The actual and potential impacts of the CEFR on language education in Japan

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Résumé : Cet article étudie comment le CECR a été mis en pratique dans l'enseignement des langues au Japon, avec des effets positifs mais aussi des difficultés et des problèmes potentiels. On peut dire que le CECR a eu beaucoup d'influence et nous traitons de ses trois principales utilisations : la traduction des résultats, l'amélioration de l'enseignement des langues étrangères au Japon (usage pédagogique du CECR) et l'établissement de critères japonais de compétences en langues étrangères. Dans le premier cas, il y a plusieurs développements en cours sur la manière d'utiliser les descripteurs de savoir-faire pour l'interprétation des résultats des tests à forts enjeux. Le CECR et en particulier les descripteurs de savoir-faire servent à évaluer les connaissances, à fixer des objectifs et d'outils de réflexion pour développer et établir programmes et cours. Un certain nombre de recherches se référant au CECR ont été menées au Japon pour produire plus de critères de compétences en langues.

Mots-clés : Cadre européen de référence (CECR), politique et aménagement linguistiques, didactique des langues, évaluation, Portfolio européen des langues (PEL)

Abstract: This paper examines how the CEFR has been applied in language education in Japan demonstrating positive impacts as well as difficulties and potential problems. It can be said that the CEFR has had much influence and we deal with the three main applications: for score translation, to improve foreign language education in Japan (pedagogical use of CEFR), and the establishment of Japan standards of foreign language proficiency. In the first case there are several ongoing developments how can do descriptors are also used for the score interpretation of high-stake tests. The CEFR and in particular can do descriptors are used as assessment, goal-setting and reflective tools to develop and plan curricula and courses. A number of research projects have been conducted to further produce language proficiency standards in Japan using the CEFR as a reference point. This leads to one of the more serious issues regarding the implementation in the Japanese and other contexts: it could be the case that the more it is adapted to a specific context, the greater the possibility that the CEFR will lose its validity and the original language proficiency scales will be altered in an unhelpful way.

Keywords: CEFR, language policy and language planning, language pedagogy, assessment, European Language Portfolio (ELP)

1. Introduction

There are several positive impacts as well as difficulties and potential problems in the application of the CEFR (Council of Europe [COE], 2001) in the language education context of Japan. With the great demand of quality assurance (in particular the higher education sector), the considerable influence of the CEFR is expected to increase. As in other contexts, the implementation of the CEFR requires major changes in the basic philosophies and practices (e.g. traditionally students have been trained to be receptive and quiet in teacher-centred classrooms) of language education in Japan (Parmenter & Byram, 2010; Majima, 2010). A number of case studies have demonstrated how the CEFR has been adapted in Japan (Nagai, 2010; Schmidt, Naganuma, O'Dwyer, Imig & Sakai, 2010 among others). The CEFR and *can do* statements have come to be widely used for three main purposes in Japan. We will examine these in turn. While recognising that the CEFR is much more than a set of *can do* statements, much of the paper deals with the use of *can do* statements as we believe that this is a starting point for the implementation of the practices and principles that the CEFR implies.

2. The pedagogical use of the CEFR

Although the CEFR was developed to implement European language policy it has been making a great impact in the Japanese educational context. This impact, has, however, been somewhat different from Europe, where we believe there is an emphasis on learning the mother tongue plus two other languages. The philosophy that underlies the development of the CEFR is to raise awareness of a European identity with shared values and acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity as well as to improve communication and mutual understanding among European people. For the latter purpose, an action-oriented approach is emphasized. The CEFR also emphasizes transparency and coherence in language teaching and promotes autonomous learning. The adaptation of the CEFR to the Japanese educational context is inevitably different from Europe simply due to the geo-political situation. Most notably, the pressure of learning modern languages other than English in Japan is much weaker than in Europe, although it is common to hear the cliché that mutual understanding among people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is very important for Japan. While English has been a compulsory subject in secondary schools and now in elementary schools, other modern languages are taught only at a tertiary level except for very limited number of private elementary and secondary schools. Hence, the CEFR's impact to promote plurilingualism is rather limited; only a few universities rigorously attempt to promote it. The major impact of the CEFR currently lies in the promotion of the transparency and coherence in development of English language curriculum as well as to empower autonomous learning. This section first illustrates the plurilingual approach taken by three institutions. Then it discusses several changes to English programs made to attain transparency and coherence as well as to transform teacher-centered knowledge driven courses into learner-centered communicative learning. Finally positive outcomes and shortcomings of these changes will be discussed.

