

# CEFR-Based Language Testing

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Özcan DEMİREL

4th Edition





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## **CEFR-BASED LANGUAGE TESTING**

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*To my grandchildren...*

## **Preface**

“CEFR-based Language Testing” is particularly prepared for ELT (English Language Teaching) students taking the “Language Testing” course at University level. It covers the summary of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and also constructing skill-based language tests and writing test items.

This book consists of 9 chapters that provide to understand the test development process gradually unit by unit starting from the basic concepts, writing test items, item analysis procedure to develop a reliable and valid language test, administering final form of the test and writing a technical manual for testees. The book ends with appendices including language descriptors, Europass: European Language Passport and SMOG test.

The author wishes to thank most warmly their students who have contributed to the development of this book through their valuable discussion of topics. The authors will be very happy if the students find it useful and practical in their academic life.

Prof. Dr. Özcan DEMİREL

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Basic Terms in Language Testing

### Objectives

After studying Chapter 1, you will be able to:

- Define basic terms used in language testing.
- Identify the relationship between language curricula and testing.
- Identify the relationship between language teaching and testing.

### Introduction

In this chapter, basic terms, language curricula, language teaching and language testing topics are defined and the relationship between language testing and language curricula and language teaching is identified. In addition, the importance of CEFR-based language testing is explained.

### Basic terms in language testing

Basic terminology on testing is given in the glossary part of the appendices of the book; but, some important terms are given as follows. These are also the principal language testing techniques.

**Translation:** Translation tests are used to measure general achievement in a foreign language. A translation test is not valid as a test of mastery of a language and also is extremely difficult to evaluate. If properly constructed, a translation test can be a valid test of the ability to translate.

**Composition:** Essay or composition tests are widely used and are highly respected. These tests allow the examinee to compose his relatively free and extended written responses to problems set by the examiner. Composition tests are not reliable.

**Dictation:** Dictation is favored by many teachers and students both as a teaching device and a testing device. It is useful for beginners and lower intermediate students of a foreign language if used in moderation. However, on critical inspection it appears to measure very little of language.

**Objective Tests:** All tests are constructed subjectively by the tester. It is only scoring of a test that can be described as objective. This means that a testee will score the same mark no matter which examiner marks his test. In addition, objective tests can be scored quickly and mechanically, because they usually have only one correct answer and involve no judgments as to degrees of correctness. They are more reliable and valid than other language testing techniques. By the way, objective tests require for more careful preparation than subjective examinations. It may be helpful at this stage to distinguish the terms examination and test. The term “test” refers to a set of items that can be marked objectively; “examination” refers to a set of longer subjective questions (e.g. compositions).

**Scored Interview Tests:** These tests are used to assess the oral competence of the student. They are roughly parallel to the composition tests. There are differences between these two devices. Composition tests are used for assessing written language but scored interview tests are used for assessing oral competence. In conducting interviews, the examiner must provide a large number of cues throughout the performance and the evaluation is generally made during the actual production of the responses.

**Short-answer Tests:** Short-answer tests combine some of the virtues of both multiple-choice and composition tests. The items are short and highly structured, yet they provide the examinee with the opportunity to compose his answers. Short-answer items require the examinee either to complete a sentence or to compose his answer according to very specific directions.

**Communicative language tests:** Communicative language tests are intended to be a measure of how the testees are able to use language in real life situations.

**Cloze test:** A type of gap-filling task in which whole words are deleted from a text. In a traditional cloze, deletion is every *n*th word. Other gap-filling tasks where short phrases are deleted from a text, or where the item writer chooses the words to be deleted are commonly referred to as cloze tests, for example ‘rational cloze’. Candidates may have to supply the missing words (open cloze), or choose from a set of options (multiple choice or banked cloze). Marking of open cloze may be either ‘exact word’ (only the word deleted from the original text is taken as the correct response) or ‘acceptable word’ (a list of acceptable responses is given to markers).

**Discrete-point test** means testing one specific point such as testing only listening comprehension or testing vocabulary etc.

**Skill-based test** means testing more than one language skill such as testing listening and reading or listening, reading and writing skills ; by the way, there are hundreds of skills and job based assessment tests ; but we mean only the language skills in this book, in other words, skill-based test refers language skills-based test.

