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

Masashi Negishi, Ph.D.
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS)
Yukio Tono, Ph.D.
TUFS
ALTE Paris 2014
Contents

• The Development of the Framework (M. Negishii)

• The Development of Resources for the CEFR-J (Y, Tono)

• Reference Level Descriptions for the CEFR-J (Y, Tono)

• The Impact of the CEFR-J (M. Negishii)
The Development of the CEFR-J

Masashi Negishi
TUFS
A Brief Summary of ALTE 2011

A progress report on the development of the CEFR-J

Masashi Negishi
Tomoko Takada
(Yukio Tono)
CEFR-J based framework for ELT in Japan

Construction of CEFR-J & Relevant Resources

Preparation Phase
- Teacher Survey
- Rewriting descriptors

Revision Phase
- Expert Survey
- CEFR-J beta
- Re-examining Can-do Descriptors

Validation Phase
- School Piloting
- Descriptor Sorting Exercise
- Comparing Self-assessment & Actual Skills
- Empirical Data & Final Revision
- CEFR-J Ver.1
- Students’ Self-assessment
- Students’ Assessment by their teachers
- Symposium
- Final Report

Resources:
- Sample tasks
- CEFR-J Vocabulary List
- ELP Descriptor DB

CEFR-J alpha

Interim Report

2008 2009 2010 2011
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
TUFS
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEFR - Level</th>
<th>Pre-A1</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text analysis</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>1057</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1722</td>
<td></td>
<td>5639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Target</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>6000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ EVP Integrated Final Version</td>
<td>1068</td>
<td>1358</td>
<td>2359</td>
<td>2785</td>
<td></td>
<td>7570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>CEFR-Level</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apple</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banana</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bean</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beef</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biscuit</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottle</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bread</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breakfast</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burger</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>butter</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cake</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>candy</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheese</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ball</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baseball</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basketball</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cartoon</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concert</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dance</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drama</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>football</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>painting</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>party</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piano</td>
<td>A0</td>
<td>Hobbies and pastimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

SP: 69
SI: 137
L: 124
R: 146
W: 171

647 descriptors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lev.</th>
<th>Category/Code</th>
<th>ELP descriptor(s)</th>
<th>General descriptors (Japanese)</th>
<th>Descriptors for children (Japanese)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>IS1-A1</td>
<td>I can say who I am, ask someone’s name and introduce someone.</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>IS1-A1-1</td>
<td>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]</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>IS1-A1-1</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>IS2-A1</td>
<td>I can understand simple questions about myself and my family when people speak slowly and clearly (e.g. &quot;What’s your name?&quot; &quot;How old are you?&quot; &quot;How are you?&quot; etc.).</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>IS2-A1</td>
<td>I can understand simple words and phrases, like &quot;excuse me&quot;, &quot;sorry&quot;, &quot;thank you&quot;, etc.</td>
<td>「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る</td>
<td>「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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>IS2-A1</td>
<td>I can understand simple greetings, like &quot;hello&quot;, &quot;good bye&quot;, &quot;good morning&quot;, etc.</td>
<td>「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</td>
<td>「やあ」「さようなら」「おはよう」といった簡単な挨拶が分かる</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Companion resources for using the CEFR-J

CEFR-J Wordlist

ELP "Can Do" Descriptor DB

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

Coursebook corpora based on CEFR
A1  A2  B1  B2

Learner corpora based on CEFR
A1  A2  B1  B2

Other resources:
EP/Core Inventory, etc.

Extraction of criterial features

Finding language points for CEFR levels

Methodological contribution to L2 Profiling Research

Syllabus/ Textbook/ Materials development

- Linking to CEFR-J
- Inventory for CEFR-J

2012 - 2013

2014 - 2015
Corpora

• Learner corpora:
  – **JEFLL 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.

• **Hypothesis testing**
  - Theory-driven approach, focusing on particular grammatical properties
  - Verb subcat; postnominal modifiers; to Infinitives; articles; tense; collocation, etc

• **Learner errors**
  - Automatic error tagging

• **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
Masashi Negishi
TUFS
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

- **TOEIC**: 741
- **TOEFL**: 405
- **Juken eigo** (English for entrance exams): 117
- **CEFR**: 10
- **CEFR-J**: 3
The Positive/Negative Graphs

The CEFR

Neutral 44%
Positive 39%
Negative 17%

The CEFR-J

Positive 75%
Negative 11%
Neutral 14%
CEFR

CAN-DO

student

teacher

self-assessment

University of Bonn

use

level(s)

A1

half

below

junior high school

high school

半数

中学校

大学
CEFR

CEFR-J
CEFR-J

CEFR-based framework for ELT in Japan
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
  o 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.