to the success (or not) of grammatical input rather than communicative competences and ability.

Thus, the purpose of this DVD is to bridge the gap between the *CEFR* and its practical implementation, as well as to demonstrate how speakers can operate at a particular *CEFR* level, what their language competences enable them to produce and how they are able to react to native speaker questions in a natural environment.

Our intention was not to simulate an exam setting or produce an oral mock exam, rather we aimed at encouraging life-long learners, who sometimes lack motivation to study, so that they realise they do not have to reach the highest levels of their language competence but they can be operational users at lower levels. The DVD context aim is to be also achievement-oriented as being so closely related to actual working environment, the recording may also be invaluable in improving learners’ self-assessment skills and, as appropriately linked to the *CEFR*, enhance the perceived usefulness of the existing *CEFR*.

We believe that the material demonstrated should have a positive impact on IPALE PARTNERS, particularly in an area where they do not currently have much material to offer their adult students and would encourage them develop ideas in this field into tangible products.

Bibliography:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre_en.asp