



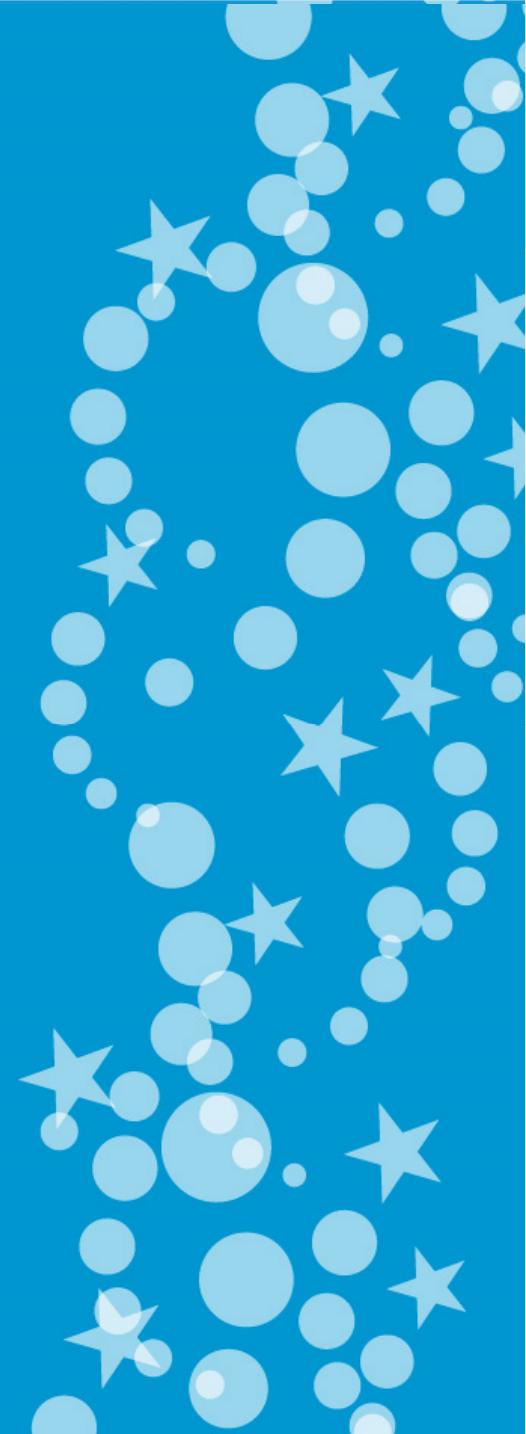
# merlin - a multifunctional trilingual learner corpus related to the CEFR

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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

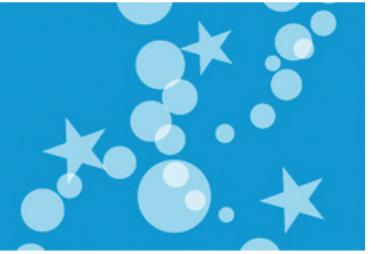




## 1. The lack of empirical illustration of CEFR levels

- overwhelming focus on CEFR **levels** expresses limited understanding of the document
- still, evidence for how levels relate to learner language is urgently needed in language learning, teaching, and testing

(Fulcher 2004, Hulstijn 2007, North 2000, Wisniewski et al. 2013, Wisniewski forthcoming)



## 2. The Reference Level Descriptions (RLD)

- Council of Europe initiative: *RLD for National and Regional Languages* (CoE, 2005)
- Recently, some RLD adopt a **bottom-up approach** (Green 2013) → based on learner corpora
  - “... electronic collections of .... texts produced by foreign or second language learners in a variety of language settings” (Granger et al. 2002: VII),
  - often annotated with the help of a standardized system of error tags (Díaz-Negrillo and Domínguez 2006)
- Examples:
  - *English Profile Project* (Saville/Hawkey 2010); *Norsk Profil* (Carlsen 2013); *Profilo della lingua italiana* (Spinelli/Parizzi 2010)



### 3. The MERLIN project

MERLIN: „Multilingual Platform for the European Reference Levels:  
Interlanguage Exploration in Context“: [www.merlin-platform.eu](http://www.merlin-platform.eu)

European Union grant (LLP 518989-LLP-1-2011-1-DE-KA2-KA2MP)

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Partners: Technische Universität Dresden (DE) (Lead Partner), European Academy Bolzano (IT),  
Charles University (CZ), telc GmbH (DE), Berufsförderungsinstitut Oberösterreich (AT),  
Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen (DE), European Center of Modern Languages - Council  
of Europe (AT) (associated partner)

