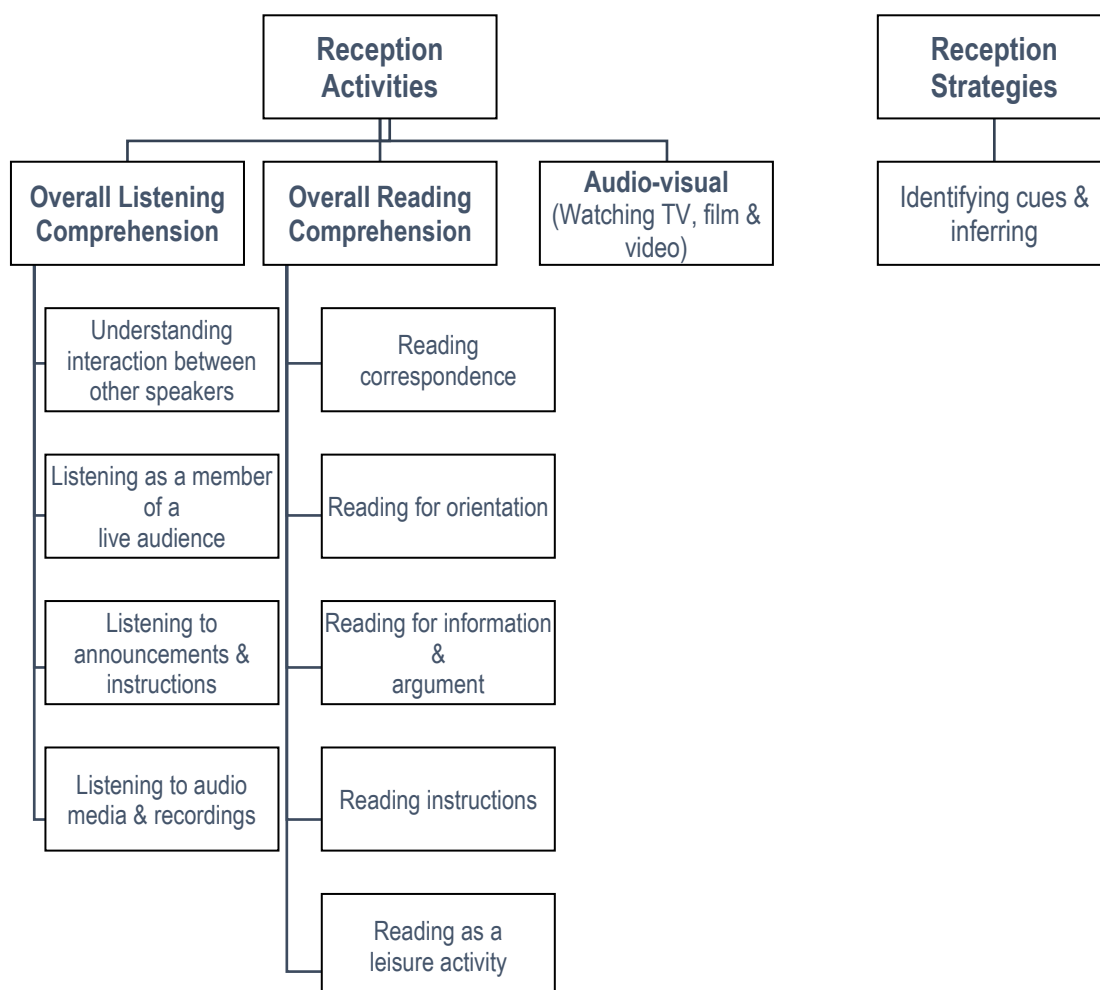


The CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales

Communicative language activities and strategies (CEFR Section 4.4)

