

A CEFR-Oriented Probe into Culture: Implications for Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

The Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), adopted by the Council of Europe (2001), is an action-based framework for language education, teaching and assessment in Europe. CEFR's descriptions of language skills across all skill levels can guide language learners, educators, and assessors. Alongside language-related issues, one phenomenon considered highly by the CEFR is culture – a concept intricately connected with language. Given the significance of culture and related concepts for language education, this study evaluated the CEFR and Companion Volume to draw inferences about culture and explore the possible implications for language learners. To this end, the two volumes were subjected to content analysis. Findings indicated several types of cultural awareness (n=7), knowledge (n=4), competence (n=8), and strategy (n=1) that language learners must adopt for successful cross-cultural interactions. These cultural expectations might also be considered under plurilinguistic awareness, knowledge, competence, and strategies. The study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically since it intends to bridge the literature gap. Prospective research, however, is urged to corroborate the findings. Furthermore, the study is expected to guide future studies tackling the significance of culture for language learners within the CEFR.

Keywords: CEFR, culture, language education, language learners, pluriculturalism, pluricultural competence

INTRODUCTION

In a constantly evolving world shaped by such various dynamics as globalization, the demand for multilingual individuals with good communication skills has also grown considerably. This need becomes substantial, especially in a world that has converted into a global village, removing the physical boundaries between countries and leading to a pluricultural global society. The Council of Europe's website defines plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as follows:

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism aim to capture the holistic nature of individual language users/learners linguistic and cultural repertoires. In this view, learners/users seen as social agents draw upon all sorts of resources in their linguistic and cultural repertoires and further develop these resources in their trajectories. Plurilingualism/pluriculturalism stresses the dynamic use of multiple languages/varieties and cultural knowledge, awareness and/or experience in social situations (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/plurilingualism-and-pluriculturalism>)

The ramifications of these changes have manifested themselves in the field of language education as well, hence leading to a paradigm shift by which intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has assumed considerable significance. Put differently, language learners are expected to be equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to communicate effectively with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This signifies that language teachers must be geared with essential pedagogical and content knowledge to implement teaching activities promoting ICC (Brunsmeier, 2017). Concerning language assessment, this means that assessment tools must consider diverse cultural contexts and evaluate cultural competence accordingly (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Internationally, the teaching of languages has been standardized with the introduction of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). This action-oriented approach provides a basis for language learning, teaching, and assessment across Europe. Specifically, the framework presents illustrative descriptors for communicative language activities and strategies (i.e., reception, production, interaction, and mediation), plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and communicative language competencies (i.e., linguistic, sociolinguistic,

pragmatic, and signing). Two decades after the introduction of its initial version, the CEFR companion volume (Council of Europe, 2020) was launched in 2020 with some revisions in its descriptors. Given the worldwide adoption of CEFR across various educational contexts (Carlsen, 2018) and the salience of culture in language education (Galante, 2022), its evaluation of cultural integration in both versions becomes significant.

To this end, this study intends to evaluate the place of culture in the CEFR for language learners. In this regard, the two volumes of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) were descriptively and extensively analyzed. The document analysis aimed to answer one main research question:

RQ (1): What is the place of culture in the CEFR regarding language learning?

The literature harbors a plethora of research on the relationship between the CEFR and various aspects, such as intercultural mediation (Liddicoat & Derivry-Plard, 2021), university entrance standards (Harsch, 2018), reading text comprehension complexity (Natova, 2021), classroom assessment (Mirici & Şengül, 2020), the views of language teachers (Kır & Sülü, 2014; Mat Yusoff et al., 2022), perceptions and awareness of learners (Glover, 2011; Runesi et al., 2022), language policy (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021; Savski, 2021). However, to the humble knowledge of the researcher, research on its relationship with the culture of language learners was not encountered in the literature. To this end, this study aimed to fill this literature gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Council of Europe (2001) proposed that the CEFR is a standardized educational guide for language learning, teaching, and assessment across Europe. The framework adopts an action-oriented approach, viewing learners as “social agents, i.e., members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9). In this context, the CEFR provides some descriptions of language use, language users, language context, skills, and competencies that must be embraced by language users and

presents common reference levels of proficiency that describe what language users can do at specific language proficiency levels. Put differently, it elaborates on the learning, teaching, and assessment aspects of language education so that they become orderly for language educators, practitioners, administrators, and learners to use. The framework was revised in 2020, introducing a companion volume with more details and additions.

