INTO EUROPE- EUROPEAN STANDARDS IN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

February 9-10, 2006
Budapest, Hungary
Common Abbreviations

Council of Europe ≠ EU:
Council is for giving advice but Union is for uniting

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning Teaching and Assessment

EALTA: European Association for Language Testing and Assessment

DIALANG: a project for creating self assessment and diagnostic testing on-line

ELP: European Language Portfolio
Council of Europe
Language Education Policies

Aim: to promote
- Plurilingualism
- Linguistic diversity
- Mutual understanding
- Democratic citizenship
- Social cohesion
● Pluralingualism is for individuals; a pluralingual person has:
  - a repertoire of languages & language varieties
  - competences of different kinds & levels within the repertoire
● Not to strive for native-like competence but to create an awareness, respect for cultures, etc. on the part of the individual
Impact of CEFR on language education

- At learner level - the ELP
- At institutional level
- At national level
- At European Level
- At international level
Guiding Principles for LL

LL is for:

- *all*
- *the learner*
- *international communication*
- *Life*

Language ability development is a human right. Language learning & teaching are life-long processes.
Who uses CEFR?

- Teachers
- Teacher trainers
- Test developers
- Pedagogic material writers
So far survey with 111 respondents from 37 European states, Egypt and Mexico has been conducted on the use of the CEFR.

The results showed that

- The best known and used parts are the common reference levels of language proficiency
- Most useful in the domains of testing, assessment and certification
- Most useful for examination providers
Recommendations

- Encourage all Europeans to achieve a degree of communicative competence in FLs
- Encourage the use of FL in the teaching of non-linguistic subjects
- Support the application of communication and information technologies.....!
- Support the development of links and exchanges with institutions at all levels of education
Standards and diversity don’t like each other.

STANDARDS
- How good things should be

DIVERSITY
- Thinks standards impose things

There should be certain standards for unity, a common framework

How to combine standards but not invade diversity
The Manual is an effort to keep standards and diversity.
The Manual

- is being piloted.
- Will be published in 2008
- is the continuation of the work of the Council of Europe’s language policy division in developing planning tools.
The Manual

- aims to:
  * contribute to competence building in the area of linking assessments to the CEF
  * encourage increased transparency on the part of exam providers
  * encourage the development of both formal and informal national and international networks of institutions and experts
  * provide a guide specifically focussed on procedures involved in the validation of a claim that certain examination or test is linked to the CEF
But, the manual is useless if...

- If the existing exam is not valid and reliable, it is meaningless to link it to the CEFR.
The manual presents four inter-related sets of procedures:

- Familiarisation: essential even for experts. Knowledge is usually superficial, even scales are not well known
- Specification
- Standard Setting
- Empirical validation
The Hungarian Context of FL Exams and CEFR
School-leaving Examination in English-1

- introduced in 2005
- part of the overall School-leaving Examination Reform of all school-subjects
- developed in accordance with international standards
- is a proficiency test, not a measure of achievement, and not based on any particular syllabus
- main purpose is to provide ss. with a valid, reliable and meaningful certificate of lang. proficiency on two levels: Intermediate & Advanced
School-leaving Examination in English-2

- is intended to measure student’s communicative language ability at both Intermediate & Advanced levels through separate tests of the four basic lang.skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing in contexts as close as possible to those in everyday life
- has an additional component at the Advanced level; the Use of English Paper which assesses candidates’ linguistic competence; their ability to apply knowledge of grammatical structures and vocabulary
- each test contains as many different texts and tasks to provide ss. with more opportunities to demonstrate their language knowledge
## Components of the Examination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examination</th>
<th><strong>Timing</strong> (minutes)</th>
<th><strong>Weighing (%)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part</strong></td>
<td><strong>Component</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intermediate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of English</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Test Level

- both levels of the examination are set to cover two ‘Council of Europe’ levels

- these are A2 and B1 for the Intermediate level examination, and B2 and C1 for the Advanced level
Test taker

- all students graduating from secondary education

- Ss. need to state prior to taking the exam whether they intend to take the Intermediate or the Advanced level
Hungarian Exams Reform Teacher Support Project

- To encourage, to foster and to bring about change in the way language is taught and learned in Hungary.
- ACHIEVEMENTS: trained item writers, including class teachers
- Trained TTs and disseminators
- Developed, refined and published item writer guidelines & test specifications
- Developed a sophisticated item production system
- Developed sets of rating scales and trained markers
- Developed interlocutor frame for speaking tests and trained interlocutors
- Items/tasks piloted
- Into-Europe series
- In-service courses for teachers in modern test philosophy and exam preparation

(Modern Public FLEs Period started in 1989 where 4 skills began to be tested, and from 1999 onwards ORIGO FLE System has been used. Unprofessional practices exist at present despite these long-term efforts)
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Prepare for Modern English Exams

