Word lists in Reference Level Descriptions of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)[1]

Carla Marello

Keywords: *CEFR*, *reference description level*, *learner's dictionaries*, *corpus-driven lexicography*.

Abstract

In this paper we consider how profiles, or sets of Reference Level Descriptions (hereon RLDs), of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) for English, German, French, Spanish and Italian present their word lists. We focus on B2 because it is the RLD level reached and published by all the profiles and also because vocabulary for C1 and C2 levels cannot be delimited. RLDs sets provide detailed information about the language that learners can be expected to demonstrate at each level and their word lists are corpus-based. We comment on their actual or prospective links with learner's dictionaries and conclude that learner's dictionaries need not enter in the profiles, which are meant for professionals, including curriculum planners, material writers and teachers. Learner's dictionaries enter German and English profiles because RDLs planners want to instruct teachers how to go beyond their lists and train students to conduct better look-ups. It should be rather the other way: learner's dictionaries should take advantage of the fact that in the profiles CEFR levels are assigned to each individual meaning of these words, either openly as in the German and English profiles or more implicitly as in the Italian, French and Spanish.

1. Introduction

Reference Level Descriptions (hereon RLDs) with learning specifications up to CEFR B2 level have been produced or updated for over 20 languages.[2] In this paper we will consider how profiles, or sets of RLDs, for English, German, French, Spanish and Italian present their word lists. We focus on B2 because it is the RLD level reached and published by all the profiles[3] and also because we agree with Glaboniat et al. (2005:78) that "vocabulary for C1 and C2 levels cannot be delimited". RLDs sets provide detailed information about the language that learners can be expected to demonstrate at each specific level and their word lists are corpus-based. We will comment on their actual or prospective links with learner's dictionaries.

2. How B2 level words were chosen

In the *Guide for the production of RDL* (version 2 November 2005), issued by Language Policy Division DG IV of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, we read that RLDs for a given language have common features and that each description specifies which inventories of forms are considered to be "open", which are "closed" and which are "necessary or optional. " Lexical inventories however belong to the category "necessary and open" (Guide 2005, § 1.2).[4] In § 2.it is explained that "depending on the resources available for each language". The choice of the morpho-syntactic and lexical material entering RLDs should be "elaborated on the basis of:

1. inventories of statistical frequency, including oral usage;
2. the perusal of large bodies of (not necessarily literary) texts;

3. knowledge considered as established in relation to the acquisition of the language concerned, in the "natural" and institutional environments, possibly in the form of acquisition sequences;
4. learners' productions, particularly language data produced in evaluation situations (body of language examinations);
5. the approaches and concepts used to analyse discourse (including conversation analysis);
6. established knowledge concerning spontaneous oral usages and their social variations;
7. the intuitive and reflexive command of the language possessed by knowledgeable and highly competent informers." (Guide § 2 Methodology)

Requirement 4 above restricted the eligible work teams to groups already active in assessment and certification, or in any case implied that RLDs planners had access to a large amount of language examinations. For the languages we are analysing they were CVCL (Centro per la Valutazione e la Certificazione Linguistica) of Università per Stranieri di Perugia, University of Cambridge, Goethe Institut,[5] Instituto Cervantes and Université Paris III – Sorbonne nouvelle.

As the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP) website[6] clearly states: "Rather than providing a syllabus of the vocabulary that learners *should* know, the EVP project verifies what they *do* know at each level." We should bear this in mind when we consider that after 200 – 250 hours lessons, B2 students "know" two thousand and seventy eight Italian words, and one hundred or two hundred more in German and English. We might argue that avoidance strategies affect the lexical density and richness of L2 students productions when they are under examination, and claim that it is too small a vocabulary and complain that word X and word Y **are not** there.[7] But in such a case we neglect the above mentioned consideration that lexical RLD inventories are necessary and open, and that if a word is not in the list, nobody keeps the teacher from teaching it.

We can objectively judge the lists only after we embraced the 'can-do' philosophy of CEFR. If we abandon the lexicographical stance which might sound as "the larger the quantity of different words and of different meanings of such words – the better" and we think of such words (in that precise meaning) as those that B2 students cannot ignore, we should admit that the lists are well selected. The words included are there to express important and necessary speech acts for the speaker at that level or they serve to explain general notions such as quantity, quality, space, time and specific notions.

