



## CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox

# Video scripts for “Pluricultural aspects”

This is the script of the videos in the Pluricultural aspects module. The scripts follow the order of the videos, with a very brief introduction that summarises the topic for those who are interested in becoming familiar with it but do not wish to go any further, and additional sections that look at the different concepts in more detail. There is also a list of references in each of the sections.

## Video 1. Introduction to pluricultural competence

### Slide 2

Before we start, it should be mentioned that in some cases, the materials in this module will refer to plurilingual competence, particularly in the sections referring to the CEFR and the *Companion Volume*, since these two concepts are dealt with together in both documents. When we talk about language competence, we are referring to linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge; however, cultural knowledge refers to competences that are relevant to specific social groups.

The CEFR states that “Language is not only a major aspect of culture, but also a means of access to cultural manifestations”, and in this sense plurilingual competence is a component of pluricultural competence. However, the main focus of this module is on pluriculturalism, and although plurilingualism will be mentioned as an element of it, and included in the first presentation as an introduction, those interested mostly on plurilingualism should go to the module dedicated to it.

### Slide 3

Pluricultural competence is not a new concept, nor is it a concept introduced in the CEFR by the *Companion Volume*. Pluricultural competence was already mentioned in the CEFR 2001, where there is a definition for plurilingual competence and pluricultural competence: “the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition [...] of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw” (CEFR 2001, p. 168).

Cultures, like languages, are seen, not as competences stored in separate mental compartments, but as assets since they interact together and build up the communicative competence of the user. The language user uses knowledge from other cultures to make sense of the communicative situation and to act accordingly. Let’s look at an example. In certain cultures, bowing is a customary gesture of respect. By knowing this in an interaction with someone from this culture, the speaker can respond by reciprocating the bow and showing that they recognize and respect the cultural practice, creating a more comfortable and harmonious interaction.



The goal is not a balanced mastery of different languages and cultures, or of the language and the culture or cultures that relate to it, but the ability to use them effortlessly and adapted to the social and communicative situation.

This concept is particularly relevant in language education since it changes our approach to the teaching and learning of languages.

#### Slide 4

In the *Companion Volume* to the CEFR, Plurilingual and pluricultural competence are dealt with in three scales: the first scale refers to pluricultural competence and the second and the third refer to plurilingual competence.

The first of these scales is Building on pluricultural repertoire, which includes activities such as:

- **Respecting personal space according to different cultures** – in some cultures, people prefer to keep a greater distance between each other when talking or interacting, while in others, people might stand closer together. Another activity included in this scale is understanding culturally bound gestural language – for example, in some cultures, raising your thumb can be a sign of approval or a “thumbs-up” gesture, while in other cultures, it may have a different meaning or be considered offensive.

A further example of an activity in the scales would be identifying misunderstandings caused by cultural differences – in some cultures, nodding may mean agreement, while in others, it may indicate understanding or simply being polite.

- **Plurilingual comprehension** is the second of the scales, which deals with the use of one language or languages to approach the understanding of another, such as using the different translations of a tourist brochure to understand its contents.
- **Building on plurilingual repertoire** is the last of the scales; that is, being able to use several languages at the same time, for example in a conversation with several individuals with different languages.

Together with the concept of Plurilingual and pluricultural competence, the *Companion Volume* has a scale on:

- **Facilitating pluricultural spaces**, which is included in the section on Mediating communication, since it focuses more on the role of the user as an intercultural mediator. It includes activities such as:
  - using questions to encourage interest in different cultures;
  - demonstrating sensitivity and respect towards “otherness”;
  - anticipating, dealing and repairing misunderstandings arising from sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences.

#### Slide 5

Presentations 3 and 4 of this module will deal in more detail with the scales of “Building on pluricultural repertoire” and the scale on “Facilitating pluricultural space”.



## References

Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>.

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion volume*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>.

## Video 2. Pluricultural competence

### Slide 2

We have looked at how Plurilingual and pluricultural competence is covered by the *Companion Volume* to the CEFR, let's now look at the term pluricultural competence.

