

An update on the CEFR-J project and its impact on English language education in Japan



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The Development of the CEFR-J

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ALTE 4th KRAKÓW
INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE 2011

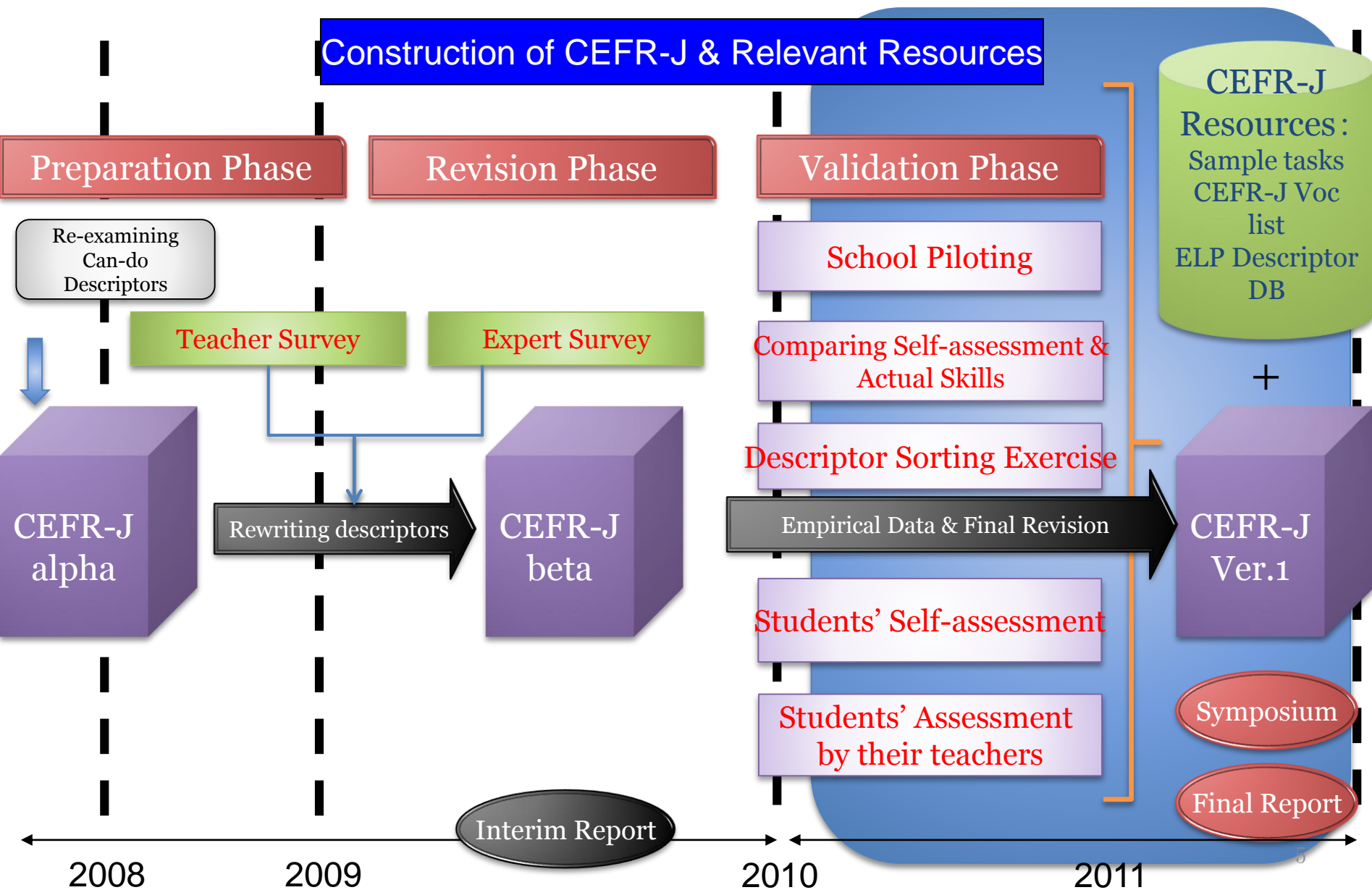


7 – 9 July 2011

A Brief Summary of ALTE 2011

A progress report on the development of the CEFR-J

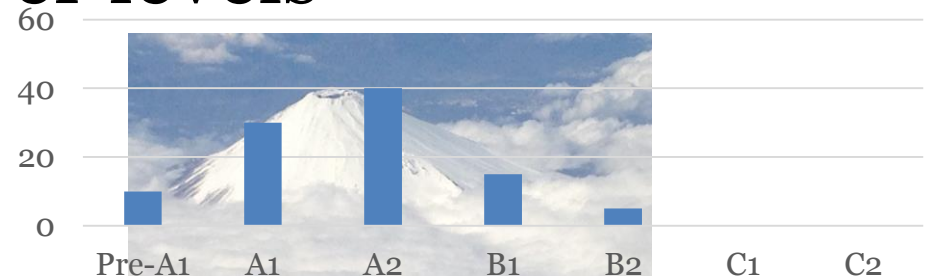
Masashi Negishi
Tomoko Takada
(Yukio Tono)





The CEFR Levels of the Japanese Learners of English

- Non/Basic Users (A1 and A2) are more than 80%.
 - Independent Users (B1 and B2) are less than 20%.
 - Proficient Users (C1 and C2) are almost nil.
- skewed towards lower levels





The Development of the CEFR-J: The Principles

- Add Pre-A1
- Divide A1 into three levels: A1.1, A1.2, A1.3
- Divide A2 into two levels: A2.1, A2.2
- Divide B1 into two levels: B1.1, B1.2
- Divide B2 into two levels: B2.1, B2.2
- No change for C1, C2
- Adapt Can-do descriptors to a Japanese context



The development of the CEFR-J

- collect descriptors available both in and outside Japan
- eradicate the inconsistencies by dissecting descriptors
 - Descriptors for productive skills
 - (1) performance, (2) criteria, (3) condition
 - Descriptors for receptive skills
 - (1) task, (2) text, (3) condition



The Validation of the CEFR-J

- Learners' Self-assessment
- Learners' Assessment by their Teachers
- Descriptor Sorting Exercise
- Comparing Self-assessment and Actual Performance



