



Centre for
Canadian Language
Benchmarks

Centre des niveaux de
compétence linguistique
canadiens

Common European Framework of Reference for
Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment and
Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000/*Niveaux
de compétence linguistique canadiens 2006:*

An overview of concepts, structures and applications

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper has two purposes. Firstly, it informs the reader on both the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) and the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB) / *Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens 2006* (NCLC). Secondly, It provides a basis for questions and discussion around the uses of CEFR in a Canadian context and the potential impact on the CLB/NCLC, the standard currently established for use in Canada.

For each framework the document provides:

- an overview of the historical context,
- the aims,
- the structure,
- the uses, and
- the approach.

It also outlines some preliminary commentary on basic differences and context for use. It examines some general information regarding the content of each framework. With respect to the CEFR, it examines the influence of the Council of Europe's recommendations concerning modern languages in the late nineties, specifically plurilingualism, a salient feature and defining characteristic of the CEFR.

In addition, tables are provided for quick reference.

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PART I: COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES (CEFR)

GENERAL INFORMATION

First published in two draft versions in English and French in 1996, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was revised and published, after feedback was received from users and potential users, in 2001. Soon after, a German translation was done followed by translations in 21 other languages¹.

The CEFR is not a curriculum or methodology but a framework on which member countries of the Council of Europe (COE) can base curriculum guidelines, assessments, and teaching and learning material for second/foreign language acquisition. It is meant for learners, teachers and curriculum planners alike and contains various scales describing levels of proficiency, which allow learners' progress to be measured at different stages².

The Council of Europe was founded in 1949 to defend human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, develop agreements to standardize social and legal practices in the member states, and promote awareness of a European identity based on shared values. The COE is separate from but works in co-operation with the European Union to pursue areas of common interest.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As noted by David Little, an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and Head of the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences at Trinity College Dublin, who wrote one of the preliminary studies for the development of the framework, the CEFR did not come into existence suddenly in 1996. Instead, it was among the latest products of the Council of Europe's three and a half decades of work on language teaching and learning. The COE has always been politically as well

¹ Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 167.

² Council of Europe. Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p 1.

as culturally and educationally motivated³. In the late nineties the Council of Europe had turned its focus towards issues of unity and culture. The CEFR explains how the need for such a framework arose from Recommendation no.R (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning modern languages. These recommendations insisted on the need to:

- Equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation;
- Promote mutual understanding and tolerance;
- Maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge;
- Meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

OBJECTIVES

In an attempt to comply with the recommendations put forth by the COE, the aims of the CEFR are identified as follows:

- To promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in different countries;
- To provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications;
- To assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts⁴.

Simply put, the CEF meets the political, cultural and educational requirements that the COE established in the late nineties. As a result, the CEFR's intent was to provide a common basis for language professionals and learners to assist in overcoming barriers in European mobility by mutual recognition of qualifications among member states.

³ Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 174.

⁴ Trim, J.L.M. (2005). *The Role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in teacher training*. Lecture delivered, Graz September, p 3. Available at www.ecml.at/documents/Trim/trim.pdf

The CEFR is therefore intended for the multitude of languages, program administrations, educational institutions and countries found across Europe. In other words, the descriptors used in the scales describing proficiency can be translated and applied to any of the European languages. It is intended to be used in a variety of contexts, including primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and higher/further education⁵.

PLURILINGUALISM, LIFELONG LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE CEFR

With an intensified focus on culture and learning by the Council of Europe, the notion of plurilingualism became an important topic. The CEFR distinguishes ‘plurilingualism’ from ‘multilingualism’. Unlike multilingualism, which is the “co-existence of different languages in a given society,” plurilingualism allows a speaker to access different aspects of any language, in which they are competent, in order to communicate effectively. In a plurilingual approach languages interrelate and interact⁶.

This concept can be illustrated with a Canadian example. Often observed in bilingual parts of Canada, such as Moncton or Ottawa, speakers having a conversation in one language (English or French) may switch to the other or incorporate words or expressions from the other language in their conversation in order to communicate more efficiently and effectively. In such cases, speakers do not limit themselves, or the listener, to knowledge or competence that either person may have regarding **one** of the two languages, instead, they draw on **a range of knowledge and competencies** which they can use to express an idea and be understood, even if that requires borrowing from another language.