Such a pedagogical guide as the CEFR will undoubtedly bring distinct advantages in a multilingual and multicultural world. First, the CEFR establishes a standardized method for measuring and comparing language competency levels (i.e., A1 through C2) across languages, thus simplifying communication and comprehension in a multilingual setting (North, 2014). Second, it serves as a manual for instructors and curriculum designers, assisting them in creating language curricula that correspond with specific competence objectives for students at various learning levels (Nagai et al., 2020). Third, the framework provides a foundation for creating tools for assessments of language competency, warranting consistent and comparable outcomes throughout languages and assessment environments (Deygers et al., 2018). Fourth, by using the CEFR, individuals might self-evaluate their language proficiency and create reasonable objectives for growth, promoting a feeling of independence in language learning (Mirici & Hergüner, 2015). Fifth, the CEFR facilitates international mobility by lowering barriers to education, employment, and residence among European nations by providing an internationally accepted benchmark for language competence (Foley, 2019). Finally, it promotes lifelong language learning by providing a framework for students to establish objectives, monitor their advancement, and continue to improve their language abilities throughout their lifetime (Piccardo & Berchoud, 2011).

Previous research on the CEFR had a multi-dimensional focus. Most of the studies concerning the CEFR were conducted in foreign countries. For instance, Musthofa (2022) explored the CEFR-based policy for Arabic language teaching in the Indonesian context. Hazar (2021) investigated the impact of the CEFR on the Turkish curriculum. Nguyen and Hamid (2021) examined the CEFR as a national language policy in the Vietnamese context.

Many other studies about the CEFR were also conducted in second language learning/instruction. For example, Savski (2023) surveyed the CEFR for its empowerment or enforcement for ELT practitioners. The CEFR was also analyzed in terms of language skills, such as reading comprehension text complexity (Natova, 2021), grammar (Kim, 2021), pronunciation (Topal, 2019), writing (Harsch & Rupp, 2011), speaking (Berger, 2020), and listening (Campoy-Cubillo & Querol-Julián, 2021). Further studies about the research topic were also conducted in the context of proficiency tests and assessments (Berger, 2020; Kim & Crossley, 2020). Teacher and student perceptions were another area on which CEFR-based studies were conducted. For instance, Abidin and Hashim (2021) examined the Malaysian teachers' perceptions and plurilingualism. Díez-Bedmar and Byram (2019) explored secondary school teachers' perceptions of the CEFR's present impact in another study. On the other hand, McNamara et al. (2019) investigated undergraduate students' perceptions of academic writing concerning the prospective use of the CEFR. Individual volumes of the CEFR were also researched previously (North, 2007, 2021). Concerning culture, however, the research has remained scarce. Yüce (2019) briefly looked into plurilingualism and pluriculturalism in the CEFR companion volume. Schneider (2020) critically examined intercultural communication within the context of the CEFR. Liddicoat and Derivry-Plard (2021) analyzed the CEFR's new volume about intercultural mediation. Given the concise literature review, it is plausible to assert that the present study will bridge the gap in the literature on the examination of CEFR's volumes in terms of culture.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted document analysis (DA) as a qualitative research method (Bowen, 2009) to explore the place of culture in terms of objectives, learning, teaching, and assessment in both CEFR volumes (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020). Bowen (2009) describes DA as an organized procedure for reviewing and analyzing printed and electronic documents (e.g., institutional and organizational). The method is frequently employed “to elicit meaning,

gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, cited in Bowen, 2009, p.28).