**Achievement test** measures what students have learned throughout a specific syllabus by the end of the term or the academic year.

**Proficiency test** measures how much of a foreign language a person knows so far, and covers holistic assessment of language level.

**Paper and pencil test** refers to a general group of assessment tools in which candidates read questions and respond in writing.

**Computer – based tests** are the exams conducted through the computer instead of paper and pencil format.

**Washback effect:** Washback is a term which is used to the influence of language testing on teaching and learning. Washback can also be viewed as a subset of a test's impact on society, and on educational systems. Contributions of washback are to provide teachers with extensive professional development opportunities, to change the “academic watch” policy, to practice mix-ability grouping instead of achievement grouping to group students, and to integrate assessment into classroom evaluation.

**Halo (Hallow) effect:** The halo effect, in brief, is the tendency for raters to evaluate conceptually different characteristics as though they all represented the same thing. In other words, one who does well in his teaching in one area also tends to do well in other areas, and visa versa. That is, the halo , may be accurate perception.

**Item Bank:** An item bank is a large collection of test items that have been classified and stored in a data base so that they can be retrieved at a later time or chosen for new tests. The items are classified according to certain characteristics such as the topic of a text, the testing point of an item or statistical information about item difficulty.

**CEFR:** The CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabus, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks across Europe.

### **Language curricula and testing**

Foreign language learning is a cumulative process which combines cognitive behaviors and new psychomotor skills. Gradually, the student acquires a foreign language system of communication by developing these behaviors and skills.

Theoretically, students should acquire these cognitive behaviors. In fact, we have to realize the first three (knowledge, comprehension and application) cognitive behaviors at secondary education level and the rest of them (analysis, synthesis and evaluation) at university level. The new psychomotor skills for the student are to be able to speak a foreign language accurately and fluently. Testing and evaluation activities in the classroom should be based on these cognitive behaviors and psychomotor skills.

We can observe the relationships among the components of a foreign language curriculum. Before determining a testing program for a course, the teacher should clearly envision his course objectives. By doing so, he will be rationally oriented and his tests will indicate how close each student has come to attain the objectives. In other words, test objectives should be based on course objectives and test content should be derived from specific course content.

### **Rationale for CEFR-based testing**

At present, skill-based tests are very common in the USA and EU countries. TOEFL is used in the USA and CEFR-based tests are used in most EU countries. They are standard tests and administered by authorized educational institutions. For this reason, primary and secondary schools and English Preparatory Schools at Universities should prepare CEFR-based tests for assessing the proficiency level of the foreign language being taught.

The author intends to contribute to the existing knowledge and skills of teachers of English and testers in preparing integrative language skill tests according to the CEFR.

# Chapter 2

## Summary of CEFR and Testing

### Objectives

After studying Chapter 2, you will be able to:

- Develop a global understanding of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- Recognize the importance of preparing the CEFR-based language tests.

### Introduction

In this chapter, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) topics are summarized to provide an overview.

### The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The CEFR is the creation of the Council of Europe. The Council continues to guide and encourage the use of the Framework. The CEFR has a number of aims. One of these is to foster plurilingualism. Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are terms used by the Council of Europe to refer to individuals who are able to use and relate to more than one language or culture. The Council uses multiculturalism and multilingualism to refer to society's uses of more than one language or culture.

The CEFR is described fully in a book from CUP (Council of Europe, 2001). If we focus on one aspect of the framework, the Common Reference Levels, we can see many possibilities for encouraging the teaching and learning of languages. When teachers of English list what makes good teaching and assessing here they usually come up with factors such as clear purpose, teachers and students understand that purpose, skills and knowledge are taught and learned, the teaching is personal and rewards success, focuses on real language in use and teaching methods match testing methods. Using the reference levels teachers find the same principles at work.

When teachers and learners meet and apply the self-assessment scale themselves they find they are easy and motivating. After carrying out familiarization tasks teachers find they can place themselves and others quickly and easily on the scale. One can also judge the level of teaching and testing tasks in the same way. The framework, however, is not a panacea. It is not going to provide instant and