It is this perspective that has shaped the objectives of the CEFR and led the framework to develop a ‘linguistic repertory in which all linguistic abilities have a place’⁷. In the same manner of thought,

⁵ Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 5.

⁶ Ibid. p 4.

⁷ Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p, 5.

the CEFR recognizes that language learning is a lifelong task, and in doing so has attempted to create language learning tools which will develop both life-long learning and plurilinguistic competence, most often demonstrated in the European Language Portfolio (ELP).

The ELP model was designed to record and formally recognize diverse language learning and intercultural experience⁸. David Little states that, “the concept of the European Language Portfolio took shape in parallel with the CEFR as a way of mediating key concepts and issues,” such as obstacles in European mobility and integration, “while at the same time fostering the development of learner autonomy”⁹.

The European Language Portfolio is personal document used by the learner to record formal and informal language learning. It contains three sections: a passport, a biography and a dossier. It also helps learners plan and monitor their learning.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The CEFR is a 260-page document which explains the political and educational context in which it was created, its aims and objectives, the adopted approach, the CEFR levels and how to use them, the illustrative descriptors and scales and how they were validated, and additional information on second language learning and teaching, such as plurilingualism and assessment.

This section focuses on the structure of the framework and will discuss the stages, levels, illustrative descriptors and scales.

The CEFR has three stages: Basic User (A), Independent User (B) and Proficient User (C), which roughly equate to the classic division of Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. These stages are further divided into the following six levels, two per stage as illustrated on the next page.

⁸ Ibid, p 5.

⁹Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 177.

LEVEL		STAGE
Breakthrough	A1	Basic User
Waystage	A2	
Threshold	B1	Independent User
Vantage	B2	
Effective Operational Proficiency	C1	Proficient User
Mastery	C2	

The decision to attribute letters to each stage and level comes from the difficulty to translate some of the terms used for the levels (i.e. Waystage, Vantage). Therefore, the common reference levels are usually referred to as A1, A2, B1, etc.

The levels are illustrated through the organization of descriptors of proficiency into different scales. There are over 50 scales and the audience and purpose of the scales differ. All but one scale, the global scale, organizes the descriptors by skill. However, all scales organize the levels on a continuum so that the descriptors of a level can be compared to the descriptors of another level without having to turn pages.

Example of CEFR overall proficiency organized according to level:

C2	
C1	
B2	
B1	
A2	
A1	

Example of CEFR proficiency organized according to skill and level:

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening						
Reading						
Spoken Interaction						
Spoken Production						
Writing						

Some scales are geared towards the learner to help set goals, while others are meant for the teacher to inform curriculum planning. The CEFR uses descriptors and scales to describe proficiency in five skills, sometimes classified into three categories:

	CATEGORIES		
	Understanding	Speaking	Writing
5 SKILLS	Listening	Spoken Interaction	Writing
	Reading	Spoken production	

Despite the fact that there are such a large number of scales, there are three that are most commonly referred to. These scales introduce the CEF Levels and are empirically validated. They include:

- The Global Scale — a set of holistic descriptors¹⁰
- The Self-Assessment Grid — a set of ‘I can’ statements and the
- The Qualitative Aspects of Spoken Language Use — a set of statements describing the quality of different aspects relating to spoken production, such as accuracy and fluency.

MAIN USES OF CEFR

With European mobility and the development of plurilinguistic competencies as primary motivation, the CEFR is used with primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and higher/further education for:

- Analyzing second language needs;
- Specifying second language learning goals;
- Planning second language learning programs, materials and assessments;
- Providing orientation for assessment and outcomes for second language learners¹¹.

APPROACH TO ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING

The CEFR framework can be used to design communicative tasks¹² which are relevant and meaningful to the learner. As early as the 1970’s, the COE expressed an interest in centering

¹⁰ Descriptors are organized according to level only, not skill

¹¹ Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 167.

¹²Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competences in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome (CEFR, p 157).

learning around the learner's needs, "by accepting that different learners have different needs, the unit/credit¹³ approach brought the learner's individuality into focus and was thus (objectively) **learner-centred**"¹⁴.

