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Research Notes

# What does plurilingualism mean for language assessment?

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# Research Notes

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# Editorial

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Bienvenue et chào mừng bạn zu dieser Ausgabe von *Research Notes*, mam nadzieję, że utaelewa un poco más de lo que es el *plurilingualism*.

The original volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) pointed to the growth in importance of plurilingualism in language learning. The online publication of the CEFR's Companion Volume in 2018, which was printed in 2020 (Council of Europe 2020), fleshed out more of what this meant in practice by providing scales and descriptors explicitly about the development of plurilingual competences.

The concepts of multilingualism and plurilingualism, defined in the first article, have been frequently discussed in the field of language education and language assessment over the last 20 years. It has been a recurring theme of discussion within the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), a grouping of language testing organisations of which Cambridge Assessment English (henceforth Cambridge English) is an important member. ALTE's 7th International Conference had been due to be held in Madrid in April 2020, but understandably had to be postponed to April 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted travel plans, let alone affected the health of millions of people globally.

The theme of the conference was, and still will be, *Safeguarding the future of multilingual assessment*, with one particular strand on *Defining the construct of multilingualism in language assessment*. This follows on from previous ALTE events focusing on the relevance of multilingualism and plurilingualism in language assessment, notably the immediately preceding conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in November 2019, which had as its theme *Monolingual testing in a multilingual reality?*, a discussion of an apparent dichotomy in today's language testing field.

Many of the papers submitted for the 7th International Conference focus on the construct and the practice of integrating plurilingualism into language assessment, and this issue of *Research Notes* takes up the discussion. In doing so, some of the authors of papers submitted for the conference have written articles for this issue, in the hope of shedding important light on how to understand the plurilingual dimension in language assessment. The authors are from, or writing about, ALTE Member and Affiliate organisations.

Language testing bodies, and Cambridge English is no exception, are now engaging in the debate and are recognising plurilingual abilities in language learners, not only in theory but also in practice.

In the first article, I present plurilingualism and its role in English language learning and assessment, making the case that the integration of learning and assessment helps us understand the construct of plurilingualism in language assessment. In addition, a simple framework is presented which aims to categorise the different ways in which plurilingual competence is recognised in assessment.

The second article aims to show how Cambridge English has begun to respond to the need for recognising the value of learners' plurilingual repertoires in discussion with international bodies and policy-makers, as well as in some of the projects, products and tests that they create.

The final three articles each look at what may be considered a form of plurilingual assessment, reflecting on the integration of learning and assessment in their respective, and very different, cases.

Gandini discusses how more than one language is used in assessment from an ALTE Institutional Affiliate, designed to suit the real-life communicative needs of people in the South Tyrol border region of Italy.

She explores the use of cross-linguistic mediation and reports on a study currently in progress.

De Backer, Slembrouck and Van Avermaet then explore the use of test takers' plurilingual repertoires as an education and assessment accommodation in non-language school subjects in an attempt at test fairness. This project comes from an ALTE Member and Van Avermaet is one of ALTE's Individual Expert Members.

Finally, Fiorenza and Diego-Hernández, who come from two different universities where ALTE Members and Affiliates are based, report on a project aimed at encouraging and assessing language learners' general plurilingual abilities.

I hope this short collection of articles will provoke and inspire current and future language educators and assessors to adopt appropriate stances on plurilingualism, relevant to the context for the learner.

Graham Seed  
Cambridge, September 2020

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# What is plurilingualism and what does it mean for language assessment?

**Graham Seed** European Research Manager, Research and Thought Leadership Department, Cambridge Assessment English

## A starting point: Integrated learning and assessment

Among others, Jones and Saville (2016) argue that assessment should be informed by, and lead to, better learning, as part of an ecosystem of learning: 'A systemic and ecological approach seeks complementarity: informal classroom assessment and formal large-scale assessment should both contribute to the two key purposes of assessment: to provide evidence *of* learning and evidence *for* learning' (Jones and Saville 2016:2; emphases in original).

Jones and Saville go on to state that this ecosystem of learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom. King (2018:33) agrees, and encourages:

... looking beyond the classroom for the sources of language learning. We know that much language learning takes place informally – listening to music, playing games and watching films, using the Internet and communicating electronically, and increasingly in our multilingual cities in the diverse street. How will educators respond to this reality, treating it not as diversion but as a major source of knowledge and incorporating what learners bring with them from their outside world ... ?

Placing the learner themselves at the centre of the ecosystem of learning and assessment, as well as the integration of learning and assessment, have been recurring themes throughout recent editions of *Research Notes* (see issues 70, 75 and 77), as researchers seek to understand the different sources and contexts of learning that language learners find themselves in. Understanding these contexts will hopefully lead to more meaningful and more effective learning, teaching and assessment.

## Other languages in the world of the English language learner

One source in the context of language learning is to recognise the language ability that language learners already have when learning English. They already have at least one language, the language they use at home, but more often than not, they may also have additional languages – if the language of schooling is different, if they speak a regional dialect or variant, or if they speak another *lingua franca*, for example. This multilingual world 'is the natural way of life for three-quarters of the human race. [This] principle ... has been obscured in parts of Europe as a consequence of colonial history. We urgently need to reassert it, and to implement it in practical ways, for, in the modern world, monolingualism is not a strength but a handicap' (Crystal 2006:409).

In Europe, recent migration, as refugees, economic or academic migrants, have added to the number of people who, like Basque or Luxembourgish speakers, already usually have *more* than one language before they start learning English. Even when mobility has been reduced, such as in the coronavirus lockdowns of 2020, the use of electronically mediated communication has kept the need for operating in more than one language alive.

The use of many languages may at first seem in stark contrast to the growing importance of English globally. In the EU, 97% of school pupils learn English as their first foreign language (European Commission 2018b). Perhaps more than three-quarters of academic journal articles are written in English (Montgomery 2013), and in the 2019 Shanghai Jiao Tong index of universities, 19 out of the 20 top-ranked universities were in the USA or UK, English-language settings.<sup>1</sup> This has led to the growth in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI).

But it is increasingly being recognised that English is not enough. Employability may demand English language skills as a given – other language proficiencies as well as multicultural sensitivities can mark employees out. These skills enable confidence in less familiar situations and domains that employees can find themselves in. Furthermore, using these linguistic resources – of the home language(s) and any other languages the individual knows – now has to be seen as an aid, not an impediment, to learning and teaching English (Cenoz and Gorter 2013, Chabert and Agost 2020, Duarte and van der Ploeg 2019, Lau and Van Viegen (Eds) 2020, Ziegler, Durus and Sert 2013). This means a change from the 'native speaker standard' as the ideal for learning English to the recognition that knowing other languages is a tool for learning English. There is a move away from siloed language lessons in schools to the practice of content and language integrated learning (CLIL), which Evans (2018:1) states is a 'more effective approach than EMI'. There is an increase in recognition of knowing other languages as being useful tools in learning English. This paradigm shift is becoming known as the 'multilingual turn in education' (Conteh and Meier (Eds) 2014, May (Ed) 2014). King (2018) summarises this as 'a new model for language':

We are moving towards a new kind of paradigm for languages. This is based on a plurilingual and asymmetric model where not all language competence needs to be the same, and where experience and learning out of school, whether in the street or on the Internet, will also contribute to the language profile of the individual ... In this paradigm English as the major vehicular language of communication has a key role to play. (King 2018:31).

## Terminology

Before proceeding, it is important to examine some key terms. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), first published in 2001 by the Council of Europe who added to it with the 2020 Companion Volume, sees a distinction between *multilingual* and *plurilingual*, as found in the King quote above.

*Multilingualism* is 'the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level' (Council of Europe 2020:28). For example, the fact that the United Nations has six official languages that all documents are available in shows that it is multilingual; or that by speaking English and German I can be considered multilingual.

The fact that I can speak English and German, as well as a number of other languages to different proficiency levels, means that I can call myself *plurilingual*, defined by the CEFR as 'the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner' (Council of Europe 2020:28). The Companion Volume goes on to describe this more:

The ability to call flexibly upon an inter-related, uneven, plurilinguistic repertoire to:

- Switch from one language or dialect or variety to another
- Express oneself in one language and understand a person speaking another
- Call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text

1. [www.shanghai ranking.com/ARWU2019.html](http://www.shanghai ranking.com/ARWU2019.html)



- Recognise words from a common international store in a new guise
- Mediate between individuals with no common language, even with only a slight knowledge oneself
- Bring the whole of one's linguistic equipment into play, experimenting with alternative forms of expression (Council of Europe 2020:28).

Furthermore, just as the CEFR has provided reference descriptors of language ability in areas such as written production or spoken interaction graded on a scale between 'Pre-A1' (the least proficient) to 'C2' (the most proficient), the Companion Volume also provides two specific sets of descriptors, *plurilingual comprehension* and *building on plurilingual repertoire*, which are attempts to exemplify what it means to have plurilingual abilities at different levels of proficiency. Table 1 shows some examples of these descriptors.

**Table 1: Selected examples of descriptors about plurilingualism in the CEFR Companion Volume**

<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Scale in which descriptor is found</i>	<i>CEFR level</i>
Can recognise internationalisms to deduce meaning of simple signs	Plurilingual comprehension	A1
Can understand short, clearly written messages and instructions by piecing together what he/she understands from the versions in different languages	Plurilingual comprehension	A2
Can use a word from another language in his/her plurilingual repertoire to make him/herself understood in a routine everyday situation, when he/she cannot think of an adequate expression in the language being spoken	Building on plurilingual repertoire	A2
Can extract information from documents written in different languages in his/her field to include in a presentation	Plurilingual comprehension	B1
Can alternate efficiently between languages in his/her plurilingual repertoire in order to facilitate comprehension with and between third parties who lack a common language	Building on plurilingual repertoire	B2+

In reading the very first paragraph of the Editorial in this *Research Notes* issue, perhaps you were able to work out the message through some of your linguistic abilities, or at least make a guess using contextual clues too. In this way you might be able to claim your plurilingual comprehension ability is (at least) A2 according to the second descriptor in Table 1.

