CHAPTER III

General Language Frameworks - Overview: Description and Analysis

3.1 The History of ESL in England

In the late 15th century, the British Empire spread all over the world. English became the language of communication for those doing business with the British. When the British Empire grew, the need for English also increased. The British wanted to communicate effectively with colonies. During the next centuries, they sent many English teachers overseas to educate colonists and local government officials. At the same time the locals were not ready to give up their first language. So the bilingual approach in English Language Teaching was introduced. As a result of this, ESL (English as a Second Language) began to spread throughout the world (yourdictionary).^1

3.2 History of ESL in the United States

Many immigrants went to the United States due to increasing opportunities in the country in the middle of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th century. Bilingual or non-English instruction was popular in both public and private schools across the States (French in Louisiana, Spanish in Arizona and New Mexico.). The Naturalization Act was passed in 1906. English skill was necessary to become naturalized citizens of the U.S. for all immigrants. It was the beginning of ESL in USA (yourdictionary).^2

The United States recognized once again the importance of foreign languages and foreign language education after World War II which naturally led to a greater interest in ESL education. During this time (1950s-1980s), linguists and educators have done a lot of research on language, language learning and language teaching. They have produced a variety of ESL teaching methods. The continuous curiosity in teaching ESL in the schools has been met with support from state and federal budgets to fund for public schools and adult basic education programs nationwide across US. The situations like these that happened UK, USA and other countries paved way for formulating language frameworks (yourdictionary).^3
3.3 Language Framework

The first paragraph of CEFR (1) document describes what Language Framework is. It is a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. It says in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. But at the same time, it is important to note that language framework does not cover every possible context of language use and does not intend to do so. Certain contexts are less well elaborated, e.g. young learners (Using CEFR: Principle of Good Practice 4).

3.4 Types of Language Framework

Brindley states that there are two types of Language Framework. The first one indicates the abilities that make up language proficiency (e.g., vocabulary, fluency), based on a theoretical model of language proficiency. It defines levels of proficiency for each of the targeted language abilities, independent of content and context. The second one is based on language behavior. Descriptors indicate 'real life' language performance in specific contexts of language use and describe levels of language performance by skill area of listening, speaking, reading and writing along a continuum of increasing ability. This type of language framework is more common. Types of tasks and degrees of skill at achieving associated communicative goals are distinguished. Based on test performance, these types of frameworks attempt to generalize performance on similar 'real life' tasks. The second type of frameworks have been taken up for the study.

The study examines three major language frameworks available in the public domain. A brief overview of each framework has been provided. The frameworks to be examined include:

- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CERF)
- American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines 2012.
- Canadian Language Benchmarks (2000) (CLB)
3.5 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

CEFR is one of the important documents for Language learning, teaching and assessment. A brief history of the Council of Europe, the background of CEFR and analysis of CEFR documents are presented in detail in this chapter. In this study, Common Reference Levels of the document have been used as a tool to correlate with the competencies of LSRW skills of the English Syllabus of USSE Scheme.

3.5.1 The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe (COU) is one of the oldest political organizations in Europe. It was founded in 1949 and headquartered in Strasbourg in France. It has 47 member-states and 5 five observer countries. The European Union and the Council of Europe are two different organizations. The Council of Europe was created to defend parliamentary democracy, human rights, develop continent-wide agreements to standardize the legal and social practices among its member states and promote European identity based on shared values and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. The programmes under the umbrella of the Steering Committee for Education and the Modern Languages Section are coordinated by the Department of Language Education and policy, comprising two complementary bodies, the Language Policy Division in Strasbourg and the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, Austria (Council of Europe).7

3.5.2 The Aims and Objectives of Council of Europe Language Policy

The Council of Europe has encouraged the learning of modern languages since the establishment of the Council for Cultural Cooperation in the late 1950’s. Modern languages were studied in the shadow of the classical languages as part of the education of intellectual, cultural or social elite at that time. They were important in diplomacy and commerce. Otherwise, international communication was mostly mediated by professional translators and interpreters. By 1960, European countries had recovered from the effect of Second World War and they felt the importance of internationalization and globalization. This factor paved a way for the importance of language learning especially foreign language learning. Over the last forty years, the process has continued to develop the framework for language learning, teaching and assessment, which gave the CERF in the present form (CEFR 2).8
3.5.3 Common European Framework

The Common European Framework is a reference tool for language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc., across Europe. It also describes in a clear way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively in the society. The CEFR is designed to promote the multilingual and multicultural Europe. It also aims to overcome language and cultural barriers among European countries and it intends to help partners to describe the levels of proficiency required by existing standards, tests and examinations in order to facilitate comparisons between different systems of qualifications. For this purpose the Council of Europe has developed a European Framework with common reference levels (CEFR 1).\(^9\)

**Figure: 3.1 Overview of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**

Source: *Working with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the Canadian Context*

3.5.4 The Principles of the CEFR

The principles of the CEFR are given below as they are in the document: represent the diverse languages and cultures in Europe; to facilitate communication and interaction
among Europeans of different mother tongues through a better knowledge of European modern languages; to achieve greater convergence at the European level when developing national policies in the field of modern language learning and teaching.