Although the framework does not provide specific pedagogy for how languages should be taught, nor does it offer a prescribed method for assessing communicative proficiency, "there is no doubt that **task-based** teaching and learning are strongly reinforced through discussion"¹⁵.

The CEFR is designed in such a way that levels can be further subdivided, called 'branching,' by teachers or program designers in order to show student progress in smaller increments. This is especially important for lower levels where learners may spend several years mastering A1 and A2. Some scales branch descriptors into 'plus' levels, however, there are gaps in some levels and many of those scales have not been empirically calibrated¹⁶. The branching approach is applied by practitioners, "institutions can develop the branches relevant to them to the appropriate degree of delicacy in order to situate the levels used in their system in terms of the common framework"¹⁷.

Each level is meant to include the competencies from the level below it, meaning that a learner at B1 is considered to be able to do whatever is stated at A2, even to be better than what is stated at A2. It is important to note that, "not every element or aspect in a descriptor is repeated at the following level." Each level includes the salient or new descriptors relevant to that level, "they do not systematically repeat all the elements mentioned at the level below with a minor change of formulation to indicate increased difficulty"¹⁸.

¹³The unit/credit approach to adult language learning first elaborated in *Systems development in adult language learning* (Council of Europe 1973) took as its starting point the analysis of learners' needs, defined as 'the requirements which arise from the use of . . . language in the multitude of situations which may arise in the social lives of individuals and groups,' Little, p 175.

¹⁴Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 175.

¹⁵Ibid, p 169.

¹⁶An example is available on pages 78-79 of the CEFR

¹⁷Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 32.

¹⁸Ibid, p 37.

Four important considerations should be taken into account when using the CEFR scales¹⁹:

1. The scales are multidimensional in that they should be read, interpreted and used together.
2. The progression illustrated in the scales reflects an order of teaching, not an order of second language acquisition.
3. The levels and scales describe a succession of language learning outcomes that take many years to achieve.
4. The behavioural dimension of the highest levels implies maturity, general educational achievement, and professional experience.

CEFR TODAY

The Council of Europe conducted a survey in 2005 to ascertain the number of language professionals familiar with CEFR. According to an analysis by David Little, the results confirm that the best known and most frequently used parts of the CEFR are the summary versions of its common reference levels of language proficiency, the 'global scale' and the 'self-assessment grid'²⁰. He also concluded that knowledge and use of the framework is confined to a minority of specialists.

Some of the ancillary resources and more specific applications of the CEFR that are reported by David Little²¹:

- Use in the Polish educational reform of 1999
- Use as a point of reference and a 'tool for reflection' in the development of language education in Catalonia

¹⁹Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 169-174.

²⁰Little, David (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39, p 167.

²¹Ibid, p 178.

- Use as a basis for developing third-level Spanish courses in the Open University, UK
- Use as a basis for elaborating English language programs for adult refugees admitted to Ireland
- Use as the underpinning for the European Language Portfolio
- Use as a basis for the online, self-administered diagnostic assessment for adults called DIALANG²².

Despite its original design for use in European countries, due to its international currency the CEFR has also been adopted in Japan, and Australia is currently considering it for use as a national framework²³.

Various groups in Canada are also exploring the potential application of CEFR.

1. The **Council of Ministers for Education, Canada** (CMEC) is currently reviewing the applicability of the CEFR in the Canadian context²⁴. Various ministries of Education are using it: Ministry of Education of New-Brunswick; the Edmonton Public school board; and the Ontario Ministry of Education²⁵
2. The **Department of Canadian Heritage** released a report in May 2006²⁶. The author, Laurens Vandergrift, recommends, “that the provinces and territories explore the feasibility of adopting the Common European Frameworks as a framework of reference for language in Canada”.

²²Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 226.

²³Trim, J.L.M. (2005). *The Role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in teacher training*. Lecture delivered, Graz September, p 3. Available at www.ecml.at/documents/Trim/trim.pdf

²⁴The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). *CICIC: Common European Framework of reference for Languages* page. CMEC Website. June 12, 2008. <http://www.cmec.ca/cfl-crl/indexe.stm>

²⁵ This is anecdotal information gathered at conferences and through discussions with second language professionals

²⁶ Vandergrift, Laurens (2006). *Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada*. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage, p 5.

