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J. A. van Ek and J. L. M. Trim

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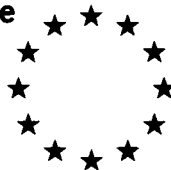
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Preface

Waystage 1990 is the latest, thoroughly revised, extended, corrected and reset version of *Waystage: an intermediary objective below Threshold Level in a European unit/credit system of modern language learning by adults* by J. A. van Ek and L. G. Alexander, in association with M. A. Fitzpatrick. This work was first published by the Council of Europe in 1977 and republished in 1980 by Pergamon Press for and on behalf of the Council of Europe under the title *Waystage English*.

Waystage was originally conceived in the context of the preparation for the broadcast-led Anglo-German multimedia co-production *Follow Me*. Overall, *Follow Me* was originally planned as a two-year English language course for use by the DVV (*Deutscher Volkshochschulverband*) in its adult education classes. The final objective was set as *The Threshold Level*, first produced for the Council of Europe by Dr J. A. van Ek, which sets down in specific detail, exemplified for English, what a language user needs to do by means of language in order to 'communicate socially with people from other countries, exchanging information and opinion on everyday matters in a relatively straightforward way, and to conduct the necessary business of everyday living when abroad with a reasonable degree of independence' (preface to *Threshold*, CUP 1998). An experiment conducted in Vienna *Volkshochschulen* showed that the full attainment of this objective under the normal conditions of adult education would take a full two years. Yet, realistically, it was likely that local conditions would oblige broadcasting and education authorities in many countries to use only the first year of the course. Together with the *Follow Me* course designers, van Ek therefore examined carefully the content of *The Threshold Level* and extracted what were considered to be the most basic categories within each of its parameters – the most essential situations, topics and functions, inescapable general notions and their simplest and most basic lexical and grammatical exponents to enable the learners to cope at least minimally in those communicative situations which may be most directly relevant to them. This specification then provided the basis for the first year *Follow Me* course design drawn up for the Council of Europe by L. G. Alexander. At first *Waystage* was not considered a legitimate terminal objective in its own right, but rather as one of many possible intermediate objectives on the way to threshold level. However, by 1980, experience with *Waystage* had shown that whilst 'we should not favour a "minimalism" which saw this first objective as a terminal goal for the mass of learners, it has in fact a coherence and breadth which make it a worthwhile objective in its own right'. (*Waystage English* p. viii) Learners who for one reason or another have only a strictly limited amount of time available for learning English will find its 'cost-effectiveness' very high.

In broadcasting terms, *Follow Me* was highly successful. First broadcast in 1979 to Germany, Austria and Switzerland, it has now been shown in some 70 countries to a combined audience of several hundred million learners. The success of this venture in international co-planning and co-production (notoriously difficult to achieve) was due, on the one hand, to the high professional expertise of the many partners involved in the planning, production, distribution and use of TV, radio and printed components, and on the other to what proved to be the universal relevance to language learners of the functional/notional framework set out in *Waystage*. However, no media product has an unlimited life. By 1989, it was time to plan for a replacement series, which BBC English again wished to situate in an international context under Council of Europe auspices. Meanwhile, a considerable amount of work had taken place within successive Council of Europe Modern Languages Projects towards the development of an enriched model for the specification of language teaching objectives, resulting in the publication in 1986–7 of J. A. van Ek's two-volume study on *Objectives for Foreign Language Learning*. The revision of the original threshold level specification as applied to English, 'to take account of developments in the fifteen years since it was conceived as a first pioneering experiment' was included among the priority areas and themes for the Council for Cultural Co-operation programme *Language Learning for European Citizenship* initiated in 1989. BBC English expressed their willingness to support revision of *The Threshold Level* and also of *Waystage*, which would follow similar lines. A similar willingness was expressed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate in view of the relevance of this revision to their continuing programme of examination reform and by the British Council in the light of its more general concern for curriculum development in the teaching of English as a foreign language. A thorough revision was accordingly undertaken and carried out in 1989–90 and published by the Council of Europe in 1991. That version forms the basis for the present publication, which has been further revised, corrected and reset.

The authors wish to acknowledge here with gratitude the support received from BBC English, UCLES, the British Council and the Council of Europe. We also wish to acknowledge our continuing indebtedness to L. G. Alexander and M. A. Fitzpatrick for the skill and judgement they brought to the fundamental task of honing down the original *Threshold Level* specification to produce the compact yet comprehensive *Waystage*. The results of that work are still apparent in the selection of functional and notional categories for *Waystage*.

Furthermore, van Ek's words in his introduction to *Objectives for Foreign Language Learning* are as relevant to *Waystage* as to *Threshold Level*: it is 'one of the results of many years of intensive collaboration and genuine interaction with colleagues from several European countries brought

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together in the framework of successive modern language projects of the Council of Europe. The number of those who in some way or other, directly or indirectly, have contributed to our study is so large that we can only say to them collectively. "Thank you all".'

J. A. van Ek

J. L. M. Trim