What is the difference between pluricultural and multicultural competence? Let's look at the definitions of the terms.

Pluricultural competence is the ability to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has experience of several cultures. **Pluriculturalism is a personal feature**. An example of this would be a person who has knowledge of different cultures and uses this knowledge in their day-to-day interactions.

Multiculturalism considers cultures as separate entities that co-exist in societies or individuals. **Multiculturalism is a societal feature**. An example of this would be a classroom with students from different cultures, this classroom would be multicultural.

A region, a country or a city is multicultural.

An individual is pluricultural.

### Slide 3

#### What does pluricultural competence mean?

Pluricultural competence is a neologism; that is, a new term, related to the concept of plurilingualism. Plurilingual individuals are in contact with the different cultures of the languages they speak, and hence they are not only plurilingual but also pluricultural. Similarly, comprehending a culture often requires some knowledge of the language spoken within that cultural context.

In tertiary education and teacher training, plurilingual and pluricultural competence is sometimes used together with "intercultural competence", which according to Byram (1997) is composed of: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness or political education. Interculturality describes the context where the communication takes place, as well as the individuals that take part and the skills and strategies they possess. While multicultural competence puts emphasis on society, and pluricultural competence on the individual, intercultural competence puts emphasis on the whole situation.



#### Slide 4

We have examined the meaning of the term pluricultural competence, but what does it entail? Pluriculturalism involves a holistic conception of language, skills, and culture. And what does this mean? It means considering these elements as interconnected and interdependent, rather than separate entities. It recognizes that language proficiency, skills, and cultural knowledge are intertwined and mutually influential. Pluriculturalism is becoming more common with globalisation. Individuals do not define themselves by a single culture and feel comfortable moving between cultures. In our increasingly globalized world, it's common for individuals to have exposure to and be familiar with several cultures. Along with language proficiency, they are also immersed in the corresponding cultures of these languages. This means they understand the customs, traditions, and ways of life associated with each culture. These are not separate or alternate, instead, they are an amalgam of traits and skills and characteristics that together define the individuals. Individuals make use of these skills and characteristics, balancing them and making use of them depending on the context of use.

Pluricultural competence is described as: the ability “to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has [...] experience of several cultures” (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 2009: 11).

#### Slide 5

And now that we have looked at the meaning of the term and at what it means, how is pluricultural competence introduced in language teaching and learning?

“The process of globalization gives rise to dynamic sociological landscapes where plurality and diversity are the norm, highlighting the need to reconceptualise language education” (Piccardo, North & Goodier, 2019: 19). As a result, language education needs to adapt to this reality by embracing a more inclusive and culturally sensitive perspective that reflects the dynamic sociological landscapes of the contemporary world.

The *Companion Volume* introduces descriptors on pluriculturalism that can support curriculum developers and teachers to broaden the perspective of language education and to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural diversity of learners. By reflecting on the descriptors, curricula can be changed to adapt to the reality in society and teaching practices can be modified accordingly. Traditional language education was sometimes focused on teaching languages in isolation, detached from their cultural contexts. Although this was not the case in all classrooms, and the evolution in the field has been outstanding, plurality and diversity were most likely not universally recognised the way they are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the recognition of plurality and diversity calls for a reconceptualization of language education. This means incorporating cultural awareness, intercultural communication skills, and a broader understanding of languages as embedded in social and cultural contexts.

#### Slide 6

Pluriculturalism is introduced into language teaching and learning by encouraging individuals to make use of their knowledge of different cultures and transfer those skills to the learning of languages (Piccardo, 2013). The knowledge of cultures is not only a goal, but a means to achieve a goal. Cultures are not just subjects of study or areas of interest but practical tools that can be used to accomplish specific goals. They serve as vehicles for communication, understanding, and engagement with diverse individuals and communities.



Although the concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are not new, approaching them from the perspective of language teaching and learning and encouraging their use to achieve language goals is now being considered. By understanding and utilizing knowledge of different cultures, individuals can bridge gaps, build connections, and effectively navigate intercultural situations.

