

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71192-0 - Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring Quality, Sustaining Diversity: Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin Conference, May 2005

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

Lynda Taylor and Cyril J Weir

This volume brings together a selection of 20 edited papers based on presentations given at the 2nd ALTE Conference, Berlin, in May 2005, to explore the impact of multilingualism on language testing and assessment. The papers consider ways of describing and comparing language qualifications in order to establish common levels of proficiency, balancing the need to set shared standards and ensure quality, and at the same time sustain linguistic diversity. Grouped according to three broad themes, these edited papers address some of the substantive and complex issues in the current assessment of language ability around the world.

Against the backdrop of a globalised environment where populations are increasingly mobile and qualifications need to be transferable, **Section One** of the volume examines issues of *transparency and diversity*, and especially the role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in this regard. Introductory contributions by Waldemar Martyniuk and Brian North helpfully set the scene for five papers that describe projects seeking to align tests and set standards in relation to the CEFR in differing European contexts (Norway, France, Germany, Spain) and across different European languages (English, French, German, Catalan, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese).

In his opening paper **Waldemar Martyniuk** provides us with a clear overview of the aims and work of the Council of Europe (CoE) and its development of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). He describes the original intentions behind the CEFR and how it has been implemented through the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as well as other initiatives of the European Union. Growing acceptance throughout Europe of the levels and standards presented in the CEFR led to recognition of the need for practical guidance on how to relate language examinations to the Framework. The outcome was a set of specified recommended procedures in the form of a Draft Manual produced in 2003, together with an emerging 'toolkit' including a reference supplement, a DVD with sample speaking/writing performances, a CD-ROM with reading/listening test items, and various content analysis grids. Since 2003 the Draft Manual has been widely piloted throughout Europe by ALTE partners and other language testing specialists; it is expected to be released in a revised, updated version in 2008. **Brian North**

Introduction

builds upon Martyniuk's paper by tracing in much greater depth the origin and purpose of the CEFR; he discusses in some detail the CEFR descriptive scheme, the Common Reference Levels and the CEFR descriptors in whose development he was very closely involved. North also suggests ways in which the current descriptors might be further validated and developed through qualitative research. **Eli Moe** then reports on an attempt in Norway to set CEFR standards for a test of reading in English within the national schools context. Her detailed description of the procedures adopted in the project demonstrate how complex can be the process of standard setting of tests in terms of the CEFR; to be effective, it requires a combined approach that balances statistical analysis, rigorous training and informed judgement. **Patrick Riba and Marianne Mavel** report their experience of undertaking a similar, nationally initiated alignment project in France for the DELF and DALF exams of French as a Foreign Language. They describe some of the theoretical and practical challenges faced and the decisions made as they sought to link their suite of exams to the CEFR. **Guenter Nold, Henning Rossa and Johannes Hartig** describe the development and validation of tests of listening and reading comprehension in DESI, a large-scale assessment project in Germany. They offer an informative account of a data-driven approach to setting standards, involving ratings of task characteristics and application of the Dutch CEFR Grids to specify test content, to predict item difficulty, and to relate both test tasks and proficiency scales to CEFR levels and descriptors. The focus on listening comprehension in their paper sheds welcome light on an often neglected area of language testing. The following paper by **Montserrat Montagut and Pilar Murtra** reports how they used the CEFR for writing level descriptors when revising the higher level certificate in the Catalan language. This is one of relatively few accounts of test developers trying to use the CEFR to develop test specifications; they reflect upon the need for flexibility in its use, even to the point of local customisation, and comment critically on problems encountered and how these were overcome at C1 and C2 level. Finally in this section, **Peter Hardcastle, Sibylle Bolton and Francesca Pelliccia** explore some of the challenges that arise when attempts are made to link tests in different languages – Italian, Spanish, German and Portuguese – onto a single frame of reference. They argue that lexico-grammatical realisations of functions may well vary in difficulty across languages making the quantification and comparison of difficulty across languages and language tests a major problem. Their paper reminds us that the linguistic description component of the CEFR is generic rather than language-specific, and that the CEFR will need to be 'interpreted' when used for specifying reference levels for any particular language. This has already been accomplished for German, for example, through *Profile Deutsch*. The specification of reference levels for English, partially achieved through earlier initiatives such as *Waystage 1979/1990* and *Threshold*

