

CEFRL: THIS WAY OUT!

CECRL : PAR ICI LA SORTIE !

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Acronyms

CEFRL: Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*, Strasbourg, Language Policy Unit, 260 p., <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97> (COE 2001).

CoE's-LPU: Language Policies Unit of the Council of Europe

CV: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors*, February 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989> (COE 2018)

Back cover

In February 2018, the Council of Europe published, more than 15 years after the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforth "CEFRL"), a Companion

volume supposed to complete the 2001 document, with new scales of descriptors, especially for mediation. This late addition ignores all the criticisms of the CEFRL formulated in the meantime, as if this document were the definitive and unsurpassable reference in language-culture didactics. The first three parts of this book, *CEFRL: This Way Out!*, provide a close critique of these two publications, at the end of which it appears that the project of the CEFRL and its Companion Volume can be summarized in a few words: pretending to deal with teaching-learning-assessment, but in reality, working only to promote a limited and commercial form of assessment, namely certification. In the first two parts, the stranglehold of private interests on the European project of school language teaching is established, with supporting evidence, while the third part highlights the many theoretical and practical dead ends and inadequacies of the CEFRL, in particular its dependence on a single methodology, the communicative approach.

The last two parts outline two parallel ways out of the CEFRL, both from a resolutely plurimethodological perspective: an "integrated assessment" that takes into account all the issues at stake in the language teaching-learning process; and an "integrated plurilingual methodology" that draws on the already existing in terms of learners' language repertoires and on the already constructed in terms of knowledge about languages and language-learning competencies.

The "exit" of the CEFRL is now open, free and wide: the authors' wish is that researchers, trainers, publishers and teachers borrow it in great numbers, and develop it!

General introduction

The idea of this four-handed work came to us spontaneously after we had each read the February 2018 CEFRL Companion Volume (henceforth "CV"): we were surprised to find that it repeated all the guidelines of the 2001 CEFRL:

- It does not take into account the numerous and diverse criticisms addressed to the CEFRL: Berchoud, 2017; Comerford, 2010; Friederike Delouis, 2008; Lefranc, 2009c; Maurer, 2011; Migeot, 2017; Prieur, 2017; Puren, 2006d, 2007b, 2012b, 2015f; Simons, 2011; to limit ourselves to only the texts cited in the present work.

-It does not take into consideration the evolutions that have taken place in the meantime in language didactics, such as the theoretical and practical developments of an actional perspective combined with the communicative approach but clearly distinct, the elaboration of a complex model of cultural competence, or the awareness of the need to build both a plurilingual and plurimethodological approach to language-culture learning-teaching-evaluation.

-It does not take into account the design of the new international standardized assessments such as PIRLS and PISA, whose competence descriptors, because they are centered on the processes and not on the products, allow for an effective linkage of assessment with teaching-learning.

-As a result, it reproduces in the new assessment tools it proposes, in particular for literary reading, plurilingual competence and mediation, the same shortcomings and defects as the CEFRL.

All these criticisms are grouped together in the third part of our book. We have preceded them with two parts that we felt were essential.

-**The first part** deals with "the Companion volume project". It highlights the only real objective of the private organizations that have taken de facto control of the orientations of the Language Policies Unit of the Council of Europe (henceforth CoE's-LPU): for them, with the aim of commercializing the certifications they deliver, it is a question of maintaining at all costs, to the point of incoherence and denial, an image of excellence both of the CEFRL evaluation system they claim and of the relationship between this evaluation system and teaching-learning.

-**The second part** studies the mode of production and the mode of writing of the CV, for a result whose quality is very far from the current academic standards.

-**The third part** brings together our criticisms of the contents of the CV, which are developed and argued, particularly with regard to evaluation: they mainly concern the CV, but are equally valid for the CEFRL. It is these criticisms that justify the title of our book, namely that it is urgent to "get out of the Framework", that is to say, to break away from the logic that it imposes, which is to construct curricula and programs, to evaluate the progress of students and to pilot their learning on the basis of an individual certification evaluation system, which is moreover monolingual and "mono-methodological", in this case elaborated with reference to the communicative approach alone.

We believe that the three parts of this critical set can provide teachers and trainers, who may find it difficult to resist the "CEFRL injunction", with the weapons of an indispensable resistance.

-In **the fourth and fifth parts**, we develop for them the idea suggested by the title of our book, namely that there are ways out of the CEFRL: the two alternative proposals presented, developed and exemplified, have in common that they refocus didactic reflection and intervention on methodology, *i.e.* on the ways in which the processes of teaching, learning and evaluation are related. We had already traced this path, in the wake of a critical analysis of the CEFRL, in a 2006 article entitled "The Common European Framework of Reference and the methodological reflection in language and culture teaching: a project to be resumed" (Puren, [2006b](#)). We were simply taking up an old proposal by René Richterich, in his 1985 work, which is still relevant today: contrary to what its title *-Besoins langagiers et objectifs d'apprentissage* (Language Needs and Learning Objectives)- suggests, and to the use that is most often made of it, he clearly distanced himself from a conception of teaching-learning based on a prior definition of teaching content -the same one that is found in the CEFRL, whose evaluation system claims to provide the basis for establishing school programs at the expense of an approach by methodology. For R. Richterich, this approach seemed logically implied in the implementation of a true learner-centeredness:

Learning to learn a foreign language, making the learner discover his own learning strategies, making him capable of developing and exploiting them, teaching him to

become autonomous, these are some of the salient features of current pedagogy and didactics. It is interesting to note that the methodological weight is twofold: on the one hand it concerns the teacher who must find the practical means to carry out the above tasks, on the other hand it concerns the learner who must acquire a method to learn. Methodology therefore applies to both teaching and learning. (1985: 13)

As early as 1979, several years earlier, R. Richterich had published an article in a well-known and widely read journal of French as a foreign language, *Le Français dans le monde*, entitled, in a manner that could not be less ambiguous, "*L'antidéfinition des besoins langagiers comme pratique pédagogique*" ("The anti-definition of language needs as a pedagogical practice", [available online](#)). This text was also, in application of the same logic of a real focus on the learner, a plea for a prior anti-definition of methodology, *i.e.* involving what we call here a "plurimethodological approach", to be taken into account not only in teaching-learning, but also in evaluation:

From different types of objectives, discover, propose, choose possible actions: for lexicon, for example, learn words by heart with their translation, look up definitions in a bilingual dictionary, establish tables of semantic fields, guess the meaning from the context, etc.; for syntax, learn rules by heart, repeat, conjugate, observe and compare to deduce general rules [...]. (1979: 58)

The two proposals we make in our fourth and fifth parts have in common, among other things, the implementation of such a plurimethodological approach.