The document stresses the concept of ‘plurilingualism’. It also differentiates the term ‘plurilingual’ from ‘multilingual’. Plurilingualism means the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society whereas multilingualism is simply diversifying the languages on offer in a particular school or educational system, or by encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language, or reducing the dominant position of English in international communication (CEFR 2).

3.5.5 Uses, Needs and Criteria of CEFR

The CEFR is used in many ways. The most predominantly, it is used for language learning, teaching and assessment. It can be used as a reference tool for curriculum development, teacher training and self-directed learning. It is needed to assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts.

To fulfil its function, the CEFR has some criteria to meet. They are comprehensive, transparent and coherent. ‘Comprehensive’ in the sense that it should attempt to specify a full range of language knowledge, skills (e.g. all levels, steps, communicative proficiency, sociocultural awareness, imaginative experience, affective relations, learning to learn, etc). ‘Transparent’ in the sense that it must be clearly formulated and explicit, available and readily comprehensible to users. ‘Coherent’ is to be free from internal contradictions. With regard to educational systems, coherence requires that there is a harmonious relation among their components (CEFR 5-8).

3.5.6 An Action-oriented Approach

The CEFR advocates an action-oriented approach. The learners use the language by performing to communicate in a variety of contexts. CEFR document describes the language use and learning like these, “Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in
specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences” (CEFR 14).

3.5.7 The Common Reference Levels

The common reference levels divide learners into three categories. Each category has two sub divisions. Basic User (A) has been divided into A1 Breakthrough or Beginner, A2 Waystage or Elementary. Independent User (B) has been divided into B1 Threshold or Intermediate and B2 Vantage or Upper intermediate. Proficient User (C) has been divided into C1 Effective Operational Proficiency or Advanced C2 Mastery or Proficiency (CEFR 23).

![Figure: 3.2 Reference Level of CEFR](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>Mastery</th>
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<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Effective Operational Proficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Vantage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Threshold</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Waystage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Breakthrough</td>
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Source: CEFR Document.

The most widely known scales from the CEFR are:

Table 1: Common Reference Levels — global scale (CEFR 24).

Table 2: Common Reference Levels — self-assessment grid (CEFR 26).

Table 3: Common Reference Levels — qualitative aspects of spoken-language use (CEFR 28). The CEFR also includes 54 other scales related to communicative activities, communication strategies, working with text, and communicative language competence.

They were developed and validated as part of the Swiss research project in the 1990s and early 2000s. (Working with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in the Canadian Context 17-18).
3.6 The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

A brief history and description of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 have been presented in this section of the chapter.

3.6.1 History of ACTFL

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is the leading organization for foreign language professionals devoted to promoting the study of languages and cultures as an integral component of American education and society. It was established in 1967. ACTFL currently has a worldwide membership of more than 11,000 language educators and administrators representing all major world languages at all levels of instruction. ACTFL offers language testing, training programs and consulting (ACTFL).15

ACTFL provides oral proficiency testing in more than 80 languages and writing proficiency testing in more than 20 languages. It provides testing and rating in accordance with the government’s Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) proficiency scales. It also provides training and professional development workshops such as Oral Proficiency Assessment, Performance Assessment, Setting Standards, Teaching Communication Skills, Curriculum Design, and Teaching Challenges related to Developing Language Proficiency, and Preparing for National Board Certifications (ACTFL).16

3.6.2 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are descriptions of what language user can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world. The levels of proficiency guidelines for LSRW skills are divided into Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The levels of the ACTFL Guidelines describe from well-educated language user to one at a level of little or no functional ability. The proficiency guidelines are presented regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired. The guidelines do not support any particular theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. They neither describe how an individual learns a language nor prescribe how an individual should learn a language, and they shall not be used for such purposes. They are an instrument for the evaluation of functional language ability. In 1986, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were first published as an

The purpose of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines is to assess the ability of language users and it can be used for global assessment in academic and workplace settings. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines is basic to the development ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners (1998). For many years, the ACTFL Guidelines have had a great impact on language teaching and learning not only in the United States but also through the world.

3.6.3 Standards for Foreign Language Learning

The statement of philosophy of Standards for Foreign Language Learning is given below from the executive summary of standards for foreign language learning preparing for the 21st century.

“Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which all students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language” (ACTFL).  

The standards do not explain the current status of foreign language education in USA. They reflect the best instructional practices which do not exist in USA.
3.7 The History of the Canadian Language Benchmarks

The Government of Canada took a stand to develop and support language training and to address the adult immigrant’s individual needs in the year 1992. The government funded a project to develop national standards, beginning with consultations with experts in second language teaching and training, testing and measurement through Citizenship and Immigration Canada department (CIC). CIC found that there was no tool or set of “Benchmarks” widely used for Canadian newcomers’ needs. Regional workshops with ESL/EFL experts and administrators, learners, immigrant serving agencies and government representatives came to know that there was a potential need to develop a new set of Benchmarks (CLB 2000 English as a Second Language for Adult).

In March 1993, CIC set up the National Working Group on Language Benchmarks (NWGLB) to guide and support the development of the Benchmarks. The first working copy of the Benchmarks was made available in 1996. The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) came up from a November 1996 conference that identified the need for an institution outside government to take responsibility for the Benchmark project. In 1998 the CCLB was established by CIC in partnership with the provincial governments. CLB have become common language criteria for the entire immigrant-serving community. Further development of the 1996 Benchmark publication
was carried out and in 2000 the current version of the Benchmark document was made available (CLB 2000 English as a Second Language for Adult).^20

### 3.7.1 Canadian Language Benchmarks

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) document represents a Canadian language standard. The CLB standards can help to articulate ESL needs, practices and accomplishments. They can also facilitate clear communication throughout the ESL community, and between it and other community/national organizations and agendas (e.g., instructors, learners, educational programs, assessors and counselors, language education funding bodies, labor market associations, licensing bodies, and employers) (CLB 2000 English as a second language for adults IX).^21

The CLB describe what adult second language learners can do, using English, at twelve levels of proficiency, or benchmarks. The twelve Benchmarks are separated into three progressive levels of proficiency:

- **Stage I (CLB Levels 1-4)** - basic level of proficiency
- **Stage II (CLB Levels 5-8)** - intermediate level of proficiency
- **Stage III (CLB Levels 9-12)** - advanced level of proficiency
- **Each Benchmark for the four language skills** - reading, writing, listening and speaking - includes examples of the kinds of real life tasks that an ESL learner should be able to perform under specified conditions in four specific competency areas:
  - Social interaction - using ESL speech or writing in interpersonal situations
  - Giving and receiving instructions
  - Suasion (getting things done)
  - Information - exchanging, presenting, talking about information

The CLB provide a standard framework that can be used to plan teaching and assessment in Canadian adult ESL programs (CLB 2000 English as a second language for adults).^22
3.7.2 Performance Descriptor of Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000

In Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000, each Benchmark contains a global performance descriptor. It is similar to a typical "band" descriptor in many proficiency scales and describes a "generalized level of performance." The following overviews of Benchmark performance profiles can help to provide a better sense of the progression of performance profiles along the CLB continuum. The overviews provide a glimpse of the progressive complexity of communicative ability across the twelve Benchmarks. They show increasingly complex competencies and communication contexts. The overviews included are the following: Speaking Benchmarks, Listening Benchmarks, Reading Benchmarks and Writing Benchmarks.

**Figure: 3.4. The CLB rating scales: Principles of assessment and evaluation in the CLB**

![CLB Rating Scales](http://www.cenni.sep.gob.mx/pdf/benchmarking%20canadiense%202.pdf)

3.7.3 Communicative Proficiency in CLB

The Canadian Language Benchmarks is based on a functional view of language, language use and language proficiency. Such a view relates language to the contexts in which it is used and the communicative functions it performs. The focus of the Canadian Language Benchmarks is thus on communication and communicative proficiency in English as a second language. Communicative proficiency is not an abstract concept of "absolute" language ability. Rather, it depends on situations of language use. It is
described as adequate control over language skills for a specified purpose (e.g., for studying, performing a job, functioning independently in a community, negotiating business deals). Depending on what communication tasks will be required, certain components may be given priority in a description of communicative proficiency, and others may not be included at all (CLB 5).  

3.7.4 Five Components of Communicative Proficiency in CLB

The CLB concept of communicative proficiency is based on models which have five distinct components. The five components can be described as follows:

1. Linguistic competence is the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary at the sentence level. It enables the building and recognition of well-formed, grammatically accurate utterances, according to the rules of syntax, semantics, morphology, and phonology/graphology.

2. Textual competence is the knowledge and application of cohesion and coherence rules and devices in building larger texts/discourse. It enables the connection of utterances and sentences into cohesive, logical and functionally coherent texts and/or discourse.