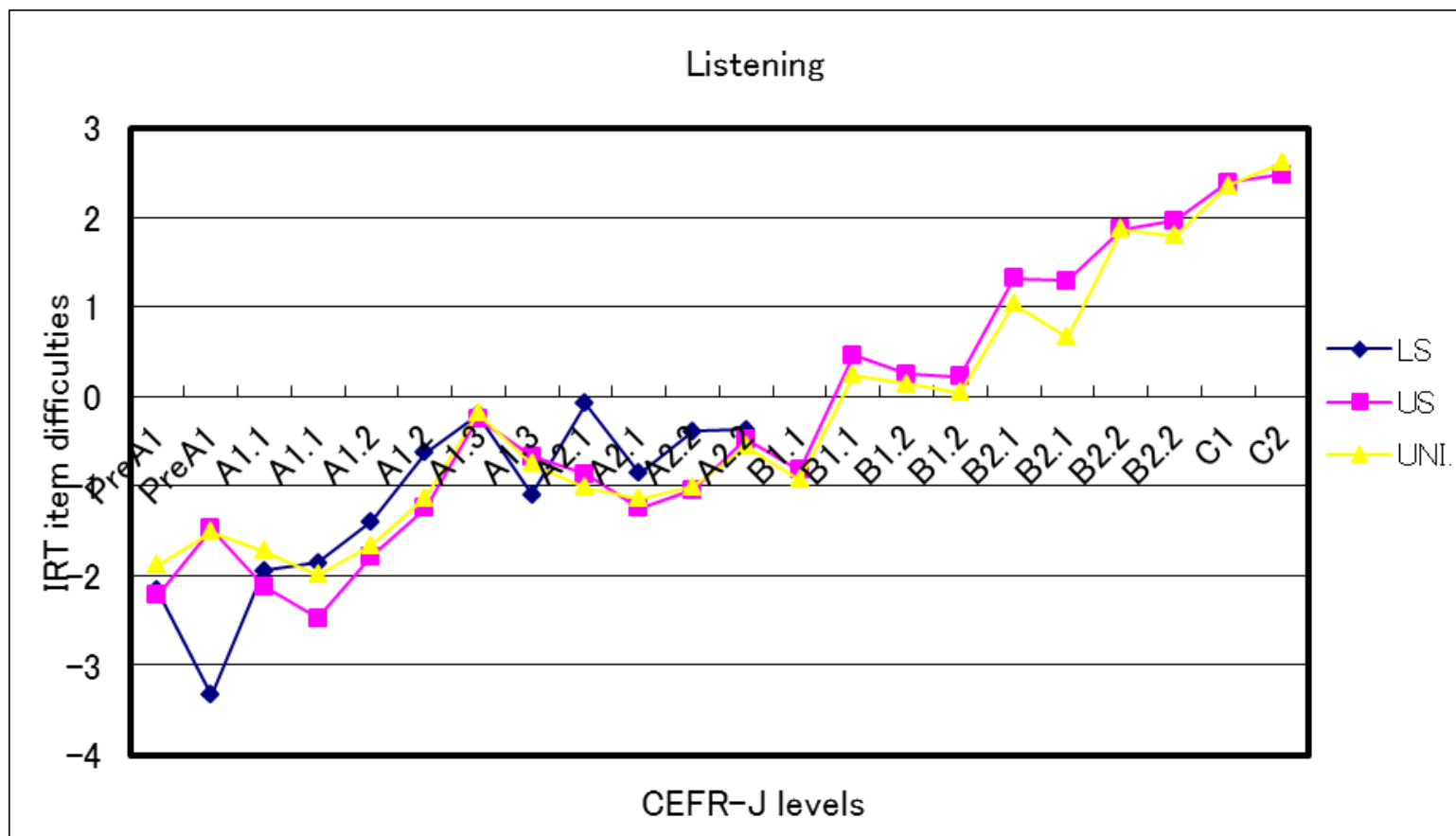
The Validation of the CEFR-J

- Carry out IRT to learners' self-assessment data
 - The descriptors in the **CEFR**
 - ← groups of **teachers** as informants (North 2000)
 - The descriptors in the **CEFR-J**
 - ← groups of **learners** as informants



Revision of the descriptors based on the results of IRT analysis

An example of item difficulty line graphs: CEFR-J Listening Can Do descriptors





Some of the problems and solutions for CEFR-J “Can Do” descriptors

Problems

1. The perceived difficulties were not necessarily ordered as we had expected.

Solutions

1. Reordering the descriptors according to the item difficulty.

Some of the problems and solutions for CEFR-J

“Can Do” descriptors

Problems

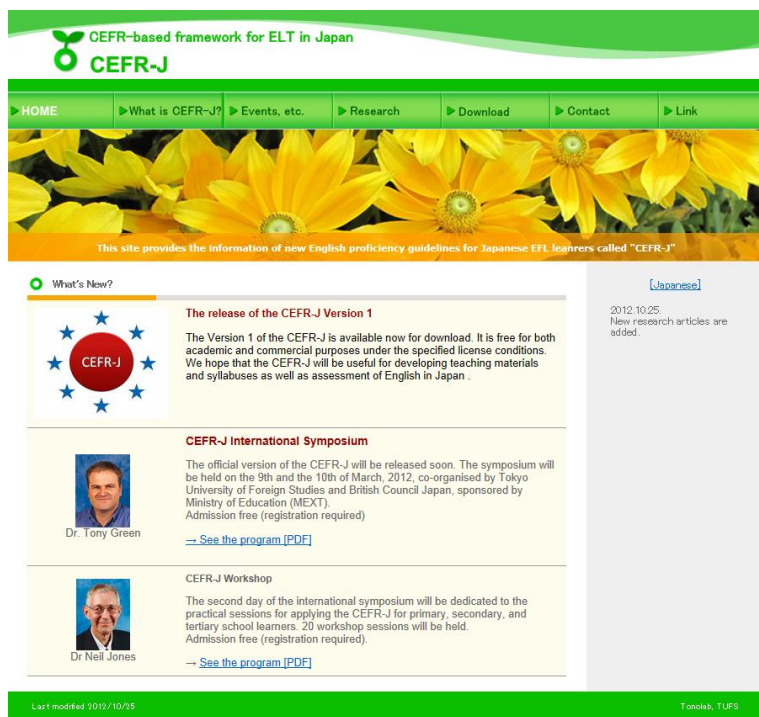
2. “Can Do” descriptors which the participants had never experienced seemed to be judged to be more difficult.
- Reading: A1.2 right (D) Beta version
- I can understand very short reports of recent events such as **simple letters, postcards or e-mails** from friends or relatives describing travel memories, etc.

Solutions

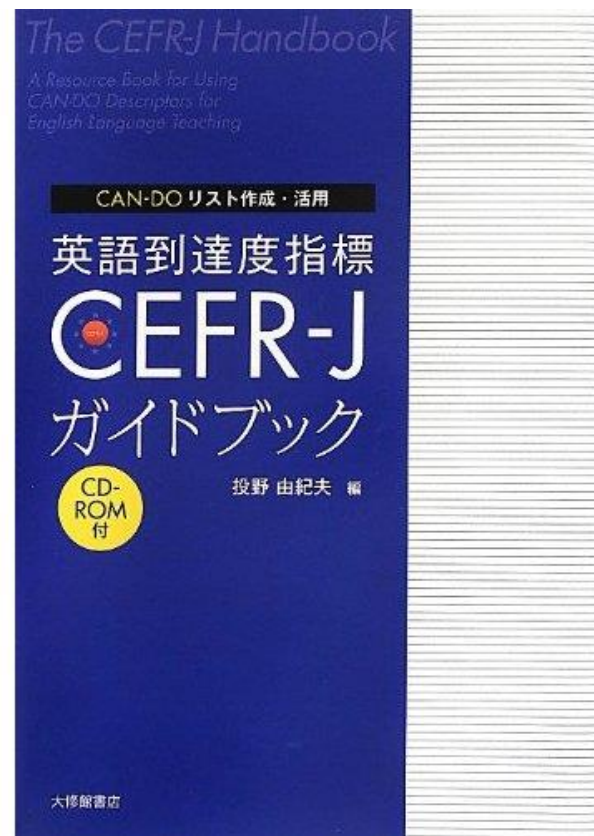
2. Eliminating the unfamiliar elements for Japanese learners
- Reading: A1.2 right Version 1
- I can understand very short reports of recent events such as **text messages** from friends or relatives, describing travel memories, etc.