The fourth part sets out and illustrates the concept of "integrated evaluation": this is an evaluation that is not thought of as having to model the teaching-learning process, as is the case in the CEFRL, but rather as an integral part of this process. This implies considering it in all the complexity of its multiple functions and in relation to the different learning methodologies available, *i.e.* within the framework of a plurimethodological approach.

We present several examples. The first is that of the "standard practice procedure" in which each of the activities, which correspond to progressive levels of mastery of language forms, has been evaluated separately since the direct methodology of the 1900s. The second example is made up of proposals for training exercises and evaluation of the different cognitive activities of the (also historical) model of the "explanation of texts", a reference school action of the direct and active methodologies of the 1900s-1960s, but which retains all its relevance, as can be seen by comparing them to the activities taken into account in the current international assessments PIRLS and PISA. The third example is that of the "General referentials of learning and evaluation of reading comprehension competence" which we (Puren) have recently participated in the elaboration of in Algeria in the framework of a project for the improvement of the teaching-learning of national and foreign languages. Finally, we present a particular case of integrated assessment, that of PISA, whose results –the assessment of reading comprehension in the mother tongue or reference language (henceforth "L1")– are correlated with surveys of the various educational actors, in order to draw from them ideas for improvement not only of the teaching-learning process, but of the overall management of the educational system.

We have just referred to the international standardized assessments PIRLS and PISA, both of which focus on the evaluation of competences. This gives us the opportunity to make a

few immediate clarifications, which we feel are essential in order to clarify our positions on questions that could give rise to suspicions, accusations or even accusations of intent on the part of some of our readers, which could influence their reading of our work.

1) The concept of "competence" as it has spread over the last three decades in all areas of evaluation and training certainly comes from the business world, but this does not invalidate it ipso facto. The fact that this concept is often used in companies to exploit employees does not allow us to discredit the thoughts and proposals of management specialists who develop it, any more than the massively unequal and selective functioning of the French education system allows us to discredit the thoughts and proposals of pedagogues who want to put differentiated teaching at the service of success for all. Concepts, as we know, can, like all intellectual tools, be used in the service of opposing values: thus "professional competencies" to justify specialized training limited to the future job; "transversal competencies", on the contrary, to justify general training opening up to broad employment possibilities.

On the other hand, precisely in language didactics, the concept of competence has been integrated since the beginning of the 20th century, under the names of "reuse", "assimilation" or even "appropriation", as the final objective of the standard school procedure of exercising (cf. [Puren, 2016c](#)), which consists in giving learners the ability to reuse language forms for their personal expression, *i.e.*, in situations other than those in which they have been taught. And the notion of "communicative competence", with its different components, has been imposed since the 1970s in this discipline as well as in business management, without any of its specialists, to our knowledge, having denounced any ideological flaw in it. To limit oneself to discrediting a concept globally on the sole pretext of its origin and/or a given use in a given field is akin to single-mindedness, or cognitive hemiplegia, and betrays in these detractors an ideological approach that is as intellectually reductive as the one they denounce in their opponents.

2) For the last three decades, all large companies have adopted the "project approach", and some sociologists have rightly pointed out that it has enabled them to move from hierarchical control, which is less and less supported by the employees, to control by the employees themselves, as the project leads them to mobilize, to invest themselves, and thus to take personal responsibility. The same criticism can be levelled at the project mode in training and education, not to mention the long-documented abuses to which it can give rise in these two fields.

But the first promoters of the project, well before the specialists in company management, were, for example, Dewey, in the USA, or Piaget, in France, pedagogues who can hardly be suspected of the slightest sympathy towards capitalist ideology. So that to discredit on principle in language-culture didactics the actional perspective, whose project is naturally the social action of reference, without considering that it can be the occasion to integrate into language didactics Dewey's Learning by doing and Piaget's "social pedagogy", is to commit a great injustice with regard to their ideas and to those who still claim them today; and it is also to foolishly deprive oneself of a concept rich in great pedagogical and didactic potentialities, useful, precisely, to counterbalance the limits and drifts of the paradigm of the inter-individual communication that has dominated during the three decades of the exclusivist communicative approach. Limiting oneself to denouncing the supposed managerial origins of the action-oriented perspective, or even accusing its promoters of being neoliberal supporters, allows some people to adopt the nice postures of progressive

intellectuals, but does a disservice to the learners, to the teachers, to the discipline... and finally to the very image of these accusers.

3) International standardized assessments such as the PIRLS and PISA surveys (see final bibliography) are not free of criticism as regards their scientific conception, and even more so as regards the purely managerial logics that they can contribute to importing or reinforcing in school education. Nevertheless, as we will show in our book, they show that it is possible to design assessment systems that are as "scientific" - in the sense, here, of being statistically equipped - as those of international certifications based on the scales and descriptors of the CEFRL, but which are oriented towards the learning process and not towards the product of use. Therefore, the former are likely not to reduce teaching and learning practices - as the latter do under the effect of the famous teaching/learning to the test -, but on the contrary to enrich these practices and to provide teachers and learners with information that both will consider reliable, and that can serve as a basis for joint reflections, negotiations and decisions in the service of the improvement of the joint teaching-learning process.

"Dangers are also opportunities": it is not because this idea is frequently found in the writings of specialists in business management, that it does not have all its relevance in didactics of language-cultures as elsewhere: a rational strategy with regard to worrying changes which seem to have to be imposed in the teaching of languages is not to refuse them in principle and in block, but to accompany them in order to arrange them, to reorient them, or even if necessary to subvert them, by putting their dynamics and the means they mobilize at the service of one's own values. We admit that this strategy is debatable, and it will undoubtedly be immediately rejected without debate by those who do not conceive that others can defend the same values as they do while promoting strategies other than their own. The devil, they say, is in the details; he can just as easily hide in big ideas that are as generous as they are exclusivist, as we have shown elsewhere in connection with the ideological version of plurilingualism that has been the CoE's-LPU since the early 2000s (Maurer, 2011). We will see that the CEFRL and its Complementary Volume are another good examples of what ultimately functions as a kind of intellectual terrorism.