In academic literature on the subject, the concept of plurilingualism is also known as *individual multilingualism*, *individual bilingualism* or other terms. One example of the concept in use is *code-switching*, described 'as (part of) a verbal action, the alternating use of two or more "codes" within one conversational episode' (Auer 1998:1), with 'codes' at its most basic meaning languages and language variants, dialects and accents. A similar, but arguably slightly different term is *translanguaging*, originating in Wales by Williams (1994) and developed by Garcia and others to mean 'the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages' (Otheguy, Garcia and Read 2015:283).

## A multilingual turn in education policy?

As discussed in the section above, the academic field has pointed towards the value of this multilingual turn (especially in the 2010s), being able to cite studies of the value of promoting a multilingual – or plurilingual – agenda in education. Some policy-makers have also begun to advocate such a stance.

In European policy-making, the 2002 Barcelona European Council envisaged all EU citizens being able to speak their 'mother tongue + two' additional languages. Despite attempts to put this into practice, the *First European Survey on Language Competences* (European Commission 2012) found that this objective had not yet succeeded, which in part led to the European Commission's adoption of the 2019 Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages. This stated that 'all Member States have acknowledged the need to enhance multilingualism and develop multilingual competence in the Union' (European Commission 2019a:17).

Gutierrez Eugenio and Saville (2017) document the progress of European policy-makers' relationship with language assessment, concluding that since 2015 there has been a shift towards recognising integrated language learning, teaching and assessment, with a focus on multilingual and plurilingual agendas.

There has recently therefore been a focus on *language-aware schools* by embracing translanguaging and plurilingual education practices. This has been easier to implement in existing bilingual areas such as the Basque country (e.g. Department of Education, Language Policy and Culture of the Basque Government and The Sociolinguistics Cluster 2013) and Valencia (Generalitat Valenciana 2018), but the European Commission has been keen to promote innovative practices in this area (Le Pichon-Vorstman, Siarova and Szőnyi 2020).

Other parts of the world have also recognised value in promoting more than the national language as a mode for study. The second article in this issue will investigate some ways in which Cambridge English has assisted this, as in many of these cases it is English that has been chosen as one of the languages that the education system places value in, alongside national, regional and other globally important languages.

## The multilingual turn in assessment?

The multilingual (or plurilingual) turn in education must affect such a turn in assessment too, with the starting point being the integration of learning and assessment. Yet very little attention has been paid to plurilingualism in the field of assessment: 'The contrast between the expanding use of multilingual practices in pedagogy, and the absence of multilingual approaches in assessment and evaluation measures is striking' (Schissel, De Korne and López-Gopar 2018). Gorter and Cenoz also believe in the link between learning and assessment in the context of plurilingualism: 'Tests should match actual language practices and multilinguals use resources from their whole linguistic repertoire. If teaching is going in the direction of a multilingual focus, assessment should also follow the same path' (Gorter and Cenoz 2017:243). The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)'s recently revised *Principles of Good Practice* (2020a) similarly agrees that assessment needs to correspond to the language contexts that the learners find themselves in. This may include 'different languages, in many different contexts with many different other users, and [learners] will acquire new language to bridge communicative gaps that exist between themselves and others. These interactions mean the language user becomes a plurilingual, pluricontextual language learner, and sites the acquisition of language very much within a socio-cognitive understanding' (ALTE 2020a:9).

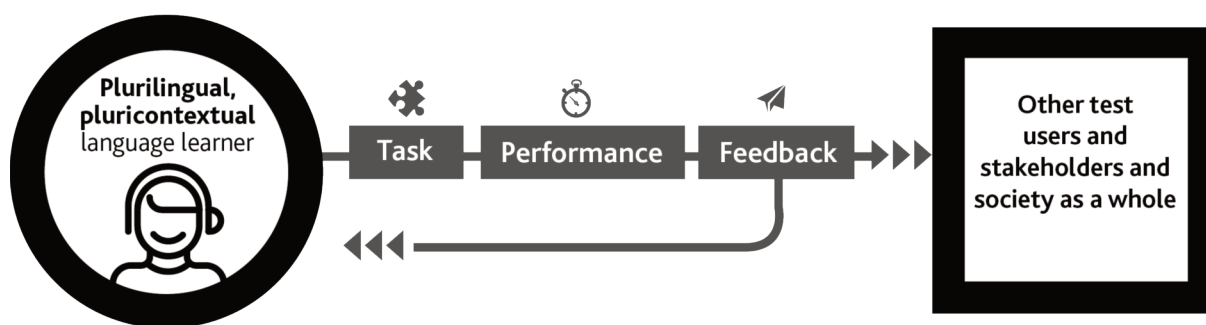


Figure 1: The role of language assessment focusing on the plurilingual language learner (ALTE 2020a)

Assessment therefore must be an opportunity to demonstrate the relevant language skills by observing performance on a relevant and *authentic* task, and providing appropriate feedback to the learner, as well as to other stakeholders as appropriate. This model is shown in Figure 1.

However, to date it has been difficult to operationalise this construct within existing language assessment tasks. What would be included in a relevant and authentic test task would depend on the contexts that each plurilingual, pluricontextual language learner finds themselves in, and that will vary from individual to individual. After all, each language learner has a unique plurilingual repertoire based not only on their proficiency in different languages, but also on any exposure to other languages, however small, they have encountered during their life – ‘each individual uses their different linguistic abilities in different ways in different situations’ (Saville and Seed forthcoming).

A further issue would be ensuring that assessors have similar plurilingual backgrounds to the test takers in order to reward the test taker appropriately, scoring reliably across multiple test versions (Lopez, Turkan and Guzman-Orth 2017). Practical constraints for test providers such as the need for assessing multiple learners at one time add to an argument that true assessment of an individual learner’s plurilingual abilities is a near impossibility.

Assessing plurilingual abilities is therefore a complex issue and requires the construct of plurilingual assessment to be defined. In fact, it is necessary to recognise that there is more than one type of plurilingual assessment, each serving a different purpose depending on the goal of what is to be assessed, and how that stems from and contributes to further learning.

## Assessment in plurilingual situations

To date, some assessments in plurilingual situations have been created. The literature and resources around these many different assessments have been analysed in order to categorise them into four broad areas, resulting in the framework shown in Table 2. This framework can therefore help understand the different constructs of assessments which tap into an individual’s plurilingual abilities and must be seen in the context of integrated learning and assessment.

Table 2: A framework of assessment in plurilingual situations

A. Drawing on one’s plurilingual repertoire to aid learning or proving skills in <b>not one named language</b> (e.g. English)	B. Drawing on one’s plurilingual repertoire to aid learning or proving skills in <b>more than one named language</b>	C. Drawing on one’s plurilingual repertoire to aid learning or proving skills in <b>other subjects</b>	D. Learning and developing plurilingual competence to function with <b>languages known, or only partially known</b>
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## A. Drawing on one's plurilingual repertoire to aid learning or proving skills in one named language (e.g. English)

The ability to communicate in one named language (English, in this case) is a skill that people need to have as their context demands it, usually in use as a common language where neither side knows each other's language, or in communication with someone whose home language is English. Because of the necessity of using English in a real context, it is therefore valid to provide an assessment of someone's ability to communicate in English. The input language received (read or heard) is in English, and the output language produced (spoken or written) should be in English. Note that 'English' can of course be substituted for any other language, particularly those languages which are used in global communication: Spanish, French, Portuguese and Mandarin may also be considered examples of this.

A user of English, whose home language is another language, may however be internally, cognitively, using another language to help them communicate in English: that is to say, they are drawing on their plurilingual competence, or repertoire, to process the communicative task at hand (Cenoz and Gorter 2013). As this is the case, testing organisations have a duty to respond to this fact in the two ways described in the paragraphs below.

The first is that test takers' plurilingual abilities should be recognised as a help, and not a hindrance in communication, just as was acknowledged in the section about education above. This means not treating evidence of plurilingual abilities as errors but as an imperfect attempt at communication in English. The case study in the next article about Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners develops and exemplifies this point.

Secondly, language testing organisations with tests where the input and output are in one and the same language, must see these tests not in isolation but as part of a multilingual *profile* of evidence of language learning (Saville and Seed forthcoming). The CEFR (2001, 2020) agrees by stating that learners can profile their language ability. Rather than demanding full proficiency in a language to claim to be able 'to speak' a language, learners can indicate which languages, and to which proficiency level, they can operate in. Figure 2 is taken from the CEFR Companion Volume as an example of a plurilingual proficiency profile, which is also broken down into different language skills or modes of communication (oral reception, written production, etc.).

	Pre-A1	A1	A2	A2+	B1	B1+	B2	B2+	C1	C2	Above C2
English											
German											
French											
Spanish											
Italian											

Figure 2: A plurilingual proficiency profile (Council of Europe 2020:40)

Quality language testing organisations with tests in different languages should collaborate with each other so that learners are able to create their own plurilingual proficiency profile based on being able to prove their language proficiency in each language relevant to their own context. ALTE's objectives are to encourage multilingualism in this way, and the ALTE Framework, an extract of which is shown in Figure 3 (ALTE 2020b), is a grid which enables tests of one language to be compared with tests of other languages, categorised according to CEFR level. The comparability of the tests across different languages is achieved through linking to CEFR levels, and successfully auditing tests through ALTE's quality management system to ensure that each of them meets ALTE's minimum standards of quality (ALTE 2020a:24–25).

