### Slide 7

Let's now go to the scales. Pluricultural competence is included in two scales in the *Companion volume*.

The first of the scales is ***Building on pluricultural repertoire***, in the section of Plurilingual and pluricultural competence, which includes activities such as respecting personal space according to different cultures, understanding culturally bound gestural language or identifying and understanding misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.

AND

The second scale is ***Facilitating pluricultural space***, included in the section on Mediating communication, since it focuses more on the role of the user as an intercultural mediator.

It includes activities such as using questions to encourage interest in different cultures, demonstrating sensitivity and respect towards "otherness" and anticipating, dealing and repairing misunderstandings arising from sociocultural and socio linguistic differences.

### Slide 8

If you want to know more, have a look at the following references:

Beacco, J. C. (2007). *From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education: Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Beacco, J., Byram, M., Cavalli, M., Coste, D., Cuenat, M. E., Goullier, F., & Panthier, J. (2016). *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Language Policy Division.

Bernaus, M., Andrade, A. I., Kervran, M., Murkowska, A. & Trujillo Saez, F. (2008). *Plurilingual and pluricultural awareness in language teacher education: A training kit*. Strasbourg / Graz: Council of Europe / European Centre for Modern Languages.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Coste, D., Moore, D., & Zarate, G. (2009). *Plurilingual and pluricultural competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Piccardo, E. (2013). Plurilingualism and curriculum design: Toward a synergic vision. In: *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 600–614.

Piccardo, E., North, B. & Goodier, T. (2019). Broadening the Scope of Language Education: Mediation, Plurilingualism, and Collaborative Learning: the CEFR Companion Volume. In: *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*, 15(1). Italian e-Learning Association. Retrieved November 11, 2020 from <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/207532/>.



## Video 3. Building on pluricultural repertoire

### Slide 2

Building on pluricultural repertoire: the construct of pluricultural competence

Pluriculturality is being able to identify and participate in other cultures, but the construct of pluricultural competence in the *Companion Volume* is more complex and includes the ability to understand “otherness” to encourage a democratic culture in Europe. A term often used in connection with pluriculturality to include this wider sense of experiencing and dealing with other cultures is intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence is the ability to experience otherness and cultural diversity, that is actively engaging with people, ideas, and experiences that are different from one’s own cultural background, in order to analyse it to derive a benefit. Once we have done this, we are better equipped to understand otherness and establish cognitive links between past and new experiences of otherness. By examining and understanding the differences between cultures, individuals can gain knowledge, empathy, and new perspectives that enhance their own personal growth and development. This leads to questioning the assumptions of your cultural group and environment, which leads to increased self-awareness and an openness to challenge preconceived notions. To put it simply, intercultural competence allows us to understand not only other people, but also ourselves. (see also: Beacco et al., 2016: 10)

Encouraging the diversity of languages and cultures involves helping learners to construct their linguistic and cultural identity within a positive experience of otherness and also encourages them to learn by fostering the interaction between different languages and cultures. If our contact with other cultures is a positive one, we will be more open to those that are different and at the same time we will appreciate the richness that knowledge of other cultures brings. Understanding pluricultural learning involves being aware of the fact that any knowledge and any level of competence can help in shaping the users’ identity and collaborate in their multifaceted competence. The languages we know and the cultures we experience shape who we are.

### Slide 3

Interculturality and plurilingualism are intrinsically linked; when a learner becomes plurilingual, they acquire interculturality to one degree or another. By fostering one, we are necessarily encouraging the other. Pluriculturality is the ability to participate in different cultures by acquiring several languages.

Intercultural competence according to Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) involves:

(1) knowledge (*savoir*), that is knowledge of how social groups function and what is involved in intercultural interaction,

(2) understanding (*savoir comprendre*), that is ability to interpret an event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to an event from our culture,

(3) making the strange familiar and the familiar strange (*savoir être*), that is, curiosity and openness towards other cultures,

and

(4) acting accordingly to the new perspective (*savoir s’engager*), that is an ability to evaluate critically perspectives, practices and products in different cultures.