The fifth part presents the main lines, along with several concrete examples of implementation, of an "integrated plurilingual methodology" (henceforth "IPM"), known until now in language-culture didactics as "integrated didactics". It also implements a plurimethodological approach: the teaching methodologies of the different languages learned –including that of the L1– are integrated in the sense that they are put together in coherence and synergy in the service of the learning process. Mediation, of which the authors of the CV present the evaluation grids as a great novelty, finds here a completely different use, oriented towards the teaching-learning process, than that of communication: in the IPM, in fact, the languages already known by the students ensure a mediation function between them and the new language.

Seven years after the questioning of plurilingualism as a new dominant ideology (Maurer, 2011), which led one of our opponents to classify us among the champions of "the necessary separation and impermeability of languages" (Forlot, 2012: 113), and to advise not to put "[this] book in the hands of all language teachers" (ibid.: 112). This is a misunderstanding, to say the least, and we hope that our proposal of IPM will convince readers, including defenders and illustrators of other plurilingual approaches, who are well

situated with different options on this same side because they refuse to abandon language teaching-learning for a nebulous "language education".

The reader in a hurry –or simply already convinced of the uselessness or even the harmfulness of the CEFRL– can go directly to the 4th and 5th parts, even if the reading of the first three will allow him/her to better understand how the last two respond to the CEFRL by formulating real counter-proposals. We hope that these will be convincing enough to rally other didacticians, who will be able to develop them individually, collectively and why not with us, starting from their own didactic environments.

The way out is clear.

Chapter 1.3.4.7. A deception and a stratagem

The authors of the CEFR had taken particular care to convince readers of the rigour of their approach to the development of descriptor scales, and the first appendix is entirely devoted to this (Appendix A "Development of Competence Descriptors", pp. 150-152). After successively presenting no less than 12 development methods (the first of which, the simplest, already calls upon the services of an evaluation "expert"), they indicate the methods they used to construct their validation procedure, which begins with a very technical method that calls upon a statistical analysis model (that of George Rasch's item response¹, which they then present on page 152):

Method 12 (the last one) is in fact the only one that calibrates the descriptors in a mathematical sense. It is the one used in the development of the Common Core State Standards, after Method 2 (intuitive) and Methods 8 and 6 (qualitative).
(p. 150)

The authors of the VC present this procedure at length in Appendix 5, "Development and validation of the new descriptors" (p. 183-192) with a full-page diagram already reproduced earlier (p. 50), and emphasizing, even more than the authors of the CEFR, the importance of the material and human resources mobilized:

Qualitative validation

137 institutions participated in the validation. 990 people participated in face-to-face workshops at these institutions in February-March 2015. (p. 185)

Quantitative validation

189 institutions took part in the next stage, bringing together 1294 participants from 45 countries.

The Rasch model is presented again, this time in a box on page 187 of Appendix A :

The Rasch model, named after the Danish mathematician George Rasch, is the most widely used of the probability models that operationalize latent trait theory (also called item response theory: IRT). The model analyzes the degree of correspondence of an item to the underlying construct (= latent trait) that is measured. It also estimates, on a mathematical scale, the difficulty values (= the difficulty of the item) and then the ability values (e.g.

¹ To appreciate the technicality of this, one can consult (and why not take...) the distance learning course by Roulin, (Université Savoie Mont-Blanc), "Leçons de psychométrie", www.psychometrie.jlroulin.fr/. To appreciate the central place currently occupied by the item response model in the development of standardized assessments, see Rocher 2015.

the degree of competence of an individual with respect to the trait in question). This model is used for two main purposes, among others:

- developing item banks for tests;*
- analysis questionnaires.*

[...]

The advantage of the Rasch model is that, unlike classical test theory, the values obtained are generalizable to other groups within the same statistical population (who share sufficiently the same characteristics).

The objective calibration and potential generalization of the values obtained make this model particularly suitable for determining at which level to place the "I can" descriptors on a common scale of the CEFR type.

Everything is done in this way in the CEFR, and even more so in the VC, to impress the reader: what language teacher, alone and even with a few colleagues, without any statistical competence or experience in the elaboration and validation of standardized evaluation items, can feel able to contest the rigor displayed by such a procedure guaranteeing the excellence of the descriptors?

Two disturbing contradictions, however, draw attention:

1) While the authors of the CEFR and the VC emphasize the importance of the material, technical and human resources that were necessary for the rigorous development of their descriptors, they invite teachers to develop their own:

Users of the CEFR are encouraged to select the CEFR levels and descriptors that they believe meet the needs of their learners, to adapt the way they are formulated to fit the particular context, and to add their own descriptors when they deem it necessary. (VC: 43)

Confusing passages such as the two below, which are supposed to specify the terms and conditions for using the descriptor scales, can only add to the perplexity of teachers:

However, it is not usually recommended that communicative activity descriptors be included in the criteria given to an examiner to score a performance on a written or oral test if the results are to appear in terms of proficiency level. Indeed, in order to account for competence, the assessment should not focus on a particular performance but rather tend to judge the generalizable skills evidenced by that performance. Of course, there may be excellent educational reasons for focusing on the success of a particular activity, but the generalization of results is not normally the focus of attention in early language learning (CEFR, p. 137).

The descriptor scales are therefore reference tools. They are not intended to be used as assessment tools, although they can be a resource for developing such tools, such as checklists for one level or a grid for several categories at different levels (VC, p. 42).

2) As language specialists and not entirely ignorant of the rules of natural logic, teachers can easily see in the descriptor statements, as we did ourselves above, many gaps and problems that prevent them from designing their own evaluations in a rigorous manner: approximation in the use of certain concepts, vagueness of certain descriptors, inadequacy of the criteria used, lack of follow-up and inconsistencies in their distribution among the different levels.