Language	Organisation	Pre-A1	A1 ALTE Breakthrough	A2 ALTE Level 1	B1 ALTE Level 2	B2 ALTE Level 3	C1 ALTE Level 4	C2 ALTE Level 5
Dutch Nederlands	The Interuniversity Testing Consortium (IUTC)					Interuniversitaire Taaltest Nederlands voor Anderstaligen – ITNA – B2 • Audit valid until: 15 June 2021  	Interuniversitaire Taaltest Nederlands voor Anderstaligen – ITNA – C1 • Audit valid until: 15 June 2021  	
English	Cambridge Assessment English			Cambridge English: Key • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: Preliminary • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: First • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: Advanced • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: Proficiency • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  
				Cambridge English: Key for Schools • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: First for Schools • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  		
		Cambridge English: Starters • Audit valid until: 9 April 2025  	Cambridge English: Movers • Audit valid until: 9 April 2025  	Cambridge English: Flyers • Audit valid until: 9 April 2025  	Cambridge English: Business Preliminary • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: Business Vantage • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	Cambridge English: Business Higher • Audit valid until: 30 April 2023  	

Figure 3: Extract from ALTE Framework (ALTE, latest version 2020b)

## B. Drawing on one's plurilingual repertoire to aid learning or proving skills in more than one named language

Practical reasons demand that language learners take various standardised tests of named languages in order to prove proficiency of their own personal plurilingual profile. Theoretically, a test could be devised to replicate the authentic multilingual situations individuals find themselves, in order to create a plurilingual proficiency profile. But the reality would mean creating numerous bespoke tests for each individual which would not be practically possible at present. Therefore, the solution is to prove proficiency through a number of quality tests, as described above. However, there are some plurilingual situations which are the same for a number of individuals, and in these cases, a test which combines two or more languages at the same time can be made a reality. The term for this, used by the CEFR and elsewhere, is *mediation*, or more specifically in this case, cross-linguistic mediation, and the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020) provides a number of illustrative descriptors for this communicative purpose; see Table 3.

**Table 3: Example descriptors of cross-linguistic mediation from the CEFR Companion Volume (adapted from Council of Europe 2020:108, 111, 202)**

Descriptor	Scale in which descriptor is found	CEFR level
Can provide a simple, rough, spoken translation into (Language B) of short, simple everyday texts (e.g. brochure entries, notices, instructions, letters or emails) written in (Language A).	Mediation – translating a written text in speech	A2+
Can summarise in (Language B) the main points made during a conversation in (Language A) on a subject of personal or current interest, provided that the speakers articulated clearly in standard language.	Mediation – processing text in speech	B1
Can relay in writing in (Language B) the relevant point(s) contained in an article (written in Language A) from an academic or professional journal.	Mediation – relaying specific information in writing	B2

Such plurilingual situations often occur in border regions, where two or more languages are actively used. South Tyrol is such a region, and a language test which exemplifies what this means in practice is detailed by Gandini in the third article in this issue.

Another type of plurilingual situation where this 'B' category of assessments is applied can often be found in tests of the national language and a language used for global communication, often English. The KPG exams in Greece test mediation skills between Greek and other languages, for example by writing an email in English in response to having read a text in Greek. Plurilingual repertoires have to be deployed in order to function in this multilingual test environment, aimed at replicating authentic tasks (see Stathopoulou 2015).

The Austrian plurilingual oral exam for upper secondary vocational colleges (Piribauer et al 2015) involves mediation across three languages: German, as the language of schooling, English, as the first foreign language, and either French, Italian, Russian or Spanish as the second. The assessment criteria explicitly reward 'language switch and interaction'.

### **C. Drawing on one's plurilingual repertoire to aid learning or proving skills in other subjects**

This categorisation of plurilingual assessments is of those primarily testing something non-linguistic, perhaps a science subject (e.g. Shohamy 2019) or maths (e.g. Heugh, Prinsloo, Makgamatha, Diedericks and Winnaar 2017). Assessments in this category are given in two or more languages, with the test takers having a free choice as to which language they use to answer the science, maths, geography or other subject questions. In this regard, the tests may be seen as a natural assessment response to the educational method of CLIL. In this form of assessment, Gorter and Cenoz recognise that 'participants are assessed differently according to their linguistic background and not as deficient speakers of their second languages' (2017:242).

A fundamental value in these tests is not only of plurilingualism but of fairness, in order to make sure that certain test takers are not excluded from demonstrating their knowledge of a particular subject because their proficiency in the favoured language of schooling is not good enough (Shohamy 2011, Shohamy and Menken 2015).

Cambridge's critical thinking admissions test for Uzbek Presidential Schools is an example of this type C category, and more details on the test administered in either Uzbek, Karakalpak or English is given in the second article in this issue.

A development of the type C category is where test takers do not have to choose which language to use before the test but during it. The test paper contains the questions given in more than one language at the same time, allowing test takers to receive input in either language and produce output in either language, maximising the use of their plurilingual repertoires to answer the questions. De Backer, Slembrouck and Van Avermaet's article in this issue provides some rich examples of this sort of assessment.

These assessments especially embody integrated plurilingual learning and assessment in all school subjects, ensuring that language classes are not seen as separate silos but have worth in the whole curriculum.

### **D. Learning and developing plurilingual competence to function with languages not known, or only partially known**

Plurilingualism has been said to be an *attitude* as well as an ability (Piccardo 2017). While learning and assessment using one's plurilingual abilities can point towards increased proficiency in and across different languages, a case can be made for developing plurilingual competence more generally – to have the confidence to be able to operate with languages not known, or only partially known, as far as is possible. The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020:157) points out some important concepts relating to their descriptors of plurilingual competence, among which are:

- All knowledge and experience of languages contribute to building up communicative competence.
- The proactive capacity to use knowledge of familiar languages to understand new languages, looking for cognates and internationalisms in order to make sense of texts in unknown languages – while being aware of the danger of “false friends”.

The value of demonstrating and encouraging these attitudes and behaviours in education – for children and lifelong – has been shown (Bak and Mehmedbegovic 2017) and it has led, amongst others, to the European Commission’s call for *language-aware schools* (European Commission 2019b:3). Curricula, often language-neutral, that focus on the development of plurilingual (and pluricultural) competences have been emerging over the last decade, often accompanied by a framework around which a curriculum is built.

The *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (FREPA, or CARAP in French) (Candelier et al 2012) is one such example of a framework, detailing descriptors around developing plurilingual knowledge, attitude and skills. *PlurCur* (Allgäuer-Hackl, Brogan, Henning, Hufeisen and Schlabach 2018) showed how a plurilingual curriculum was piloted in different schools across Europe.

Assessment that comes from learning and leads to further learning is just as important in this category. However, assessment of attitudes and behaviours is different from language proficiency assessment, and therefore the assessments that were suggested in categories A, B and C, though helpful, may not be wholly relevant for this category. Assessment techniques such as observations, monitoring, learning portfolios, language learning diaries and self-assessment may be more appropriate (Saville and Seed forthcoming), though little attention has been paid to assessment in plurilingual curricula. EVAL-IC, profiled in the final article of this issue by Fiorenza and Diego-Hernández, is however one example where this has taken place.

## A digital future for authentic plurilingual assessment

The CEFR’s *action-oriented approach* has highlighted the value of an authentic task-based approach to learning and assessment of language communication (Piccardo and North 2019). The development of technological solutions in this space has helped to create more quickly processed and more accurate assessments, for example by using adaptive tests (Walczak 2015) and automarking of writing (Yannakoudakis, Øistein, Geranpayeh, Briscoe and Nicholls 2018) and speaking (Wang et al 2018). In the current era, assessments should more authentically reflect real-life communication – all the more so as a result of the change in lifestyle of many people across the world due to the coronavirus lockdowns of 2020.

The recognition of plurilingual competence enables going further in communication than in just one language, and this can be replicated to the learning as well as the assessment spaces using digitally assisted authentic tasks, personalised to the learner and localised to the context as much as possible. The example of IELTS Smart Learning, given in the following article, can be viewed as a format for a tool which could be replicated in many different geographies, and ties together recognition of plurilingual abilities, cultural sensitivities, motivation in learning, integrated learning and assessment, with the use of digital technology.

Mobile devices, through the use of video capture, can be used to collate evidence of an individual’s plurilingual abilities not just in education and assessment but in the other two ‘worlds of learning’ that Jones and Saville (2016) describe in the learning-oriented assessment model: the personal world and the social world. For example, a video of a language learner using plurilingual resources to interact with locals and other tourists while on holiday could be

securely uploaded to a portfolio of evidence, so that a teacher or the user themselves would be able to assess their language learning and make decisions as to what should be the next focus in their language learning journey.

The use of technology is therefore able to capture far more evidence about not just language proficiency but also plurilingual abilities than in the past, and this is likely to be the future of plurilingual assessment.

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# Taking account of plurilingualism in Cambridge Assessment English products and services

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## English is necessary – but not sufficient

A first glance at the name Cambridge Assessment English implies that the focus is only on English. However, especially in the last 30 years, the organisation has been keen to promote multilingualism, with the English language playing its part in a diverse, multilingual and multicultural world.

Since the increased recognition of plurilingual repertoires in learning and assessment following the publication of the Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2020), Cambridge English has naturally mainly responded within category A of the framework outlined in Table 2 in the first article of this issue, that is to say the recognition of plurilingualism in learning-oriented assessments that require input and output in one language, English. Where this happens, English is to be seen as necessary – but English alone is not sufficient, in that it is part of a plurilingual profile of language ability that a person can demonstrate.

This article gives an overview of some of the ways Cambridge Assessment English (henceforth Cambridge English) takes account of plurilingual repertoires, more widely in society and policy, and also in the lives of the individuals who interact with their products and services, using three particular case studies to exemplify this. The first section looks at recognition of plurilingualism in the work that Cambridge English engages in through international co-operation and projects, concluding with a case study of a bespoke project Cambridge English is involved in with the Uzbekistan Presidential Schools. The second is in integrated learning and assessment, examining the use of technology in a product called IELTS Smart Learning. Finally, a revised Cambridge English Qualification for young learners exemplifies how to take account of plurilingualism in more formal assessment contexts.