After the revision process,

The release of the CEFR-J in 2012



The publication of *the CEFR-J Guidebook* in 2013





Developing resources for using the CEFR-J

Yukio Tono

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After the release of the CEFR-J Version 1

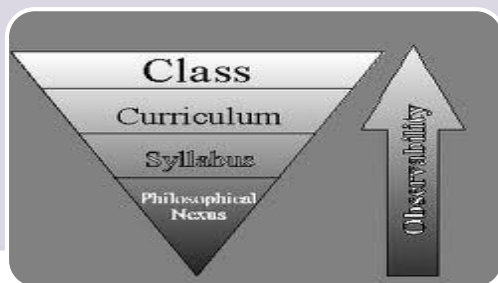
Resource development

- Wordlist
- Descriptor DB
- Handbook

Profiling research

- Corpus building
- Criterial feature selection

Companion resources for using the CEFR-J

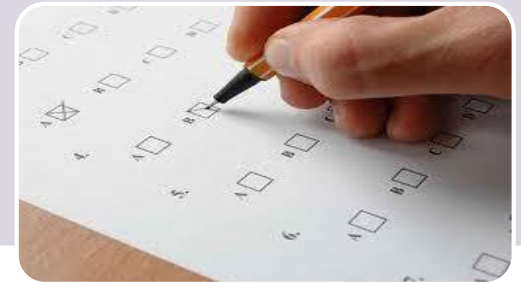
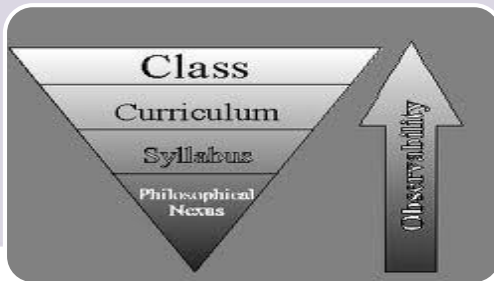


CEFR-J Wordlist

ELP "Can Do" Descriptor DB

CEFR-J Handbook

Companion resources for using the CEFR-J



CEFR-J Wordlist

ELP 'Can Do' Descriptor DB

CEFR-J Handbook

CEFR-J Wordlist Version 1

CEFR - Level	Pre- A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	Total
Text analysis	976		1057	1884	1722	5639
Our Target	1000		1000	2000	2000	6000
+ EVP Integrated → Final Version	1068		1358	2359	2785	7570

Using the wordlist for task development

Can do descriptor

I can exchange simple opinions about very familiar topics such as likes and dislikes for sports, foods, etc., using a limited repertoire of expressions, provided that people speak clearly.

(A1.2 Spoken interaction)



I like .../ I don't like ...
Do you like ...?

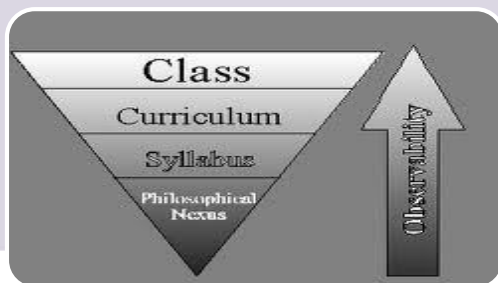


CEFR-J Wordlist

apple	A0	n	Food and drink
banana	A0	n	Food and drink
bean	A1	n	Food and drink
beef	A1	n	Food and drink
biscuit	A1	n	Food and drink
bottle	A0	n	Food and drink
bread	A0	n	Food and drink
breakfast	A0	n	Food and drink
burger	A1	n	Food and drink
butter	A1	n	Food and drink
cake	A0	n	Food and drink
candy	A0	n	Food and drink
cheese	A0	n	Food and drink

art	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
ball	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
baseball	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
basketball	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
cartoon	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
concert	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
dance	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
drama	A1	n	Hobbies and pastimes
football	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
music	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
opera	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
painting	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
party	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes
piano	A0	n	Hobbies and pastimes

Companion resources for using the CEFR-J



CEFR-J Wordlist

ELP "Can Do" Descriptor DB

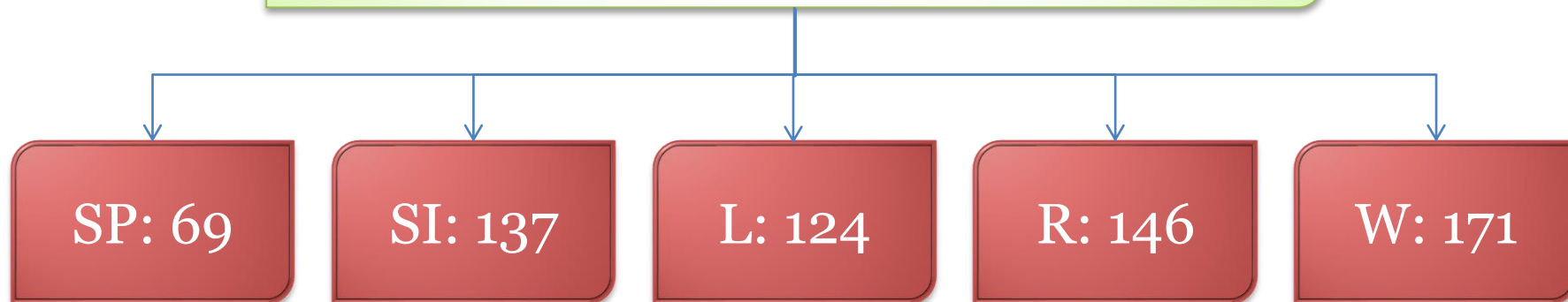
CEFR-J Handbook

The "Can Do" Descriptor DB

European Language Portfolio



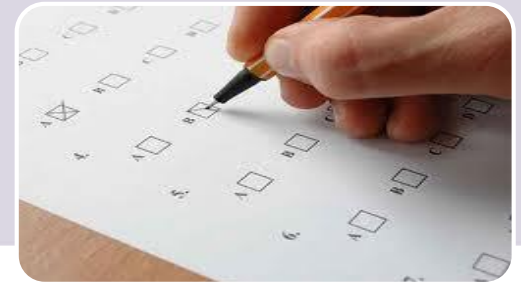
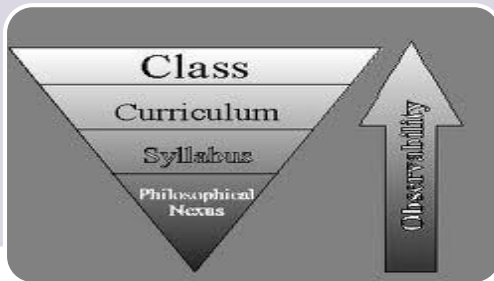
2,800 "Can Do" descriptors



647 descriptors

Lev.	Category/C ode	ELP descriptor(s)	General descriptors (Japanese)	Descriptors for children (Japanese)
A1	IS1-A1	I can say who I am, ask someone's name and introduce someone.	自分が誰であるか言うことができ、相手の名前を尋ねたり、相手のことを紹介することができる	自分の名前を言ったり、相手の名前を聞いたり、相手の紹介ができる
A1	IS1-A1-1	I can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics[1.2000-CH]	簡単な質問をしたり、簡単な質問に答えることができる。また必要性の高いことや身近な話題について発言したり、反応することができる	簡単な質問をしたり、簡単な質問に答えることができる。また身近なことについて話したり、質問に答えることができる
A1	IS1-A1-1	I can make myself understood in a simple way but I am dependent on my partner being prepared to repeat more slowly and rephrase what I say and to help me to say what I want.	簡易な方法であれば通じるが、ゆっくり繰り返してくれたり、自分が言った事を言い直してくれたり、自分が言いたいことが言えるよう助けてくれるような相手に依存している	相手がゆっくり話したり、自分が言ったことを確認してくれるなど、やさしい人だったら自分の簡単な英語は通じる
A1	IS2-A1	I can understand simple questions about myself and my family when people speak slowly and clearly (e.g. "What's your name?" "How old are you?" "How are you?" etc.).	相手がゆっくりはっきり話してくれれば、「名前は？」「歳は？」「調子はどう？」などの自分や家族についての簡単な質問を理解することができる	相手がゆっくりはっきり話してくれれば、自分や家族についての簡単な質問が分かる
A1	IS2-A1	I can understand simple words and phrases, like "excuse me", "sorry", "thank you", etc.	「すみません」「ごめんなさい」「ありがとう」といった簡単な語句を理解することができる	「すみません」「ごめんなさい」「ありがとう」といった簡単な語句が分かる
A1	IS2-A1	I can understand simple greetings, like "hello", "good bye", "good morning", etc.	「やあ」「さようなら」「おはよう」といった簡単な挨拶を理解することができる	「やあ」「さようなら」「おはよう」といった簡単な挨拶が分かる

Companion resources for using the CEFR-J



CEFR-J Wordlist

ELP "Can Do" Descriptor DB

CEFR-J Handbook

Tono, Y. (ed.) (2013) *The CEFR-J Handbook*.