The explanation for these two contradictions is the implementation of what must be called a real deception on the part of the organizations in charge of the CEFR and the VC². The statements of the descriptors can remain imprecise for certification professionals because their precision is in fact given by the first items attached to them at the end of the long

² On the subject of this paragraph, see also *infra* sub-chapter 4.1.3.2.

and very technical initial calibration procedure. The reader cannot "understand" the descriptors once they have been elaborated - in the sense that he/she cannot concretely grasp the level of competence to which each of them corresponds - if he/she does not have these items. As noted above (subchapter 1.2.1), "the mere fact that teachers then use the descriptors of these level scales themselves to create their own items and 'correct' them does not mean that their assessments ... are standardised, and it does not in itself guarantee the validity or reliability of their extrapolations.

The creation of new items - necessary for renewing the tests - is not done by the certification bodies on the basis of descriptors, which are far too imprecise for that, but on the basis of already calibrated items: the new items are, for example, mixed with the old ones in the validation tests, so as to eliminate from among the new items those for which the students obtain a score that is too far removed - plus or minus - from the scores they obtain on the old, already calibrated items. This is why the banks of validated items are protected by the certification bodies as carefully as the manufacturing secrets of an industrial company: we invite our readers, in order to see for themselves, to compile, as we had to do (Puren) for an expertise work with the Algerian MEN, the so-called "liberated" items³ of the PISA reading comprehension tests from the set of French documents published by the OECD⁴. It will be seen that nothing is done to facilitate this work: random dispersion of item reproductions between the different documents, no complete set of items proposed for any test, even greater limitation of examples of item correction guides. One wonders, then, why the authors of the CEFRL and the VC are inviting teachers to do a job that they know they have neither the training nor the means to do⁵. The only possible answer is the following, and we have already given it in sub-chapter 1.1.1: it is the certification bodies that are effectively "in charge", and they are implementing a clever stratagem. The aim is to promote their own qualifications to these teachers, and to the managers and decision-makers of the school systems, while ensuring that they are unable to compete with them. This inability can only convince education officials, policy makers in their countries, and ultimately the teachers themselves, that the only reasonable decision is to entrust these organizations with the certification of their students in parallel with the national examinations, and probably then in replacement of these examinations, since these certifications are the only ones that can claim international recognition.

The operation to conquer the French market, which is based on this stratagem, is already well under way, as we have shown in this same sub-chapter 1.1.1, with the active cooperation of the French Ministry of Education, which is trying to convince public opinion that the results of language teaching are bad and those of national exams are not credible, that the alignment of school evaluations with "international standards" is indispensable, and that the only effective way to do so is to register all students for international certifications⁶.

³ That is to say, made public: you will appreciate the metaphor...

⁴ All these documents are available on the same page at www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa_19963785.

⁵ Language inspectors do not have the means to do so either, as can be seen from an analysis of the "Reading" grid, p. 4, of the official document "Descriptors of abilities from levels A1 to C1", B.O. special n° 9 of 30 September 2010, French Ministry of Education, . *B.O. special* n° 9 of September 30, 2010, French Ministry of Education, https://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/special_9/20/7/langues_vivantes_155207.pdf.

⁶ The PIRLS and PISA assessment tests are not designed to assess individual students, but to collectively assess cohorts of students.

There is, however, at least one other solution, which would consist, for example, within the French national education system, of developing competency scales *with* their banks of items that could be used by teachers for institutionalized continuous assessments during the course of the curriculum and for the final baccalaureate examination, as Luxembourg has done with the EpStAN, "standardized tests"⁷. The French national education system has the necessary scientific and technical skills, as demonstrated by the development, implementation and processing of the standardized CEDRE assessments (Cycle des Évaluations Disciplinaires Réalisées sur Échantillons), and the fact that their author, the DEPP (Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance), is also in charge of the PIRLS and PISA surveys for France⁸. However, the political will to do so by mobilizing the necessary resources and means is still required, and it is clearly this political will that is lacking in France⁹.

⁷ "Standardized Tests," NAPS, <https://epstan.lu/fr/landing-page-fr/>. Many examples of assessment tasks can be found at www.epstan.lu/cms/fr/materiel-d-information.

⁸ Presentation of CEDRE on the M.E.N. website: "The cycle of disciplinary evaluations carried out on samples (CEDRE), which began in 2003, measures the skills of students at the end of school and at the end of secondary school. It covers most of the subject areas in reference to the programs: mastery of language (school), general and language skills (middle school), foreign languages, history-geography and civic education, experimental sciences, mathematics. The presentation of the results makes it possible to situate the performance of the students on a scale of levels. Renewed at regular intervals, these evaluations allow the evolution of the "level of the students" to be followed over time. The detailed analysis of skills in the various disciplines is in itself a very rich material for teachers."

(www.education.gouv.fr/cid81218/methodologie-du-cycle-des-evaluations-disciplinaires-realisees-sur-echantillon-cedre-en-fin-d-ecole-et-fin-de-college.html).

Note the central place of work on items (and not on descriptors) in the presentation, on this page, of the "implementation of evaluation". See also "Méthodologie du cycle des évaluations disciplinaires réalisées sur échantillon (CEDRE) en fin d'école et fin de collège" (Methodology of the cycle of disciplinary evaluations carried out on a sample basis (CEDRE) at the end of school and the end of collège), www.education.gouv.fr/cid81218/methodologie-du-cycle-des-evaluations-disciplinaires-realisees-sur-echantillon-cedre-en-fin-d-ecole-et-fin-de-college.html, and "La maîtrise du langage et de la langue française en fin d'école primaire" (Mastery of language and the French language at the end of elementary school), Note Évaluation 04.10 October 2003, <https://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/21/9/5219.pdf>. This second document is older than the first, but it has the advantage of presenting the "Scale of Comprehension" used at that time. For the English language, one may also consult the presentation by Beuzon S., Garcia É. & Marchois C. (2015).

⁹ In its 2017 report (available online: see final bibliography), the Cour des Comptes deplored the fact that CEDRE did not have the resources to organize these assessments in all school disciplines with the frequency required to make effective use of their results.

Chapter 3.6.2 Communicative approach and Action-Oriented Approach e in the CEFRL and CV proficiency grids (extract)

[...] the authors of the CV do not make any changes to the CEFRL descriptors, or even any additions, that could be analyzed as an introduction of actional criteria.