The analytic procedure of DA follows (i) query, (ii) selection, (iii) appraisal, and (iv) synthesis (Bowen, 2009). In this regard, the two volumes of the CEFR (2001, 2020) were acquired first. Such keywords as "culture," "intercultural," and "pluricultural" were searched throughout the documents. Additionally, the documents were analyzed entirely to cross-check. The relevant parts of the documents were highlighted and then grouped under appropriate categories (i.e., objectives, learning, teaching, and assessment). In other words, data were analyzed through content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The procedure was replicated by three field experts, including the researcher, for consistent results.

The analyzed documents and procedures for data analysis are displayed in the following table and figure.

Table 1. The Analyzed Documents

Title	Author(s)	Publishing date	Publisher	Page
Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.	Council of Europe. Council for Cultural Co-operation. Education Committee. Modern Languages Division	2001	Cambridge University Press	265
Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume	Language Policy Programme Education Policy Division Education Department Council of Europe	2020	Council of Europe	278

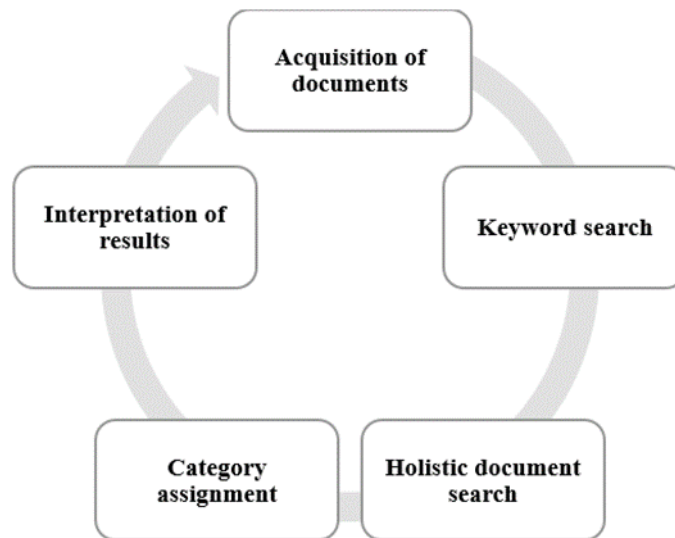


Figure 1. The Procedures for Data Analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent years have necessitated the adoption of the plurilingualism concept by the Council of Europe within the context of language learning. According to the plurilingual approach, people should broaden their language experience by interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds and learning from them at home and in society. Incorporating all linguistic knowledge and experience enhances communicative competence and fosters engagement and interactions. According to the CEFR, plurilingualism, a concept in pluriculturalism, involves the use of language as a means to access cultural manifestations, enhancing a person's cultural competence by comparing, contrasting, and actively interacting with various cultures, including national, regional, and social ones. Regarding the necessity of CEFR, it was stated in a symposium held in 1991 that language learning and teaching in member countries should be intensified for increased mobility, effective international communication, respect for identity and cultural diversity, better information access, and improved working relations (Council of Europe, 2001). In brief, the CEFR highlights how crucial international communication competence and cultural awareness are

to language learning. The objectives are to promote cultural diversity, enhance social cohesion, empower communities to protect cultural heritage and establish intercultural dialogue with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The CEFR holds that language use involves language users as social agents developing communicative language competencies. The CEFR posits that language learners develop interculturality by becoming plurilingual and acquiring knowledge of other languages. This enhances their linguistic and cultural competencies and contributes to intercultural awareness, skills, and knowledge, resulting in a more complex personality and enhanced capacity for further language learning. Additionally, they engage in activities under various conditions and constraints, producing or receiving texts related to specific domains. Monitoring these actions leads to reinforcement or modification of their competencies. It is important to note that proficiency in communication requires more than just language, including sociocultural awareness, creative experience, affective relationships, and learning to learn. According to the CEFR, overall language proficiency encompasses a wide range of general competences, communicative language competences, communicative language activities, and communicative language strategies. A careful analysis of both volumes revealed that language users should possess several types of culture-related awareness, knowledge, competences, and strategies to be considered competent in intercultural communication (Table 3).