2.1 Plurilingual approach

Keio University made the most challenging and ambitious adaptation of the CEFR to promote plurilingual education. In April 2006, a five-year research project was launched at the Keio Research Center for Foreign Language Education, jointly financed by the

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and Keio itself. The Action Oriented Plurilingual Learning Project (AOP project) aims to promote the continuity and transparency of foreign language education at all levels of the Keio educational system- which consists of one elementary school, three junior high schools, five senior high schools, and ten university departments- and to achieve collaboration among its language teachers. This involved the development of a learning and assessment framework based on the CEFR and the European Language Portfolio (ELP), specifically distributing copies of a Japanese version of the "European Language Portfolio – Junior version" (under license from The National Centre for Languages in England) to foreign language teachers in the Keio system. One of the shortcomings of this approach was that the ELP was used without any adaptation to the Keio context. Results from a survey carried out in Keio indicate that there was resistance to the large-scale implementation (Horiguchi et al., 2010), with some respondents stating that the ELP is for learners in Europe who have contact with foreign languages on a daily basis and it is based on the European plurilingual ideal.

The achievement goals for each of the 25 foreign language programs of Osaka University of Foreign Studies (currently integrated in Osaka University) were created in a unified fashion with direct reference to the CEFR (Majima, 2010). These achievement goals were disclosed to the students to increase learner autonomy and social accountability within the programs. Furthermore, some cases of collaboration in this institution, such as in the Russian Language Department have been made, where classes proceed in the unified way and speed, including coordination with the CEFR-conforming Test of Russian as a Foreign Language. However, it remains to be seen whether complete implementation of these goals into other language programs in the institution will emerge. Much of the difficulties of the implementation lie in resistance from instructors who are not familiar with the CEFR or misunderstand it. They regard the CEFR-based language program as a controlled and governed system, which they fear threatens their teaching autonomy.

A smaller but successful adaptation of the CEFR to a number of language programs at a tertiary institution is observed in the Muroran Institute of Technology, Hokkaido (where 600 first year students have to choose between Chinese, German, and Russian). The instructors of the three languages collaborated to produce similar *can do* lists based on the CEFR for the curriculum of the three languages (Krause-Ono, 2010). Each language has its own idiosyncrasies and different order in which new subjects are introduced, in short, its own steps to progress. Therefore, it is necessary for each language to develop their own *can do* lists. For this purpose *can do* statements from the *Profile Deutsch* (Glaboniat et al., 2005) were translated to form a Japanese language template. Seven part-time instructors of Chinese and Russian collaborated over the span of one year in developing the teaching materials. At the beginning of the collaboration, none of the instructors had ever heard of *can do* lists. At the end of the process, learning guidelines and also the learning content of each language were coordinated. Since April 2010, all instructors use the same material within the teaching of each language. The coordinator reached out to the part-time teachers by providing information and training regarding the use of the CEFR, special funding for meetings/workshops, and special payments for developing the new teaching materials. This was found to be the key for successful and well-implemented programs.

2.2 Renovation of English language program

While reforms of modern language programs to promote plurilingualism at a tertiary level are under way, many universities are attempting English language program reforms due to much debate and criticism on the inefficiency of English education. In spite of six-year compulsory English education before tertiary education and at least one year (usually more) at a tertiary level, Japanese university graduates are generally not perceived to be competent in communicating in English in daily life or job-related situations. Some of the major reasons for such an inefficient and ineffective English education seem to lie in the lack of the transparency and coherence in the program as well as traditional teacher-centred teaching methods.