–“Notes, messages and forms”, CEFRL p. 84

| | NOTES, MESSAGES & FORMS |
|----|---|
| C2 | As B1 |
| C1 | As B1 |
| B2 | As B1 |
| B1 | <i>Can take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems.</i> |
| | <i>Can write notes conveying simple information of immediate relevance to friends, service people, teachers and others who feature in his/her everyday life, getting across comprehensibly the points he/she feels are important.</i> |
| A2 | <i>Can take a short, simple message provided he/she can ask for repetition and reformulation. Can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need.</i> |
| A1 | <i>Can write numbers and dates, own name, nationality, address, age, date of birth or arrival in the country, etc. such as on a hotel registration form.</i> |

Below is the long analysis we made of this CEFRL grid in Puren 2009c:

One will recognize, I hope, that an evaluation grid with six levels, four of which are defined by the same descriptors, constitutes a real docimological aberration: it means indeed that for the same observed performance (the one indicated here in B1), the evaluator could attribute to the productions of candidates for the certification, as regards the competence of written interaction (since it is about written interaction), as well the level B1 as the level B2, C1 or C2! But on what criteria? On the basis of which criterion: " on the basis of the client ", as we say colloquially?! [...]¹⁰

[First question:] Why is it that the authors of the CEFRL, in their scale of six levels of competence, cannot find specific descriptors for the three higher levels of competence?

The answer lies, in my opinion, in their unconscious and systematic application of the information-communication paradigm: all the descriptors they use here concern, as we can see, the punctual transmission of information content. However,

¹⁰ [In reality, it is the teachers who are confronted with such a docimological aberration when they want to use these descriptors directly for their own correction of students' productions. This is not the case, on the other hand, for the designers of standardized assessments working in certification agencies, who will simply propose in their tests calibrated items of maximum level B1 to which they will attribute the same score, without then needing to worry at all about the definition of the higher levels. This is an illustration of what we denounced in sub-chapter 1.3.4.4 as a deception of teachers, to whom the competency scales are presented as scientific assessment models available to them, whereas they are unusable as they stand.

this paradigm proves inadequate in texts such as notes and messages, which as "working documents" are by nature part of a logic of social action, that is to say, collaborative and durable.

In this type of texts, in fact, the information must be treated, from its elaboration to its transmission, in relation to its foreseen or foreseeable use by the addressee(s), in relation to what he/she/they will have to or will be able to do with it. In other words, the notes and messages imply an action on the information that the informant must carry out according to the action by the information that he/she foresees that the recipient(s) will have to carry out. It is precisely in the joint consideration of these two actions (the action on and by the information) in different temporalities that lies the difference between what I will call "informational co-action", on the one hand, and communicative interaction, on the other.

Second question: One really wonders what forms have to do with this mess (in this case, with this group of texts), even if, if one looks hard enough, one can say that a form is a document characterized by a very strong upstream action on the information as one wishes the user to communicate it, by means of a very directive formatting (lines to be filled in, boxes to be ticked, etc.) conceived precisely as a function of the action one wishes to carry out with the information thus collected. But there is still no interaction in the sense of reciprocity, and even less common action on and through the information thus transmitted.

The most plausible answer to this second question is that this is another effect of the information-communication paradigm on which the authors of the CEFRL have remained. What has united notes, messages and forms in their minds, as it seems to me in the descriptors they use, is the simplicity of the information requested/transmitted (they assume that it is few and factual) and the simplicity of the language used to transmit it (they assume that it is written in short sentences or even in telegraphic style). Hence, very logically, they found it impossible to propose in this grid more complex criteria and performance indicators for the three higher levels B2, C1 and C2, for which it would have been necessary to resort to criteria of informational competence such as relevance in the choice or design of the medium, the information content, the recipient and the moment of transmission.

(Puren, 2009: 25-26)

It is in application of the idea expressed at the very end of the above excerpt that we presented, a few years later, the following examples of possible actional criteria for this grid, limited to notes and messages (Puren, 2016g: 58):

| NOTES and MESSAGES | |
|---------------------------|---|
| C2 | Can evaluate the effectiveness of his/her overall activity in order to benefit from it in the future. |
| C1 | Can communicate information to the right person(s) at the right time. |
| B2 | Can select and present information according to the needs of the recipient(s). |
| ... | ... |

The implementation of such criteria, as we can see, requires placing the candidates, during the evaluation tests, in a kind of "global micro-simulation" - they are given an identity, a function, a working environment and a mission as recipients, as well as recipients characterized in the same way, as is the case in the two French institutional certifications "compatible with the action perspective the DCL, Diplôme de Compétence en Langue, and the CLES, Certificat de Compétences en Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur, which assess a person's competence to work in a foreign language-culture respectively as an employee in a company and as a university student (see "DLC" and "CLES" in the final bibliography).

–“Notes, messages and forms”, Companion Volume, p. 95

Reminder: the descriptors present in the CEFRL and included in the CV are in blue type, the descriptors added in the CV are in black type.

| NOTES, MESSAGES AND FORMS | |
|---------------------------|--|
| C2 | No descriptors available; see B2 |
| C1 | No descriptors available; see B2 |
| B2 | Can take or leave complex personal or professional messages, provided he/she can ask clarification or elaboration if necessary. |
| B1 | Can take routine messages that are likely to occur in a personal, professional or academic context. Can take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems. |
| | Can write notes conveying simple information of immediate relevance to friends, service people, teachers and others who feature in his/her everyday life, getting across comprehensibly the points he/she feels are important. Can take messages over the phone containing several points, provided that the caller dictates these clearly and sympathetically. |
| A2 | Can take a short, simple message provided he/she can ask for repetition and reformulation. |
| | Can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. Can fill in personal and other details on most everyday forms, e.g. to request a visa or visa waiver, to open a bank account, to send a letter recorded delivery, etc. |
| A1 | Can write numbers and dates, own name, nationality, address, age, date of birth or arrival in the country etc. such as on a hotel registration form. |
| | Can leave a simple message giving information on e.g. where he/she has gone, what time he/she will be back. (e.g. 'Shopping: back at 5 p.m.'). |
| Pre-A1 | Can fill in very simple registration forms with basic personal details: name, address, nationality, marital status. |

This 2018 version of the CV does indeed make "additions" to the 2001 CEFRL version in terms of levels (addition of "Pre-A1"), examples, indication of the three types of texts, domains as well as difficulty and performance criteria; level B2 is this time described in a specific way, so that it is now the three higher levels, and not the four, that are described in an identical way. As in many CEFRL grids taken up and completed in the CV, it would be

possible to point out inaccuracies and inconsistencies¹¹, but the main point here is that no substantive corrections have been made: forms are still integrated into the other two types of documents (this time they are even specified in some descriptors, like the other two), and the action criteria do not appear at the higher levels, with the possible exception of the performance criterion "leaving messages" (cf. The action criteria do not appear at the higher levels, with the possible exception of the performance criterion "leaving messages" (cf. "leaving messages" in B2), which one wonders, however, to what extent it could be concretely applied in non-scripted evaluation tests other than to written production, which is already covered by the performance "taking messages".