Why certain words **are in the lists,** to the surprise of most purist conformist thinkers,[8] might be explained by the *Guide* in the last page under the subtitle *IV Specific notion*. We reproduce the passage because the concept of *dictionaries* appears, just to be kept at distance.[9]

1.The inventories of the reference level descriptions use a typology and/or a minimum internal classification thereof common to all languages (by lexical field and sub-field).
2.The inventories of specific notions are not dictionaries. They only indicate meanings or formal characteristics (such as gender) as and when necessary.
3.The inventories of specific notions include international words (particularly at the A levels).
4.The inventories of specific notions include transparent words (e.g. Pan-Roman, Pan-Slavonic, etc of learned Greek and Latin origin).
5.The inventories of specific notions comprise a number of elements which are comparable from one language to another at the same level.

6.These inventories comprise open lists (name of numbers, colours, foods) once a certain level is reached (A2 for example).

7.These inventories comprise items of regional usage when levels are reached for which the *Framework* specifies this competence.

Point 1 explains why there are general nouns in the list even though students do not use them, though a comparison of lists also proves that point 5 might prompt to reach a greater homogeneity for what concerns hyperonyms coverage.

Point 4 is better appreciated with C1 and C2 levels. Apart from *agricoltura, fotografia* the Italian B2 list includes just *ideologia* (s.f.), as a word of "learned Greek and Latin origin". Point 7 is internationally more than eurocentrically interpreted by the EVP which" shows, in both British and American English, which words and phrases learners around the world know at each level – A1 to C2 – of the CEFR." *Profile deutsch* ecompasses Swiss and Austrian variants and the *Niveau B2 pour le Français* " a pu voir le jour grâce à une collaboration étroite […] entre les experts belges, suisses et français"(p.3).

3. The inventories are not dictionaries

The fact that the inventories are not dictionaries is true of the whole list, not only of the inventories of specific notions. In the printed versions the inventory of words related to specific notions does not look much different from inventory of functions, except for them being single words in alphabetic lists and accompanied by a POS label and eventually a gender label in the Italian *Profilo*, but barely listed in the French *Niveau B2*, or in the Spanish *Plan Curricular.*

As for POS labels English RLDs acknowledge only some innovations because they label can, might etc. as 'modal verbs', more, many as 'determiners ; pronouns' (more has also POS 'adverb'). German Profile has a label 'w-wort' for wer10, while Italian Profilo is very traditional and *dovere, potere, volere* are accompanied by the label (v.int.), which identifies them as intransitive verbs. Discourse analysis and speech acts, such important facets of interaction, are forgotten when they label *good morning* or *hello* as exclamations or ital. *grazie* 'thank you' and *buonanotte* 'good night' as (inter.) i.e. exclamations and German *Halt, Stopp* as 'interjektion'.

The old traditional Italian approach (no longer followed by modern Italian monolingual dictionaries containing hundreds of entries which are bound morphemes) is also evident in the treatment of productive derivative morphemes. We find only whole words: no Ital. *–mente* while there are 20 adverbs ending with this morpheme in B2 list, all meaning "in X way", except *probabilmente* 'perhaps' and *personalmente*, 'in my opinion'. German, on the contrary, has a "suffix" label and uses it for *Atom-* B2, *Einzel-* A2*, Mit-* A2. English Vocabulary Profile face derivation through "word family" (see fig. 1).

But above all the inventories are not dictionaries because they do not give definitions. Words redirect to the general or specific notions or to the functions which determined their presence in the inventory. In the index (pp. 362–414) of *Niveau B2 pour le Français. Un référentiel* it is clearly stated " Cet index n'a qu'une fonction de consultation: il sert à l'utilisateur à trouver, dans les chapitres concernés, aux pages indiquées, la mention de l'unité recherchée et la catégorie ou sous-catégorie fonctionnelle ou notionnelle où elle s'insère." (p. 361). It might even be said that in the inventories there are not words but lexical units, because they forward to a unique and specific meaning of the word the first time it appears.[11] An extreme consequence of that is the treatment reserved in EVP for *the back* which is in A1,

whereas the noun *back* is in A2, or the fact that the Italian *Profilo* gives *ci* (part. pron. luogo i.e.'place') in A1 because of *c'è* 'there is', but lists its *ci* (part. pron. – pron.) function "us, to us" only in A2. The *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes* gives *cuál* 'which'for the first time in A2 level (*Funciones,* A2, 3.4. «Preguntar por preferencias»), but explains it in B1 level (*Gramática* 7.3. «Los interrogativos»).