#### Main aims:

- develop a freely accessible online platform to **illustrate** the CEFR levels  
for **German, Italian and Czech**
- contribute to the **validation** of selected CEFR scales

(cf. Wisniewski et al. 2013)



### 3.1 The MERLIN project: data

- written productions from standardised language tests (telc, Frankfurt & UJOP, Prague) with strict quality controls
- ~200 texts per (available) CEFR test level (N=2470)
- metadata (L1, age, gender ...)
- ~280.000 tokens



## 3.2 Re-ratings & transcriptions in MERLIN

- **re-ratings** of written parts of the original tests with ...
  - assessor-oriented, CEFR-related analytical rating grid (cf. Table 3, CEFR); rating criteria based on chapter 5 categorization, i.e. grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range & control, sociolinguistic appropriateness, coherence & cohesion
  - assessor-oriented holistic rating scale („General linguistic range“)
- **quality control:** 10% double-rated; CTT & Multi-facet Rasch analyses; problematic Italian ratings → all re-re-rated → fair averages
- **transcription/digitisation** (xml mind©) → guideline-based, reliability checks



### 3.3 Developing the annotation scheme

#### Sources of tags in the annotation scheme

1. CEFR (scale operationalization)
2. SLA research
3. users (needs analysis; questionnaires & interviews; textbook analyses; language test analyses)
4. text analyses

(cf. e.g. Sieber 2012, Yang/Sun 2012, Vajjala & Meurers 2012, Paquot/Granger 2012, Bulté/Housen 2012, Granger & Bestgen 2011, Lu 2010, 2011, Mellor 2011, Carlsen 2010, Housen & Kuiken 2009, Bardovi-Harlig 2009, Malvern et al. 2008, Rimrott & Heift 2008, Burger 2007, Stede 2007, Nesselhauf 2005, Read/Nation 2004, Schmitt/McCarthy 2004, Dewaele 2004, Daller/Van Hout/Treffers-Daller 2003, Ortega 2003, Wray 2002, Santipolo 2002, Bachmann 2002, Nation 2001, 2007, Read 2000, Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim 1998, Laufer/Nation 1995, O'Loughlin 1995, Halliday/Hasan 1989, Arnaud 1984, Wisniewski forthcoming, 2013)



## 3.4 Structure of annotations in MERLIN

- 1) target hypotheses** (cooperation with Falko, e.g. Recnizeck/Walter et al. 2010)
- 2) annotation of errors and other learner language features**
  - manual and automatic annotations
  - pilotings and reliability checks, extensive documentation
  - layered design (orthographical and grammatical features for whole corpus, vocabulary, sociolinguistic appropriateness, pragmatics for A2 & B2)



### 3.5 Envisaged features of the MERLIN platform

- free online access to all resources, open-source tools
- full texts (with & without annotations), metadata, and tasks
- detailed task descriptions (ALTE Grid for writing)
- CEFR profiles (grammatical accuracy , vocabulary range/control, coherence/cohesion, sociolinguistic appr., general linguistic range)
- simple & advanced search options
- sort texts: metadata – annotations – task level – CEFR level ...
- create & export word lists
- display statistical measures (e.g. of lexical variety, grammatical complexity)
- cross-language learner language analyses



## 4. Applications of the MERLIN platform

- second language acquisition research (corpus-based studies often use intuitive distinctions of more or less competent learners)
- natural language processing research for L2
- language learning
- language teaching
- language testing
- ...



## 4.1 A closer look: MERLIN in Language Testing

### Generally...

- Charles Alderson (1996) identified use of L2 corpora ←→ still underexploited (Ball 2001, Barker 2004, Flowerdew 2012)
- learner corpora contribute to transparency, consistency, comparability of testing ← → high costs → L2 corpora often not freely available (e.g. Cambridge ESOL, Barker 2010)

### Merlin useful for...

- relating language tests to the CEFR
- CEFR-related item writing, development of assessment materials
- empirically-based rating scale construction (Hawkey/Barker 2004, Fulcher et al. 2011)
- CEFR rating scale validation (Wisniewski 2013, forthcoming)



## 5. Conclusion

- availability
- needs orientation
- learner-centred approach
- multiple uses
- MERLIN bases CEFR use on empirical data → helps to control reification of CEFR scale system (Fulcher/Davidson 2007: 232)
- but corpus is small – the work must go on!



# Thank you for your attention!

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