- Part 1: What is the CEFR?
- Part 2: What is the CEFR-J?
- Part 3: Using the CEFR-J

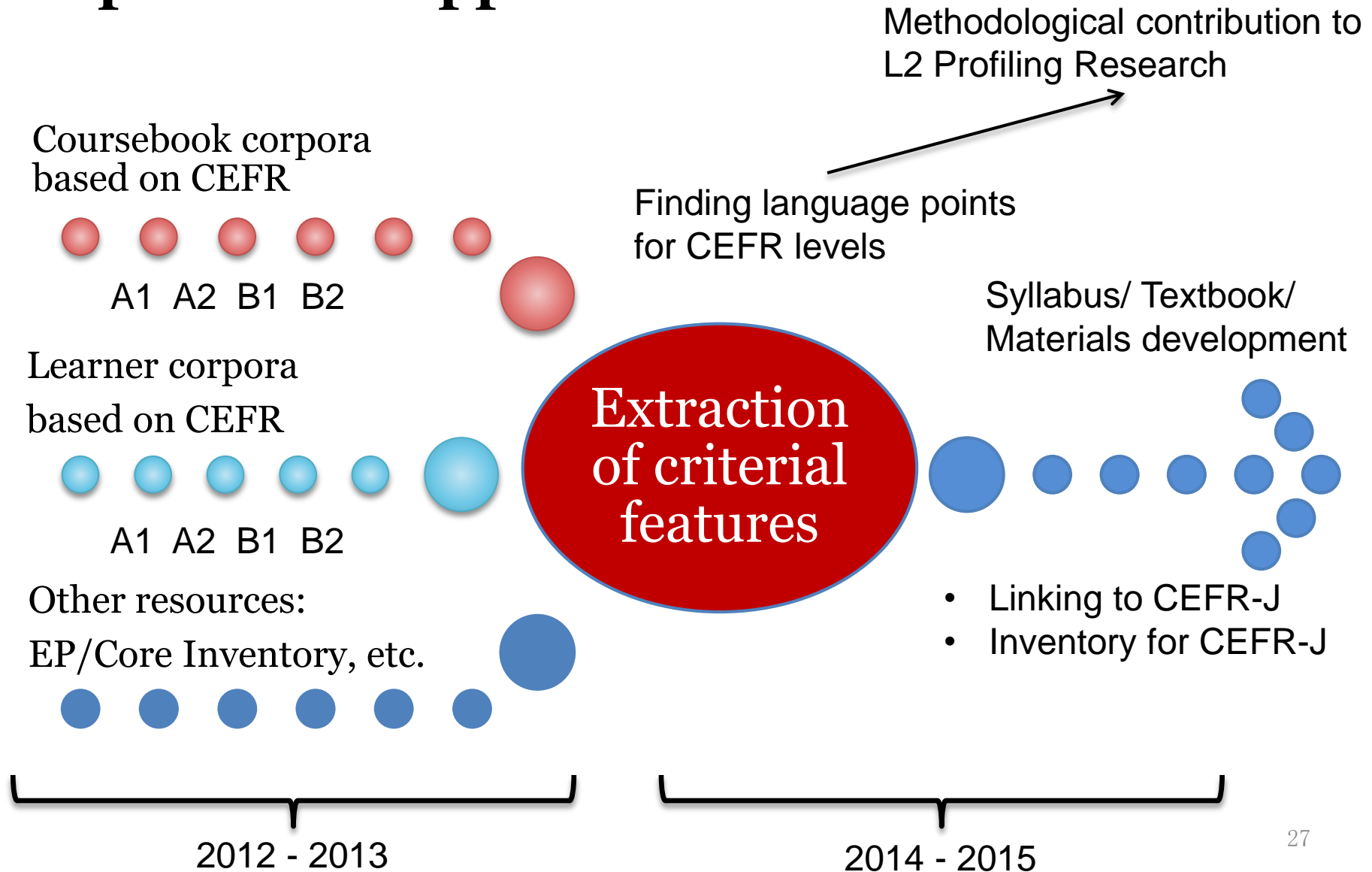




RLDs for the CEFR-J



Corpus-based approach



Corpora

- **Learner corpora:**
 - **JEFLC Corpus** (WR; JH/SH; 10,000 samples ; c. 670,000 tokens)
 - **NICT JLE Corpus** (SP; OPI-like interview data; 1281 subjects; c. 2 million)
 - **MEXT Data** (1,600 JH-3 students; randomly sampled; WR & SP)
 - **GTEC for STUDENTS Writing Corpus** (WR; exam scripts; 30,000 samples; 2.5 million)
- **Textbook corpora:**
 - Exam materials
 - Major ELT coursebooks based on the CEFR
 - English textbooks used in Japan (for comparison)



Method of identifying criterial features

- **Grammar**
 - Data-driven approach
 - Extract all the grammar points taught at secondary school
 - Using machine learning to find out which features classify CEFR levels best → compare different classifiers:
 - Decision Tree/ Support Vector Machine/ Random Forest/ etc.
- **Learner errors**
 - Automatic error tagging
- **Hypothesis testing**
 - Theory-driven approach, focusing on particular grammatical properties
 - Verb subcat; postnominal modifiers; to Infinitives; articles; tense; collocation, etc
- **Lexical profiling**
 - Measures of text characteristics:
 - Lexical richness measures: Guiraud; Yule's K
 - Complexity measures: Sentence length; T-unit length; VP/T-unit; Clause/Sentence; Complex nominal per clause/T-unit, etc.



The Impact of the CEFR-J

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The Impact of the CEFR-J

- In 2011,
The impact of the CEFR-J wasn't yet clear.
- How about now?



Impact Analyses

- The backwash or washback of language tests has been investigated mainly by using “questionnaires”, “interviews to teachers and learners”, and “classroom observations” (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons; 1996, Watanabe; 1996, Muñoz & Álvarez; 2010).

Impact Analyses

- The impact of such comprehensive frameworks as the CEFR or the CEFR-J, however, is far-reaching, and therefore should be explored not only at the classroom level, but also in a much wider context.
- How?
 - Analyse **Big Data**.