Table 3. The Culture-Relevant Components of Overall Language Proficiency

Awareness	Knowledge	Competences	Strategies
Intercultural	Savoir	Lexical	Mediation
Sociocultural	Savoir-faire	Paralinguistic	
Lexical-Semantic	Savoir-être	Semantic	
Pragmatic	Savoir apprendre	Phonological	
Paralinguistic		Orthographic	
Phonological		Sociolinguistic	
Orthographic		Pragmatic	
		Pluricultural	

**Awareness* – understanding of something; *Knowledge* – acquired information about something; *Competence* – ability to do something; *Strategy* – a way of dealing with something

Intercultural awareness is the recognition of the similarities and distinctions between the world of origin and the world of the target community, including regional and social differences (Council of Europe, 2001). Enhanced by a wider variety of cultures, helping to contextualize both worlds, it includes understanding how each community perceives the other, often through national stereotypes. Baker (2012) highlighted the transition from cultural to intercultural awareness in English language teaching. However, with the CEFR, the focus has shifted to pluricultural awareness. In a study, Wang and Chang (2011) found that cross-cultural voicemail exchanges resulted in a rise in intercultural awareness for Chinese learners. In another study, Özişik et al. (2019) reported that language teachers needed training to teach intercultural awareness in Turkish. It might briefly be suggested that intercultural/pluricultural awareness should be raised among language users, and language teaching programs should prepare teachers for its teaching.

In conjunction with this, language users must possess intercultural knowledge as part of the savoir. It is essential to understand the values and beliefs that social groups in different countries and regions hold in common, including, but not limited to, religious faith, cultural taboos, presumptions of shared history, etc., to facilitate intercultural communication (Council of Europe, 2001). Associated with this, declarative knowledge (savoir) is a blanket

term including the knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness (Council of Europe, 2001). As for the knowledge of the world, language learners rely heavily on factual knowledge about the target country's geography, environment, demographics, economics, and politics (Council of Europe, 2001). As for sociocultural knowledge, language learners need to understand the community and culture of a language since this is often outside of their prior experience and may be influenced by preconceived notions related to day-to-day life, interpersonal relationships, values, opinions, body language, and ritual behavior (Council of Europe, 2001). In communicative situations, general competences like world knowledge, sociocultural, intercultural, and professional experience are combined with communicative language competences and strategies to complete tasks effectively (Council of Europe, 2020). Previous studies supported these arguments by reporting that intercultural capabilities required knowledge of the world (Scarino, 2010), pop culture elements (e.g., movies, music, books, and magazines) provided learners with sociocultural knowledge (Murray, 2008), and meta-historical themes offered potential for intercultural knowledge (Nordgren, 2017). Additionally, Barili and Byram (2021) reiterated the need for intercultural knowledge for intercultural encounters. In sum, research advocated acquiring intercultural knowledge for successful cross-cultural interactions.

Savoir-faire (skills and know-how) encapsulates practical skills and know-how (e.g., social skills) and intercultural skills and know-how (Council of Europe, 2001). Regarding the prior, social skills involve adhering to conventions and performing expected routines, especially for foreigners (Council of Europe, 2001). On the other hand, intercultural skills include the ability to relate to another culture, be culturally sensitive, and recognize and use different contact methods with other cultures (Council of Europe, 2001). It is likely asserted that language users should develop social and intercultural skills as part of savoir-faire for effective intercultural interactions. In an earlier study, Tomova (2021) stated that social and intercultural skills might be acquired through peer assessment. Moeller and Abbott (2018)

maintained that cultural learning plays a vital role in language classes, as it develops social and cross-cultural skills that enable students to look at the world from a different perspective, particularly in the context of globalization, migration, and immigration. In brief, language users must have cultural skills and know-how for improved intercultural communication.