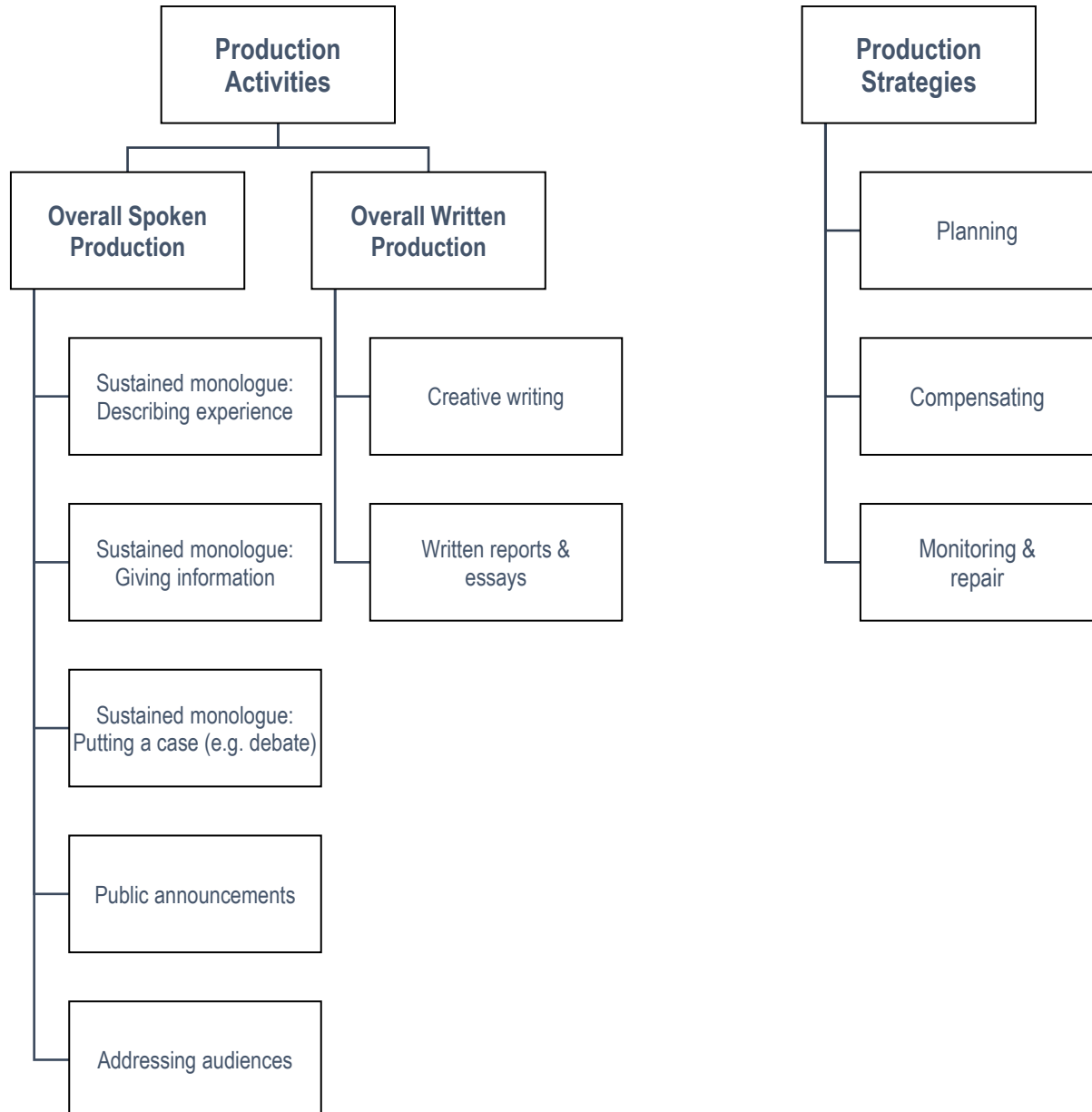
Reception

Reception involves receiving and processing input, activating what are thought to be appropriate *schemata* in order to build up a representation of the meaning being expressed and a hypothesis as to the communicative intention behind it. Incoming co-textual and contextual cues are checked to see if they 'fit' the activated schema – or suggest that an alternative hypothesis is necessary. In **aural reception (one-way listening)** activities, the language user receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers. In **visual reception (reading)** activities the user receives and processes as input written texts produced by one or more writers. In **audio-visual reception**, for which one scale (watching TV and film) is provided, the user watches TV, video, or a film and uses multi-media, with or without subtitles and voiceovers.