Introduction

1979/1990, is currently being extended through the *English Profile* project (www.englishprofile.org). The papers grouped in Section One thus explore the role and value of the CEFR in achieving transparency and coherence across multiple languages, multiple skills, multiple testing purposes and diverse socio-educational contexts, from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. The application of the CEFR in this regard is consistent with one of the fundamental aims of the ALTE members, i.e. to work together on common levels of proficiency and common standards for the language testing process designed to support the mutual recognition of language certificates across Europe. From the mid-1990s ALTE worked on placing the examinations of ALTE members within a common framework; more recently, effort has focused on relating the emerging ALTE Framework to the Common European Framework of Reference through empirical investigation as well as extensive work on the content analysis of examinations, guidelines for assuring the quality examinations and empirically validated performance indicators in different European languages.

Section Two of the volume considers the theme of *quality and diversity*. Papers in this section reflect contemporary concerns among language testers over quality management processes in test development and administration, including the application of testing standards and codes of practice; the notion of quality assurance and fairness review extends to embrace research into examination impact in various contexts. In the first paper in this section **Cyril Weir and Stuart Shaw** propose a comprehensive framework for establishing the various types of evidence needed to build a sound and convincing validity argument to underpin examinations. They demonstrate how a socio-cognitive framework can be applied to tests of second language writing and how such an approach may also assist in the process of linking exams to the CEFR in a transparent and coherent way. **Thomas Eckes** describes the complex process of assuring the quality of a high-stakes writing examination of German as a Foreign Language; he focuses on the application of *a posteriori* advanced statistical procedures such as multi-faceted Rasch measurement (MFRM) to provide a detailed view of how the rater-mediated performance assessment system functions. In his discussion of rater variability and the potential threat this poses for quality assurance, he speculates on possible factors underpinning rater variability and identifies avenues for further research. **David Coniam's** paper also addresses the critical quality assurance issue of rater severity/leniency but this time in the context of oral examinations in Hong Kong. Like Eckes, he uses MFRM to explore the impact of rater variability on scoring validity and argues for more careful consideration to be given to the process of using assessors' raw scores to report final grade outcomes. **Hanan Khalifa** continues the focus on quality assurance in this section by describing the cycle of activities undertaken by Cambridge ESOL in establishing their new Teaching Knowledge Test

Introduction

(TKT). She explains how the generic Test Development Model developed by ESOL since the mid-1990s provides a rational and transparent basis for planning, managing and auditing exams, in order to maximise their validity and to ensure they are consistent with accepted professional standards in the field. **Maurizio Gotti and Carol Taylor Torsello** report on the development of a certification system (CERCLU) for tests of English and Italian within the context of university reform in Italy. They describe the procedures involved in creating and validating the test instruments, and discuss some of the diverse problems encountered with regard to technical (i.e. weighting) and technological (i.e. computer implementation) features. **Roger Hawkey** examines issues of test quality and test taker diversity in relation to an impact study of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Findings from the three-phase study conducted worldwide provide us with some useful insights into perceptions of test fairness, test anxiety and motivation, and test difficulty. The final paper in Section Two is by **Antony Kunnan** and deals with the concept of test fairness and the wider contexts in which tests operate. Building on his earlier Test Fairness Framework presented at the Barcelona 2001 conference, he proposes a complementary macro framework – the Test Context Framework – capable of analysing the wider context in which tests function, which can include political and economic, educational, social and cultural, legal and ethical, and even technological and infrastructure factors. Kunnan suggests that together the two Frameworks offer test agencies and institutions a comprehensive model for evaluating tests and testing. All the papers in this second section resonate with ALTE's long-established commitment to the concept of quality assurance in language testing and to continual improvement. In the early 1990s, for example, ALTE developed a Code of Practice which became the basis for elaborating professional standards for ALTE members and their stakeholders as well as for developing quality assurance systems and quality management tools that could be applied to the development, administration and validation of tests produced by ALTE members. Developing the concept of quality assurance and its management has to be a collaborative venture between partners and is not prone to imposition in the ALTE context. ALTE recognises that the field of language testing in different languages will be at different stages of development and that developing a language testing capacity in the European context, albeit in a relatively narrow domain, is an ongoing venture. Similarly, in a context where participants are free to walk away at any time, progress cannot be achieved through force or coercion but rather through involvement, greater understanding and personal commitment. Nevertheless, ALTE members are keenly aware that as test providers they carry significant responsibility and have sought to play a leading role in defining the dimensions of quality and how an effective approach to quality management can be implemented. Work on quality assurance has been in progress