Existential competence is characterized by an open-mindedness towards new experiences, concepts, individuals, communities, and nations, a capacity to assimilate different cultural perspectives, and a capacity to disassociate oneself from traditional attitudes toward cultural differences (Council of Europe, 2001). As part of *savoir-être*, existential competences are sensitive to cross-cultural perceptions and relationships, as one culture's language of friendliness and engagement may be interpreted as belligerent or insulting by another (Council of Europe, 2001). In parallel, language users should hold positive and open attitudes toward new cultures as part of *savoir-être* for successful cross-cultural communication. Lussier and Amireault (2022) recommended developing intercultural partnerships and exchange programs that align with real-world situations, encouraging cultural diversity and strengthening students' cultural identities, ultimately improving existential skills. According to Byram (2008), young learners are more likely to acquire *savoir-être* because of their curiosity and openness to otherness in foreign language learning. This makes sense because young learners have lowered language ego (Berzonsky, 1990).

Savoir-apprendre, on the other hand, is the capacity to observe and take part in new experiences and incorporate new knowledge into the existing knowledge (Council of Europe, 2001). Language skills develop over time, allowing users to solve problems effectively and independently, explore possibilities, and use opportunities better. As part of *savoir-apprendre*, heuristic skills refer to the learner's capacity to adapt to new situations (changes in language, people, behaviors, etc.) (Council of Europe, 2001). In that regard, learners should be open to new intercultural experiences and adopt heuristic skills as part of *savoir-*

apprendre for fruitful pluricultural interactions. DeCapua and Marshall (2010) held that disagreement in cultural expectations in language classrooms impacted learners' learning ability. Helm and Guth (2016) proposed that language learning through telecollaboration promoted savoir-apprendre. Similarly, Barili and Byram (2021) asserted that savior-apprendre, like other savoirs, were needed for intercultural citizenship.

After developing intercultural awareness and demonstrating culture-relevant knowledge, language users might be expected to acquire pluricultural competence within plurilingualism/pluriculturalism. Plurilingual and pluricultural competence involves the ability to use multiple languages and experiences of different cultures for communication and intercultural interaction (Council of Europe, 2001). As put forward in the CEFR companion volume (Council of Europe, 2020), building on pluricultural repertoire encapsulates the following:

Table 4. The Notions and Descriptors of Intercultural Competence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need to deal with ambiguity when faced with cultural diversity, adjusting reactions, modifying language, etc. • the need for understanding that different cultures may have different practices and norms and that actions may be perceived differently by people belonging to other cultures; • the need to take into consideration differences in behaviors (including gestures, tones, and attitudes), discussing over-generalizations and stereotypes; • the need to recognize similarities and use them as a basis to improve communication; • willingness to show sensitivity to differences; • readiness to offer and ask for clarification, anticipating possible risks of misunderstanding.
(Council of Europe, 2020, p.124)

Further descriptions of pluricultural competence within the context of descriptors are as follows: At A level, learners identify cultural problems in communication and behave appropriately. At B level B1, learners respond to cultural signals and social-pragmatic expectations. At the B2 level, learners engage effectively and can correct misapprehensions.

At the C level, learners explain cultural attitudes, values, and behaviors, manage ambiguity, and express positive responses (Council of Europe, 2020). In their study, Baños et al. (2021) argued that pluricultural competence might be taught via audiovisual translation for language learning. In addition, learning more about the purpose of plurilingual and pluricultural competence and how it impacts teaching might help teachers recognize students' varied language abilities and embrace an eco-friendly approach to language teaching (Chen & Hélot, 2018). Furthermore, promoting students' language awareness development might enhance their plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Oliveira & Ançã, 2017).

The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) states that communicative skills encompass language skills, sociocultural awareness, imagination, affective relationships, and learning skills. Sociocultural awareness can be defined as an understanding of the social and cultural contexts influencing intercultural communication and interactions. Its significance for understanding the cultural context in which language is used was voiced previously (McConachy, 2009). In addition, the lack of proper training for its instruction by middle and high school teachers was also expressed earlier (Luque et al., 2017). Similarly, Hidayat et al. (2023) highlighted the limited focus on sociocultural awareness in online teacher training programs. Chao (2016) declared that community service-learning increased language learners' sociocultural awareness. These studies emphasize the urgency to help learners develop sociocultural awareness and train language teachers to incorporate it into their practice. In connection with this, language users must acquire sociolinguistic competence, which involves the ability to comprehend and master the social aspects of language use, such as linguistic indicators of social relationships, conventions of politeness, expressions of folk wisdom, and register distinctions, dialects, and accents (Council of Europe, 2001). Neuner (1996) held that socio-culture might be integrated into language education through pragmatic (e.g., language use), cognitive (e.g., knowledge), and affective (e.g., attitudes) dimensions and suggested that sociocultural teaching might be embedded in curricula for