## Taking account of plurilingualism in international co-operation and policy-making contexts and projects

Evidence of Cambridge English's multilingual focus can be found through collaboration on the European and global stage, notably through the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), of which Cambridge English, at that time UCLES, was a key founding member following a visit to the Spanish testing organisation at the University of Salamanca back in 1989 (ALTE 2020b). ALTE's aims are to promote both quality in language assessment and diversity in multilingualism, and since then Cambridge English has played a pivotal role in ALTE, hosting its Secretariat and contributing widely to the debate.

Through its role in ALTE, Cambridge English has been able to participate in events promoting multilingualism within European institutions such as the annual celebration of the European Day of Languages at the European Parliament (Cambridge English 2018a).

The European Commission also appointed a consortium led by Cambridge English and other ALTE Members to carry out the 2008–2012 SurveyLang project, which measured the language skills of 15-year-olds from across Europe in order to assess the progress towards the 'mother tongue + two' goal of the 2002 Barcelona declaration (European Commission 2012). Cambridge English also led the 2015 *Study on Comparability of Language Testing in Europe* for the European Commission (European Commission 2015) and provided strategy input for implementing multilingualism (Saville and Gutierrez Eugenio 2016).

Collaboration with the Council of Europe as well as its European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) has taken place, most notably with Cambridge English input into the CEFR, both in the initial publication in 2001 and the Companion Volume over 2018 to 2020, which promote plurilingualism.

Cambridge English has not just worked at the Europe-wide policy level, but at national and regional levels, helping play a part in the promotion of a plurilingual education in both Europe and beyond. It has supplied expertise and assessments in enabling education systems to develop a bilingual model so that learners have the essential plurilingual repertoires that involve English to be able to enter higher education and find employment (Cambridge Assessment English 2018b). Examples are with Spanish in Madrid (2018b:50) and Panama (2018b:68), and with Arabic in Egypt (2018b:72) and Saudi Arabia (Cambridge Assessment English 2020a).

A CLIL approach was taken to improve the Mongolian and English language abilities in a state-funded curriculum-building support project in Mongolia (Cambridge Assessment English 2018b:22), just as in Kazakhstan, where a pilot was run in 50 state schools across the country to train teachers and provide them with the tools to take this approach in learning and assessment (Cambridge Assessment English 2020b).

Also in Kazakhstan, education and curriculum standards, teacher support and assessment were developed for the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools in the trilingual environment of Kazakh, Russian and English (Cambridge Assessment English 2018b:20). Selection for places at higher education is highly competitive and being able to operate in English and the home language(s) in all subjects gives plurilingual learners an advantage.

The following case study shows a project which values learners' language abilities to identify those suitable for admission to education, but does so in a way that can be categorised in the 'C' column of the framework for plurilingual assessment described in Table 2 of the first article in this issue, in that test takers are free to choose the language of the test taken, thus helping achieve fairness in testing.

### **Case study: Uzbekistan Presidential Schools**

As part of their selection tests, Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing provided tests aimed at measuring applicants' ability in Thinking Skills for entry into 'Presidential Schools' – a prestigious network for schools which is being established across Uzbekistan, the main goal being to select the brightest children in the country to be the future leaders of the country.

The project sponsors were keen to ensure that the tests provided opportunities for the brightest children from across the country. Three different versions of the tests were designed for different school years (Grades 5 and 6; Grades 7 and 8; Grades 9 and 10), and each version of the test was available in three languages: Uzbek, Karakalpak (spoken in Karakalpakstan, an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan), and English. Candidates were free to choose whichever language version they wanted to take the test in. Providing the test in Karakalpak was seen as important to give all children equal opportunities, and taking the test in English did not mean the candidate was given any special recognition.

The 75-minute test was designed to target thinking skills (critical thinking and problem solving), as these skills are recognised as extremely important for the modern day, as well as being curriculum-independent, not testing the

candidates' ability to memorise information, but rather the skills required to think through unfamiliar problems, working quickly and accurately. The test system was first used in July 2019 in four regions of Uzbekistan.

**Table 1: % of candidature in each language by region (N = 11,473)**

Region	English	Uzbek	Karakalpak
Khiva	0.4%	99.6%	–
Namangan	1.1%	98.9%	–
Nukus (Karakalpakstan)	1.6%	36.0%	62.4%
Tashkent	8.3%	91.7%	–
Overall	2.8%	81.5%	15.7%

<p>Prezident maktablariga kirish test sinovlari – Namunaviy test savollari hamda javoblar izohi</p> <p><b>Test A: Muammoga yechim topish</b></p> <p>1 Anora o'z pullarini hisoblab ko'rgach, uning 12000 so'm ekanligini bildi. U barcha pullarini uch qismga bo'lib, 100 so'mlik, 200 so'mlik va 500 so'mliklarga ajratib chiqdi. Natijada unda 100 so'mlik pullar soni 200 so'mlik pullarga nisbatan uch marta ko'pligi, 200 so'mlik pullar esa 500 so'mlik pullarga nisbatan ikki marta ko'pligi ma'lum bo'ldi.</p> <p>Anorada umumiy hisobda nechta pul birliklari mavjud?</p> <p>A 42 B 48 C 60 D 72 E 84</p>	<p>President maktablariga kirish testi - Úlgi test sorawlari hám juwaplar túsindirmesi</p> <p><b>Test A: Máselege sheshim tabiw</b></p> <p>1 Anora aqshalarin esaplap korip, onin 12000 som ekenin aniqladı. Ol hámme aqshasin úsh bólekke bólip, 100 somliq, 200 somliq hám 500 somliqlarga ajratip shıqtı. Nátiyede, onda 100 somliq aqshalar sanı 200 somliq aqshalarga qaraqanda úsh esege kóp ekenligi, al 200 somliq aqshalar bolsa 500 somliq aqshalarga qaraqanda eki ese kóp ekenligi aniqlandı.</p> <p>Anorada ulıwma esaplaǵanda neshe pul birlikleri bar?</p> <p>A 42 B 48 C 60 D 72 E 84</p>
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**Figure 1: Presidential Schools critical thinking test item in both Uzbek (left) and Karakalpak (right)**

**Table 2: Average score of candidates by language, broken down by school grade versions**

Grade	Uzbek version	English version	Karakalpak version	Average
5–6	12.75	12.95	11.18	12.52
7–8	11.81	11.56	10.28	11.56
9–10	12.32	12.35	11.02	12.12

The results show the average score across the Uzbek and English candidature to have no significant difference ( $t(9501) = .69, p = .49$ ). Despite a slightly lower average score for Karakalpak test takers, the Uzbek Ministry of Education was satisfied that, for this first administration, their results were broadly in line with candidates taking the tests in Uzbek in that region. They particularly valued the inclusion of candidates from that background who otherwise may not have been able to access these high-stakes tests in order to support learners' further education. This is achieved through the provision of appropriate test specifications and item writer training to raise awareness of the cultural and educational context in Uzbekistan. There is also a strong focus on the iterative process of refining various quality assurance processes in light of evidence from the first delivery of these tests. For the future, the ministry is committed to continuing to provide the tests in both Uzbek and Karakalpak, and working with Cambridge Assessment to provide selection tests suitable for the Presidential Schools across Uzbekistan as they move towards having one of these schools in each of the 14 regions across the country.

## Taking account of plurilingualism in integrated learning and assessment

The case study above shows the value of recognising the individual learner's needs. Jones and Saville (2016) place the learner at the centre of the ecosystem of learning, where assessment is *learning-oriented*. ALTE's *Principles of Good Practice* document (2020a) puts the plurilingual, pluricontextual language learner at the centre of assessment activity.

The first article in this issue recognised the existence of other languages in the world of the English language learner, most notably their home language (variant or dialect) and other languages they encounter in their daily life, as well as any additional exposure to other languages they have had in their lifetime. Cambridge English has promoted the value of this plurilingual competence in English language education, for example in the English Profile Studies series (e.g. Čatibušić and Little 2014) and through webinars (Cambridge Assessment English 2019).

The English Profile Studies series also sought to highlight some of the challenges that certain language groups tend to have based on the linguistic distance that needs to be breached between that language and English. In integrated language learning and assessment contexts, it is important to understand the linguistic features that may prove difficult for someone learning English, but additionally the social and cultural differences. The following case study is an example of how Cambridge English responded to these needs in an integrated learning and assessment product: IELTS Smart Learning.

### Case study: IELTS Smart Learning

IELTS Smart Learning (ISL) is a speaking-focused, learning-oriented assessment app designed for and sold in the Chinese market, targeted towards teenagers. It is designed and owned by the IELTS partnership – Cambridge Assessment English, the British Council and IDP – in collaboration with the Chinese technology firm iFlytek, and was launched in April 2020.

ISL is made up of a series of units covering four CEFR levels from A1 to B2: each unit represents one week's study and covers one topic, such as holidays, healthy food, or technology. Each unit is carefully scaffolded, moving from read-aloud tasks at word and chunk level, through more extended read-aloud tasks, to translation, and finally to an IELTS task for freer speech practice. Learners are given personalised feedback for each task on a range of features including pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy and lexical level.

The app is designed to support the communicative approach through placing the learners in real-life contexts where possible, and also uses principles of gamification to support younger learners in developing motivation and confidence.

#### *Needs analysis*

Before the design phase of app production, research was conducted into the key needs of learners and school teachers in China, through exam data analysis (IELTS 2018) and focus group interviews. Speaking was often found to be a weaker skill among learners for the following reasons:

- There is a lack of practice and targeted feedback: Class sizes can be particularly large in China, meaning both that communicative methodologies are more difficult and that learners do not often receive targeted feedback. Focus groups reported carrying out speaking practice through drilling, and that some learners only received targeted feedback when giving class presentations.

- A lack of feedback leads to a lack of improvement: Analysis of IELTS exam results among Chinese test takers suggests that fewer than 30% of Chinese test takers get the band score they need first time, and that about 50% will retake IELTS three or more times.
- A lack of practice and feedback leads to a lack of confidence: Focus groups reported a general lack of confidence when speaking, making comments such as 'Chinese students are too shy. Not brave enough to express ideas.' It was also suggested that some teachers chose not to focus on speaking in class because they themselves struggled with this skill.