Big Data Analysis

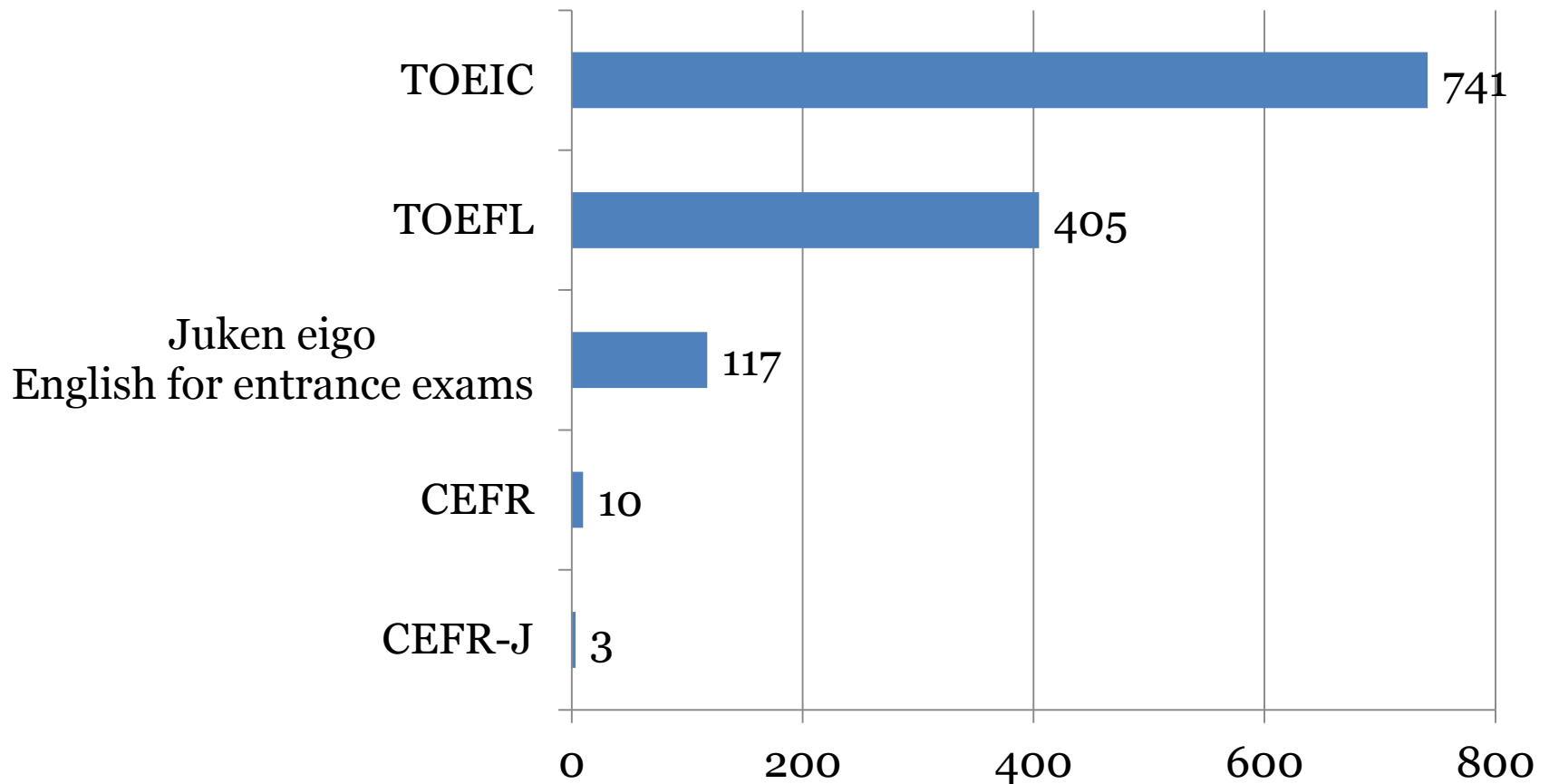
- The data analysed: 15,579,018 texts, written in Japanese, from August 2012 to September 2013
- The analyses: carried out by Jetrun Technology Inc.
- The results of the analyses: “Positive/Negative Graphs” and “Word Maps”
- The “Positive/Negative Graphs”: created by analysing the comments in terms of the attitude of the writer, based on the semantic database
- The “Word Maps”: indicate the relationship of the key words in the writing. The words were automatically analysed based on the tailored database of Jetrun Technology Inc. The connections shown in the “Word Maps” are those of the key words in the same sentence. It is necessary to interpret the relationships between the key words by looking not only at the main webs but also at the extended webs.

Big Data Analysis

The computer programme was customised for this particular research so that such everyday words as “Can Do” and “level(s)” could be categorised as key words. The term “Can Do”, which happens to be the name of a popular 100 yen shop chain in Japan, is usually excluded in this kind of analysis, but since this is one of *the* crucial terms for this analysis, the author made a special request to include it as key words.