learners to develop sociocultural competence. Rakhimova et al. (2017) claimed that learners might achieve sociocultural competence through computer technologies since they allow intercultural communication/exchanges. Sociocultural competence also requires learners to "adjust to a nonstandard accent or dialect" (Council of Europe, 2001, p.75) and thus notice the subtle accentual variations across different languages (Álvarez, 2007).

Lexical items, according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), include fixed expressions (e.g., direct exponents of language functions, proverbs, phrasal idioms, phrasal verbs, and fixed collocations) which "embody cultural difference and significant values and beliefs shared by the social group(s) whose language is being learned" (p.150). The vocabulary range scale (Council of Europe, 2020, p.131) contains a lexical repertoire that covers such fixed expressions and awareness of connotative meanings. Lexical awareness, in this regard, signifies the understanding of the cultural links between these lexical items and their meanings in proportionate to learner levels. In a study, Tang (2022) recommended language teaching through culture for increased lexical awareness. Similarly, Xie and Cao (2022) proposed lexical pragmatics for cultivating lexical pragmatic awareness, given the connection between pragmatic conventions and culture. In this context, language users must have lexical pragmatic awareness for successful cross-cultural interactions. Following its development, they might be expected to acquire lexical competence as part of linguistic competence. Lexical competence is the understanding and utilization of a language's vocabulary, comprising lexical and grammatical elements (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR companion volume even includes a scale for "vocabulary range" (Council of Europe, 2020, p.131). Learners might also be expected to acquire semantic and lexical competence. According to the CEFR, semantic competence refers to the learner's comprehension and awareness of the organizational structure of meaning (Council of Europe, 2001). Language users might acquire this with particular reference to pragmatic semantics that "deals with logical relations such as entailment, presupposition, implicature, etc." (Council of Europe, 2001, p.116). Khazami and Ziafar (2017) found that higher contrastive lexical competence

meant less urgency to avoid ambiguity than general fluency. In a recent study, Lehan et al. (2023) revealed the efficiency of internet-based systems in improving lexical competence. On the other hand, semantic competence involves recognizing and adapting to cultural differences in concepts, such as emotions and word significance, to ensure effective communication (Jackson et al., 2019). Additionally, it takes more than just semantic competence to understand idioms and metaphors in language; one must also understand the cultural context in which these terms are used (MacArthur, 2010).

Similarly, pragmatic awareness can be associated with culture, considering the link between language use and culture (McConachy, 2019). As pragmatic competence relates to actual language usage (Council of Europe, 2020), pragmatic awareness refers to understanding cultural differences in linguistic items. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to comprehend the principles of language use, the organization of messages, the performance of communication functions, and the organization of events following interactional and transaction models (Council of Europe, 2020). As part of communicative language competence, pragmatic competence includes "flexibility, turn-taking, thematic development, coherence and cohesion, propositional precision, and fluency" (Council of Europe, 2020, p.129). Cultural norms are significant for pragmatic competence, with cultural variables determining when and how to use certain idioms and understand the intended meaning in a given context (Berns, 2013; Kecskes, 2014). Pragmatic competence also involves effective engagement in a wide range of speech activities in a cultural context (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Pragmatic competence also includes communicating and using non-verbal communication effectively (Benattabou, 2020). Furthermore, understanding idiomatic terms and knowing when and how to employ them effectively in a given cultural setting is crucial for pragmatic competence (Liontas, 2015). All in all, pragmatic awareness, knowledge, and competence are essential skills for intercultural communication.