3. The **Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)** uses the CEFR as program support material and has studied the potential adoption for use of the ELP in the Canadian context for elementary and secondary education.
4. The Canadian **Public Service Commission** is also promoting use of CEFR, “As a conceptual base for testing, we have adopted the Common European Framework (CEF) of Reference for Languages in conjunction with the standards approved by PSHRMAC and best practices in the testing of oral skills”.²⁷
5. **CESBA** had a workshop in April, 2008 entitled “A Common Framework for Languages”. It provided a forum for dialogue on building a common framework and development of criteria for effective language teaching and learning and provided examples from the European Common Framework and Portfolio.
6. **TESL Canada** held a three hour symposium in October 2006 on CEFR entitled “The European Language Portfolio and Its Potential in Canada” that included some models/examples of usage. Also, Christine Stechishin co-presented on CEFR and CLB at that conference.
7. **TESL Canada** had a workshop May 2008 presented by CASLT entitled “Defining, Tracking and Recognizing Second Language Proficiency: Common Framework and Language Portfolio for Canada”. It intended to increase awareness among participants of the uses of the Common European Framework and Portfolio for Languages and their application in Canadian classrooms. Also, information was shared on pilot projects utilizing the Common Framework and sample Portfolio components.

²⁷Speech by Maria Barado, President of the PSC at the **Official Languages Champions Meeting**, February 19, 2007, Ottawa. <http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/spch-disc/2007/2007-02-19-eng.htm>.

PART II: CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS 2000 (CLB)/NIVEAUX DE COMPÉTENCE LINGUISTIQUE CANADIENS (NCLC)

GENERAL INFORMATION

The *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* (CLB) is the second version of a framework first published in 1996 as a working document. It is available for both English and French, *les Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens 2006* (NCLC). The CLB/NCLC is recognized as the official Canadian standard for describing, measuring and recognizing the language proficiency of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants in both English and French. It was originally developed for settlement purposes of newcomers to Canada. The CLB/NCLC framework is not a curriculum, a methodology or a test. Instead, it depicts communicative proficiency in ESL and FSL on a scale with descriptive statements illustrating successive levels of achievement. The CLB/NCLC framework is used by teachers and curriculum planners as a reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing adult ESL/FSL in Canada. In addition, there have been ancillary resources, such as the “Can Do” statements which have been developed for use by the learner.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The CLB/NCLC grew out of a need to create a common language for of the ESL/FSL community in terms of second language proficiency for immigrants across Canada. The English version first published in 1996 included ESL for adults and literacy learners. However, as a result of revisions and improvements, which began in 1999, the literacy and benchmark documents became separate pieces. Today, the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* is specially designed to target the ESL adult immigrant population, while ESL literacy audiences are addressed in another document, the CLB 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners²⁸. Another important change as a result of the revisions was the division of Oral Communication into Speaking and Listening. Regarding the publication of the NCLC, the first version was released in 2002 and was called *Standards linguistiques canadiens 2002* –

²⁸Note: To date, there is not an equivalent literacy version developed for an FSL audience.

Français langue seconde – Adulte. This document was later revised and validated and has become *les Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens 2006 – Français langue seconde pour adultes*.

OBJECTIVES

Until CLB/NCLC was developed, there was no Canadian standard for describing language abilities of learners. It was designed to promote consistency in language training programs across the country and to facilitate Canadian mobility by enabling immigrants to progress without reassessment and reclassification of ESL/FSL levels. The aim of the CLB/NCLC is to meet the need of a national standard framework from which assessment tools and other materials can be created to assist in settlement and successful integration of adults who have immigrated to Canada.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The CLB/NCLC framework documents contain general information about its history and evolution as well as its features and applications. It is a practical guide for teachers and curriculum planners that describe communicative competencies and performance tasks in which learners demonstrate application of language knowledge and skill²⁹.

This section illustrates the structure of the CLB/NCLC framework through discussion of the stages, benchmarks (levels), and descriptors.

The CLB/NCLC has three stages: Stage I, Basic Proficiency; Stage II, Intermediate Proficiency; and Stage III, Advanced Proficiency. Each stage contains four benchmarks or levels, for a total of twelve benchmarks.

²⁹Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna (2000). *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000*. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, p VIII.