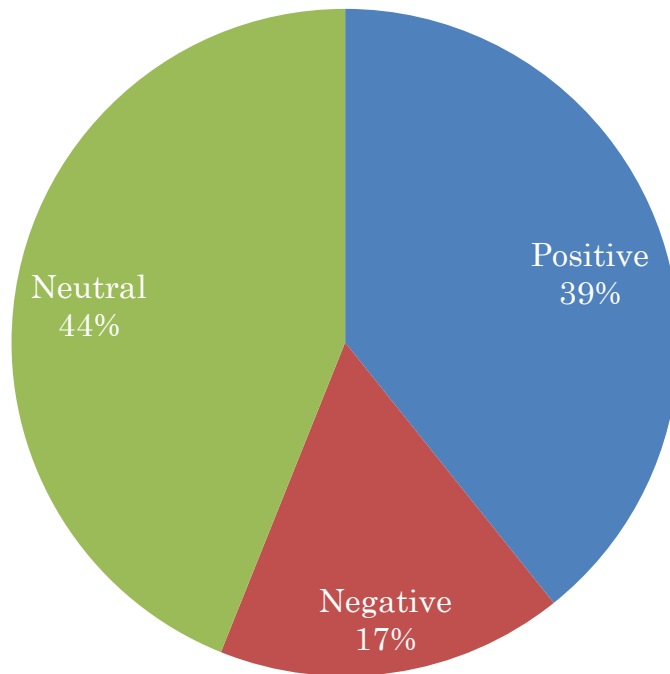
The numbers of websites per month



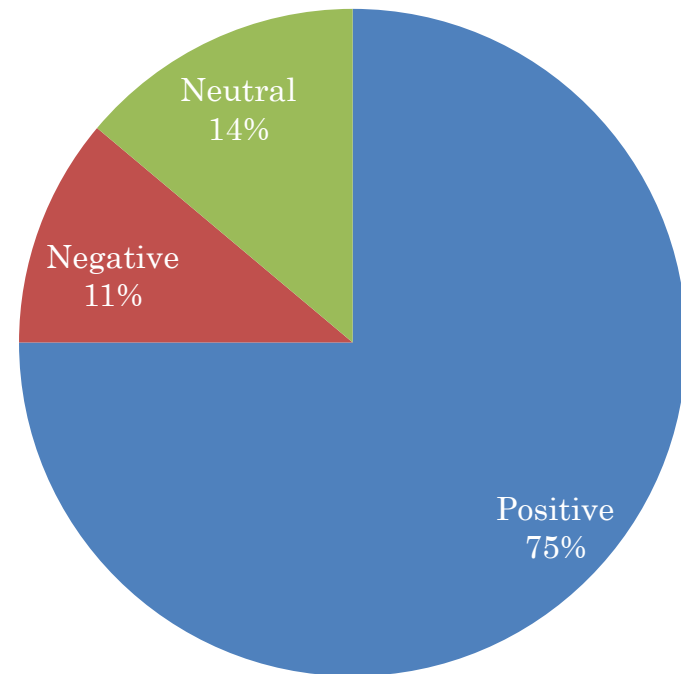


The Positive/Negative Graphs

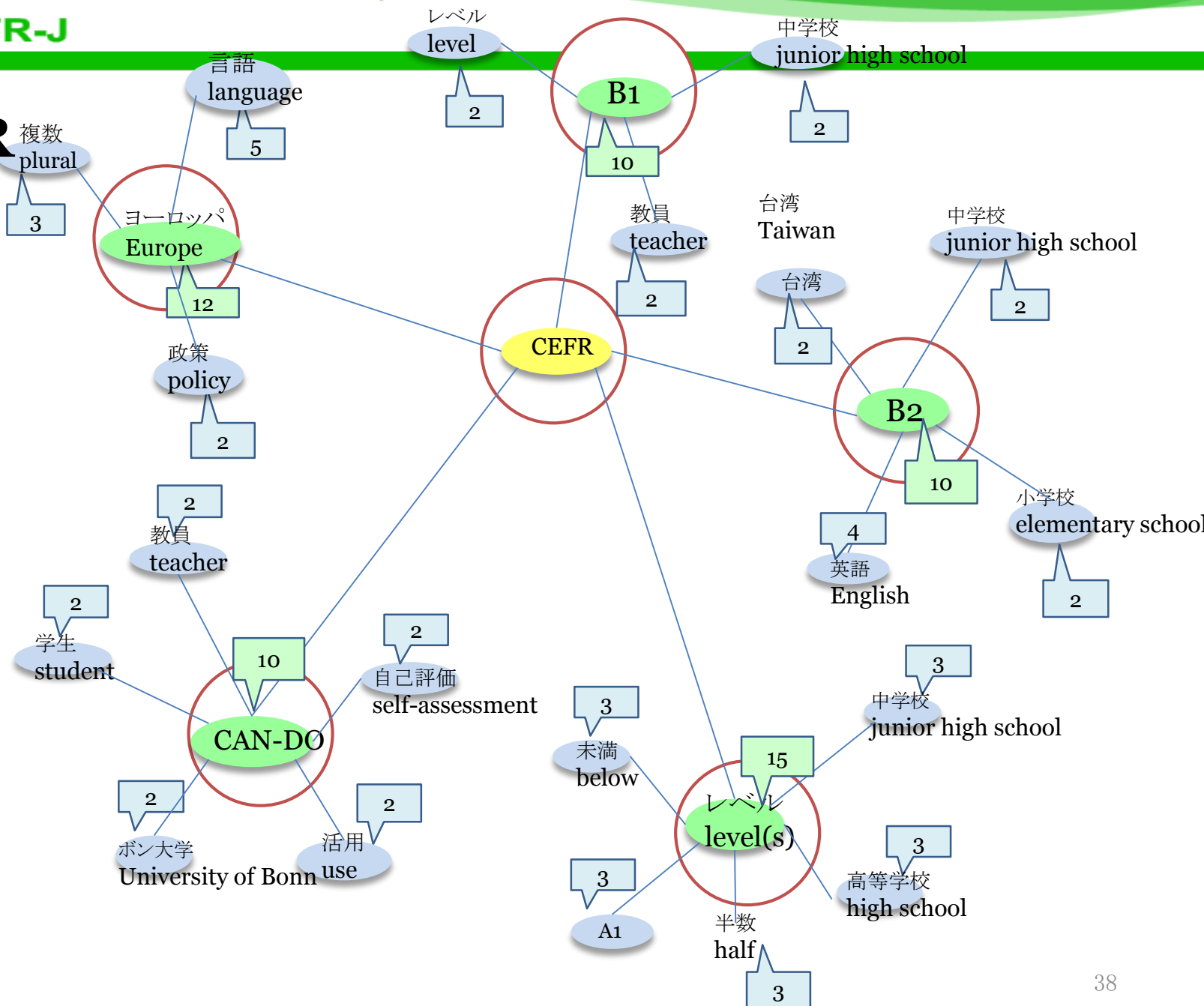
The CEFR



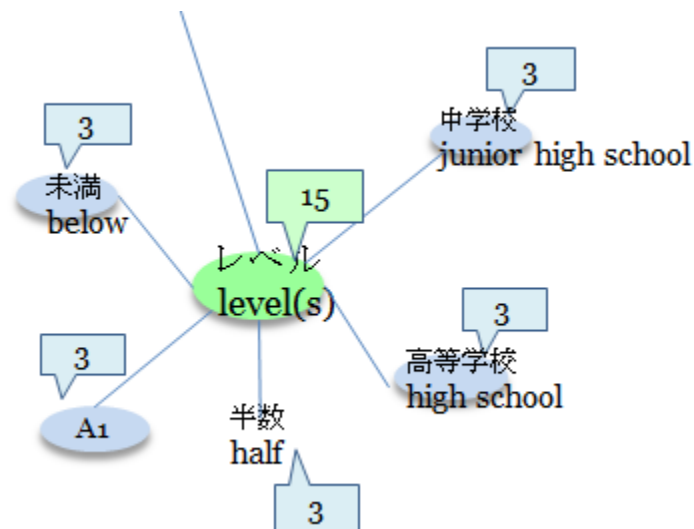
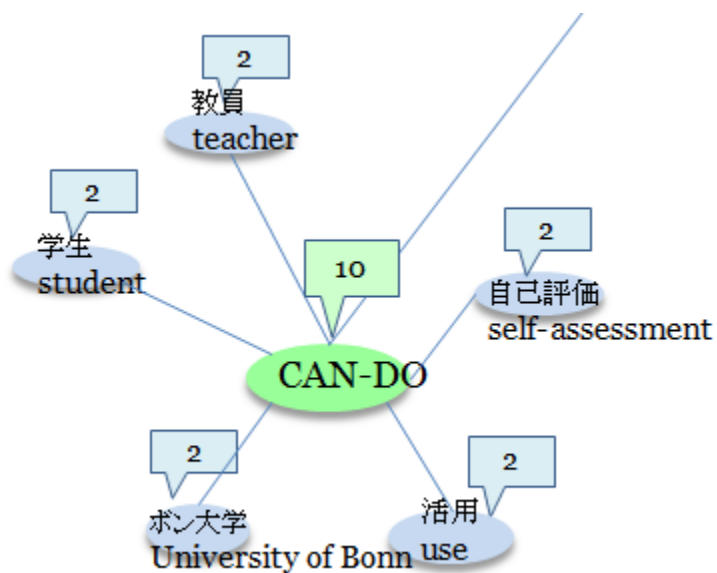
The CEFR-J