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71192-0 - Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring Quality, Sustaining Diversity: Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin Conference, May 2005

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

for several years now, more recently in the hands of an ALTE sub-group. Much of this has been presented at conferences and is publicly available in documented form, including on the ALTE website (www.alte.org).

As assessment interfaces increasingly with language proficiency requirements for participating in social, occupational and democratic processes, **Section Three** of the volume focuses on *ethics and diversity*, especially the complex relationships between linguistic identity and diversity on one hand, and immigration and citizenship policy on the other. In the opening paper of this section, **Joseph Sheils** outlines the Council of Europe's policy on social integration and citizenship. With regard specifically to its language policy he identifies a number of European Conventions and factors relating to language provision for integration and citizenship purposes, highlighting some common issues in member states concerning language provision and testing for residence or citizenship. Finally he explores the contribution the CEFR has to make in this area. **Nick Saville and Piet van Avermaet** continue this important theme, reporting on the political and ethical issues involved in defining and assessing the language proficiency required for citizenship and for active participation in society. They helpfully re-examine some commonly held assumptions in this area and consider the current role being played by language tests as well as the contribution members of the language testing community can make to political debate and public discourse. **Lynda Taylor** examines the issues that linguistic diversity raise for language testing in light of a preliminary survey of perceptions, policy and practice among European language test providers. She goes on to suggest how testing agencies might adopt a principled and pragmatic approach that affirms linguistic diversity while at the same time maintaining essential standards of quality and fairness. **Anne Lazaraton** explores another important strand relating to ethics and diversity, that of the non-native speaker in the role of language assessor. She reflects critically on what the available literature tells us about the traditional native speaker construct and about the issues which are perceived to surround the use of non-native speakers in language testing; and she highlights a number of useful implications and recommendations for language testers to consider. **Helen Sunderland and Chris Taylor** take us back to the relationship between language learning and citizenship. They provide a fascinating account of how test developers in the UK set about developing citizenship materials for ESOL learners as public policy and government legislation moved towards far greater regulation in relation to immigration and social cohesion in the early 2000s. Sunderland and Taylor offer a commentary on the problems they encountered and explain how they attempted to overcome these. Although the context has continued to evolve since this paper was first presented in 2005, it gives us a valuable insight into how key stakeholders in the process – both teachers and learners – can participate collaboratively and creatively in what may be a controversial initiative. In the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71192-0 - Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring Quality, Sustaining Diversity: Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin Conference, May 2005

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

final paper in this volume **Liz Hamp-Lyons** reflects on possible assessment trends for the future, specifically in the context of writing assessment. She considers notions of standards, diversity, individualism, local norms, equity and equality, suggesting that if we are to be ‘ethical educators’ we need to hold these notions in balance with one another as we strive for best practice in our approach to and use of assessment.

