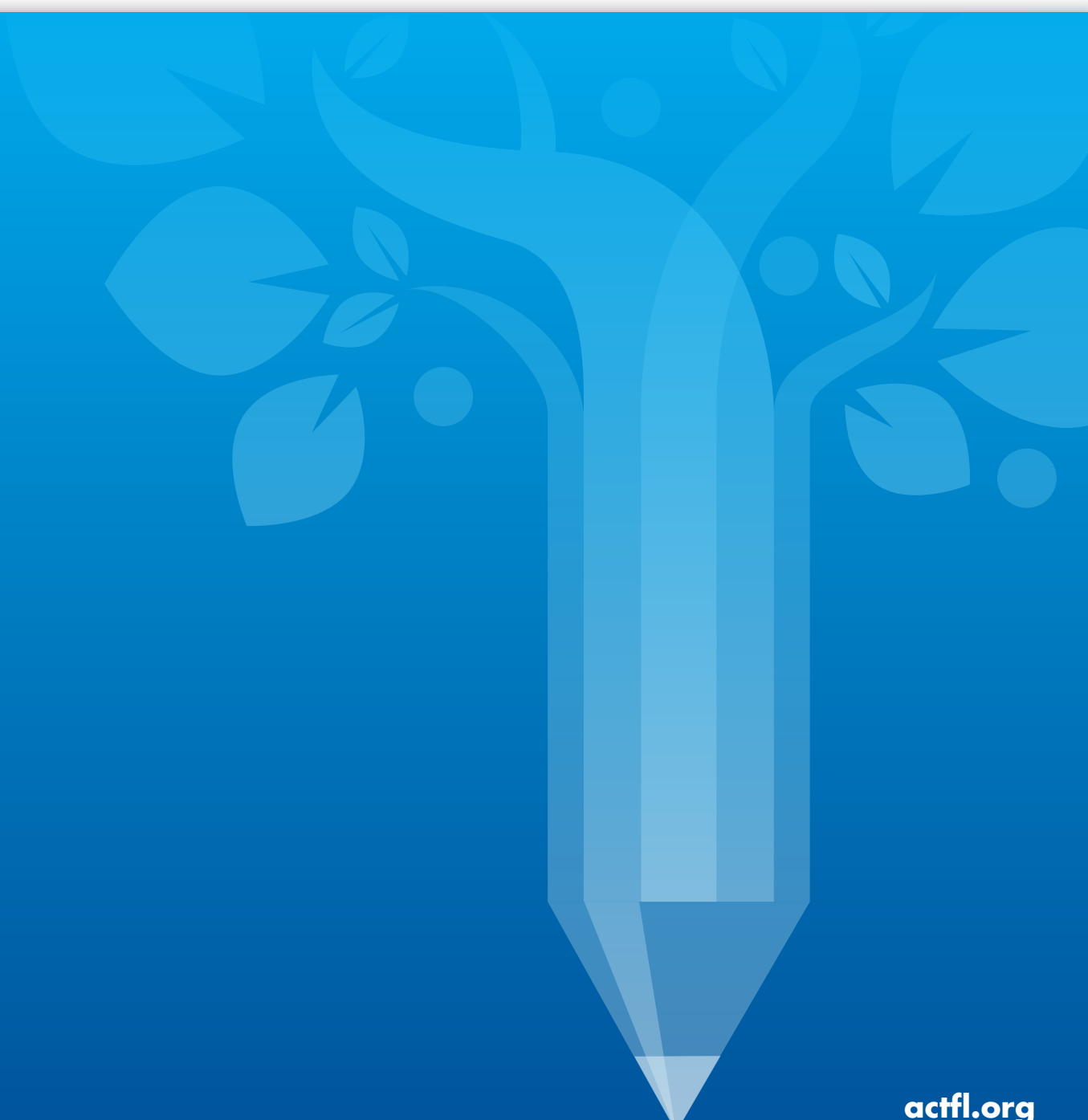# Assigning CEFR Ratings to ACTFL Assessments

INTRODUCTION

There are two major frameworks for learning, teaching, and assessing foreign language skills: the U.S. defined scales of proficiency, i.e., the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*/ILR Skill Level Descriptions, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR). Both frameworks form the basis of major testing and certification systems. In addition, these frameworks are used for textbook development, curriculum development, and educational standards. Despite the fact that both systems have co-existed for close to 15 years, there were few empirical studies to establish correspondences between them. The fact that there were no official correspondences led to an array of proposed alignments between the two systems.

In order to address the challenges deriving from two major frameworks coexisting but not interacting with each other, the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), in collaboration with ACTFL, launched the first of a series of four ACTFL-CEFR Alignment Conferences in 2010. The goal of this series was to establish an empirically-based alignment between the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* and the CEFR and the tests based on those frameworks. The conferences brought together leading proficiency experts from the U.S., Canada, and Europe, representing 15 organizations from fourteen different countries and received support from both US and EU organizations[1]. The conference series developed into a formal collaboration between ACTFL and the European Center for Modern Languages (ECML), a Council of Europe (CoE) institution, to explore such topics as the elements of proficiency, pathways from frameworks to the classroom, linking language proficiency to goals in higher education, and establishing common language policy goals.

The transatlantic cooperation has resulted in many publications to better educate the experts and the public on both frameworks. The collaboration has led to, for example, the development and publication of the NCSSFL-ACTFL "Can Do" statements that better correspond to the CEFR, several studies linking ACTFL tests to the CEFR, and the inclusion in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012* of terminology that reflects its similarities to the CEFR. In 2015, the Council of Europe selected a total of 54 ACTFL reading and listening proficiency test items in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish to demonstrate CEFR levels A1 to C1 in the Council of Europe's Illustrative Reading and Listening Test Tasks and Items project (published at the CoE website 2016).