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This is an output of the project “CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox” (2020-2022) of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). The ECML is a Council of Europe institution promoting excellence in language education in its member states.

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#### Slide 4

Let's now look at how pluricultural competence is dealt with in the *Companion Volume*. As we mentioned in previous videos, Building on pluricultural repertoire is contained in the section on plurilingual and pluricultural competence and it includes activities such as respecting personal space according to different cultures, understanding culturally bound gestural language or identifying and understanding misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.

The *Companion Volume* to the CEFR presents the pluricultural profile as differing from the plurilingual profile and reminds us that, as different competences, their mastery can be uneven in an individual. An example of this would be an individual who has good knowledge of a culture but little knowledge of the language. Or in reverse, someone who has learnt the language but whose knowledge and contact with the community has been limited. This is particularly the case for individuals living in communities with different languages or dialects.

In fact, uneven profiles are more common than even ones along the life trajectory of individuals, particularly so if their profile is analysed from a pluricultural and plurilingual perspective.

Profiles are not static; they are dynamic and change with life experiences. In this sense, life choices will alter the individual's profile, making them more competent in some areas and less in others depending on the moment of their lives.

Pluricultural competence helps develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, improves awareness of the complexity of the languages spoken and helps individuals in their relationships with others and in dealing with new situations. All of this facilitates language learning and a positive view of other cultures.

#### Slide 5

So, what is it exactly, what does Building on pluricultural repertoire mean? Building on pluricultural repertoire includes activities such as: understanding cultural values and differences by reading books, watching films or meeting others with different cultures; avoiding cultural misunderstandings by being aware of prejudices and cultural assumptions; dealing with cross-cultural communication, being able to explain their culture in relation to other cultures and dealing with ambiguity by providing clarity to the interactions; identifying cultural cues and understanding how culture influences behaviour, acting appropriately depending on the context.

Pluricultural competence contributes to society as it allows individuals to be aware of the diversity of cultures and to value diversity and otherness, thus fostering social cohesion. This is why the concept is included not only in the CEFR and its *Companion Volume*, but also in several Council of Europe documents that can be consulted in the bibliography.

#### Slide 6

Let us now look at the scale in more detail. The progression in the scale is characterised as follows:

*A level* users are able to recognize cultural differences and act appropriately in simple everyday exchanges.



*B1* users will be able to identify cultural cues and act according to sociopragmatic conventions, as well as explain characteristics of their culture and the culture of others.

*B2* users can go a step further and help deal with misunderstandings related to cultural differences and facilitate communication.

*C level* users can be understanding of cultural backgrounds by linking culture to beliefs, values, and practices. They can also express a capacity for sensitivity to differences and can react constructively and with cultural appropriateness.

## Slide 7

How can we encourage intercultural competence in language teaching, learning and assessment?

According to Byram et al (2002: 9), “the ‘**intercultural dimension**’ in language teaching aims to develop learners as **intercultural speakers** or **mediators** who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity.” Intercultural learning is also one of the concerns of the European Portfolio, as portfolio approaches to learning can help learners develop openness to otherness as well as increase their flexibility of thought.

While language competence includes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, as well as skills and existential competences, cultural competence refers to the skills and existential competences that are relevant to specific social groups who speak a given language and know its culture. Both language competence and cultural competence are essential for effective communication and engagement within a specific linguistic and cultural context.

Encouraging intercultural competence involves working with the learners on three pillars:

- (1) their attitudes, learning to value and respect cultural diversity while being willing to learn and empathize with people from other cultures. Also, seeking to engage with individuals from different cultures, tolerating uncertainty and ambiguity.
- (2) their knowledge and understanding, understanding diversity and being aware of stereotypes and prejudices as well as understanding that communicative conventions might be different for different cultures. Also, understanding the processes of cultural, social and individual interaction.
- (3) and their skills, such as empathy, cognitive flexibility and ability for critical thinking, showing the ability to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges.