The field of language assessment is extremely broad today; assessment issues are dealt with in different ways by national and regional authorities throughout Europe and the world. ALTE was originally formed when a few organisations sought to establish a forum for the discussion of common issues and challenges in assessment. ALTE’s direct interests and aims were at that time on a much smaller scale. It is important to underline that it brought together those interested in the assessment of their own language as a European foreign language. This might be in an international context, particularly with the more widely spoken languages but also in a national context, as is the case with lesser spoken languages in particular. While some ALTE members are located within ministries or government departments, others are within universities and cultural agencies. As a group, ALTE has always aimed to provide a benchmark of assessment quality in the particular domain in which it operates and to operate as a capacity builder in the multilingual European context, but ALTE does not set out to establish or police the standard for European language assessment in general. Increasingly, however, ALTE’s work is perceived as having relevance outside its own immediate context. The two international conferences held in Barcelona in 2001 and in Berlin in 2005 (and the third to be held imminently in Cambridge in April 2008) attracted considerable interest and support not only from across Europe but also from much further afield, suggesting that these events provide a welcome forum for the international language testing community to come together and discuss shared interests and concerns. With its broad coverage of key issues, combining theoretical insights and practical advice, we believe that this proceedings volume on *Multilingualism and Assessment* will be a valuable reference for academics and policy-makers, e.g. immigration bodies, not only throughout Europe but in the wider international community. It will also be a useful resource for postgraduate students in language testing and for all practitioners who are seeking to define language proficiency levels in relation to the CEFR and similar frameworks.

Lynda Taylor and Cyril J Weir
March 2008

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71192-0 - Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring Quality, Sustaining Diversity: Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin Conference, May 2005

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Section One

Achieving Transparency

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71192-0 - Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring
Quality, Sustaining Diversity: Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin Conference, May 2005

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71192-0 - Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring Quality, Sustaining Diversity: Proceedings of the ALTE Berlin Conference, May 2005

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 Relating language examinations to the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Waldemar Martyniuk

Council of Europe

Language Policy Division, Strasbourg

About the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is the continent's oldest intergovernmental organisation, founded in 1949, with its permanent headquarters in Strasbourg, France. At the time of writing, it serves 800 million people in 46 member states, with five observers (Canada, Japan, the Holy See, Mexico and the United States).

The main aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members. It was created to: protect human rights and the rule of law in all member states; consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legal and constitutional reforms undertaken nationally, regionally and locally; seek solutions to social problems such as intolerance, discrimination against minorities, human cloning, drugs, terrorism, corruption and organised crime; promote and develop a European cultural identity, with special emphasis on education; and promote social cohesion and social rights.

The Council of Europe has been active in the area of languages for over 40 years now. Its programmes are co-coordinated by two complementary bodies: the Language Policy Division in Strasbourg and the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (Austria). The Division in Strasbourg focuses on instruments and initiatives for the development and analysis of language education policy for the countries which have ratified the European Cultural Convention and provides a forum for debate on policy development. The Centre in Graz (ECML), established in 1995, has as its mission the implementation of language policies, including support for the policy instruments developed in Strasbourg, and the

Section 1 Achieving Transparency

promotion of innovative approaches. Its strategic objectives include the practice of modern language learning and teaching and the training of language educators.

Language education policy aims and principles

The Council of Europe language education policies aim to promote:

- **PLURILINGUALISM:** all are entitled to develop a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages over their lifetime in accordance with their needs.
- **LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY:** Europe is multilingual and all its languages are equally valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity; the right to use and to learn one's language(s) is protected in Council of Europe Conventions.
- **MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING:** the opportunity to learn other languages is an essential condition for intercultural communication and acceptance of cultural differences.
- **DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP:** participation in democratic and social processes in multilingual societies is facilitated by the plurilingual competence of individuals.
- **SOCIAL COHESION:** equality of opportunity for personal development, education, employment, mobility, access to information and cultural enrichment depends on access to language learning throughout life.¹

The following guiding principles define the CoE language education policy:

- Language learning is for *all*: opportunities for developing their plurilingual repertoire is a necessity for all citizens in contemporary Europe.
- Language learning is for the *learner*: it should be based on worthwhile, realistic objectives reflecting needs, interests, motivation, abilities.
- Language learning is for *intercultural communication*: it is crucial for ensuring successful interaction across linguistic and cultural boundaries and developing openness to the plurilingual repertoire of others.
- Language learning is for *life*: it should develop learner responsibility and the independence necessary to respond to the challenges of lifelong language learning.
- Language teaching is *co-ordinated*: it should be planned as a whole, covering the specification of objectives, the use of teaching/learning