A number of reforms of English curriculum to overcome these problems at a tertiary level have been conducted with reference to the CEFR. One such example comes from a public university, Ibaraki University. Nagai and Fukuda (2004) demonstrated how a general education English program was built based on the CEFR. The Integrated English Program (IEP) consists of 5-level, five skill-based courses and EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and is implemented university-wide involving five colleges (Humanities, Science, Education, Engineering, and Agriculture) with the enrolment of more than 2200 students. The IEP was developed to solve problems of the previous English program such as the absence of established goals or outcomes for students' English levels, and the lack of sequence for courses so that there was no opportunity to build upon skills learned the semester before. The self-assessment grid of the CEFR was used to set the overall goals of the five-level[1] English courses in the IEP curriculum:
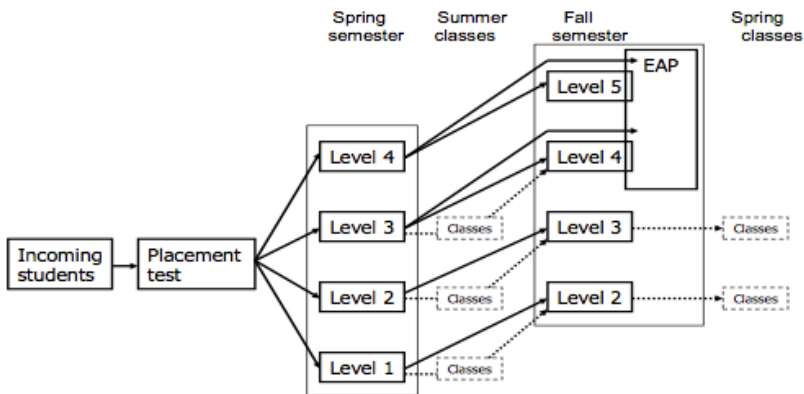

Figure 1 IEP Curriculum Structure

Then, more detailed and concrete expected learning outcomes of each of the five level courses and an EAP presentation course were produced. To create such learning outcomes, scaled descriptors in relevant language activities listed in the CEFR were modified to fit a particular course of the IEP. For instance, one of the learning outcomes of the presentation course was created by specifying the topic and the manner of the presentation usingB1 descriptors in the 'addressing audience' activity of the CEFR, as shown below. Words in italics indicate the original statement for which modification is

needed and words in bold indicate the resultant modification. Additions to the *can do* statements are underlined.

Spoken production (B1): Addressing Audience
Can give prepared straightforward presentations *on a familiar topic within his/her field* → **on the safety of cellphones, environmental issues, and the topics of his/her concern** which are clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision, <u>using PowerPoint</u>. Can take follow up questions, but may have to ask for repetition if the speech was rapid.

Figure 2. Example of a modified outcome statement

The concrete learning outcomes are essential components of the course design. They are the basis on which daily classroom tasks, language activities and teaching materials are devised as well as the basis for both teacher-assessment and self-assessment. Coherence of the entire IEP curriculum is ensured by setting clear objectives for each 5-level and EAP courses. Each course in the IEP program has been designed and planned to achieve the expected learning outcomes, which describe what learners are able to do at the end of the course. As a result, the courses in the program are transformed into learner-centred task-based courses. However, it should be noted that because such curriculum development involves negotiations with different types of people in the institution, such as top administrators, curriculum committee members, and instructors, it is not easily carried out.

Ware, Robertson and Paydon (2010) provide another example of English curriculum reform which was carried out in Tokai University, a large private university. In 2007 it was decided that *can do* statements would describe all curricula. The Foreign Language Center at Tokai developed an integrated program for all four skills that involves course objectives in the form of CEFR *can do* statements, assessment *can do* statements for each genre, assessment rubrics for each of the 3 levels (basic, intermediate, & advanced) for each course, student self-assessment sheets and supplementary explanation of criteria terms. Part-time staff were required to attend 5 faculty development meetings from December 2009 to July 2010. Topics of these one-day meetings included explaining the new *can do* statements-based curriculum, and introduction of writing assessment rubrics and assessment procedures. While it is not currently clear to what extent instructors accept or willingly implement the system, these ongoing initiatives are backed up by sound pedagogical principles and practices, and curriculum control is achieved. However, there is a loss of teacher autonomy.