-“Co-operating” (CEFRL, p. 86)

| CO-OPERATING | |
|--------------|---|
| C2 | As C1 |
| C1 | <i>Can relate own contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.</i> |
| B2 | <i>Can give feedback on and follow up statements and inferences and so help the development of the discussion. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground, confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.</i> |
| B1 | <i>Can exploit a basic repertoire of language and strategies to help keep a conversation or discussion going. Can summarise the point reached in a discussion and so help focus the talk.</i> |
| | <i>Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding and help keep the development of ideas on course. Can invite others into the discussion.</i> |
| A2 | <i>Can indicate when he/she is following.</i> |
| A1 | No descriptor available |

Below we repeat the long analysis we made of this CEFRL grid in Puren 2009c.

It is to be expected that the collective dimension will be strongly emphasized in the proposed scale of "cooperation".

And indeed, it appears clearly at levels B1 ("facilitate focus on the topic", "facilitate further conversation or discussion") and B2 ("invite others to participate", "facilitate the development of the discussion").

But the descriptor chosen for the highest level of competence (C1-C2, "Can skilfully link his/her own contribution to that of other interlocutors", emphasis added) focuses on individual competence and not on the effectiveness of participation in joint work. On the scale of competences of a social actor, the descriptors proposed

¹¹ The qualifiers "usual" (B1) and "complex" (B2) are heterogeneous in nature, and therefore cannot be used to characterize progressive levels of difficulty in the same type of document (here, messages). The "academic" messages in B1 disappear in B2, as if they could not be of a level as complex as the "professional" messages, and more complex than the personal messages, which are found alone in B2. These "academic" messages in B2, which correspond to the fourth "domain" proposed by the authors of the CEFRL - the "educational" domain - are not preceded by "academic" messages at A1 level, which is indicative of the little importance given to learning in this document.

here for levels B1 and B2 are certainly more important than this personal language-only know-how proposed in C1 and C2.

This scale also takes into account another personal "skill" such as the one already retained in the C2 level descriptor of the "General oral interaction" grid ("Can come back to a difficulty and restructure it so skillfully that the interlocutor barely notices it"). The valuing of these two skills - placed as descriptors for the higher levels - apparently stems from a conception of collective work in which the main issue would be to facilitate language communication and make it effective.

But here we are really in the middle of a communicativist ideology, which the authors of the CEFRL have decidedly failed to overcome: in order to cooperate well, it is not enough to communicate well; knowing how to communicate obviously makes it possible to solve communicational problems, but it does not make it possible to solve, and may on the contrary have the effect of concealing, the actional problems (i.e. the different conceptions of action) and the different stakes (personal, collective and social). Actional efficiency requires that these problems and stakes be made explicit and debated by the social actors, to the point of assuming the risks of confrontation and even rupture: it is precisely the competences necessary to these activities of explicitation, debate (confrontation of ideas) and management of what was formerly called the "group dynamics" (confrontation of persons and groups) that are the "high level" competences expected of a social actor. [...]

Finally, to finish with this "cooperative" grid, let us note the perverse effect caused by the ideology of Anglo-Saxon "political correctness", which certainly explains in part the decision taken by the authors of the CEFRL to avoid, as a matter of principle, any "negative" descriptor in their scales.¹² In the example above, if they write "No descriptor available" in A1, and "[the candidate] can indicate that he/she is following what is being said" in A2, it is obviously because they forbid themselves to write in A1 "Cannot indicate that he/she is following what is being said", or "Has difficulty in indicating that he/she is following what is being said"... The same type of remark applies to all the scales proposed in the CEFRL, where it is announced that "no descriptor is available" for the first levels of competence (Puren, 2009c: 22-23)

In our 2016 article (Puren 2016g: 58), we had proposed, consistent with our 2009c analysis, the following additions (in bold).

| COOPERATE | |
|------------------|---|
| C2 | Can propose a halt to the discussion in order to make the necessary decisions to continue the cooperation. |
| [...] | [...] |
| A2 | Can indicate that he/she follows what is said. Can indicate that he/she is not following what is being said at any given time. |

¹² [Note for the present work] We have dealt with this issue in a specific sub-chapter above: 1.3.3 "The issue of positive descriptors".

| | |
|----|---|
| A1 | Can decline an invitation to cooperate in language if he/she does not feel able to, so as not to disturb others. |
|----|---|

(CEFR p. 71, my additions in bold)

The authors of the *Framework* write, in justification of the frequent absence of specific descriptors in their example grids:

*There may not be descriptors for all subcategories at each level since some activities cannot be undertaken until a given level of proficiency is achieved, while **others are no longer a goal above a certain level.*** (p. 29, emphasis added)

But this is because they only take into consideration communicative objectives. Taking the action into account leads us to consider the cases, which are frequent, where it requires declining the invitation to participate in the exchange or explicitly putting an end to it.