According to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), general phonetic awareness includes the following pronunciation abilities:

Table 5. General Phonetic Awareness and Skills

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an ability to distinguish and produce unfamiliar sounds and prosodic patterns; • an ability to perceive and catenate unfamiliar sound sequences; • an ability, as a listener, to resolve (i.e., divide into distinct and significant parts) a continuous stream of sound into a meaningful structured string of phonological elements; • an understanding/mastery of sound perception and production processes applicable to new language learning.
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(Council of Europe, 2001, p.107)

Previous research showed that phonological awareness might vary significantly from culture to culture; however, its significance in predicting reading depends on a given culture's language and educational environment (McBride-Chang et al., 2004). In addition, cultural variations in oral storytelling and literacy were shown to impact phonological awareness (Alcock et al., 2010; Gillon & Macfarlane, 2017). After developing phonological awareness, language users are expected to be phonologically competent in the target language. As one of the linguistic competences, phonological competence refers to the ability to comprehend and control the phonetic units of language, distinguish phonetic characteristics, compose words, and understand sentence phonetics, such as prosody, inflection, and vowel reduction (Council of Europe, 2001). In the CEFR's revised version (Council of Europe, 2020), phonological competence was renamed phonological control and grouped as one of the linguistic competences. In a study, Topal (2019) argued that language learners and teachers must be equipped with phonological, phonemic, and meta-phonological awareness and eventually be competent. Learners from different linguistic backgrounds (e.g., tonal and non-tonal languages) might have perception problems in cross-cultural communication (Shen & Froud, 2016). Also, heavily accented language users might cause communication breakdowns in intercultural encounters (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Language users must develop phonetic awareness and phonological competence to minimize communication breakdowns in cross-cultural interactions.

Different languages use different orthographic systems. For example, Chinese uses a logographic system, while English uses the Latin alphabet. With such variations in writing conventions, language users should develop orthographic awareness for improved intercultural communication in the written discourse. Following the adoption of this awareness, learners might develop orthographic competence, which refers to comprehending and creating symbols in written language (Council of Europe, 2001). Some European languages use alphabetical systems, while others use ideographic (or consonantal) systems. To be competent in the target language's orthography, learners must know letter forms, spellings, grammar, typographic conventions, and standard logographic characters. Orthographic competence was renamed orthographic control as one of the linguistic competences in the revised CEFR volume (Council of Europe, 2020). In a study, orthographic awareness was associated with improved literacy skills (Wong, 2020). Additionally, orthographic awareness, knowledge, and competence provide language users with the necessary tools to avoid miscommunication and assist them in promoting their cultural sensitivities in written communication (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018). Accordingly, language users might be expected to develop orthographic awareness and acquire relevant knowledge and competence for successful intercultural communication in written discourse.

A final culture-relevant awareness, knowledge, and competence might be claimed to be in paralinguistics within the context of the CEFR. Paralinguistics encompasses using body language, extrinsic speech components, and communication prosodic characteristics (Council of Europe, 2001). Body language typically conveys conventionalized meanings that may vary from culture to culture. For intercultural communicative competence, one must have paralinguistic competence as one of the nonverbal exchange abilities (Yang, 2018). In another study, Derenowski (2011) maintained that teaching materials should promote paralinguistic awareness from a cultural perspective. Paralinguistic exploitation (mimes, gestures, and facial expressions) was also included in the plurilingual repertoire of language users (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020). Intercultural communication requires understanding

how different cultures express emotions such as joy, sorrow, frustration, or concurrence through body language and tone of voice (Neuliep, 2016). For that reason, language users with sufficient paralinguistic awareness, knowledge, and competence are highly likely to benefit from this in cross-cultural communication.

Mediation is included as one of the communicative language activities and strategies that might be related to culture. It is a social and cultural practice that promotes communication and collaboration, resolves sensitive issues and tensions, and requires social and cultural skills, especially in cross-cultural and cross-lingual mediation (Council of Europe, 2020). Mediation emphasizes the role of language in communication, collaboration, and information transfer, impacting social, pedagogical, cultural, linguistic, or professional contexts, and refers to the role of the user/learner as a social actor, bridging gaps and building meaning within or across multiple languages (Council of Europe, 2020). A direct connection between mediation and culture can be established concerning mediating communication, comprising “facilitating pluricultural space and acting as an intermediary” (Council of Europe, 2020, p.90), for mediating communication promotes comprehension and develops effective communication among users/ learners with personal, sociocultural, linguistic, or intellectual differences (Council of Europe, 2020).