Classes conducted by individual instructors have been successfully updated in adopting an action-oriented approach in the classroom and in promoting autonomous learning. O'Dwyer (2010) presented the learning cycle using ELP in EFL classes. An initial outline of the learning stage includes defining the content and correlating to relevant *can do* statements, which leads to self-assessment and goal-setting procedures. The learning stage is carried out, before conducting reflection. This may not be revolutionary, it can be traced to Kolb (1984) and Little and Perclová (2001), but when implemented in conjunction with *can do* statements taken from a validated reference system such as the CEFR the relevance of learning programs can be increased for learners and other stakeholders. Sato (2010) also developed an English course where learners were provided with self-assessment and metacognitive training with procedures including initial

completion of the task-specific *Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklist* of the ELP before task completion, then instruction and awareness-raising on features of "good" communicative performance and relevant communication strategies, re-practice of the task, a second completion of the checklist before a review and final re-performance of the task and completion of the checklist. Collett & Sullivan (2010) provide a specific example where the curriculum and weekly learning units are explicitly linked to original *can do* statements and a Study Progress Sheet aims to develop learners' self-regulative learning skills of goal-setting and reflection. Such learning practices can go toward effective implementation of learner-centred practices suggested by the CEFR and the ELP and, in turn, possibly facilitate lifelong learning.

2.3 Positive effects and shortcomings

The main positive impact of the pedagogical use of *can do* statements is the perceived shift from teacher-centred knowledge driven classes to learner-centred communication-oriented instruction. Although, it cannot be said that the CEFR has been the only influence on this shift, we do believe that if the practices and principles inferred by the CEFR and ELP are undertaken in a considered way, then this shift will be effectively facilitated for language educators and language learners. Another positive impact of the CEFR is the promotion of self-regulated learning. With the help of ELP, the importance of autonomous learning is well recognized. Many educators now realize that unless learners commit themselves to learning by themselves the effect of the learning will be very limited. Goal setting and assessment, put in terms of *can do* statements, have been widely adopted from individual classes to institutional-wide basis. The shift to learner centred instruction will undoubtedly continue, regardless of the view that the CEFR is still not widely known or explicitly acknowledged among a large group of educators in Japan. In this regard, new initiatives in language teacher training may foster language educators imbued with a positive, action-oriented, reflective approach to learning. This will mainly come in the form of the implementation of Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (JPOSTL) (Jimbo, 2011), which is adapted from the European original (EPOSTL). Furthermore, research projects based on the CEFR (see section 4 below), are emerging and it is expected that this trend will continue. These movements could bring about the increased prevalence of CEFR-based practices in Japan.

Case studies shown above, however, indicate that the implementation of CEFR-based holistic language curriculum reform is not easy. In the case of top-down implementation without much adaptation of the CEFR to a particular Japanese educational context, the good intention of the language reform may result in vain. The AOP project case clearly demonstrates that reform in foreign language education is likely to occur not in a top-down manner but through gradual innovative steps that occur at the classroom level through the actions of individual teachers. The ELP should be left ambiguous and flexible, so that teachers can transform it as they like. A top-down approach can be difficult, and teachers may become more open to change if models of how the teacher actually uses ELP in the classroom are presented (Horiguchi et al., 2010). While top-down implementation brings the benefits of integrated, effective decision-making and curriculum control, there is the risk of the loss of teacher autonomy and their resulting indifference to the reform. To adapt the CEFR to the entire language program, teachers must share its basic philosophy and ideas. The amalgam of top-down and bottom-up implementation with a strong leadership is necessary.