3. Functional competence is competence to convey and interpret communicative intent (or function) behind a sentence, utterance or text. It encompasses macro-functions of language use (e.g., transmission of information, social interaction and getting things done/persuading others, learning and thinking, creation and enjoyment) and micro-functions, or speech acts (e.g., requests, threats, warnings, pleas, etc.), and the conventions of use.

4. Socio-cultural competence focuses on appropriateness in producing and understanding utterances. These include rules of politeness; sensitivity to register, dialect or variety; norms of stylistic appropriateness; sensitivity to "naturalness"; knowledge of idioms and figurative language; knowledge of culture, custom and institutions; knowledge of cultural references; and uses of language through interactional skills to establish and maintain social relationships.

5. Strategic competence manages the integration and application of all the other language competence components to the specific context and situation of language use. It involves planning and assessing communication, avoiding
potential or repairing actual difficulties in communication, coping with communication breakdown, and using affective devices. Most of all, its function is to ensure effectiveness of communication "transactions" (CLB 5). CLB plays a vital role in standardization of assessment and teaching across Canada.

3.8 Conclusion

The impact of globalization reflects in almost everything. It has great impact in language teaching and learning. Countries are in a position to standardize language learning and teaching. So, Language Frameworks have come to exist. They play great role in language teaching and learning assessment and syllabus and curriculum design.

The frameworks which were reviewed and discussed in this chapter clearly show that the framers of the frameworks have taken into account the global requirements of competence and performance in using English for various purposes and contexts of communication. For example, CEFR focuses on presenting a comprehensive way in their program (by identifying structures, cultural contexts, formats of business communication, etc.) what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. In other words, learning English is not necessarily focused on learning English literature and absorbing the moral and ethical values the literature may offer. The focus is on what a student can do with the language in his or her career, finding and pursuing of which no more is linked to his or her own country. Frameworks deliberately focus not only on the current classroom situation and the situation outside of it, but also on the future. In other words, Frameworks do their best to move from one step to another, from one level to another and from one type of communication to another type of communication. Structures are chosen deliberately to meet the future needs even as the selection, gradation and presentation of the structures, vocabulary items, and meaning as well as the contents of lessons presented take care of age levels, past structures and content and forms already mastered. It is important to note that the CEFR is meant for a group of countries which all use primarily related languages, languages of the European family of languages. There may be some differences in the script systems adopted; there may be vocabulary differences and even connotation and denotation of vocabulary items, etc. Yet there is a thread linking all these languages, mostly in the word order and sentence types and cultural sharing. On the other hand, English learning and teaching in
India is a different story. Syntax of our Indian languages offers a clear contrast, in addition to other differences in vocabulary use, idiomatic expressions, cultural contexts and thought processes, etc.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Framework is a useful device, if it is kept in mind the specific situation or situations for which this ACTFL is framed. Diversity is quite glaring in the United States, even if most people prefer to use English both at home and outside of their homes. At the same time, growing Hispanic/Latino population and increase in the number of people in recent years as immigrants from Middle East and Muslim countries from Africa demand a different combination. ACTFL takes care of these at the State level through bilingual education, etc. But in the school curriculum, based on the appreciation of what people or parents really want for their children, the focus is on framing Proficiency Guidelines. And these Proficiency Guidelines assess the ability of language users and it can be used for global assessment in academic and workplace settings. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines is the basis to develop ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners (1998). American social, cultural and business situations demand proficiency of various types in English because America is focused on global trade even as its industries are geared toward selling their products and expertise abroad. Accordingly, in tune with the assessment tools adopted in other trades, English speaking-reading-writing “trade” is also more geared towards achieving proficiency as quickly as possible and in as short a duration as possible.

Canada also offers an interesting position. The focus of the Canadian Language Benchmarks is on communication and communicative proficiency in English as a second language. Communicative proficiency is not an abstract concept of "absolute" language ability. Rather, it depends on situations of language use. It is described as adequate control over language skills for a specified purpose (e.g., for studying, performing a job, functioning independently in a community, negotiating business deals).

In other words, these three major Frameworks focus more on communication, and mastery of forms of communication especially for business and other trade purposes. While still looking at language as a blend of the four language skills, they would use the skills as steps to reach the ultimate purpose of diverse communication. In addition, it is important to note once again that the languages they deal with (perhaps less in Canada) have some fundamental similarities with the English language and this may work toward
the learners’ and users’ advantage. Asian and African groups may not be fully covered in this process, but their immigration policy clearly favors the educated and thus most migrants may have some knowledge of English.

This comparison points out that syllabus and curriculum should focus on the fundamentals of the English language, on strategies that would enable the students to learn English with ease and speed, and on teachers’ training that should focus on interference from home language or the language/s of the surrounding in mastering and using English.
List of References