Of the two scales (i.e., facilitating pluricultural space and acting as an intermediary) provided in the CEFR, the goal of the first is to create a space for multilingual and multiethnic participants to communicate effectively (Council of Europe, 2020). The user/learner is a cultural facilitator, providing a neutral, trust-based space to improve communication. Some key concepts are using questions to promote comprehension of cultural norms, sensitivity to different perspectives, anticipating and correcting misunderstandings, appreciating different viewpoints, and flexibility. The scale moves from B1 through B2+. At B2+, the user/learner can appreciate different perspectives and express themselves in a way that is relevant to the context. Users/learners can control their actions/expressions based on context at the C level, making minor adjustments to avoid or correct

misunderstandings/cultural incidents. The second scale, on the other hand, enables multilingual and multicultural participants to communicate effectively by creating a neutral, trust-based space (Council of Europe, 2020). Common concepts include cultural awareness, sensitivity to different points of view, anticipation of misunderstandings, recognition of different perspectives, and adaptability. Users can perform actions based on context.

Previous research supported the adoption of mediation strategies by language learners for effective multicultural communication (Pundziuvienė et al., 2023). A study by Liang (2021) found that online multimodal discourses potentially transform intercultural communication. It also suggested that online multilingual peer mediation can improve university students' multilingual awareness and engage them in intercultural dialogue. In another study, Morgado (2019) asserted that picture books are great for intercultural mediation because they are multimodal and emphasize contemporary living themes, assisting children to comprehend the multicultural world and the importance of meaningful intercultural activities. According to Kossakowska-Pisarek et al.'s (2022) study, only one-third of the participants understood the concept of mediation, even though 91% of the 79 participating teachers agreed that it is essential in language development and teaching. However, some aspects of CEFR are difficult for teachers to accept, highlighting the challenges in implementing CEFR across higher education. In short, the relevant literature endorsed language learners and teachers' teaching and acquisition of mediation activities and strategies for successful intercultural communication.

All in all, pluriculturalism has been adopted by the Council of Europe in language education. Pluriculturalism refers to using a single language to access different cultural manifestations, thus improving cultural competency. The Council of Europe aims to foster cultural diversity, social cohesion, and intercultural dialogue by promoting multilingualism. Language learners must have several types of cultural awareness, knowledge, competences, and strategies to be competent in cross-cultural communication. Intercultural awareness refers to the awareness of similarities and differences between the world from which one

comes and the community in which one wishes to live. Language teachers must be trained on how to teach cross-cultural awareness in Turkey.

CONCLUSION

The significance of intercultural communicative competence must be addressed in a multilingual and multicultural world. From a CEFR-oriented perspective, this signifies acquiring specific types of awareness, knowledge, competence, and strategies for effective intercultural communication. The present study examined the two volumes of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) as regards cultural relevance and salience for language learners. It was found that intercultural/pluricultural awareness needs to be increased among language users and that language teaching programs must prepare teachers for teaching it. Also, research has supported the need to acquire intercultural knowledge for successful intercultural interactions. Once learners have developed intercultural knowledge and demonstrated culture-related knowledge, they can expect to gain pluricultural competence in plurilingualism / pluriculturalism. It was further found that pragmatic knowledge, knowledge, and competence are essential for intercultural communications. In addition, language users must develop phonetic and phonological knowledge to minimize communication failures in cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, they can be expected to create orthographic expertise and competence to communicate in a written discourse. Moreover, language users with adequate paralinguistic awareness, knowledge, and competence can benefit significantly from this in a cross-cultural context. In summary, the literature supports the need for language learners and teachers to teach intercultural awareness and develop mediation activities/strategies for effective intercultural communication.

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