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ON THE MATTER OF EUROPEAN INDICATOR OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND A FRAMEWORK STRATEGY FOR MULTILINGUALISM

К ВОПРОСУ О ЕВРОПЕЙСКОМ ИНДИКАТОРЕ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ И СТРАТЕГИИ МУЛЬТИЛИНГВИЗМА

Summary. The article describes the mechanism for determining the European indicator of language competence. The concept of "language competence" is used to define the terminology of linguistic units required for successful communication. The Council of Europe confirmed the need to implement measures to obtain reliable and comparable data on the results of training and learning foreign languages in the EU member states and defined the main requirements for them: the objective test that provides the reliability, accuracy and validity of the results, the ability to identify innovative approaches and sharing of best practices in education policy.

Key words: language competence, proficiency level, assessment, linguistic skills, multilingualism.

Аннотация. Статья посвящена описанию механизма определения европейского индикатора языковой компетенции. Понятие «языковой компетенции» используется для определения стандартной терминологии, системы лингвистических единиц, необходимых для успешного осуществления коммуникации.

Совет Европы подтвердил необходимость осуществления мер, направленных на получение надежных и сопоставимых данных о результатах подготовки и обучения иностранным языкам в странах-членах ЕС, определив следующие основные требования: объективное тестирование, обеспечивающее надежность, точность и валидность результатов, возможность для выявления инновационных подходов и обмена наилучшими практиками в образовательной политике и методах преподавания иностранных языков на основе усиленного обмена информацией и опытом.

Мультилингвизм возникает по мере расширения в культурном аспекте языкового опыта человека от языка, употребляемого в семье, до овладения языками других народов. Человек формирует коммуникативную компетенцию на основе всех знаний и всего языкового опыта. В соответствии с ситуацией индивидuum свободно пользуется любой частью этой компетенции для обеспечения успешной коммуникации с конкретным собеседником.

Ключевые слова: языковая компетенция, уровень владения языком, оценивание, лингвистические умения, мультилингвизм.

Анотация. У статті описується механізм визначення європейського індикатора мовної компетенції. Поняття «мовної компетенції» використовується для визначення стандартної термінології, системи лингвістичних одиниць, необхідних для успішної реалізації комунікації. Рада Європи підтвердила необхідність впровадження заходів, що націлені на отримання об'єктивних даних про результати навчання іноземним мовам у країнах-членах ЄС, визначивши наступні головні вимоги: об'єктивне тестування, точність та валідність результатів, можливість впровадження інноваційних підходів та обміну досвідом.

Ключові слова: мовна компетенція, рівень володіння мовою, оцінювання, лінгвістичні вміння, мультилінгвізм.

The result of over twenty years of research, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency. It is used in Europe but also in other continents and is now available in 38 languages. The **significance** of the subject is characterized by the need for studying basic points of European linguistic strategy.

The **aim** of this stage of work was to consider the main features of European Indicator of Language Competence and to interpret the set out strategy for promoting multilingualism in European society.

The following **objectives** had to be solved to attain the aim:

- to improve the concept of the indicator of language competence and multilingualism;
- to analyze current approaches to study and interpretation of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines and the assessment of foreign language proficiency;
- to define significant characteristics for the assessment of foreign language proficiency.

The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2. It also defines three 'plus' levels (A2+, B1+, B2+). Based on empirical research and widespread consultation, this scheme makes it possible to compare tests and examinations across languages and national boundaries. It also provides a basis for recognising language qualifications and thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility.

The CEFR's illustrative scales of "can do" descriptors are available in a bank of descriptors [2] together with many other related descriptors.

The CEFR's scales of foreign language proficiency are accompanied by a detailed analysis of communicative contexts, themes, tasks and purposes as well as scaled descriptions of the competences on which we draw when we communicate. This helps to explain why the CEFR is increasingly used in teacher education, the reform of foreign language curricula and the development of teaching materials.

The CEFR does not offer ready-made solutions but must always be adapted to the requirements of particular contexts, for example, the teaching and learning of Romani and of French Sign Language. The need for careful interpretation and adaptation is especially acute when the CEFR's descriptive apparatus and proficiency levels are used to explore the communicative needs of adult migrants and to guide the assessment of their proficiency in the language of their host community.

An Intergovernmental Policy Forum on *"The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities"* (6-8 February 2007, Strasbourg, Council of Europe) gave member states an opportunity to debate a number of policy issues raised by the rapid adoption of the CEFR in Europe and the increasingly widespread use of its proficiency levels.

Recalling that in educational matters responsibility lies with the member states, the forum concluded that "rather than vis-à-vis the Council of Europe, it is towards one's own learners and one's European partners that one has a responsibility for making coherent, realistic use of the CEFR" [3].

Progress towards the objective of ensuring that all pupils learn at least two foreign languages from an early age can only be measured using reliable data on the results of foreign language teaching and learning.

At the meeting of the European Council in Barcelona in March 2002, the Heads of State or Government called for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator.