The benchmarks are titled as follows:

LEVEL	PROFICIENCY	STAGE
Benchmark 1	Initial basic	Stage I
Benchmark 2	Developing basic	
Benchmark 3	Adequate basic	
Benchmark 4	Fluent basic	
Benchmark 5	Initial intermediate	Stage II
Benchmark 6	Developing intermediate	
Benchmark 7	Adequate intermediate	
Benchmark 8	Fluent intermediate	
Benchmark 9	Initial advanced	Stage III
Benchmark 10	Developing advanced	
Benchmark 11	Adequate advanced	
Benchmark 12	Fluent advanced	

Each CLB/NCLC also contains a description of a person’s ability to use the English (or French) language to accomplish a set of tasks. The Benchmarks are organized according to four skills:

- Speaking
- Listening
- Reading
- Writing

The description of a person’s ability to use English or French as a second language is organized in the following sets of descriptors:

- **Global Performance Descriptors** — a brief account of learner’s ability in each skill
- **Performance Conditions** — the context in which an ability is demonstrated
- **Competency Outcomes and Standards** — examples of communication tasks³⁰ and learner outcomes which define that benchmark

CLB descriptors are not organized into scales of overall proficiency, rather, they are organized according to their purpose and function for each skill, within each CLB/NCLC. There is not one set of holistic descriptors encompassing a second language learner’s overall proficiency or level; the skills are considered individually. Furthermore, each CLB/NCLC is examined individually, in that they are not presented on a continuum of levels³¹.

Competencies serve as a basis for the CLB/NCLC and are explored in each skill at each level. The CLB/NCLC defines a competency as “a general statement of intended outcome of learning,” and describes it as being, “directly observable and measurable performance outcomes,” can help indicate a learner’s range of language ability³². The CLB/NCLC recognizes that those competencies considered to be the most universally relevant encompass the following four: **social interaction, giving and receiving instructions, suasion** (getting things done), and **information**.

³⁰The CLB defines ‘tasks’ as a practical application and demonstration of language abilities in a structured unit of communication, complete with a particular content of language data, purpose, procedures to be carried out on the language data, objectives and defined successful completion outcomes. A practical activity/action, which results from using language. A unit of language teaching or assessment in task-based instruction (Grazyna Pawlikowska-Smithh 2002, p 84.)

³¹An ancillary resource called the Companions Tables exists with the CLB/NCLC illustrated on a continuum.

³²Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna (2000). *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000*. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, p X.

MAIN USES OF THE CLB/NCLC

The CLB/NCLC is intended to meet the needs of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants for living and working in Canada. The framework describes, measures and recognizes second language proficiency.

By providing a national framework of reference, the CLB/NCLC can be used for the development of:

- language learning programs,
- curricula and
- materials (including materials for the learner, such as checklists), and
- assessments

which are relevant to the needs of adult newcomers to Canada during the process of settlement and integration.

APPROACH TO ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING

ESL/FSL learning is learner-centred when it is purposeful, relevant and meaningful to the learner³³. The CLB/NCLC is meant to serve as a basis for learning activities which can be tailored to an individual's abilities and learning styles, thus making the framework **learner-centred**. The CLB/NCLC maintains that language is for communication and that communication is demonstrated through a learner's ability to communicate proficiently in increasingly demanding communicative contexts³⁴. The framework is therefore **task-based**, providing an opportunity for the learner to demonstrate knowledge (competence) through examples of communication tasks and learner outcomes in the four skills.

³³Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna (2000). *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000*. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, p VIII.

³⁴Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna (2002). *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Theoretical Framework*. Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. Canada, p 32.

According to the theoretical framework³⁵, the CLB/NCLC is based on the principle that, “language use is a dynamic, interactive process in a social context; it requires a continuous assessment of relevance of information, planning, construction, interpretation and negotiation of meaning through various strategies and processes”. In other words, due to the fact that language evolves, so must the teaching of a second language. The CLB/NCLC is therefore constructed in such a way that enables development and change in their application.

The CLB/NCLC provides opportunity for lateral movement, in other words, development within a CLB/NCLC rather than an increase in a CLB/NCLC level. “The Benchmark level of a learner or a group of learners may not show a change after an otherwise successful session of study. There is ample room for “lateral” development and progress within a Benchmark level for every learner. This is particularly true for higher levels of proficiency”³⁶.