3 The use of the CEFR for score translation

Coordinated use of CEFR-based tests for languages other than English is rare in Japan. Tests, such as the Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera (DELE) for the Spanish language and the Goethe-Institut's German language examinations (Goethe-Zertifikat A1-C2), are only really used in Japan by the small number who choose to study in the relevant region (Rudolf Reinelt of Ehime University, personal communication). There is, however, a prominent focus on standardized testing in the English language context. *Can do* descriptors are used for the score interpretation of the most high-stake English tests in Japan such as TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) and Eiken (Test for Practical English Proficiency). The *can do* lists of both TOEIC and Eiken are produced through similar empirical studies. Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administers TOEIC, conducted a survey to 7,292 TOEIC examinees in Japan (and 3,626 in Korea) concerning what they can do using English in daily life situations and related their scores to tasks they say they can perform (Powers, Kim & Weng 2008). Test takers were provided with a checklist of 75 *can do* statements in daily life activities (conversing, travelling, requesting, shopping) and basic job activities (listening/speaking, reading, writing) to be answered on a 5-point scale (not at all, with a great deal of difficulty, with some difficulty, with very little difficulty, easily, for each point). As a result of this survey, the meaning of TOEIC scores is provided by *can do* statements, which show what participants can actually do using English in daily life situations.

Likewise, the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP), which administers Eiken, gave self-assessment questionnaires to 20,000 successful test takers asking what they can accomplish in real-life situations using English. As a result of this study, STEP produced *can do* lists of four language activities: reading, listening, speaking and writing for each of seven grades. One of the most advanced Reading proficiency statements is as follows: "Can understand a wide variety of texts from a range of social, professional, and educational situations".

On the other hand, a beginner level of reading descriptor states: "Can recognize the letters of the alphabet and punctuation marks, and can understand basic English words, phrases, and sentences". (The Society for Testing English Proficiency, 2008)

These *can do* lists provide test takers and educators with a comprehensive overview of the proficiency levels provided by the test score or grade. They not only help test takers to better understand and to be familiar with the levels of language ability targeted at each grade, but also give a general picture of what typical language learners believe they *can do* in Japan (Naganuma, 2010). Furthermore, providing guideliness about what test takers *can do* helps make decisions on who is suitable or who needs training and avoid "false-positive" decisions for organizations in cases such as starting a new project with overseas companies based on the test scores of employees. In Hong Kong, India, Greece and Taiwan and other regions, tests have been used by companies and ministries, for the purpose of recruitment, promotion, developing internal language training programs (BULATS, 2008). The Business Language Testing Service Test Suite (BULATS, administered by STEP in Japan) is specifically designed to measure the test-taker's English skills in work situations and environments, a significant departure from general English tests in Japan. Test scores are mapped directly to the CEFR levels (e.g. 0-19 corresponds to A1, 20-39 corresponds to A2 etc.). The score result form provides the correspondence with the ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe) *can do* statements.

The bureaucratic adoption of test scores is a high stake, political decision that will continue to cause controversy in the field of applied linguistics and beyond. TOEIC is currently the standard that the majority of companies in Japan adopt for such purposes, but organizations like STEP are aggressively pushing for their share of the market. In the area of testing the use of *can do* lists (those of TOEIC and Eiken are produced independently of the CEFR *can do* descriptors), supports the adoption of the CEFR principle that the proficiency level of the language user should be described by positive and concrete behavioural terms. *Can do* statements provide information that the score or grade on a test could not.

4. The establishment of Japan standards of foreign language proficiency

The issue of standards of language proficiency is another high-stake arena. A number of research projects have been conducted to produce language proficiency standards in Japan using the CEFR as a reference point. The CEFR-J project, with government funding through a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research, attempts to produce Japan standards for foreign language proficiency based on the CEFR (Negishi, 2011). The project recognizes the importance of the CEFR's proficiency standards which provide the common basis for discussing learning, teaching of foreign language as well as assessment of learners' achievement. The CEFR proficiency *can do* statements do not target any particular language nor any particular context, because of its principal philosophy – reference level for all languages in any context. The purpose of the project is to contextualize the *can do* statements provided by COE (2001) to fit the needs and situations of foreign language education, in particular English education in Japan. The CEFR-J includes a Pre-A1 level and has a finer level classification of each of the CEFR basic levels, for example the A1 level is comprised of three sublevels: A1.1, A1.2, and A1.3. The project has produced a grid with two *can do* statements for each sub level. The project also tried to modify the *can do* statements of all proficiency levels by specifying tasks, themes of tasks, and conditions of language activities. For example, a A1.1 level of Writing descriptor states: "I can write upper- and lower-case letters and words in block letters."