## Slide 8

If you want to know more, have a look at the following references:

Barrett, M. D., Huber, J., & Reynolds, C. (2014). *Developing intercultural competence through education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Beacco, J., Byram, M., Cavalli, M., Coste, D., Cuenat, M. E., Goullier, F., & Panthier, J. (2016). *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Language Policy Division.

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- Council of Europe (2011). *European Language Portfolio: Principles and Guidelines*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. (Available at [www.coe.int/portfolio](http://www.coe.int/portfolio))
- Council of Europe (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Fleming, M., and Little, D. (2010). *Languages in and for Education: a role for portfolio approaches?* Strasbourg: Council of Europe. (Available at [www.coe.int/lang](http://www.coe.int/lang) → NEWS → INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM → PROGRAMME AND DOCUMENTS)

## 4. Pluricultural aspects: facilitating pluricultural space

### Slide 2

Before we deal with the scale on building a pluricultural space, we have to go back to the idea of intercultural competence, to the ability to experience and understand otherness and establish cognitive links between past and new experiences of otherness. If acquiring intercultural competence is understanding otherness, we need to foster this understanding by creating a communicative safe space where different cultures can be brought together in neutral territory.

Pluricultural competence is relatively independent of educational content (Coste, Moore and Zarate, 2009) but very much linked to beliefs and experiences. Pluricultural competence is fostered by positive experiences and the creation of a safe communicative space where to experience other cultures without judgement is conducive to the acquisition of the competence.

Creating a pluricultural space is not just building a repertoire as in the previous scale we examined, it is acting as a cultural mediator. It is not just being aware of the potential misunderstandings, it is foreseeing them and actively helping to resolve them and facilitating communication. As a mediator the person aims to facilitate a positive interactive environment for successful communication between participants of different cultural backgrounds, including multicultural contexts.

### Slide 3

The speaker, acting as a social agent, needs to be aware of the sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences to achieve their goal of broadening the intercultural understanding of the participants in the communicative act. As a social agent, the speaker has a crucial role in facilitating intercultural understanding and in fostering a more inclusive intercultural exchange.

Consequently, the scale includes the following concepts:

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- using questions and showing interest to promote understanding of cultural norms and perspectives between participants;
- demonstrating sensitivity to and respect for different sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspectives and norms;
- anticipating, dealing with and/or repairing misunderstandings arising from sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences.

#### Slide 4

The progression in the scale is characterised as follows:

- *A level* users have limited descriptors in this scale, but they can show ability to contribute to intercultural exchanges by showing a positive attitude using verbal and non-verbal language. As we mentioned before, creating a pluricultural space is about attitude, which can be shown in different ways.
- *B levels* deal with introducing people and showing interest; understanding different perspectives and being sensitive and flexible, facilitating clarification when needed to resolve a misunderstanding.  
*B1 users* deal mainly with introductions, asking and responding to questions and showing interest in the cultures. They can also support the conversation by expressing agreement and understanding. At a B2 level, users can deal with feelings, ideas, and opinions, they can work collaboratively and discuss similarities and differences. In their interactions, they can deal with unfamiliar situations appreciating the perspectives of others and clarifying misinterpretations.
- C level users can act as mediators offering support to face misunderstandings and ambiguity. They can guide discussion to keep them positive and respectful of differences.

#### Slide 5

If you want to know more, have a look at the following references:

Bavieri, L., & Beaven, A. (2021). Developing interpersonal and intercultural skills in a university language course. In: *Language Learning in Higher Education*, 11(1), 245-252.

Byram, M. (1988). *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Coste, D., Moore, D., & Zarate, G. (2009). *Plurilingual and pluricultural competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

North, B., & Piccardo, E. (2016). Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): A Council of Europe project. In: *Language Teaching*, 49(3), 455-459.

Piccardo, E. (2019). *Mediation for pluricultural competence: synergies and implications*. Retrieved from: <https://ecspm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Piccardo-Reading-20190321.pdf>.