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Introducing CEFR into the Teaching of Foreign Languages

Margit KRAUSE-ONO

外国語教育への CEFR 導入

クラウゼ=小野・マルギット

Abstract: This report focuses on the steps taken since 2008 to introduce the CEFR into the teaching of foreign languages other than English, at Muroran Institute of Technology. Seven part-time instructors of Chinese and Russian collaborated over the time of one year in developing teaching materials, as well as can-do-lists based on the level A1 of the CEFR. For this task, the CEFR-based German textbook “Und du?” was used as a reference.

Introduction

CEFR is the acronym for Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It was developed by the Council of Europe and adopted by the EU in 2001. In more than 46 countries it is now used for language education, the development of teaching materials, can-do-lists, and language portfolios as well as for evaluating language proficiency. The CEFR describes the content of six levels of proficiency, from basic A1 to complete fluency C2, based on 5 competencies. One of its main goals is to render learners autonomous.

Background

At Muroran Institute of Technology, one foreign language other than English is compulsory in the first year of studies. The students choose between Chinese, German, and Russian. As they have learned only English so far, they are total beginners in those languages. The language courses are given once a week, which amounts to a total of 30 weeks. In the second year, students may continue to study the language during the first semester, however this is optional. Nevertheless, a third to a half of the students continues to take classes. Two full-time and two part-time instructors teach German and another seven part-time instructors teach Chinese and Russian.

CEFR as common language reference

Already in 2008, in all German classes conducted by me, the textbook “Und du?” which covers level A1 was used. The book concentrates on teaching with chunks by using the immediate method developed by Azra/Vannieuwenhuysse. Japanese is only used in the bilingual table of content as well as in the wordlists in each chapter and in the index at the end of the book.

The reactions of the students were very positive and from September 2008 the goal was to convince the part-time instructors to develop their own teaching materials and methods based on the CEFR. Already in the spring of the same year, an application for funding for this project had been granted.

First it was necessary to explain what the CEFR is about and the advantages it would bring forth. The textbook “Und du?” would then be an example of how to proceed. Also, it would be very important to develop can-do-lists, in order to give the responsibility back to the students and to make them autonomous.

Fortunately the CEFR is translated into Japanese because it is often applied and used for Japanese language courses for Europeans. This is especially actively pursued by AJE, the Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe. They compiled the following book in 2005, which was supported and published by the Japan Foundation: ヨーロッパにおける日本語教育事情と Common European Framework of References for Languages.

The CEFR itself was translated into Japanese by Yoshijima (2004) and is now published by Asahi Press. At the beginning of this project it was still downloadable and sent as a pdf-file to all part-time instructors at Muroran Institute of Technology. In addition, several workshops on the CEFR and on how to develop teaching materials with chunks were held in the satellite bureau of Muroran IT in Sapporo on the weekends, as all seven part-time instructors are from Sapporo. In the textbook “Und du?”, chunks are used to attain the competency of speaking/producing, understanding, and interaction as described in the A1 level of the CEFR. Heringer (2009), as well as Handwerker & Madlener (2009), writes in detail about the usage of chunks and the empirical basis for such.

One of the difficult parts was to convince the instructors of the necessity of can-do-lists, which should be given at least every other week. Students can check how well (or not so well) they have understood something or are able to actively use or understand newly learned content. Next, the lists are collected, put into statistics and given back to the students the following week, urging them to file the lists and use them as references. The purpose of can-do-lists is at least twofold. They put abstract descriptions of proficiencies into clear and transparent language (look at table 1). They also mirror the students what they have learned so far. By extension the lists are motivating and at the same time render the students more autonomous and responsible. Schmidt (2007), as well as Naganuma (2008) wrote about the importance of can-do-lists, their usage and

their benefits. Naganuma(2008) also writes about plans of adopting can-do-lists into the Japanese Proficiency Test for foreigners from 2010 on.

Although there are can-do-lists provided by the Council of Europe, it was necessary for us to break them down into smaller steps, which cover the content of a week or two.

A typical can-do-list looks like the following:

わたしにできることは（9）			ドイツ語 II 2009
相手の兄弟（姉妹）／両親等が何をしているのか（どんな仕事をしているかとか、学生であるかどうか等を）尋ねることができる。	できる	まあ何とか	あまりできない
自分の兄弟（姉妹）／両親等が何をしているのか（どんな仕事をしているかとか、学生であるかどうか等を）答えることができる。	できる	まあ何とか	あまりできない
相手がどんな仕事に就きたいのか尋ねることができる。	できる	まあ何とか	あまりできない
自分がどんな仕事に就きたいのか答えることができる。	できる	まあ何とか	あまりできない
自分の親戚／家族について話すことができる。	できる	まあ何とか	あまりできない

Table 1

The part-time instructors were willing to cooperate and since April 2009 all instructors use the same material for each language. They also proceed and progress approximately in the same way and speed.

Since the first semester of 2009, all four instructors for German use the textbook “Und du?”. As I had used the book already in 2008, I compiled all preparations, exercises, can-do-lists, as well as the recordings of students’ dialogs into a digest for the other three teachers of German.

Beginning in April 2009, all 12 German classes have been taught according to a common syllabus. All the students have also been given the same can-do-lists. The Chinese and Russian classes also proceed in the same manner.

At first, to teach in a communicative way and with chunks was a challenge for most of the Japanese teachers. Therefore, I prepared each lesson as detailed as possible and sent it to the other teachers in advance. I also added example dialogs, which were then recorded and uploaded to a moodle-platform, from which the students can download them. The non-native teachers of German did not follow the preparations strictly; however they used them as a kind of guidance and reference. Unfortunately, a similar preparation was not possible for the Chinese and Russian classes. Therefore, at the workshops, reports about the experience gained in German classes as well as feedback were given to the instructors of Chinese and Russian to help and encourage

them to develop adequate teaching materials and can-do-lists.

After the first semester, all 340 students of German were given the same test simultaneously. All teachers corrected the exams according to the same answer key. The exam itself accounted for 60% of the final mark. The final mark was calculated by adding the remaining 40%, which accounted for participation, preparation and performance of dialogs by students in each instructor's classes.

At the end of the first semester 2009, new funding was necessary for the second semester in order to continue to develop common teaching material based on the CEFR for Chinese and Russian. This funding was granted by the new president, which allowed us to continue the project.

During the workshop in July 2009 the syllabus for the second semester was jointly written by all instructors. Except for some details in the teaching content, all syllabi for foreign languages other than English are written with the same wording.

As mentioned before, for each language a course has been set up on a moodle-platform, by our colleague, associate professor Eric Hagley. So far, the platform has been only used to upload audio-files.

Conclusion and outlook

The cooperation of the teachers of each language went well and will hopefully continue in 2010. Common syllabi will be developed jointly, same textbooks will be agreed on and uniform exams for all classes of each language will be given.

The teachers for Chinese and Russian had to develop their own material as textbooks based on the CEFR are still in the making in Japan. Therefore, they used the German textbook "Und du?" as reference. During the academic year 2009, students of Chinese and Russian were given loose copies, as the teachers prepared and developed the material teaching as they went. It is now our plan to compile those loose copies and can-do-lists into textbooks based on CEFR. How and in which way this will be accomplished, is to be decided during our last workshop in January 2010.

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