Furthermore, the ongoing project intends to list, we believe in collaboration with the English Profile project, vocabulary and grammatical patterns necessary to carry out tasks assigned to certain language activities in a given level of proficiency. The CEFR-J project confronts the problems of abstractness and generality of the CEFR proficiency descriptors.

In 2010 the Japan Foundation (JF) established the JF Standard for Japanese-Language education (JF Standard). Its purpose was to provide a reference tool for teaching and learning of the Japanese language and assessment of learners' Japanese proficiency. Learners can identify their Japanese proficiency levels by using the JF Standard. The proficiency level is judged by what they *can do* in Japanese. The standard is also to be used for designing Japanese language curricula or courses as well as developing textbooks and tests (Japan Foundation, 2010a). They present some samples of how to use the JF standard for such purposes (Japan Foundation, 2010b).

The JF Standard consists of 270 *can do* descriptors of three proficiency levels (A1, A2 and B1) in relation to five language activities: Listening, Reading, Spoken Production, Spoken interaction, and Writing[2]. The descriptors adapt the CEFR scaled *can do* descriptors of the five language activities to the Japanese educational context. As in the CEFR document, the five language activities are further classified into subcategories such as

"overall oral production", "sustained monologue: Describing experience", and "Public announcement" in speaking activity. The JF Standard specifies the theme, situation, and condition of language activities. For instance, one of the CEFR's A2 descriptors of "the sustained monologue: describing experience" states as follows: "Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points. Can describe everyday aspects of his/her environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience." (COE, 2001:59)

A rather broad topic of the oral description in the above statement is specified in the following JF Standard *can do* statement with the topic of a task and the situation of the monologue limited to an introduction of the speaker's hometown or other familiar cities: "Can introduce in short simple terms famous sights, local specialties and other features when giving a friend a tour of one's own hometown or other cities familiar to oneself." (Japan Foundation, 2010b)

The foundation encourages the user to create his/her own language portfolio using the JF Standard. For this purpose the foundation created a web site called "Minna-no (Everyone's) *Can do*" site (<http://jfstandard.jp/*can do*>), which contains all the JF Standard *can do* statements as well as original 493 CEFR *can do* statements written both in Japanese and English. The user of the site can extract *can do* statements according to proficiency level, language activity, or/and linguistic competence. Furthermore, the user can modify the selected statements specifying the theme and situation of a task among other elements and store the statements in their own folder, creating his/her own personalised language portfolio. These practices promote autonomous learning as well as life-long learning, an explicit goal of the CEFR.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents three major applications of the CEFR into the Japanese educational context: the score interpretation of high stake proficiency tests, attempts to create Japanese proficiency standards for foreign languages, and various pedagogical uses of can do descriptors to improve foreign language education as well as to promote autonomous learning.

There is a large focus on standardized testing in Japan with long-standing concerns about the distortion of the curriculum to accommodate such high-stake testing. There will be attempts to link tests to the CEFR to obtain recognition. Advances in popular tests toward the use of scaled *can do* descriptors (TOEIC) or toward the general *can do* method (EIKEN) are positive and will hopefully contribute to improved learner outcomes. However, it is preferable that the linkage between the CEFR and the tests has an impact on the design of the tests. A relation between situations and environments in which test takers will find themselves and the test content is critical. Along with more rigour, in terms of professionally accepted practice in creating, adapting, or equating scales to the CEFR, these need to be brought to the standardised testing arena (Bachman, 2011). Research does not support the view that standardised testing can be relied on alone to raise standards while contextualized formative assessment has been shown to improve learning (Falsgraf, 2009). Score interpretation of popular proficiency tests in terms of *can do* descriptors will have a positive effect on language education in Japan if they are used properly for formative assessment of learners and help the wider society interpret and understand that value.

