

## Assessing vocabulary knowledge for learners of French as a foreign language: accounting for L1 variability to go beyond the CEFR scale

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Providing reading materials for language learners adapted to their proficiency level is fundamental. For nearly twenty years in Europe, the CEFR framework (Council of Europe, 2001) is being used as a reference for harmonizing language teaching, learning and assessment (Fulcher, 2004). The success of the framework is often explained with several factors: “many decades of work based on the ‘action-oriented approach’ (...) positive wording of the level descriptors and its non-compulsory nature with a structure open to multimodality and adaptations” (Figueras, 2012). Yet the proficiency scale that comes with the CEFR has not been without criticisms (on the intuitive teacher judgements of the scale, on the relevance and validity of the level descriptors, on the inadequacy to consider individual differences and variability among learners (Hulstijn, 2007; Fulcher, 2010)). It is a fact, though, that the CEFR scale has staked out its place in Europe and beyond, thus providing a common ground for language pedagogy.

In this communication, our concern will be focused on the impact of the CEFR levels as regards to vocabulary complexity assessment, complexity being understood here as difficulty in word recognition and meaning identification in reading tasks. Our work aims at identifying variability among the CEFR levels according to feedback from learners of French. Like Tack and collaborators (Tack et al., 2016), we will use a graded lexical resource for French as a foreign language (FFL), FLELex (François et al., 2014), to identify the words in a text that are difficult to understand by intermediate non-native speakers of French (from A2 to B1, the learners come from a wide range of countries, they will be tested with a placement test from ADCUEFE – the association of university centers teaching FFL in France). A comparison of the expectations provided by FLELex as regards lexical knowledge with the annotations provided by the learners (they will annotate known / unknown words in authentic texts) will be analyzed as regards to different variables, specially the mother tongue (language family type), the number of months/years learning French in a non-French speaking country and the number of months/years learning it in immersion. This analysis will try to explain discrepancies in lexical knowledge between learners based on their background, especially their mother tongue.

Our contribution will propose balanced CEFR grades to the FLELex resource according to the results obtained regarding the effect of the variability of learner’s background. More generally, we will discuss issues in lexical acquisition as regards to the CEFR levels.

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