Following the call of the Barcelona European Council, the European Commission has developed a survey based on the CEFR to measure the foreign / second language proficiency of pupils at the end of compulsory education. The Commission undertook this task on a consensual basis with Member States' representatives, involving the Expert Working Groups on Languages and on Indicators and Benchmarks.

The purpose of the survey is to establish a [European Indicator of Language Competence](#), providing member states with internationally comparable data on the results of foreign language teaching and learning in the European Union.

The European Indicator of Language Competence provided Member States with hard data and comparisons on which any necessary adjustments in their approach to foreign language teaching and learning can be based. The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council (Brussels, 1.8.2005; COM(2005) 356 final) [4] set out parameters and management arrangements for implementing the Indicator.

The purpose of the indicator was to measure foreign language skills in each Member State.

The Commission proposed to give specially developed tests of competence to a sample of pupils in education and training establishments in all the Member States.

The indicator ought to record the proficiency of the sample at the six levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The Commission proposed that in the first instance, and for practical reasons, foreign language competence should be tested in the five languages most frequently taught in the Union as a whole (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian). Experience gained during the first cycle of tests should permit a wider range of languages to be tested in subsequent cycles.

The indicator measured four linguistic skills:

- reading;
- listening;
- speaking;
- writing.

Oral skills were not tested during the first cycle (again for practical reasons).

Often, linguistic competence is affected by factors outside the education system (languages on TV, the home environment) as well as factors within the system (experience of the teacher, total number of hours of language classes). Tests should therefore be supplemented by questionnaires aimed at teachers and pupils with a view to gathering contextual information.

It was necessary to create a body whose members were instructed in technical aspects, and to report on the progress made in implementing the indicator in their country. Current groups of experts did not have a sufficient mandate or the necessary technical expertise in language testing or the development of indicators to do this.

Consequently, it was proposed to establish an Advisory Board consisting of representatives of the Member States (the "EILC Advisory Board") with the following role:

- advising the Commission on the specification of the tender for creation of the testing instruments and on the criteria for selection of the tenderer;
- advising the Commission on the assessment of the contractor's work;
- advising on the collection of data in the Member States;
- securing good progress on implementation in the Member States;
- evaluating the results.

The specific activities necessary for gathering data was carried out by the Member States, with due regard to the procedures and standards laid down by the Commission on the advice of the Advisory Board. These activities entailed:

- organising the participation of a sample of institutions;
- distributing the testing material to invigilators and making practical arrangements for the tests to take place;
- collecting the responses and arranging for them to be marked according to the central standards;
- passing the resultant data to the central coordinator [5].

In November 2005 the Commission of the European Communities issued A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism [6]. The communication set out the Commission's strategy for promoting multilingualism in

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European society, in the economy and in the Commission itself. The aim was to build up citizens' linguistic skills until each citizen had acquired practical skills in at least two languages other than his or her mother tongue.

Multilingualism refers to both a person's ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area.

The European multilingualism policy had three aims:

- to encourage language learning and promote linguistic diversity in society;
- to promote a healthy multilingual economy;
- to give citizens access to European Union legislation, procedures and information in their own languages.

Various activities for promoting language learning and linguistic diversity were set out in frame of the communication:

- the LINGUA, Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes;
- the Culture, Youth in Action and Lifelong Learning programmes;
- youth exchanges;
- Town Twinning Programmes;
- European Voluntary Service;
- the financial support of the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (a non-governmental organisation which represents the interests of the over 40 million citizens who belong to a regional and minority language community);
- the financial support of the Mercator network of universities active in research on lesser-used languages in Europe;
- the research programme to overcome language barriers through new information and communication technologies;
- the social sciences and humanities research programme supporting research on language issues.

The areas in which the EU needed a more mobile workforce with language skills were set out. The increased use of on-line machine translation demonstrates that an essentially mechanical function of that kind cannot replace the thought processes of a human translator, and thus emphasises the importance of translation quality. Demand for trained interpreters is increasing in an expanding market, particularly in supranational and international organisations. Interpreters help the institutions of multilingual societies to function. They support immigrant communities in their dealings with courts and hospitals, and with the police and immigration services. Properly trained interpreters thus contribute to safeguarding human and democratic rights.

The very first Regulation adopted by the Council defines the European Community as a multilingual entity, stipulates that legislation must be published in the official languages and requires its institutions to deal with citizens in the official languages of their choice.

Over the past ten years several multilingual initiatives (Citizens First, Dialogue with Citizens, Your Europe - Citizens and the Citizens' Signpost Service) helped citizens to understand how European legislation affects them, what their rights are when they move to another country and how they can exercise their rights in practice.

The following activities as implementation the European Indicator of Language Competence, discussion and production a recommendation on ways of bringing the training of language teachers up to date promotion, creation of chairs in fields of study related to multilingualism and interculturalism through the proposed programme for education and lifelong learning were proposed to promote a multilingual European society. It was also proposed to support the teaching and learning of languages through its cooperation programmes in the fields of education, training, youth, citizenship and culture.

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