4. German and English electronic versions have "sort of "learner's dictionaries.

Languages, such as German and English, which have well-known, popular and long-established monolingual dictionaries, have clothed bare words (in the electronic versions of their profiles) so much so that the final lexical inventories greatly resemble a dictionary. Better still they look like the embodiment of that "dictionary on demand" (with entries and hidden parts, which unfold on demand), as designed by Sue Atkins and Henri Béjoint in the 1990s.

In fact the German profile contains e-Großworterbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache 4.0 2003[12] and EVP, because of the homonymic nature of its core vocabulary, is "obliged" to give very short semantic hints such as "the place where you go to do your job" or "to do a job, especially the job you do to earn money" in the entry **work** (see fig.1).

The point is: if the profiles are for English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals, including curriculum planners, material writers and teachers, why should such users need so much information? What is really useful for them (and cannot be found in learner's dictionaries up to now) are examples written by students.[13]. It is rather the other way: learner's dictionaries do not need to enter (in) the profiles, but rather should take advantage of the fact that in the profiles CEFR levels are assigned to each individual meaning of these words, either openly as in the German and English profiles or more implicitly as in the Italian, French and Spanish profiles. Fig. 2 reproduces Plan Curricular A1-C2 inventories for perception and shows that inventories are the starting point of a lexicographical development which the three aforementioned Romance.languages do not pursue up to now inside the respective profile projects. The reason why the German profile and EVP are so rich in their lexicographic descriptions is probably "pedagogical". RLD planners want to instruct teachers how to go beyond their lists and train students to improve their look-up techniques, because as past and recent experiments point out "learners do not know where to look up much of the information they need" (Frankenberg-Garcia 2011:97).

work 🔊 /wɜːk/   **Outline view**

Word family:
Nouns: work, worker
Verbs: work
Adjectives: working

► NOUN

PLACE

A1 [U] the place where you go to do your job
Dictionary examples:
*Do you have far to travel **to** work each day?*
*Thousands of people are seriously injured **at** work every year.*
*When does she leave **for** work?*
*What time do you **start/finish** work?*
⊙**Learner example:**

Finally, when he finish[es] work, he goes [to] a pub.

JOB

`A1` [U] something you do as a job to earn money
Dictionary examples:
Has she got any work yet?
*Many young people are **out of** work.*
⊙ Learner example:
I'd like to come and help you but I've got work tomorrow.

ACTIVITY

`A2` [U] the activities that you have to do at school, for your job, etc.
Dictionary examples:
I'll have to take this work home with me and finish it there.
The teacher said she was pleased with my work.
⊙ Learner example:
If you haven't any work on Thursday we can start our work on that day.

▶ VERB

DO JOB

`A1` [I or T] to do a job, especially the job you do to earn money
Dictionary examples:
*She worked **as** a cleaner at the hospital.*
*Mike works **for** a computer company.*
My dad works very long hours.
⊙ Learner example:
She works [from] Monday to Friday.

OPERATE

`A2` [I or T] If a machine or piece of equipment works, it is not broken.
Dictionary examples:
Our telephone isn't working.
*I can't **get** the radio **to** work.*
⊙ Learner example:
I tried to phone her house, but her phone wasn't working, so I decided to go to her house.

Figure 1. EVP entry *work*.

