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**Abstract:****Descriptors for communicative competences in sign languages in the CEFR**

Ever since the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for spoken language, there was a need for common learning objectives, curricula and teacher training in sign languages. A CEFR for sign languages is not only an instrument for a standardized and internationally consistent assessment, but a milestone in the development of vocational education standards. Through the integration of empirically developed and statistically verified descriptors for communicative competences in sign languages in the revision of the CEFR (CEFR Companion Volume) we have laid the grounds to achieve this goal.

The project reported empirically developed descriptors for Sign Languages that characterize second language proficiency levels in learning sign language

as a second language. The descriptors were developed in cooperation with the deaf community. They were calibrated in a large survey. The resulting scales and level profiles of the CEFR will determine the further standardization and testing of language skills in SL.

Particular attention was paid to text competences in SL. Although sign languages do not have a writing system, SL learners must acquire certain textuality features and text types to perform well. Video recordings of deaf text experts showed that descriptions, narrative stories, formal lectures, reports, arguments and artistic performances use different features and structural components to convey meaning.

Specific descriptors were differentiated for receptive "reading - comprehension" and productive "writing – signing of video message" skills that were mapped to six competence levels and categorized in seven scales. The findings are statistically founded and as such more reliable than any of the descriptions found elsewhere. They will be the basis for class-compliant sign language courses, topic-specific further training courses, professional qualifications of sign language teachers, standardized tests, recognized certificates, etc.

The descriptors stand next to the spoken language and serve as a guide for the training and promotion of text competence in sign language in the education. In addition to the didactic benefits of lesson planning, the juxtaposition of spoken and sign languages is a cornerstone in the political recognition of sign languages as full-fledged and worth learning languages.