These issues with speaking are being brought into focus with the upcoming revisions in the national China exams: the Zhongkao (secondary school entrance exam) and Gaokao (university entrance exam) are rolling out new exam specifications that include, for the first time, a productive spoken component. Both exams also include translation, which would need to be addressed in our app for face validity.

Following proof-of-concept trialling and user feedback, it became clear that input such as context screens and task instructions would need to be available in both English and Chinese, to serve a range of teaching and learning styles. For example, some learners would spend limited time on these input screens, preferring to skim this content and focus instead on the task itself. This style of engagement meant that these screens were being ignored when in English, leading to a poor user experience and minimal activation of schemata.

### *Development*

From these problems, it became clear that an app to develop speaking needed to support teachers by providing self-study activities with a variety of task types and clear, targeted feedback, while also providing a safe and motivating learning environment that included recognition of plurilingual competence. Learner and teacher focus groups were held throughout the app's development to make sure these problems were addressed. Additionally, the app was tested by over 1,500 beta users, who completed surveys fortnightly over a 4-month period on a variety of areas, including their confidence and their perception of their own language progress.

### *Recognition of plurilingual competence in ISL*

Instructions, context setting and feedback screens for each task will shortly be available in either Chinese or English. Having this choice allows the learner to work with their own learning preferences, deciding for themselves which language, or both, they prefer to receive information in. This also allows tasks to be set in authentic contexts at lower levels without the risk that such contexts will not be understood. From B1, the learner is encouraged to move to English if possible, but messaging in the app makes it clear that they can return to Chinese at any point. This fits into the overall philosophy of the app by encouraging the learners to take small risks while preserving a sense of safety and not negating their plurilingual competence.

In addition, each unit includes a translation task. This is partly because translation is part of Chinese national tests and therefore fundamental to the value of the app. Importantly though, it is right to recognise that translation is in itself a real-life communicative skill, included in the CEFR descriptors under mediation (see the first article in this issue). Each translation task puts the learner in a real-life context where translation is necessary, such as helping a friend talk to an assistant in a shop or facilitating information-sharing between two people from different cultures. The ISL translation task has proved popular with learners, being rated the most useful of the different task types.

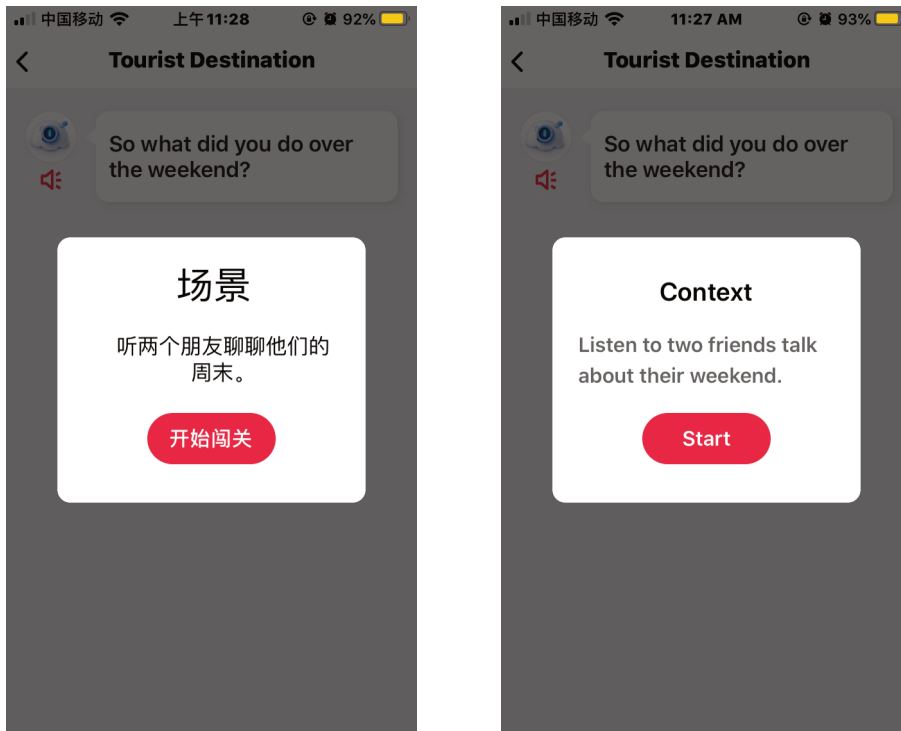


Figure 2: Context setting prompts available in either language

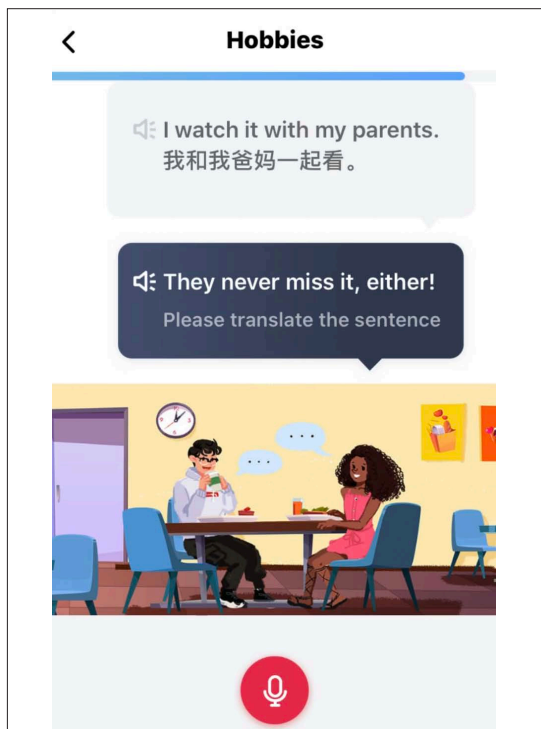


Figure 3: Example of translation activity in ISL

ISL is still new on the marketplace, and so substantial user data from the full launch is not yet available. However, beta users gave the app very positive feedback: having used the app for several months, 95% felt that it helped them to improve their oral English, and 97% rated the feedback given as very helpful (n=662). There are plans to continue to analyse data and iterate app development to ensure ISL remains as useful to users in the future.

## Taking account of plurilingualism in more formal assessment contexts

While apps such as ISL specifically integrate learning with assessment, the Cambridge English 'traditional' products of exam papers remain a component of the ecosystem of learning and assessment, and have always taken into account communicative ability along the lines of the socio-cognitive framework (Weir 2005). This has meant, for example, the focus on clear pronunciation rather than native-speaker-like pronunciation (Cambridge Assessment English, no date) and the need for speaking examiners to be of sufficient proficiency rather than native speakers.

The need for a plurilingual profile approach to assessment can be evidenced by the BULATS test, in use from 1998 to 2016, which had versions in English, French, German and Spanish. The recent focus on a learner's plurilingual competence has had an effect on taking this resource into consideration as a linguistic repair strategy in Cambridge English exam papers, rather than seeing evidence of this as an error. The following case study shows how this is put into practice in the revised Cambridge English A1 Movers exam.

### Case study: Revised Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners

In 2014, Cambridge English commenced a revision project for Pre A1 Starters, A1 Movers and A2 Flyers, as part of their continual improvement cycle. The primary aim of this revision project was to ensure that the exams continue to reflect young learners' English language achievement accurately (Albrecht and Dunlop 2018). The revision project was conducted in phases and involved the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from a range of sources, such as questionnaires and interviews with key stakeholders; content and psychometric analysis of the tasks and papers; and reviews conducted by examiners, test developers and other assessment experts. The revised Pre A1 Starters, A1 Movers and A2 Flyers exams were launched in January 2018.

As part of the revision, new Reading/Writing tasks were introduced to A1 Movers and A2 Flyers, to give learners further opportunity to demonstrate their reading and productive writing skills (Davies and Dunlop 2018). Part 6 of the revised A1 Movers Reading and Writing paper requires candidates to complete sentences, answer questions and write full sentences about an illustrated scene. The items require written responses ranging from one or two words up to full sentences. Part 7 of the revised A2 Flyers Reading and Writing paper requires the candidate to write a short story based on three pictures. The task requires candidates to write 20 or more words communicating a progression of events based on the pictures. The assessment criteria for these two tasks emphasise comprehensibility over spelling and grammatical accuracy in line with what can be expected of learners at CEFR Levels A1 and A2 (Cambridge Assessment English 2018c).

An example of the three pictures found in Part 7 is given in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4: A2 Flyers sample Writing picture prompt



One candidate from China replied with the following response:

One day, Sam and Mary play basketball. They are very happy. Suddenly, basketball in the ocean. one haitun help they catch the basketball.

A maximum of 5 marks is available, and the assessment criteria for achieving 5 marks is given in Figure 5.

Score	Criteria
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Response describes a progression of events which are explicitly connected to each other and</li><li>• Response is based on all three pictures and</li><li>• Minimal effort is required on the part of the reader to make sense of the response</li></ul>

Figure 5: Assessment criteria for a score of 5 in Part 7 of the A2 Flyers Writing test

The candidate above meets the criteria as shown in this mark scheme in that the response describes the progression of events in all three pictures, and although the reader requires a small amount of effort to make sense of the response, it is minimal.

It is clear that the candidate did not know the English word for 'dolphin' and rather than not displaying any communicative ability at all, uses their plurilingual competence by transliterating the Chinese word 海豚 into the word *haitun*. It is of course wrong and not an English word, but succeeds in at least making the message complete. The assessment criteria, mindful of the test's target candidature and purpose, is not focused on accuracy of vocabulary but on communicative message, and therefore does not penalise.