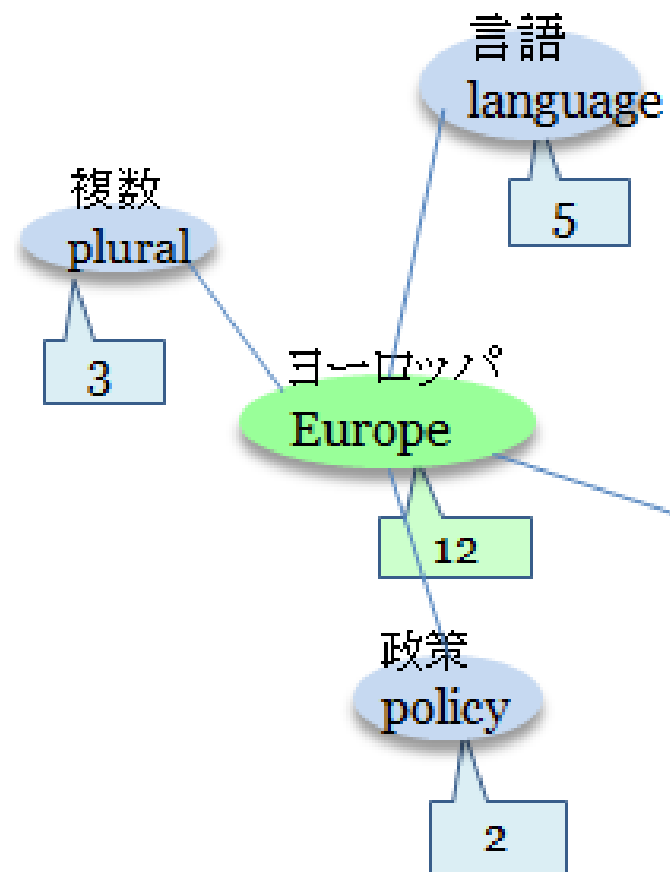
CEFR



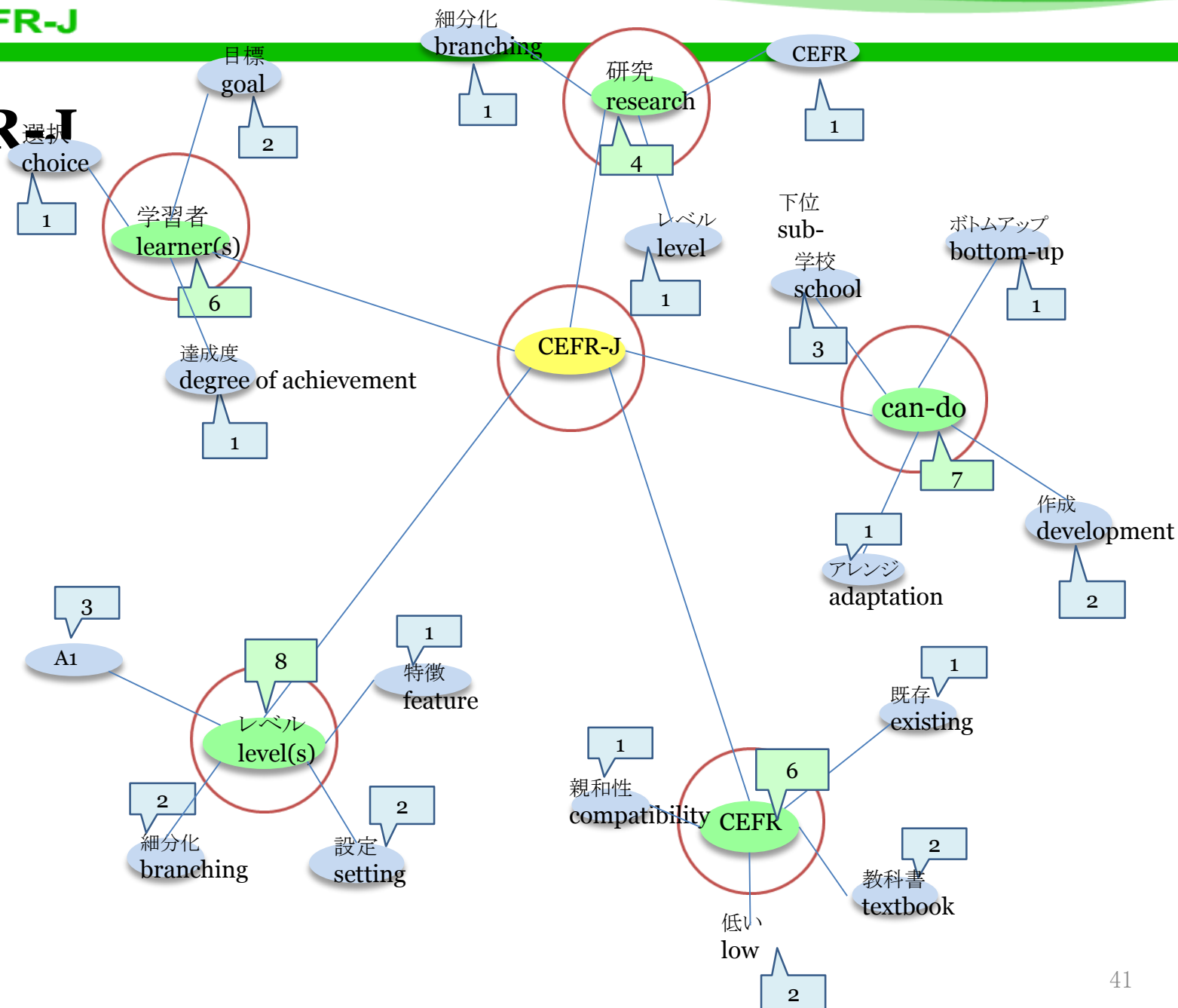
CEFR



CEFR

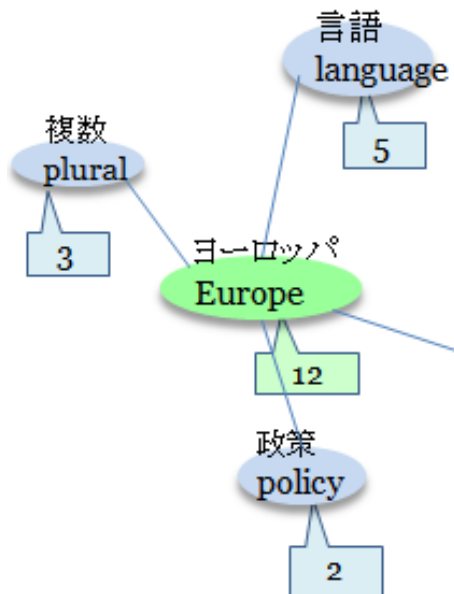


CEFR-J

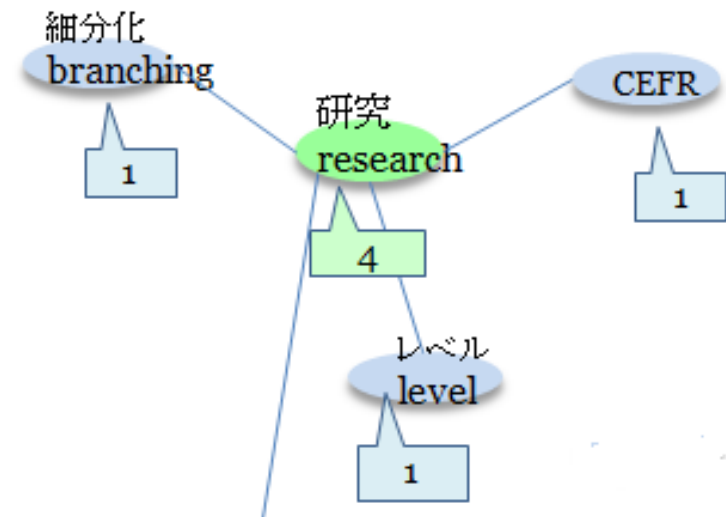




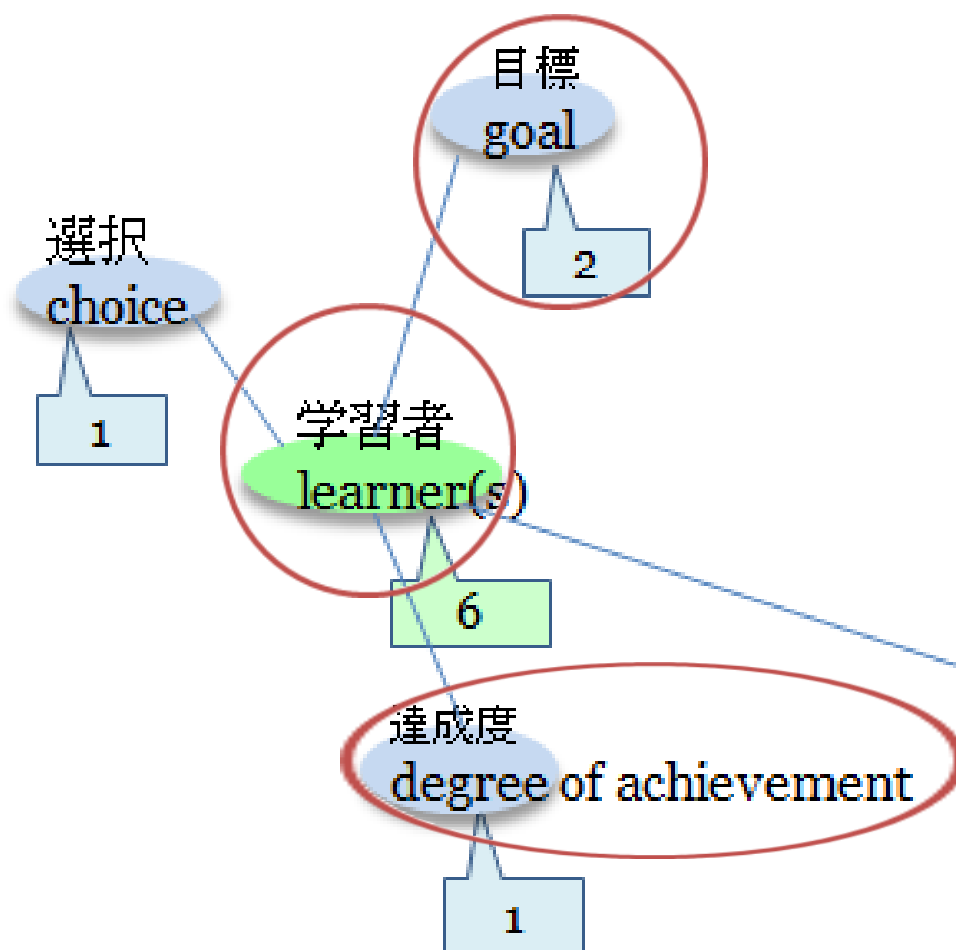
CEFR



CEFR-J



CEFR-J



Impact on Testing, not on Teaching

North (2009: 307) argues that “... the impact of the descriptive scheme or other aspects of the CEFR on curriculum or teaching have as yet been very limited”, and he quotes Little (2007) as follows:

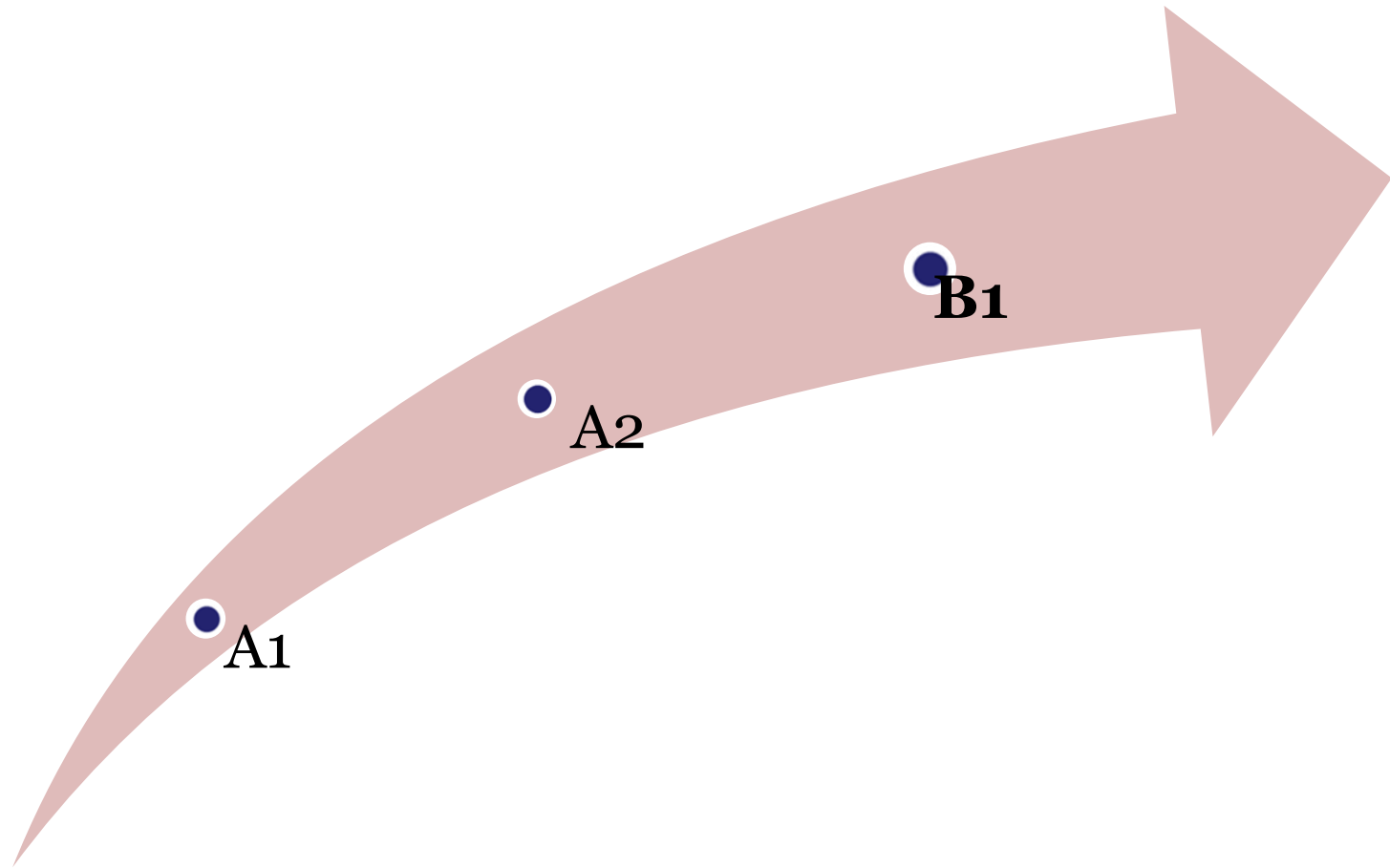
To date (*the CEFR's*) impact on language testing far outweighs its impact on curriculum design and pedagogy ...’ (Little 2007: 648) and ‘On the whole the CEFR has no more occasioned a revolution in curriculum development than it has promoted the radical redesign of language tests (Little 2007: 649)

A Price to Pay

- High item discrimination
 - narrowly-focused “Can Do” descriptors: too narrow to reflect on teaching and build syllabus based on it.
- CEFR-J version 1: A2.1 Spoken Interaction
 - I can give simple directions from place to place, using basic expressions such as "turn right" and "go straight" along with sequencers such as first, then, and next.



CEFR-J “Can Do” descriptors: too narrow to reflect on teaching





Impact on language policy

- The “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization”: released on 13th December 2013.
- Specific reference to the CEFR
- The plan proposes that Japanese teachers of English should assess four skills with the use of “Can Do” descriptors, and it specifies the attainment target of the Japanese people’s English proficiency in terms of the CEFR levels.



Impact on teaching of other languages

- The CEFR-J is beginning to be used as a framework of the attainment targets for other languages, e.g. French, Japanese, etc.
- ← The progress of learning is tangible to learners and teachers due to the branching of lower CEFR-J levels.

Conclusion

- After the completion of the CEFR-J version 1, *the CEFR-J Guidebook*, and its related resources have been available for use.
- Our search for criterial features for the CEFR and/or CEFR-J is still in progress.
- So far, the impact of the CEFR-J seems to have been limited compared with specific language tests. Discussion regarding the CEFR-J centres around “levels” and “branching”, rather than “language policy” as in that of the CEFR.
- Teachers find it hard to see the link between the narrowly-focused “Can Do” descriptors and their everyday teaching.