

### 3.6 Content coherence in Common Reference Levels

An analysis of the functions, notions, grammar and vocabulary necessary to perform the communicative tasks described on the scales could be part of the process of developing new sets of language specifications.

- **Level A1 (Breakthrough)** – is considered the lowest level of generative language use – the point at which the learner can *interact in a simple way, ask and answer simple questions about themselves, where they live, people they know, and things they have, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, rather than relying purely on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organised repertoire of situation-specific phrases.*
- **Level A2** does appear to reflect the level referred to by the **Waystage** specification. It is at this level that the majority of descriptors stating social functions are to be found, like *use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address; greet people, ask how they are and react to news; handle very short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in free time; make and respond to invitations; discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet; make and accept offers.* Here too are to be found

descriptors on getting out and about: the simplified cut-down version of the full set of transactional specifications in ‘The Threshold Level’ for adults living abroad, like: *make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks; get simple information about travel; use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask for basic information, ask and give directions, and buy tickets; ask for and provide everyday goods and services.*

- The next band represents a **strong Waystage (A2+)** performance. What is noticeable here is more active participation in conversation given some assistance and certain limitations, for example: *initiate, maintain and close simple, restricted face-to-face conversation; understand enough to manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort; make him/herself understood and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations, provided the other person helps if necessary; communicate successfully on basic themes if he/she can ask for help to express what he wants to; deal with everyday situations with predictable content, though he/she will generally have to compromise the message and search for words; interact with reasonable ease in structured situations, given some help, but participation in open discussion is fairly restricted; plus significantly more ability to sustain monologues, for example: express how he/she feels in simple terms; give an extended description of everyday aspects of his/her environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience; describe past activities and personal experiences; describe habits and routines; describe plans and arrangements; explain what he/she likes or dislikes about something; give short, basic descriptions of events and activities; describe pets and possessions; use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions.*
- **Level B1** reflects the **Threshold Level** specification for a visitor to a foreign country and is perhaps most categorised by two features. The first feature is the ability to maintain interaction and get across what you want to, in a range of contexts, for example: *generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect; give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends; express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly; exploit a wide range of simple language flexibly to express much of what he or she wants to; maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to; keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.* The second feature is the ability to cope flexibly with problems in everyday life, for example *cope with less routine situations on public transport; deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually travelling; enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics; make a complaint; take some initiatives in an interview/consultation (e.g. to bring up a new subject) but is very dependent on interviewer in the interaction; ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said.*
- The subsequent band seems to be a **Strong Threshold (B1+)**. The same two main features continue to be present, with the addition of a number of descriptors which focus on the exchange of quantities of information, for example: *take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems; provide concrete information required in an interview/consultation (e.g. describe symptoms to a doctor) but does so with limited precision; explain why something is a problem; summarise and give his or her opinion about a short story, article, talk, discussion, interview, or documentary and answer further questions of detail; carry out a prepared interview, checking and confirming information, though he/she may occasionally have to ask for repetition if the other person’s response is rapid or extended; describe how to do some-*

thing, giving detailed instructions; exchange accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence.

- **Level B2** represents a new level as far above B1 (Threshold) as A2 (Waystage) is below it. It is intended to reflect the Vantage Level specification. The metaphor is that, having been progressing slowly but steadily across the intermediate plateau, the learner finds he has arrived somewhere, things look different, he/she acquires a new perspective, can look around him/her in a new way. This concept does seem to be borne out to a considerable extent by the descriptors calibrated at this level. They represent quite a break with the content so far. For example at the lower end of the band there is a focus on effective argument: *account for and sustain his opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options; construct a chain of reasoned argument; develop an argument giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view; explain a problem and make it clear that his/her counterpart in a negotiation must make a concession; speculate about causes, consequences, hypothetical situations; take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses.* Secondly, running right through the level there are two new focuses. The first is being able to more than hold your own in social discourse: *e.g. converse naturally, fluently and effectively; understand in detail what is said to him/her in the standard spoken language even in a noisy environment; initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly; use stock phrases (e.g. 'That's a difficult question to answer') to gain time and keep the turn whilst formulating what to say; interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party; adjust to the changes of direction, style and emphasis normally found in conversation; sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.* The second new focus is a new degree of language awareness: *correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstandings; make a note of 'favourite mistakes' and consciously monitor speech for it/them; generally correct slips and errors if he/she becomes conscious of them; plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipient/s.* In all, this does seem to be a new threshold for a language learner to cross.
- At the next band – representing a **Strong Vantage (B2+)** performance – the focus on argument, effective social discourse and on language awareness which appears at B2 (Vantage) continues. However, the focus on argument and social discourse can also be interpreted as a new focus on discourse skills. This new degree of discourse competence shows itself in conversational management (co-operating strategies): *give feedback on and follow up statements and inferences by other speakers and so help the development of the discussion; relate own contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.* It is also apparent in relation to coherence/cohesion: *use a limited number of cohesive devices to link sentences together smoothly into clear, connected discourse; use a variety of linking words efficiently to mark clearly the relationships between ideas; develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.* Finally, it is at this band that there is a concentration of items on negotiating: *outline a case for compensation, using persuasive language and simple arguments to demand satisfaction; state clearly the limits to a concession.*
- **Level C1**, the next band, was labelled *Effective Operational Proficiency*. What seems to characterise this level is good access to a broad range of language, which allows fluent, spontaneous communication, as illustrated by the following examples: *Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language. The discourse skills characterising the previous band continue to be evident at Level C1, with an emphasis on more fluency, for example: select a suitable phrase from a fluent repertoire of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get the floor, or to gain time and keep it whilst thinking; produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.*
- **Level C2**, whilst it has been termed '**Mastery**', is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence. What is intended is to characterise the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include: *convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices; has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning; backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.*