The CEFR drew language researchers' and educators' attention and then prompted them to create foreign language proficiency which fits Japanese educational context because of its global nature. The CEFR provided a universal measure, intended as Pan-European but recognized more widely beyond Europe. Language educators and researchers in Japan felt the urge to create their own language proficiency standards, without being isolated from the global educational standards. As the contextualization of the CEFR to Japanese educational context proceeds, it becomes clearer that detailed specification of the original scaled descriptions is necessary. For instance, as the CEFR-J project demonstrates, a finer division of proficiency level may be necessary to reflect the typical learning pace of average Japanese learners of English. As the JF Standard indicates, much detailed specification of tasks assigned to each language activity and conditions of performance in the scaled descriptors is necessary when they are used as self-assessment checklists as well as goals of a language course. Then, a much-voiced criticism of the CEFR echoes here in Japan as well: how well does the local standard based on the CEFR match the original CEFR proficiency levels? It is ironical that the CEFR is used for the creation of a local standard precisely because it provides a global measure. However, the more local the standard is, the less global it becomes. It is a question of devising the local standard and at the same time guaranteeing the global proficiency levels.

The broader issue of how achievement and proficiency are interrelated is also relevant. The use of the CEFR as a global proficiency scale needs more careful treatment. The local specification of the CEFR proficiency levels means a departure from the CEFR global standards and raises issues such as how closely the localized scales are related with the CEFR scales. To answer such an issue, we have to verify the localized proficiency levels through quantitative as well as qualitative verification. The important issue we should consider, however, is that whether we still want to guarantee a global proficiency level (or rather a part of it) and at the same time assess achievements made in a language course. To facilitate self-regulatory learning, the objectives should be concrete and specific and testable. Therefore, the *can do* statements for this purpose must be very specific and hence it is difficult to guarantee an overall level of proficiency. Furthermore, we are not sure how many concrete tasks are required to match the proficiency expressed by one *can do* statement of say B1 spoken production level. The key is suitable and relevant addition of parameters and illustrations to extend the CEFR without challenging its validity.

The CEFR has most widely been applied to curricula and courses improvement, resulting in positive effects on language education in Japan. The CEFR, more specifically *can do* schemes which describes expected learning outcomes in observable behavioural terms, is having a growing influence on foreign language education in Japan. The use of *can do* statements as checklists in a course to facilitate learners' self-regulatory learning is spread widely and quite successfully implemented. O'Dwyer (2010), Sato (2010), and Collett & Sullivan (2010), among many others demonstrated great successes in improving learners' ability to learn. The development of foreign language curricula based on the CEFR brought about much transparency and coherence in language programs through identifiable learning outcomes. However, the institution-wide implementation of such curricula occasionally faces difficulty. The case studies here call for the amalgam of top-down and bottom-up implementation, combined with informed and strong leadership. While resistance is likely, competition (on local, national and global levels) continues to create the need for quality assurance in language education and the implementation of CEFR-informed practices outlined above.

In conclusion, the CEFR will implicitly and explicitly continue to influence language education in Japan. If the JF Standards and similar standards of foreign language proficiency are adopted and used on a wide scale, then the prospects will be positive. The resulting effects on language pedagogy and possibly language testing will be seen in the future. The adverse effects of language testing may be reversed should a more learner-centred pedagogy produce more effective and autonomous learners of language.

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Notes

[1] Five IEP levels are designed to correspond roughly to the CEFR proficiency levels as follows: Level 1 to A1, Level 2 to A2, Level 3 and 4 to B1, and Level 5 to B2 (more detailed explanation, see Nagai and Fukda 2004). The proficiency of students at Ibaraki University was assessed using DIALANG and found the proficiency levels of the majority of the students are A1 in Listening, A2 in Reading, A2 in Writing, B1 in Structure, and between A2 and B1 in vocabulary. It was concluded B1 is an appropriate goal for the IEP program. B1 descriptors are used for Level 3 which is a required level for graduation.

[2] The Japan foundation is expected to complete B2 level can do proficiency descriptors for the Japanese language in 2011. The descriptors are provided both in Japanese and English.