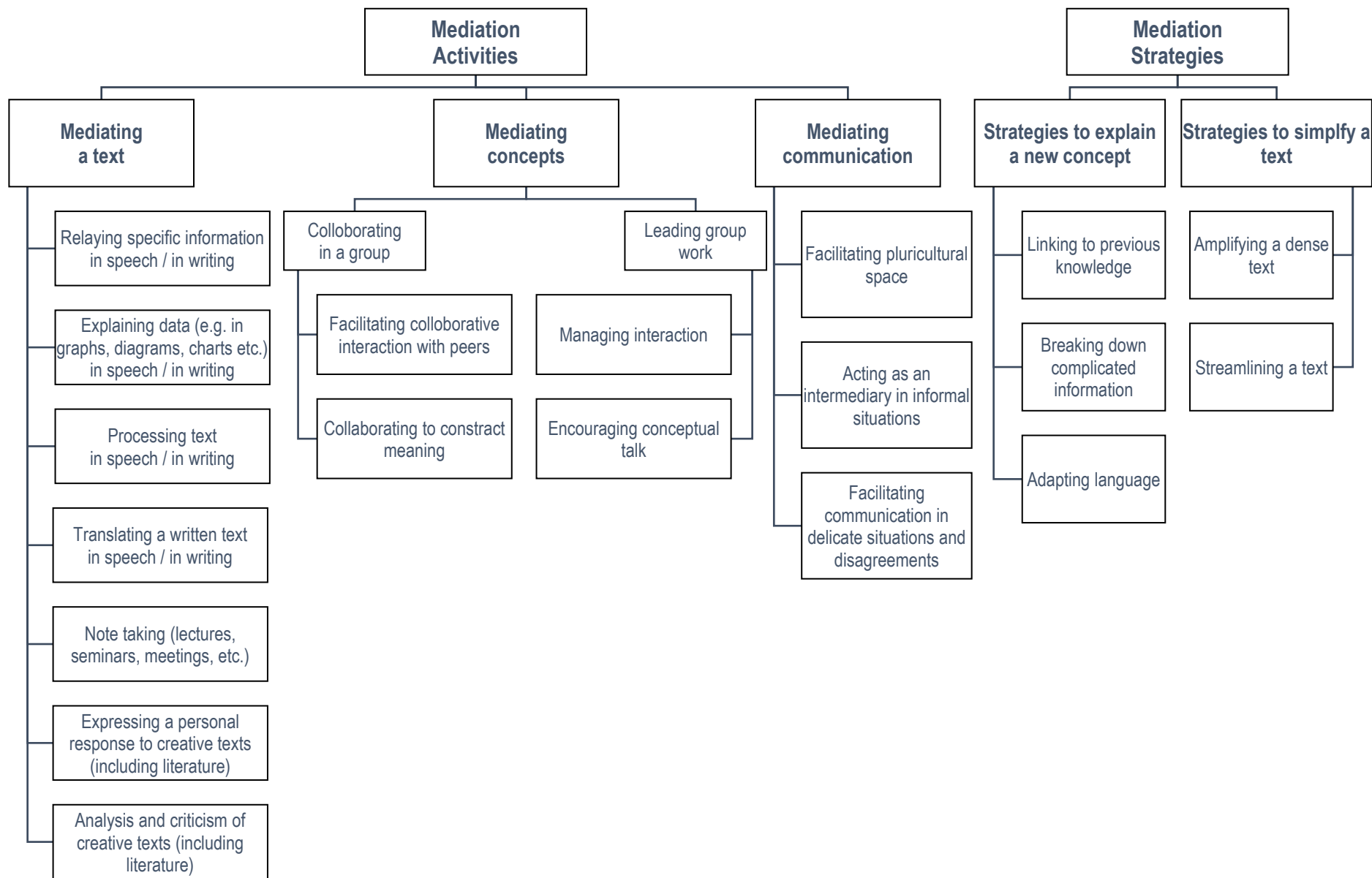


Production

Production includes both speaking and writing activities. Spoken production is a 'long turn,' which may involve a short description or anecdote, or may imply a longer, more formal presentation. Productive activities, spoken and written, have an important function in many academic and professional fields (oral presentations, written studies and reports) and particular social value is attached to them. Judgements are made of what has been submitted in writing or of the fluency and articulateness in speaking, especially when addressing an audience. Ability in this more formal production is not acquired naturally; it is a product of literacy learnt through education and experience. It involves learning the expectations and conventions of the genre concerned. Production strategies are employed to improve the quality of both informal and formal production. *Planning* is obviously more associated with formal genres, but *Monitoring* and *Compensating* for gaps in vocabulary or terminology are also a quasi-automated process in natural speech.