In fact, not only is the candidate demonstrating an A2 level of English writing for this context, but also A2 plurilingual abilities if we match the candidate's attempt to an A2 descriptor found in the CEFR scale for 'building on plurilingual repertoire': 'Can use a word from another language in his/her plurilingual repertoire to make him/herself understood in a routine everyday situation, when he/she cannot think of an adequate expression in the language being spoken' (Council of Europe 2020:162).

## Conclusion

The recognition of plurilingual competence and abilities within individual learners is starting to have an effect on language learning and teaching and should also have an effect on assessment, particularly if an integrated learning and assessment approach is taken, as the CEFR has done. The effect can be felt not only on the individual learner, but in all worlds that the learner finds themselves in within the ecosystem of learning, as well as at national and supranational levels. With the learner at the centre, this is important to note for educators and assessors, even for a large assessment body like Cambridge English which may be viewed as 'monolingual'.

It has been clear that in today's multilingual world 'English is necessary, but not sufficient'. National education bodies, for example, have been keen to invest in English language education and assessment, but not at the expense of other languages, especially the home languages and languages of schooling at the regional and national levels.

The increase in digital technology is increasingly becoming useful in enabling learners to utilise their plurilingual repertoire to help them learn English and meet their real-life communicative needs, and Cambridge English has, and will continue to have, its part to play.

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# Assessing learners' bilingual skills across different levels of the CEFR

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## Introduction

The multilingual turn we are witnessing in the academic and theoretical debate on second language acquisition research and language teaching clearly responds to the needs of today's multilingual society, where language users are more and more often required to act as mediators, moving flexibly across languages and cultures, and drawing upon their entire linguistic and cultural repertoire, partial as it may be in some languages. Language testing and assessment seem to be much slower to follow through in this change of approach, as highlighted by several prominent voices in the field (among others Shohamy 2011, 2013, Stathopoulou 2015, Gorter and Cenoz 2017).

Indeed, plurilingualism has always been a key part of the linguistic policy promoted by the European Union (EU), both as a symbol of the EU ideals, as well as a means to facilitate intercultural exchanges and foster a common identity. For the same reason, mediation had been recognised, together with reception, production and interaction, as one of the crucial linguistic activities by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) already in its first edition, which stated that 'Mediating language activities ... occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies' (Council of Europe 2001:14). However, the lack of more specific descriptors articulating how this skill develops throughout the levels identified by the CEFR led to this skill being often overlooked by practitioners, as it was assimilated alternatively to production and reception, especially in the field of language assessment. A first step towards the assessment of mediation in its own right came with the publication of *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). A Manual* (Council of Europe 2009), which includes spoken and written mediation in the communicative activities listed in Form A1 (General Examination Description), and more specifically in Forms A17 (Spoken Mediation), A18 (Written Mediation) and A22 (Aspects of Language Competence in Mediation). More recently, the call to look at language assessment from a different perspective, more suited to our multilingual and globalised world, was made even more explicit with the publication of the new Companion Volume to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018), which includes descriptors for various mediation activities and strategies, as well as for plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

Equipped with these new instruments, it is therefore vital, as recommended by Chalhoub-Deville (2019), that language assessment broadens its perspectives to consider multilingual constructs and include them, if they appear relevant for the specific purpose of the examination. This allows exams to better reflect the complexity of many contexts, since multilingualism is becoming the norm for many communities across the world, and the 'full (linguistic) humanity' (Schissel, Leung and Chalhoub-Deville 2019:373) of a growing number of people with complex linguistic biographies, who grow up to be bi- or plurilingual adults despite being born in an apparent monolingual reality. A multilingual approach in language testing and assessment could then take multiple forms, depending on the purpose of the test, the test takers involved and the context the testing is in.

This article will look at an example of bilingual assessment, developed and delivered in the multilingual region of South Tyrol (Italy), and in particular at how translanguaging is incorporated in its reading and speaking tasks, and how well the tasks match the CEFR descriptors for mediation and plurilingual competences. It will also outline an ongoing follow-up study, which investigates exam strategies and washback through in-depth interviews with exam candidates.

## Background and context

South Tyrol is a mountainous region situated in the northeast of Italy, on the border with Austria, with a complex ethnolinguistic makeup, which includes three ethnic groups each with their own official language: German, Italian and Ladin, spoken in different proportions across different parts of the region. While the Ladin minority (4.53% of the population) and the Italian community (26.06%) are mainly concentrated in specific areas of the region (respectively Gardena and Badia Valley for the Ladin community, and the larger centres of Bozen/Bolzano and Meran/Merano, as well as the southern area, bordering the province of Trento), the German-speaking majority is well distributed across the region, and reaches 90–100% of the population in most of the other areas (Astat 2019).

The history of the region explains the complexity of its ethnolinguistic makeup and the importance given to language, culture and ethnicity issues, which results from a difficult process that led from the promise of an administrative and cultural autonomy made by King Vittorio Emanuele III shortly after the annexation to the Kingdom of Italy in 1919 (Von Hartungen 2002) to the implementation of the autonomy statute in 1972 and successive improvements in 2001.

Crucial importance in the autonomy statute is given to the decree regulating several aspects of public life in the region (e.g. access to public employment, composition of administrative organs and distribution of resources) according to ethnolinguistic proportion among the different groups (DPR 572/1976). Also, the decree grants equal status to all three languages in public administration and guarantees to each citizen the right to use their preferred language when approaching institutions. Therefore, civil servants and employees of privatised firms offering a public service (such as the postal service and public transport) are required to reach a certain level of proficiency in Italian and German (or Italian, German and Ladin in the area where the majority of Ladin speakers live). Expected levels of proficiency are linked to specific job descriptions, and are now expressed with reference to the CEFR (whereas in the past they were linked to the level of education required for a certain job and were expressed according to a different system of levels). Language proficiency can be demonstrated in different ways, most commonly through an exam of bilingualism in Italian and German (Esami di bilinguismo/Zweisprachigkeitsprüfungen).

### History of the exams of bilingualism

Since its inception in 1977, the exam of bilingualism has undergone three quite radical reforms, which have altered its structure completely, reflecting to some extent the major theoretical developments in applied linguistics and language teaching methodology. From January 1977 to December 1998, the exam consisted of two translation tasks (German into Italian, and Italian into German). Both texts were approximately at the same level and a rather strong emphasis was placed on the accuracy of the translation, which is consistent with the dominant position of grammar-translation methods in language teaching and testing at the time, following closely the methodology applied to the teaching of classical languages. However, a debate soon started around the use of translation as a means to assess general language skills (Egger 2001), as the influence of the communicative approach progressively reduced the importance of translation, which started to be considered a language skill *per se*, not necessarily a good representation of the general level of proficiency of candidates and/or of their level of ability in other skills. Once a candidate had passed the written exam, there was an oral examination, which could take place no sooner than 30 days after the written exam.

From January 1999 to December 2013, a new exam format was introduced, which began to draw upon the concept of mediation skills. Instead of a translation, candidates were given two short reading tasks (one in Italian, one in German) with six comprehension questions each, to be answered using the 'other' language.

**Concrete per natura**

Che differenza c'è fra un ambientalista donna e un ambientalista uomo? Forse solo una camicia. „Ero a casa e stavo stirando, quando mi ha chiamata al telefono l'ex ministro dell'ambiente", racconta Grazia Francescato, già presidente del WWF Italia e Presidente dei Verdi: "Dopo un po' che parlavamo mi sono resa conto che avevo dimenticato il ferro sulla camicia. Momento di panico: che faccio, metto giù il telefono o sacrifico la camicia?"

Che cosa avrebbe fatto un uomo? La Francescato, con garbo ha salvato la camicia. "Noi donne siamo più concrete di molti uomini, più agganciate alla realtà", dice. "Abbiamo anche una lunga abitudine a prenderci cura della famiglia, della casa, del Vecchio nonno, della pianta di basilico sul balcone, del gatto malato. Per noi è naturale prenderci cura anche del pianeta Terra, un pianeta malato, bisognoso di cure. Forse è per questo che ci sono sempre più donne nell'ambientalismo.

(da: Famiglia Cristiana, 30/97; versione abbreviata e riveduta)

**Domande guida/Leitfragen:**  
*Si prega di rispondere alle seguenti domande in tedesco.  
 Per rispondere sono sufficienti 1-2 frasi complete.  
 Bitte beantworten Sie die folgenden Fragen auf Deutsch.  
 Für die Beantwortung genügen jeweils 1-2 vollständige Sätze.*

1. Come inizia il racconto di Grazia Francescato? (3 informazioni)
2. Di che cosa si è accorta dopo un po' che parlava?
3. Che cosa si è chiesta nel momento di panico?
4. Come spiega Grazia Francescato il fatto di aver salvato la camicia? (2 informazioni)
5. Di che cosa si prendono cura le donne?
6. Perché ci sono sempre più donne nell'ambientalismo?

Figure 1: Example of Italian reading task with comprehension questions (to be answered in German)

**Bundesdeutsch aus österreichischer Sicht**

Dass die Beziehung zwischen Deutschen und Österreichern eine ganz spezielle ist, beruht nicht nur auf der teilweise gemeinsamen Geschichte, der geographischen Nähe und der engen politischen und wirtschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit, sondern auch und vor allem auf der gemeinsamen Sprache. Dabei spielt die Sprache eine sowohl verbindende als auch trennende Rolle – zum einen, weil sie tatsächlich gleichzeitig ähnlich und unterschiedlich ist, zum anderen aber, weil sie eng mit Vorurteilen und Stereotypen und mit dem Identitätsverständnis der beiden Länder verknüpft ist.

So sieht etwa eine Reihe von österreichischen Sprachwissenschaftlern und Intellektuellen gerade in der Beziehung zu Deutschland und zur Sprache der Deutschen die Wurzel eines Minderwertigkeitskomplexes und einer tief verankerten schizophrenen Haltung der Österreicher zur eigenen Sprache.