INTO EUROPE
Prepare for Modern English Exams INTO EUROPE

- is for teachers and students to understand the levels and demands of modern European examinations
- is a series of four books devoted to different skills
- the four volumes:
  - Reading and Use of English
  - The Speaking Handbook
  - The Writing Handbook
  - Listening
Prepare for Modern English Exams INTO EUROPE

- the Listening Handbook is accompanied by 2 CDs.
- the Speaking Handbook is accompanied by a five-hour DVD, showing students’ performances on good and bad Speaking tasks.
- The Writing Handbook presents scripts produced by real learners, which are annotated with raters’ comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the scripts.
Prepare for Modern English Exams INTO EUROPE

- In the volumes you can find:
  - hundreds of tasks with keys
  - review of the process of understanding and producing language
  - Useful advice for assessment and evaluation
  - Summary of different testing methods and approaches
  - Guidelines to test design
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European Language Portfolio
European Language Portfolio (ELP)

- is designed to support four of the Council of Europe’s key political aims:
  
  * the preservation of linguistic & cultural diversity
  * the promotion of linguistic & cultural tolerance
  * the promotion of plurilingualism
  * education for democratic citizenship
ELP has TWO functions

- **REPORTING**
  * displays owner’s capabilities in relation to foreign languages
  * supplements formal exams by presenting additional information about the owner’s experience & foreign language achievement

- **PEDAGOGICAL**
  * is used as a means of making the language learning process more transparent to learners
  * helps learners to develop their capacity for reflection & self assessment
  * fosters the development of learner autonomy & promotes life-long learning
Parts of European Language Portfolio

**Language Passport**
- provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages
- records formal qualifications and describes language competencies and significant language and intercultural learning experiences
- includes information on partial and specific competence
- allows for self-assessment, teacher assessment and assessment by educational institutions and examinations boards
- requires that information entered in the Passport states on what basis, when and by whom the assessment was carried out
- is for adult users (16+)
Parts of European Language Portfolio

European Language Portfolio

- Language Passport
- Language Biography
- Dossier
Parts of European Language Portfolio

**Language Biography**

- facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress
- encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts
- is organized to promote plurilingualism i.e. the development of competencies in a number of languages.
Dossier

- offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport.
The Catalan Context of FL Exams and CEFR
2 levels defined B1? & B2?

Standard language proficiency certificates since 1995

The exams are:
- Developed centrally
- Related to published curricula
- Written according to set specifications
- Pre-tested, standardised marking & administration,
- Analysed statistically
Issues to be solved include....

- Develop an item-bank system
- Link levels to CEFR
  - Difficulty level of exams across time
  - Difficulty index of exams between 2 proficiency levels
  - Exam revision Linking CEFR levels

- Adoption or adaptation?: scale development is long and indispensible process along the course
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Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)
CPE

- is the highest level Cambridge ESOL exam
- at level C2 of the Council of Europe's CEFR for Languages
- CPE has five papers:
  * Reading (1 hour 30 minutes)
  * Writing (2 hours)
  * Use of English (1 hour 30 minutes)
  * Listening (40 minutes (approx.))
  * Speaking (19 minutes (approx.))
Viewpoint of a specialist in psychometrics...
Standard Setting and Test Equating

- Standard setting is a judgemental process
- SS is an integral part of any test development & test score interpretations

- Test equating is a statistical process
- TE is limited only to linking parallel forms of the same test
Misconceptions and definition of some testing-related terms

- Equating $\neq$ linking

- Alignment $\neq$ linking

related to content validity specification: both using qualitative and quantitative method- Manual Ch4 specification does not require quantitative methods for content validation
● We tend to make sample-free estimation under the influence of IRT
● Yet,
● As scales are different, if our item does not fit one scale, it does not mean that it is wrong
Standard Setting

- Human judgement is the epicenter of every standard setting (Berk, 1995), therefore the cut-off scores can be contentious but the procedures of our test can be and should be justified.
Claims vs. evidence

- A2 level says the learner can understand simple instructions on equipment encountered in everyday life or
- A1 level says the learner can understand simple instructions such as a public telephone

- 1. All these can be relative
- 2. CEF does not provide evidence, just the claims of experts. No mention of how items were decided.
- 3. Besides, all stakeholders should have a say on the beginning and end of cut-off scores, who are going to be the judges, whose values would the levels reflect?...
- Teachers are not qualified to judge items
- Teachers are qualified to judge the level of students
- But..
- Training sessions are needed for the teachers to become judges
- Problem: How long and how much should we train them?
UNTIL IT HURTS!!!
To conclude...

- Relating your exam to CEFR is a long and painful process.
- Adoption is not always possible but adaptation is.
- Levels are qualitatively defined and more quantitative work is needed, so the manual is helpful but not perfect.
- Reliability and validity are prerequisites for linking your exam to CEFR.