A1	A2
	▪ tener ~ calor/frío/sueño/ sed/hambre/dolor ▪ estar cansado ▪ doler ~ la cabeza/el cuello ▪ ver, mirar, oír, escuchar

A1	A2
B1	B2
- tocar/sentir ~ calor/frío/sueño/ sed/hambre - estar/sentirse/encontrarse ~ bien/mal/regular - cansarse	- vista, oído, gusto, tacto, olfato - tener/pasar/sentir ~ un calor/un frío ~ horrible/espantoso - tener ~ un dolor/un sueño ~ horrible/espantoso - estar ~ agotado/hambriento/helado - agotarse - experimentar dolor
C1	C2
- dar ~ calor/frío/sueño/ sed/hambre/náuseas - morirse ~ de sed/de hambre/de cansancio/de frío/de sueño - estar ~ sediento/congelado/ tiritando (de frío) - tener ~ un agujero en el estómago/la garganta seca - tener ~ apetito/debilidad/ganas de comer - caerse de sueño, cerrársele a uno los ojos, entrarle a uno ~ hambre/sueño/frío - estar/sentirse/encontrarse ~ fatigado/hecho polvo - estar muerto - fatigarse - no poder ~ más/uno con su alma - estar ~ malo/mareado - sentir ~ malestar/molestias/náuseas - encontrarse ~ bien/mal/fatal/de pena - dar ~ un dolor/un pinchazo - ruborizarse, sonrojarse - estar (sordo) como una tapia, no ver tres en un burro - temblar como una hoja, poner(se) ~ la carne de gallina/la piel de gallina/los pelos de punta	- entrarle a uno ~ hambre/frío/calor/sueño - tener un hambre ~ voraz/canina/atroz - tener ~ pesadez/sopor/somnolencia - tener un sueño ~ ligero/profundo/pesado - estar ~ famélico/tieso de frío - sudar como un pollo - andar ~ cansado/agotado/hecho polvo - estar ~ exhausto/reventado - estar uno ~ que se muere/para el arrastre - no poder dar un paso más - ver las estrellas

Figure 2. Plan curricular Nociones específicas. Inventario A1-C2 2.3 Sensaciones y Perceptiones fisicas**.**

Notes

[1] This publication has made use of the entry **work** of the English Vocabulary Profile. This resource is based on extensive research using the Cambridge Learner Corpus and is part of the English Profile programme, which aims to provide evidence about language use that helps to produce better language teaching materials. See http://www.englishprofile.org for more information.

[2] According to http://englishprofile.org/ there are learning specifications for Basque, Catalan, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, Galician, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish and Welsh.

[3] English Profile reaches C2. Italian profile up to B2 was published in 2010. *Profile deutsch*, after a first version A1-B2 developed in co-operation between Austria, Germany and Switzerland, reached C2 with its 2.0 version in 2005. *Plan Curricular*, it is to say the Spanish as L2 profile, was published in 2006 by Instituto Cervantes.and reaches C2, while *Un Referentiel: Niveau B2 Livre + CD*, the French profile, edited by Jean-Claude Beacco, Simon Bouquet et. al. appeared in 2004 and *Le Niveau A1*appeared in 2006, both printed by Didier, Paris.

[4] The *Guide* mentions as an example names of food which are needed in A1, but their list is not final.

[5] With the cooperation of Austrian Culture Ministry and of the Eidgenössische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren.

[6] http://www.englishprofile.org/index.php

[7] Boogards (2008, p. 1235) deals with the marking of high frequency words in the most recent editions of the big five learners dictionaries of English, and remarks that "more and more information about the frequency or importance of a core vocabulary is provided.[…] A comparison between the data presented in different dictionaries casts some doubt on the reliability of these indication".

[8] As for instance *check-in* (s.m.) in the A1 Italian list in observance of the **point 3 point 3** of *Specific notion.*

[9] We introduce numbering in the list for cross-reference sake inside this paper

[10] Though the article of e-Großworterbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache 4.0 2003, reproduced at its side, labels *wer* as 'Indefinitpronomen'.

[11] The French *Niveau B2* has an index listing words from the inventories and italicized words, such as *refuser* 'to refuse', which forward to functions, not to an "expression des notions", such as *réfrigérateur* 'fridge', which is in Roman type.

[12] *Profile deutsch* (2005) reaches C1 and C2 and therefore "Zur Ergänzung des Wortschatzes wurde ein vollständiges Wörterbuch für Deutsch als fremdsparache in die bestehende Struktur integriert". (p. 6).

[13] The English profile gives also the country from where the author student comes.

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