Im Allgemeinen werden die größten Unterschiede zwischen den beiden nationalen Varietäten Deutschlands und Österreichs von den befragten Personen im Bereich der Aussprache gesehen. Dabei zeichnet sich jedoch ab, dass dieser Unterschied für viele wenig fassbar ist und nur mit unscharfen Termini beschrieben wird.

Konkreter zu fassen als die Ausspracheunterschiede sind dagegen Unterschiede im Lexikon, die vor allem im Bereich der Gastronomie und der Bezeichnungen für Lebensmittel liegen.

(aus: I. Kaiser, Bundesdeutsch aus österreichischer Sicht 2004, gekürzt und leicht verändert)

**Leitfragen/Domande guida:**  
*Bitte beantworten Sie die folgenden Fragen auf Italienisch.  
 Für die Beantwortung genügen jeweils 1-2 vollständige Sätze.  
 Si prega di rispondere alle seguenti domande in italiano.  
 Per rispondere sono sufficienti 1-2 frasi complete.*

1. Worauf beruht die spezielle Beziehung zwischen Deutschen und Österreichern? (4 Informationen)
2. Welche Rolle spielt die Sprache dabei?
3. Womit ist die Sprache außerdem eng verknüpft? (2 Informationen)
4. Welche Meinung vertreten Sprachwissenschaftler zu dieser Frage?
5. Worin werden häufig die größten Unterschiede gesehen?
6. In welchem Bereich lassen sich die Unterschiede besser fassen?

Figure 2: Example of German reading task with comprehension questions (to be answered in Italian)

As can be seen in the examples, which were part of a collection of tasks that was made available to candidates to prepare for the exams in what were formerly called levels A and B (with reference respectively to graduate career and post-high school career paths), the questions covered most of the content of the text, but the need to answer the questions required some minimal reworking of the sentence structure and the concepts. A relatively strong grammar focus was still evident, as the rubric specifically asked to answer the questions using one or two full sentences, which is not so common in real-life communication. Despite the initial attempt at creating a task that revolves around the use of mediation and plurilingual skills, which responds better to the specific needs of a bilingual region, it seems that the level of authenticity would have been improved by asking the questions in the same language the candidates had to answer them, which would probably better mimic what might happen in a real-life situation where a bilingual person is required to use their cross-linguistic mediation skills (i.e. by answering someone's questions about a text written in a language they do not fully understand). Except for the length and level of complexity of the text, the task seems to match relatively well the descriptors for Overall Mediation at Level B2/C1, as candidates are expected to be able to demonstrate a clear understanding of a text in language A by conveying 'detailed information and arguments reliably' (from the B2 descriptor, Council of Europe 2018:105) in language B, with precision of expression, clarity and fluency being a clear plus that can bring the skill level required towards C1 (Council of Europe 2018:105).

During this phase (1998–2013), a significant increase in the number of exam dates available and a general streamlining of the procedure made things much easier, with both the written and oral exams being taken on the same day.

The endeavour towards efficiency continued with the implementation of the current version of the exam, introduced in January 2014, which was mapped against the CEFR and brought on a rather radical restructure, so that for the first time since the exam of bilingualism was created candidates are tested on all four skills in both languages. The new features of the exam consist of a brand-new listening section and an expanded reading and writing section, with a clearer distinction between the two skills, and a language in use task. To facilitate the comparison with the previous version of the exam, and to better understand the role that the two languages play in the various sections, examples of tasks that represent the mediation and plurilingual skills construct for Level B2/C1 are included in the next section.

In this version, the receptive tasks are all based on multiple-choice tasks rather than open questions to facilitate and speed up the marking process of these sections, allowing candidate results to be ready within a very short turnaround time. The listening and reading/writing sections both take place in the morning, followed by the speaking section in the afternoon, consisting of a bilingual interview in front of a panel of four examiners. The current version of the exam is the only one that has been mapped on the CEFR from Level A2 to Level C1.

## The plurilingual approach to testing in the current format of the exam

The approach to plurilingualism adopted by this exam matches the view of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018), which goes beyond the idea of balanced bilingualism that is often referred to or implied when most people talk about bilingualism, where a speaker is exactly as competent in language A as in language B. On the contrary, the CEFR clearly includes partial and developing competences, offering descriptors across all different levels, even for skills such as mediation and translation. According to this perspective, bilingualism is dynamic, and should rather be described as a continuum (Figure 3), where speakers can place themselves according to their dominant language in a given context and a given moment, and move along the continuum depending on how their skills develop.

This applies to the context of South Tyrol as well, as recent studies have shown how most speakers have a strongly dominant language (Vettori and Abel (Eds) 2017), and often their level in the language of the other ethnolinguistic group is much lower than one would normally expect in a bilingual region. Based on this idea of bilingualism as a continuum, Figure 3 also shows how the level of the weaker language determines the level of the exam that a candidate is able to take, as the goal is to overcome the barrier between languages drawing upon the whole linguistic and cultural resource of the individual, rather than to show balanced mastery of the two languages (Council of Europe 2018:157).

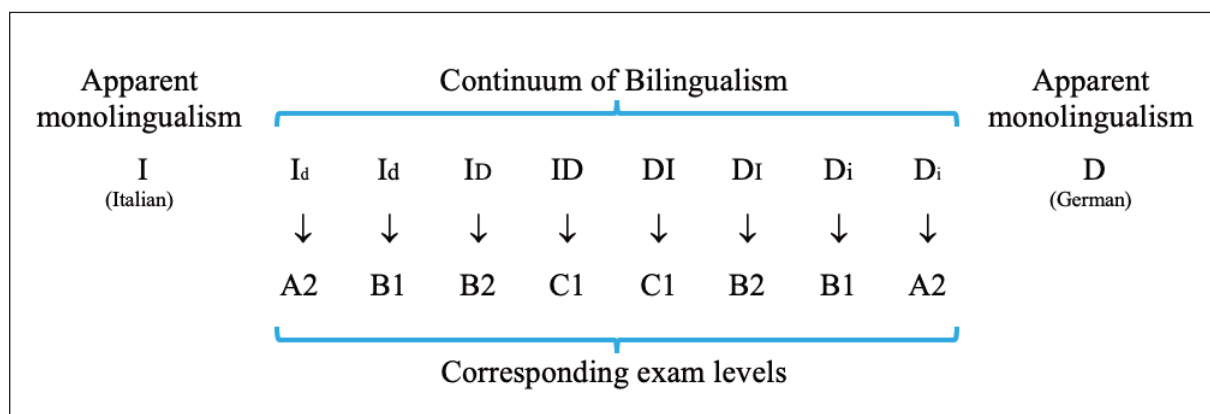


Figure 3: Bilingualism as a continuum with corresponding levels available to candidates for the exam of bilingualism used in South Tyrol, partially adapted from Valdés (2003), as reported in Baker (2006)

The results of a previous reverse engineering exercise (Gandini expected 2020) on the sample papers available on the website of the South Tyrolean Office for Bilingualism ([www.provincia.bz.it/formazione-lingue/bilinguismo/l-esame-di-bilinguismo.asp](http://www.provincia.bz.it/formazione-lingue/bilinguismo/l-esame-di-bilinguismo.asp)) show how the two languages are activated in the different sections of the exam. While in the listening section there is minimal contact between the two languages, which are simply tested one after the other, both the reading/writing (Figures 4 and 5) and the speaking tasks (Figures 6 and 7) follow an integrated approach where the two languages are activated simultaneously, as a part of a plurilingual system, where each plays its role and gives a contribution to the achievement of the task.

**A – C1**  
**Testo 2**

**Il Panettone natalizio**

- Il panettone è un prodotto natalizio da forno originario di Milano e oggi conosciuto in tutto il mondo in quanto viene confezionato e distribuito su larga scala dalle grandi industrie dolciarie. Si tratta di un dolce le cui origini milanesi risalgono alla seconda metà del quindicesimo secolo. La sua sagoma tradizionale appare un po' diversa da quella che l'industria propone e che oramai è considerata tipica: mentre la forma a cassa conica terminante in una cupola arrotondata è rimasta la stessa, in origine il panettone si presentava più basso. E così è ancora, in parte, per i panettoni prodotti artigianalmente non solo dai pasticceri ma soprattutto dai fornai, le cui preparazioni in Italia sono molto apprezzate. Si può sostenere che a Natale tutti amino offrire ai propri ospiti, o portare in dono ad amici e familiari, un panettone artigianale di cui si narra la nota prelibatezza dovuta all'eccezionale bravura del proprio fornaio di fiducia. Anche questo fa parte della tradizione.
- Sono varie le storie sulla nascita del panettone. Naturalmente si tratta di leggende, come ad esempio quella del cuoco di Ludovico il Moro, duca di Milano. Costui, avendo bruciato il dolce preparato per la cena di Natale, impastò velocemente la pasta lievitata di cui ancora disponeva arricchendola con uvetta e frutta candita. La leggenda narra che il dolce improvvisato riscosse un enorme successo.
- In realtà si pensa che il panettone abbia origine dall'abitudine di quel tempo di mangiare pane di frumento a Natale. Per trasformarlo in un dolce si utilizzava ciò che era a disposizione in cucina, come l'uva passa e i frutti canditi, ingredienti poveri che si preparavano in casa, mettendo ad appassire i grappoli d'uva per conservarli e cuocendo con un po' di zucchero le scorzette di limone e di arancia. Una versione semplice di questa preparazione è costituita, ancora oggi, dai pane con l'uvetta che ogni fornaio italiano produce, mentre il panettone rappresenta l'elaborazione ricca e molto gustosa di questo dolce povero.

**Beantworten Sie bitte folgende Fragen in deutscher Sprache:**

- Weizenbrot mit einfachen Zutaten, wie Rosinen und kandierten Früchten: so entstand der „Panettone“. Kreuzen Sie an, indem Sie die Informationen dem Text entnehmen.
  - richtig
  - falsch

In welchem Abschnitt befindet sich die Antwort?