–“Co-operating” (CV, p. 101)

Reminder: the descriptors present in the CEFR and included in the CV are in blue type, the descriptors added in the CV are in black type.

| COOPERATING | | PROSIGN |
|--|--|---------|
| <i>Note: This scale is developed further in the scales for <i>Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers</i> and <i>Collaborating to construct meaning</i>.</i> | | |
| C2 | Can link contributions skilfully to those of other speakers, widen the scope of the interaction and help steer it towards an outcome. | |
| C1 | Can relate own contribution skilfully to those of other speakers. | |
| B2 | Can give feedback on and follow up statements and inferences and so help the development of the discussion. Can summarise and evaluate the main points of discussion on matters within his/her academic or professional competence. | |
| | Can help the discussion along on familiar ground, confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc. Can summarise the point reached at a particular stage in a discussion and propose the next steps. | |
| B1 | Can exploit a basic repertoire of language and strategies to help keep a conversation or discussion going. Can summarise the point reached in a discussion and so help focus the talk. | |
| | Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding and help keep the development of ideas on course. Can invite others into the discussion. | |
| A2 | Can indicate when he/she is following. | |
| A1 | No descriptors available | |
| Pre-A1 | No descriptors available | |

It can also be seen from this grid that the CV authors' intention was only to complete the CEFR grids, without correcting them –paradoxically, the introduction of an entire section entitled "Implementation of the action approach" in the CV (p. 27-28) did not lead to this perspective being taken into account in the grids that were taken up again, which remain

at the sole communicative paradigm to which the CEFRL was limited. The mention "No descriptor available" is extended to the new Pre-A1 level, whereas the authors had a good opportunity to implement the idea of the authors of the CEFRL, often presented as original by its commentators, according to which communication can be non-language¹³. They could have proposed the following descriptor:

| | |
|--------|---|
| Pre-A1 | Can indicate, if necessary by mimicry and gesture, that he/she cannot cooperate. |
|--------|---|

Just as communication competence, in the perspective of information management by a responsible social actor, includes knowing why, when and with whom not to communicate, so action competence includes "knowing not to participate in the action in progress", or "putting oneself in a position of observation or waiting". In other words, to implement one's competence is also to know and take into account one's level of incompetence. But it is clear that the evaluation of this aspect of the social action competence cannot be done outside of scenarios or collective mini-projects, and that it would also imply integrating a part of formative self-assessment and co-assessment, which is not foreseen in the certifying evaluations proposed by the organizations controlling the UPL-CoE.

Conclusion of the first part (extract)

An examination of the descriptors, particularly those in grids other than the "general grids", shows that they are often very poorly constructed and in fact unusable as they stand: approximation in the use of certain concepts, vagueness of certain descriptors, inadequacy of the criteria used and inconsistencies in their distribution are their fatal flaws. When the authors of the CEFR invite teachers to use these descriptors to create their own tests, it is a real strategy of smoke and mirrors: Neither teachers nor inspectors actually have the means or the technical skills, which will "logically" lead education officials to turn in the end to organizations that have experience in the field... One is even entitled to wonder whether the mediocrity of the proposed descriptors is not part of a deliberate strategy designed to protect a market that has been created by proposing a "European Framework of Reference for *International Language Certification*", which should be the true title of the CEFR.

We can now understand why the authors of the CEFR emphasize, in their "Warning", the priority they give to learning and teaching. When they announce as their second main objective that their descriptors should "**facilitate the exchange of information between practitioners and learners** so that the former can tell the latter what they expect of them in terms of learning and how they will try to help them" (p. 4, emphasis added) would be a nice joke if it were not in fact part of a well-thought-out strategy whose

¹³ Cf. CEFRL chap. 4.4.5 "Non-verbal communication", pp. 88-90, and the repetition of the idea in CV, p. 28.

performance would certainly merit being ranked at C2 in a management school's "Market Conquest" competency scale.

To develop long critiques of the CEFR and VC descriptors from the sole didactic point of view, as we have often done ourselves (Puren), is not only irrelevant to the bodies "in charge", but on the contrary reinforces the image of a text that would be important for educational leaders, teachers and trainers. The language educators involved in the Council of Europe have been either useful idiots or cynical profiteers, or a mixture of both, with all the nuances that the complexity of human psychology allows. We acknowledge that we ourselves have deserved to be condemned to bear the first, unenviable title¹⁴, even if we ask for a reduction in sentence for having been so without any personal gain, and for having realized for some years now that we were wrong (cf. the title of our 2012 review article, "Pour en finir avec le CECR" (Puren, 2012b).

(pp. 83-84)

General conclusion

We have come to the end of this long journey, which began with the reading of the Companion Volume (CV) and ended with a thorough re-examination of the CEFRL, followed by two complementary counter-proposals. The CV, in fact, served as a gateway to the CEFRL, which many of the educationalists with whom we discussed the project wondered whether it was still worthwhile to continue criticizing it. Wasn't this, in fact, a rearguard action? Wasn't everyone already in agreement about its shortcomings? This would have been the case if the CEFRL had been outdated, weighed down by its cumbersome writing style, discredited by its approximations, and plagued by its total lack of reflection on methodology; if an alternative had emerged since its publication... But none of this has happened: on the contrary, every day the CEFRL occupies a growing place in educational systems, to the point that in the skeptical reactions of colleagues to any critical undertaking, there is often more discouragement than disapproval: "There is no alternative".

The publication of the CV tells us at least one thing: for the few authors who are still with us and for the new ones who have joined us, nothing has changed since 2001. The CV bears no trace of any critical look at the CEFRL, as if the object were totally untouchable, sacred, and it makes no room for any new proposal in terms of teaching-learning-evaluation, as if didactic time had stopped in 2001 and that, in this castle of the didactic Sleeping Beauty, it was only a matter of opening a few new salons: here the one of Mediation, there the one of Sign Languages.

The CV and the CEFRL retreated to the heights of splendid isolation, several feet above any academic debates.

Splendid isolation that has the appearance of autism. Ignoring what is being written in the fields of learning psychology, linguistics, and language didactics, the result is a CV that suffers from the same theoretical weaknesses as the 2001 CEFRL, sometimes even more pronounced and more glaring with the passing of time. And the heart of the project –to

¹⁴ In 2006 (Puren, 2006b), we published an article entitled "The Common European Framework of Reference and methodological reflection in language and culture teaching: a work in progress".

enclose mediation and plurilingualism in scales of descriptors, even though they are extremely complex– then appears in all its absurdity, like a technician mirage.