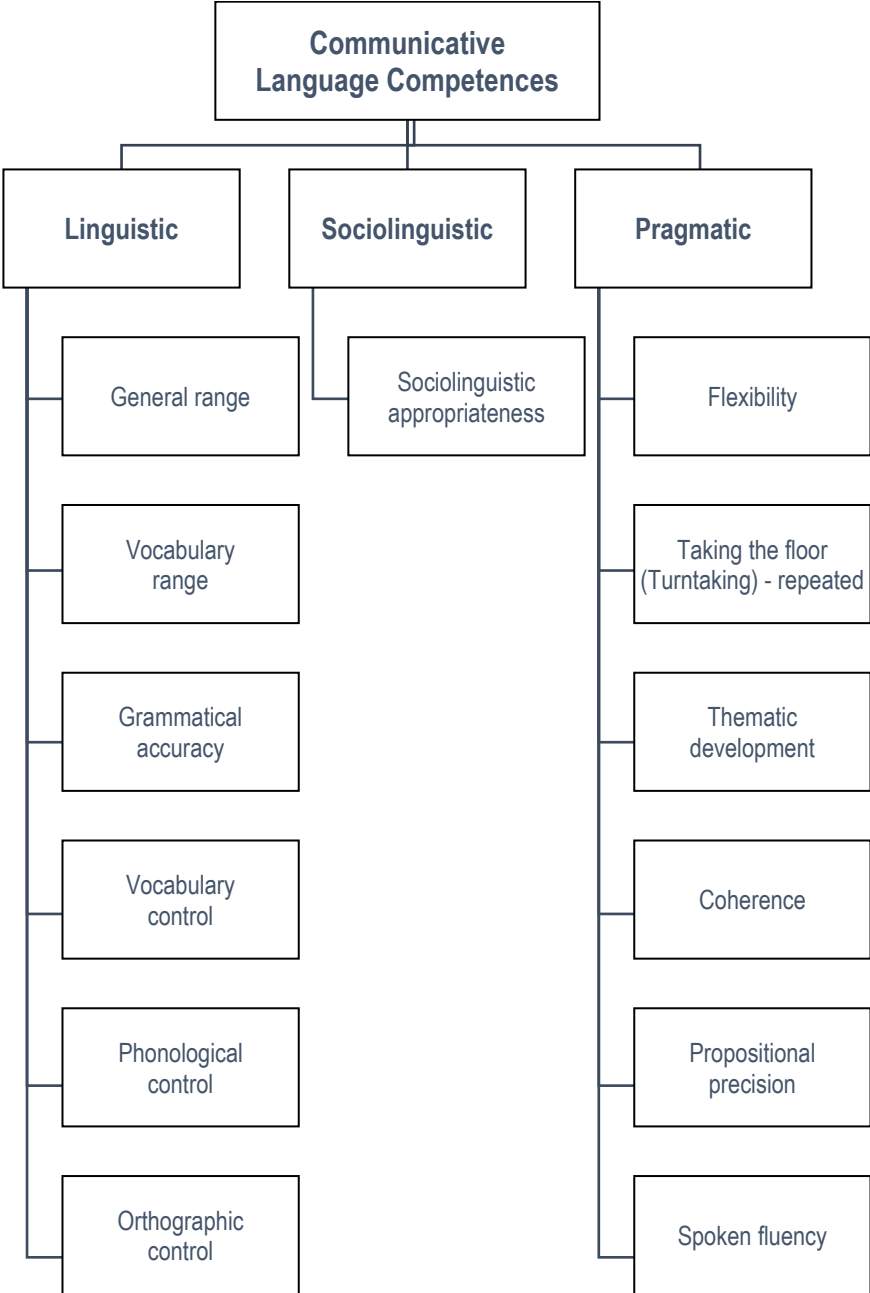






Communicative language competences

As stated in the first section when discussing the CEFR descriptive scheme, the view of competence in the CEFR does not come solely from applied linguistics but also applied psychology and socio-political approaches. However, the different competence models developed in applied linguistics since the early 1980s did influence the CEFR. Although they organised them in different ways, in general these models shared four main aspects: strategic competence; linguistic competence; pragmatic competence (comprising both discourse and functional/actional competence), and socio-cultural competence (including socio-linguistic) competence. Since strategic competence is dealt with in relation to activities, the CEFR presents descriptor scales for aspects of communicative language competence in CEFR Section 5.2 under three headings: *Linguistic competence*, *Pragmatic competence* and *Sociolinguistic competence*. These aspects, or parameters of description, are always intertwined in any language use; they are not separate 'components' and cannot be isolated from each other.

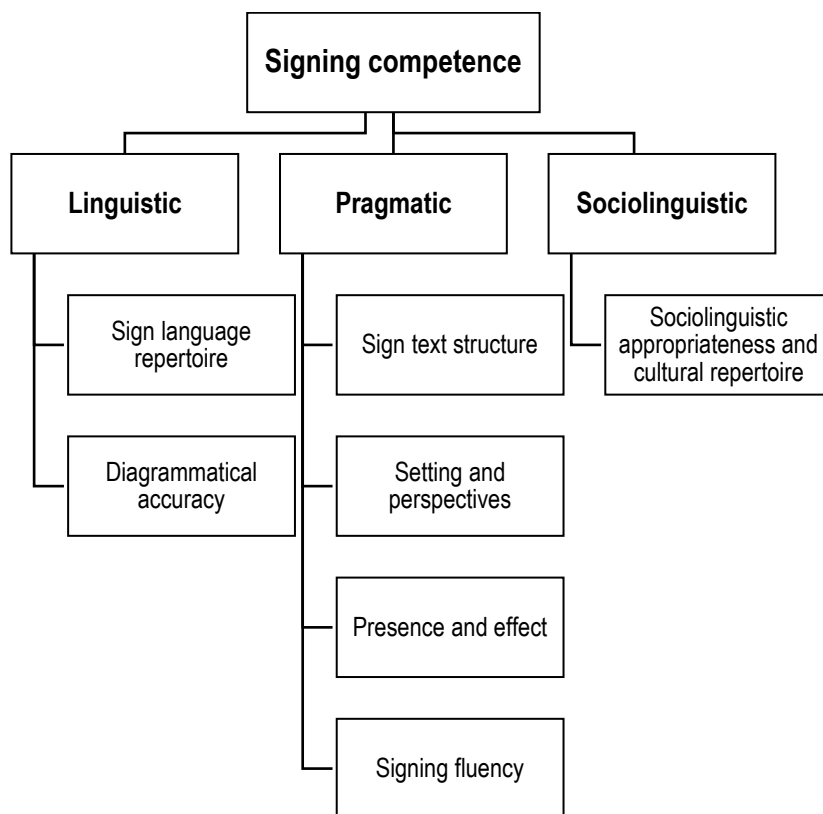


Signing competences

Many of the CEFR descriptors, especially those for spoken communicative language activities, are as applicable to sign language as they are to spoken language, since sign language is used to fulfil the same communicative functions. This is indeed the basis of the ECML's ProSign Project. However, there are obviously ways in which sign language differs substantially from spoken language. Fundamentally it involves a spatial and diagrammatical competence in the use of visual space. And it involves a broadened notion of the term "text", namely for video recorded signing that is not based on a written script. These competencies go far beyond the paralinguistic features of communication through spoken language. The signing space is used to nominate and later refer to relevant persons, places and objects in a form of spatial mapping. Sign languages then have syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology just like any other language. These differ of course from one sign language to another, as there are different sign languages in different countries. But there are certain common features such as the use of indexing, pronouns and classifiers. In addition, facial expression, body, head, and mimics are used extensively in addition to hand and arm movements.