Three important considerations should be taken into account when using the CLB³⁷:

1. The CLB/NCLC is based on a theory of language proficiency rather than second language acquisition.
2. The CLB/NCLC does not imply linear, sequential, additive or incremental learning/acquisition processes. Language learning and acquisition are integrative processes and the focus is therefore on the description of the outcomes, not on the process and the timing to achieve them.
3. The hierarchal structure of the CLB/NCLC stages implies progressively demanding contexts of language use.

CLB/NCLC TODAY

The CLB are used by ESL practitioners across Canada, in a variety of ways:

³⁵Ibid, p 24.

³⁶ Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna (2000). *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000*. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, p IX.

³⁷ Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna (2002). *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Theoretical Framework*. Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. Canada, p 32.

- In Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs in the Maritime Region, Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan; In all British Columbia (ELSA) and Manitoba (MIIP) federal-provincial language-training programs;
- In several provincially-funded ESL programs in post-secondary and private programs;
- In Enhanced Language Training (ELT) programs across Canada;
- In some TESL/TESOL teacher- training programs;
- In employment and training programs to help determine articulation standards in order to set standards to facilitate access to numerous professional and trade programs;
- In some colleges and universities to understand the language proficiencies needed for admission;

The NCLC are less widespread due to the demographics of newcomers in Canada. The number of immigrants who are learning FSL is much less than those who are learning ESL. In addition, the geographic and economic circumstances lead to a greater number of newcomers who require English in order to obtain employment in their communities because they are living outside of Quebec. The province of Quebec uses a benchmarking system produced by the *Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'immigration* that is based on the English CLB. The NCLC are for immigrants outside of Quebec and are used in certain regions in Canada, including New- Brunswick and Ontario.

The CLB/NCLC is currently being used in contexts which extend beyond the original intent of the framework. In recent years, CLB/NCLC has been increasingly used in programs and resources for pre-employment and employment purposes.

While the use of CLB/NCLC outside of the original intent of the framework is not condoned, it is known that the standard is being used in programs for other types of language training. Over the years, CCLB has received requests to use CLB/NCLC with various groups, such as, international

college and high school students who may or may not be intending to immigrate; overseas learners of English or French for work-related purposes; children and young teens who may be immigrants and/or children of immigrants; employment preparation program participants, adult Canadian-born learners who are learning an official language other than their first language.

PART III: COMPARISON

THE VANDERGRIFT REPORT AND MANITOBA'S RESPONSE³⁸

While little literature exists that compares the two frameworks, the ESL/FSL community in Canada is aware of the report written in 2006 by Laurens Vandergrift, Second Language Institute, University of Ottawa, which was funded through the Official Languages Research and Dissemination Program, a joint initiative of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage. The report promotes the CEFR as the preferred framework in Canada while disregarding the CLB/NCLC. The following points highlight Vandergrift's reasoning³⁹:

He provides many supports for the CEFR for the Canadian context, stating that:

- It is theoretically grounded
- It is empirically validated
- It has face validity
- It is transparent and user friendly
- It is context-free but context-relevant
- It is comprehensive
- It is flexible and open

Vandergrift explores one weakness of the CEFR, saying:

- It does not sufficiently discriminate levels at the lower end of the framework

³⁸ Pettis, Joanne. *Manitoba Response to the Report Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada, May 2006*. Draft discussion paper. Adult Language Training Branch. Manitoba Labour and Immigration.

³⁹Vandergrift, Laurens (2006). *Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada*. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage, p 19-21.

His consideration for the CLB/NCLC for use in a Canadian context does not extend beyond the following observations:

- The CLB/NCLC were created for adult immigrants who are developing language skills for entry into the Canadian workforce, therefore they are not suitable for school contexts without significant adaptation
- The CLB/NCLC are not empirically validated, transparent or user-friendly, context-free and context relevant, comprehensive or flexible and open

The Province of Manitoba has drafted a response to the Vandergrift report. The draft response disagrees with the Vandergrift analysis of the CLB and recommends the CLB for use in the Canadian school system for the following reasons⁴⁰:

- The CLB/NCLC was created for use in Canadian community, school, and work contexts
- Dr. Vandergrift's report was written from a biased perspective due to his commitment in October 2005 to produce a research paper calibrating existing frameworks in Canada to the Common European Framework
- Favouring CEFR would undermine a decade of working towards implementing the CLB/NCLC across the country
- The CLB/NCLC fulfils the same goals for a framework as the CEFR, in that they both define language proficiency, are criterion referenced and measure learner progress
- The CLB/NCLC is empirically validated, transparent and user-friendly, context-free and context relevant, comprehensive or flexible and open

⁴⁰ Pettis, Joanne. *Manitoba Response to the Report Proposal for a Common Framework of Reference for Languages for Canada, May 2006*. Draft discussion paper. Adult Language Training Branch. Manitoba Labour and Immigration, pp 1, 3, 5.

At the time of writing this report, the exact status of this response is not known.

PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO
FRAMEWORKS

PURPOSE

CEFR	CLB/NCLC
To fulfill a need for cultural unity in Europe in the 1990s by adopting common action in areas of culture, namely modern language learning.	To establish a common standard for describing language proficiency of adult immigrants to Canada

OBJECTIVES

CEFR was developed for:	CLB/NCLC was developed for:
International use	The Canadian context
Multiple languages	English and French
Primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, higher/further education	Adult immigrants

CHARACTERISTICS

CEFR	CLB/NCLC
Based on the principle of lifelong learning and plurilingualism , the notion that all linguistic abilities have a place and value	Based on the principle that language use evolves and therefore so must second language teaching
Contains over 50 scales of illustrative descriptors, however, there are many gaps in the descriptors provided for the numerous scales organized for specific activities, i.e. Skill: <i>Spoken Production</i> Scale: <i>Sustained Monologue</i>	Contains 5 sets of descriptors for each level and for each skill (240 in total). Sets of descriptors are included for four competency areas: social interaction; giving and receiving instructions; suasion (getting things done); and information
All but one of the descriptors are organized by skill or specific activity. There is a scale which contains descriptors of overall general proficiency .	Descriptors are organized by skill. There is not a scale which contains descriptors of overall general proficiency .
Descriptors are organized in scales on a continuum , revealing descriptors as they compare to the other levels	Descriptors are organized in sets according to purpose and function for each level. Each Benchmark is viewed individually ⁴¹
Identifies 5 skills : Listening; Reading; Spoken Interaction; Spoken Production; Writing	Identifies 4 skills : Speaking; Listening; Reading; Writing
Uses a branching approach where the institution is responsible for sub-dividing the levels into smaller increments as necessary to show progress within a level. The CEFR has divided some levels to include an additional 'plus' level	Uses a lateral movement approach which provides an opportunity for progress within a CLB/NCLC. There is no official indication that teachers or institutions sub-divide CLB/NCLC levels
The descriptors for each level contain salient or new proficiency descriptors only. They do not repeat what is in the level below.	The descriptors are adjusted to illustrate a more demanding context of language use. They do repeat what is in the level below.

⁴¹ The Companion Tables are an ancillary resource presenting the CLB on a continuum.

FAST FACTS

	CEFR	CLB/NCLC
Publishing	First two drafts (English and French) were in 1996, later revised and published in 2001 to become the version we know today, this time being translated into 21 other European languages.	First CLB draft (Working Document) was published in 1996. Revised and improved, a second CLB version came out in 2000. The NCLC was first published in 2002, followed by a revised version in 2006.
Audience	Intended for learners, teachers, and curriculum planners.	Intended for ESL instructors, program planners, language assessment developers and program administrators.
Uses	It is used for analyzing needs, specifying learning goals, planning language learning programs, materials and assessments and providing orientation for assessment and outcomes for learners.	It describes, measures and recognizes second language proficiency. It is used for developing language learning programs, curricula, materials and assessment.
General Approach	Learner-centered and task-based.	Learner-centered and task-based.
Current Status	Used internationally, including countries outside of Europe. Australia is considering using it as their national standard. Japan adopted it in 2004.	Used across Canada and recognized internationally as a national framework. To date it has not been validated or released for international use. However, there are requests to this effect.

N.B. The information contained in this table is not meant to be an exhaustive list detailing the CEFR or the CLB/NCLC. It is for immediate reference and fast consultation only. For complete details concerning the information, please refer to the paper or the primary resources provided in the references.

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