TEST-BY-TEST ALIGNMENTS: CEFR RATINGS FOR ACTFL PROFICIENCY TESTS

Based on the information and discussions from the ACTFL-CEFR Conferences and resulting papers and journals, ACTFL worked with an EU-based research group to develop an ACTFL-CEFR crosswalk to be able to offer CEFR ratings for ACTFL assessments. The research generated by the ACTFL-CEFR Conferences very clearly showed that frameworks cannot be aligned based solely on their constructs (see e.g. the papers compiled in Tschirner 2012). Frameworks can only be aligned on a test by test basis. That is to say, CEFR tests need be linked to the ACTFL Framework, and ACTFL tests need to be linked to the CEFR.

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[1] American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Council of Europe Language Policy Unit, European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) , Institute for Test Research and Test Development (ITT), Leipzig, University of Leipzig, Brigham Young University, American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), University of Cambridge ESOL, Goethe Institute, American Consulate General of the United States, The European Language Certificates (telc), Gesamtverband Moderne Fremdsprachen, and Language Testing International.

To date, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the OPIc have been linked to the CEFR using the CoE's Standard Setting Approach (Bärenfänger & Tschirner 2012; Council of Europe 2009; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2012), while the ACTFL Listening Proficiency Test (LPT) and Reading Proficiency Test (RPT) were linked using empirical validation studies in addition to the CoE's Standard Setting Approach (Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2013a; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2013b; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2015; Tschirner, Bärenfänger, & Wisniewski 2015).

RECEPTIVE SKILLS – LINKING ACTFL TESTS TO THE CEFR

In a series of validation studies, the ACTFL Reading Proficiency Test (RPT) and Listening Proficiency Test (LPT) were validated and linked to the CEFR (Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2013a; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2013b; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2015; Tschirner, Bärenfänger, & Wisniewski 2015). The initial validation studies were done in English using a side-by-side study approach. Test-takers took both, the ACTFL RPT and LPT and NATO's Benchmark Advisory Test (BAT) Reading and Listening, which assess reading and listening proficiency in English according to NATO's STANAG 6000 scale equivalent to the U.S. Government's Inter-Agency Language Roundtable (ILR) proficiency scale. The studies provided clear internal and external validity arguments, and they established the correspondences as shown in Table 1 below (Swender, Tschirner, Bärenfänger 2012; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2011).

Because RPTs and LPTs are based on the same construct for all languages (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012-Reading and - Listening), because they follow the same blueprint, and because they follow the same quality assurance procedures, it can be claimed that RPT and LPT ratings are equivalent across languages. In addition, all items are piloted and evaluated rigorously using both classical and IRT approaches to item validation (Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2013 a and b). Moreover, in 2015, these correspondences were empirically shown to be the same for Spanish, French, and German (Tschirner and Bärenfänger 2015). Finally, another standard-setting procedure verified the established link between ACTFL and CEFR ratings on ACTFL tests for German (Tschirner, Bärenfänger, & Wisniewski 2015).

PRODUCTIVE SKILLS – LINKING ACTFL TESTS TO THE CEFR

In 2011, the ACTFL OPI and OPIc were linked to the CEFR using the CoE's Standard-Setting Approach (Council of Europe 2009) and the correspondences shown in Table 1 were established (Bärenfänger & Tschirner 2012; Tschirner & Bärenfänger 2012). The study was done in German. Because the construct of the OPI/OPIc is the same across languages, and because both rater training and proficiency assessment follow the same rigorous quality assured standards for all languages, these results may be generalized to all languages for which there exists an OPI or OPIc procedure (close to 100 at present). A Standard-Setting Study to link the ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) to the CEFR will be completed by the end of 2016. It is assumed that the correspondences will be very similar, if not identical, because the WPT was developed on the basis of the OPI. Note that the correspondences for the productive modalities are different than for the receptive modalities.

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ASSIGNING CEFR RATINGS TO ACTFL ASSESSMENTS

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN ACTFL AND CEFR RATINGS AND ACTFL ASSESSMENTS

Based on extensive research and linking and validation studies, CEFR ratings can be assigned on ACTFL assessments, in all languages. Please note that these are one-directional correspondences. To date, no CEFR-based test, or other international test not developed by ACTFL, has been linked to the ACTFL Framework. For a current list of tests that may be rated according to the ACTFL Framework see *www.languagetesting.com/cefr*.

ONE-DIRECTIONAL ALIGNMENT: Receptive Skills – Reading and Listening		ONE-DIRECTIONAL ALIGNMENT: Productive Skills – Speaking and Writing	
Rating on ACTFL Assessment (LPT, RPT or L&Rcat)	Corresponding CEFR Rating	Rating on ACTFL Assessment (OPI, OPIc or WPT)	Corresponding CEFR Rating
Distinguished	C2		
Superior	C1.2	Superior	C2
Advanced High	C1.1	Advanced High	C1
Advanced Mid	B2	Advanced Mid	B2.2
Advanced Low	B1.2	Advanced Low	B2.1
Intermediate High	B1.1	Intermediate High	B1.2
Intermediate Mid	A2	Intermediate Mid	B1.1
Intermediate Low	A1.2	Intermediate Low	A2
Novice High	A1.1	Novice High	A1
Novice Mid	0	Novice Mid	0
Novice Low	0	Novice Low	0
0	0	0	0