For communicative and contact purposes with spoken language users, the repertoire of proper signs is supplemented by literally spelling out words or names with the so-called finger alphabet. Roughly, each letter of the spoken language script corresponds to a handshape. This "fingering" however is a means of conveying something unfamiliar, e.g. a proper name, in order to use e.g. data bases that are restricted to graphemic access. So this "fingering" is a part of contact language necessary for the deaf to access the written knowledge of the spoken world. Everyone must know it, but it is not regarded as a characteristic of sign language proper.

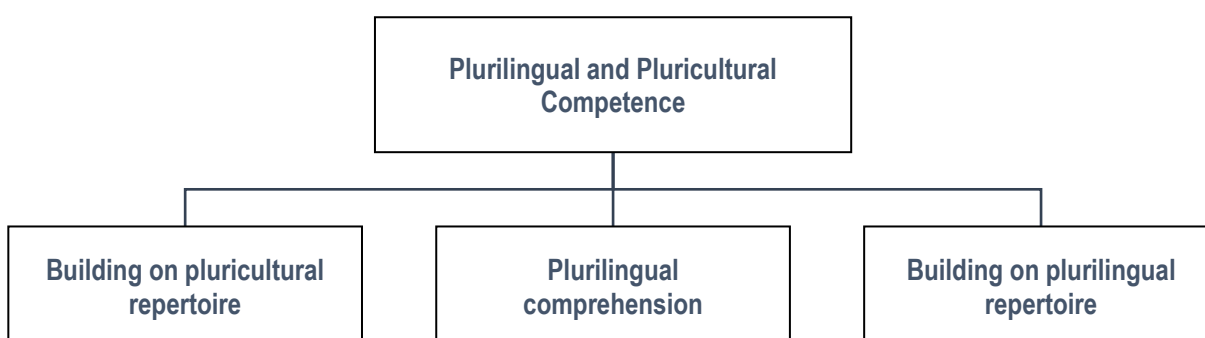
Due to the divergent modalities of signed and spoken languages it cannot be assumed that the different levels and the respective competencies of the CEFR for spoken languages can be transferred onto sign languages as such. No European spoken language shows typological features that are characteristic of the European sign languages. So whereas a translation of *communicative functions* from spoken to sign languages can work, a translation of *language competences* is less appropriate! Naturally, the categories for signing competence relate to the linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences found in spoken languages. And some of the descriptors given in the previous section can also be applied to sign language. For ease of reference, however, the descriptor scales for signing competence are provided here together separately.



Plurilingual and pluricultural competence

The notions of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism presented in the CEFR Sections 1.3, 1.4, and 6.1.3) were the starting point for the development of descriptors in this area. The plurilingual vision associated with the CEFR gives value to cultural and linguistic diversity at the level of the individual. It promotes the need for learners as ‘social agents’ to draw upon all of their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences in order to fully participate in social and educational contexts, achieving mutual understanding, gaining access to knowledge and in turn further developing their linguistic and cultural repertoire. As the CEFR states:

‘... the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact’. (CEFR Section 1.3)



The vision of the learner as a social agent in the action-oriented approach takes these concepts further in relation to language education, considering that: ‘... the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to ‘develop a linguistic repertoire, in which all linguistic abilities have a place’. (CEFR Section 1.3)

In the development of descriptors, the following points mentioned specifically in the CEFR were given particular attention:

- ▶ languages are interrelated and interconnected especially at the level of the individual;
- ▶ languages and cultures are not kept in separated mental compartments;
- ▶ all knowledge and experience of languages contribute to building up communicative competence;
- ▶ balanced mastery of different languages is not the goal, but rather the ability (and willingness) to modulate their usage according to the social and communicative situation;
- ▶ barriers between languages can be overcome in communication and different languages can be used purposefully for conveying messages in the same situation.

Other concepts were also taken into consideration after analysing recent literature:

- ▶ the capacity to deal with ‘otherness’ to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc., in order to enable communication and collaboration;
- ▶ the willingness to act as an intercultural mediator;
- ▶ the proactive capacity to use knowledge of familiar languages to understand new languages, looking for cognates and internationalisms in order to make sense of texts in unknown languages – whilst being aware of the danger of ‘false friends;’
- ▶ the capacity to respond in a sociolinguistically appropriate way by incorporating elements of other languages and/or variations of languages in his/her own discourse for communication purposes;