Let us nevertheless give the CV credit for having drawn our attention when it was published in 2018, and for having revived the critical look at the CEFRL, which had become untouchable over the years, imposed as much by the weight of the institutions (initially European and then national, but always without any critical look) as by the force of habit and the difficulty of conceiving a new, different path. In the light of this new perspective, the CEFRL-CV appears as it is at last, as a work that has skillfully diverted attention from what should always have remained the essential in language-culture didactics –the teaching-learning pair– to the benefit of evaluation alone, and even more so, of an evaluation reduced to the sole certification dimension, so particular, so little useful to the whole of the educational community, and only profitable for a few organizations that happen to be at the origin of the project. The CEFRL has succeeded in making its readers believe that it was interested in the problem of teaching-learning because it has produced a few pages on this side, but in fact they are only a few soothing speeches on plurilingualism and the plurilingual repertoire of learners; as soothing as they are irrefutable because they never go beyond a few assertions of principle and never concern themselves with giving them a real methodological content. It is up to the exegetes of CEFRL thinking, the "useful idiots", to take care of this! The authors of the CEFRL did the same for the action perspective, which was thrown out in a hurry, reduced to a few debatable examples of "tasks" (including the unforgettable "putting together a cupboard": the initiated will understand, the others will have the pleasure of discovering it) and to vague slogans that are politically correct ("the learner is a social actor") but which remained hollow for lack of specifying the conditions of their implementation. But these few touches were enough to give the illusion that the CEFRL was actually interested in teaching-learning, whereas –as we think we have sufficiently shown here– the real issue was elsewhere, in the certification activities alone. The CEFRL is an academic shell game.

You think you are lifting the pot and discovering the "teach" card, but you invariably come back to "certify". You think you've lifted the pot and found the "learn" card, but "certify" appears again. You think you've found "evaluate"... and "certify" appears again! Let's remember that in this game, it is the master of the game who inevitably wins. He only needs the credulity of others.

What the conditions for the elaboration of the CV confirm is that the CEFRL is not in reality the product of the Council of Europe, or if it is, it is only because the "Council of Europe" is only a label of respectability, of democratic appearance, a nominee, a convenient guarantee of untouchability. The CV, and before it the CEFRL but in a less obvious way, is the work of two organizations, two private profit-making companies, the Cambridge English Learning Assessment and the Eurocentres Foundation. The authors, whose names are listed in the acknowledgements but not on the cover, are all employees of these organizations. Things could not be clearer. That their private employers benefit in this context is not surprising. That they claim to be building public educational language policies on this basis is much more so.

Behind this mechanism, it is the whole process of expertise that should be questioned: the procedure for choosing experts, the construction of the framework of their mission, the mode of work by compilation within the framework of a carefully maintained inter-society; upstream, it is even the mission entrusted to the CoE's-LPU that should be questioned:

what mandate, what real political project? Downstream, we should question without taboo the permeability of educational institutions, those of France in the lead, with a Ministry of Education which, without the slightest critical eye, has made the CEFRL the cornerstone of its language teaching system in a few years, and which, now that the enterprise is well advanced, creates certifications within its public education system, only to hastily entrust them, for a fee, to the Cambridge English Learning Assessment. The loop is perfectly closed: "*L'affaire est dans le sac*" ("The matter is settled"), to put it in the terms of bad French-language thrillers.

We believe that our critical work was already necessary in itself, because it provides teachers with the means to resist injunctions to use the CEFRL which, because of the weight of hierarchies, they find difficult to oppose; it gives them the necessary arguments to denounce the private interests of the organizations at work in the CEFRL project, to show the practical uselessness and even the harmfulness of its proposals for teaching and learning, because of its exclusively certification logic, to demonstrate the weak scientific validity of this document.

But we wanted to go further and propose ways out. The undertaking is not without risk: we too may be open to criticism. But this is the academic game and it is the only one worth playing, because it is at the heart of our discipline of human sciences. We have opened up two avenues that have in common the dimension of integration, understood as bringing coherence and synergy to the different didactic traditions from one language to another.

The first track concerns precisely evaluation, the only real issue of the CEFRL, and we have taken it to show that another way is possible, another conception of evaluation, which we have called "integrated". An integrated evaluation is, in particular, in school teaching, an evaluation that is integrated with education, that is to say, that considers the different school functions of language: a means of working on documents (as in MA, Active Methodology), a means of communication (as in CA, Communicative Approach), a means of learning other languages (as in IMM, Integrated Multilingual Methodology) and a means of action (as in SAOA, Social Action-Oriented Approach). It is through this breach in the mono-methodological conception of the CEFRL, based on CA alone, that the second open avenue, that of the integrated plurilingual methodology, also passes. Here again, we show that another path is possible, non-dogmatic, non-doctrinaire, plurilingual and plurimethodological-plurimethodological because plurilingual-, adaptable according to the languages and the didactic environments. The plurilingualism of the IMM builds the teaching-learning of a new language on what is already there in terms of language repertoire and on what is already built in terms of knowledge about languages and language learning competencies.

With the opening of these two methodological paths, we hope to have indicated to all actors –educational leaders, didacticians, program designers, trainers and teachers– where the exit was.

In particular, we hope that this book will help the French Ministry of Education and all the actors involved in school language teaching in the different countries, by providing them with new, realistic avenues, adaptable to each national or regional situation, for the different levels of the curricula and for different teaching devices. Our short analysis of an extract of the French programs of 2019, presented in the conclusion of the 5th part, shows that this institutional text is already working on different orientations, not yet articulated

and combined as they could and should be, with for the moment an anchorage to the CEFRL as massive as it is inadequate and inapplicable, but with also –reason to hope– a real plurilingual opening which could easily be developed and implemented from our proposals.

Our wish at this stage is not to remain alone, scientifically speaking. These first two proposals must now be translated and adapted for different didactic configurations: they are sufficiently open to allow this. If ways out of the CEFRL have been traced, they still remain to be developed, and to be taken collectively.

When it comes time to conclude for good, we know that despite all this critical work and these counter-proposals, the CEFRL will continue to be a "reference" for at least a while. In what way, exactly? Its mark will undoubtedly continue to be affixed to language course offers and certification tests, in the form of a few well-known letters and numbers: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. These are symbols, codes that suit language schools and textbook authors well, and this is the only real use that is currently made of the CEFRL: while it is now obvious that the descriptors are not usable by teachers, these few signs constitute a common language that it seems that the community of language teachers still needs for a while to communicate.

This is true. But we hope that the reference to the CEFRL will be limited to this, that the CEFRL will be used for everything else, and that methodological reflection will be relaunched, with the objective of developing plurilingual learning and, as a means, the elaboration of effective teaching-learning-evaluation methods that are both diversified and integrated.

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