  - 1
  - 2
  - 3

- Eine Legende erzählt, dass der „Panettone“ zum ersten Mal und unabsichtlich von Ludovico il Moro zubereitet wurde. Kreuzen Sie an, indem Sie die Informationen dem Text entnehmen.
  - richtig
  - falsch

In welchem Abschnitt befindet sich die Antwort?

  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
- Am Anfang hatte der „Panettone“ eine andere Form: welche? Kreuzen Sie an. Nur eine Antwort ist richtig.
  - a) Er war flacher und runder als heute.
  - b) Er war größer als heute und braun.
  - c) Er war flacher als heute, hatte aber die gleiche abgerundete Form.
  - d) Er sah ungefähr so wie eine Kugel aus.
- Ergänzen Sie bitte die Sätze mit einem Wort. Manchmal sind mehrere Lösungen möglich, sofern sie grammatisch und inhaltlich korrekt sind.
 

Jedes Jahr \_\_\_\_\_ wir uns die gleiche Frage: Was essen wir \_\_\_\_\_ Weihnachten? Wichtig ist auch die Frage der Geschenke. In der Familie beschenkt man \_\_\_\_\_ gegenseitig, kleine Geschenke erhalten meist auch Freunde und enge Geschäftspartner. Obwohl viele Menschen \_\_\_\_\_ die Vorbereitungen gestresst sind, gilt Weihnachten als Fest der Liebe und der Familie.
- Wie und mit welchen Rezepten feiert man Weihnachten in Ihrer Familie? Nennen Sie Beispiele (140-160 Wörter). Am Ende der Textproduktion muss die Anzahl der Wörter angegeben werden.

**LÖSUNGEN**

Aufgabe 1	Aufgabe 2	Aufgabe 3	Aufgabe 4
richtig – 3	falsch – 2	c	stellen, zu/an, sich, durch

Figure 4: First part of the reading/writing section of the exam, at Level C1. Reading text in Italian, followed by comprehension questions, language in use and writing task to be completed in German, available online: [www.provincia.bz.it/formazione-lingue/bilinguismo/downloads/2\\_schriftl\\_Arbeit\\_A\\_italienisch.pdf](http://www.provincia.bz.it/formazione-lingue/bilinguismo/downloads/2_schriftl_Arbeit_A_italienisch.pdf)

**A – C1**  
**Text 2**

**Neue WG-Formen**

- Was ist eine WG? Na ja, natürlich eine Wohngemeinschaft. Mietwohnungen sind bekanntlich teuer, Studentinnen und Studenten oder andere junge Leute haben nicht so viel Geld; da ziehen sie einfach zusammen in eine Wohnung. Jeder hat sein eigenes Zimmer, Küche und Bad benutzen alle gemeinsam. Man teilt sich die Miete und die anderen monatlichen Kosten: Strom, Wasser, Telefon usw. Für viele Leute ist das eine Möglichkeit, während des Studiums nicht mehr im Haus der Eltern zu leben, sondern unabhängig zu sein. Das WG-Leben ist meist lustig, wenn auch nicht immer harmonisch. Wenn mehrere Menschen zusammenleben, gibt es immer Konflikte. Der eine räumt die Küche nie auf, nachdem er gekocht hat, der oder die andere bezahlt nicht pünktlich seinen oder ihren Anteil an der Telefonrechnung oder bedient sich immer am vollen Kühlschrank der anderen.
- Das Klischee der WG aus Studenten, die eher an Partys als an das Studium denken, stimmt weniger denn je. Es gibt heute verschiedenste Arten von WGs. Zum Beispiel gibt es die PlusWGs, Wohngemeinschaften für Leute ab 50 oder 60 Jahren. „Gemeinsam statt einsam“ ist ihr Motto. Sie sind alleinstehend, zum Teil noch im Beruf aktiv und möchten ihren Alltag und ihre Freizeit mit anderen gemeinsam gestalten. Oft wohnen sie in einem komfortablen Haus mit Garten, der von allen WG-Bewohnern gemeinsam gepflegt wird. Oder es gibt auch Gruppen von sogenannten Aussteigern, die sich aus ihren Berufen zurückgezogen haben und jetzt ein Selbstversorgerleben inmitten der Natur führen wollen.
- Eine andere Idee liegt der Senioren-WG zugrunde. Dort wohnen ältere Leute zusammen, die sich gegenseitig helfen und Gesellschaft leisten und eventuell eine gemeinsame Hilfe zum Putzen, Einkaufen und andere mühsame Arbeiten bezahlen. Dann gibt es die Mehrgenerationen-WG und die Alleinziehenden-WG, deren Namen für sich sprechen. Verbindend ist der Wunsch, die alle Kosten und die Alltagsorganisation zu teilen, aber auch die Vorteile des Zusammenlebens auszunutzen.

**Risponda alle seguenti domande in lingua italiana:**

- Quando gli studenti condividono un appartamento vivono in perfetta armonia. Selezioni la risposta corretta, attingendo le informazioni dal testo.
  - vero
  - falso

In quale sezione numerata si trova la risposta?

  - 1
  - 2
  - 3

- Le persone anziane decidono di vivere insieme ad altri coetanei anche per avere compagnia ed aiutarci a vicenda. Selezioni la risposta corretta, attingendo le informazioni dal testo.
  - vero
  - falso

In quale sezione numerata si trova la risposta?

  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
- Nel testo si legge che gli studenti che scelgono di vivere insieme ad altri coetanei vogliono (solo una scelta è corretta)
  - a) condividere i costi dell'appartamento: affitto, gas, elettricità, ecc.
  - b) preparare meglio gli esami.
  - c) fondare nuove comunità e imparare a vivere in armonia.
  - d) separarsi definitivamente dai propri genitori e cucinare quello che vogliono.
- Completati le seguenti frasi con una parola. A volte sono possibili più soluzioni purché siano corrette a livello grammaticale e di contenuto.
 

Gli affitti diventano sempre più \_\_\_\_\_ e non solo gli studenti, ma anche molte persone sole e anziane scelgono di \_\_\_\_\_ un appartamento. Non è una scelta facile perché non sempre \_\_\_\_\_ appartamenti condivisi si vive \_\_\_\_\_ armonia. Bisogna imparare ad accettare dei compromessi nella vita quotidiana nel rispetto reciproco.
- Condividere un appartamento, in casi specifici può essere una vera e propria soluzione. Che cosa ne pensa? Motivi la Sua risposta con degli esempi (140 – 160 parole). Conti e riporti il numero delle parole usate nella produzione scritta.

**SOLUZIONI**

Domanda 1	Domanda 2	Domanda 3	Domanda 4
falso – 1	vero – 3	a	cari/costosi, condividere, negli, in

Figure 5: Second part of the reading/writing section of the exam, at Level C1. Reading text in German, followed by comprehension questions, language in use and writing task to be completed in Italian, available online: [www.provincia.bz.it/formazione-lingue/bilinguismo/downloads/2\\_schriftl\\_Arbeit\\_A\\_deutsch.doc.pdf](http://www.provincia.bz.it/formazione-lingue/bilinguismo/downloads/2_schriftl_Arbeit_A_deutsch.doc.pdf)



As can be seen in the examples, in the reading section candidates are required first to read a text in language A and answer reading comprehension questions about it formulated in language B. The section proceeds then with a language in use task and a writing task (generally on a topic closely connected to the reading task), which are also to be completed in language B. At first glance, the current format of the exam at Level C1 gives a much clearer picture of a candidate's reading and writing skills than the previous version, used until 1998. Also, the addition of a cloze task adds some details about the grammatical competence on a range of topics that differs across the levels.

The fact that the code-switching happens immediately after reading the text seems a step forward in terms of authenticity, even though the choice of true/false and multiple-choice items and the formulation of the question stem as a statement rather than a question are significant limits in this respect.

The structure of the exam is very similar across the levels, with only minimal differences to the type of multiple-choice items, as can be seen comparing sample tasks across different levels available online: [www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/die-zweisprachigkeitspruefung.asp](http://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/die-zweisprachigkeitspruefung.asp). However, the changes in length and complexity of the source text are clearly visible, as are those related to the number of items (especially in the language in use task), the text type and the expected word count for the written production.

It is not easy, unfortunately, to match the reading comprehension questions and the language in use task to specific descriptors in the new Companion Volume of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018), as the type of items chosen (multiple-choice questions and gap-fills) rather limits the dimension of translanguaging included in the reading tasks to the identification of specific details listed in language B (in the stem or the options of the multiple-choice questions) within a text written in language A, and this case is not contemplated in the new descriptors. However, the more skilled candidates are able to use concepts and ideas from the reading in language A in the writing task which needs to be completed in language B, as well as to recycle some vocabulary and expressions used in the questions. However, as the CEFR clearly states in its first edition (Council of Europe 2001), categories and examples are only included as a suggestion, and exam developers should feel free to approach the classification with a critical eye in view of their specific contexts, create further sub-categories, merge some of the ones that are given, and reject others to better reflect the activities that test takers are being asked to perform.

Much closer is the alignment of the oral exam with the scales of plurilingual competence (Council of Europe 2018:157–162). This part of the exam consists of two tasks: a brief presentation and a personal opinion on a loosely connected topic. Each task is followed by questions in both languages from the four members of the panel (two German speakers and two Italian speakers), who then assess candidates on the following criteria in both languages:

- task achievement and communicative ability
- coherency and fluency
- linguistic expression and vocabulary range
- grammatical appropriacy and accuracy.

With regard to the assessment procedure of the speaking exam, it is important to highlight how the responsibility of assessing both languages falls upon all members of the panel and is not split according to ethnolinguistic groups.

Despite not being explicitly mentioned in the assessment criteria as listed on the website of the Regional Office for Bilingualism, plurilingual competence is certainly one of the main features of this exam, especially at higher levels such as C1 and B2, where candidates are expected to interact as naturally as possible with their interlocutors, moving back and forth between Italian and German. A good candidate, therefore, is the one that refers back to what has been previously discussed (in the other language) and co-constructs the interaction in a way that seems very relevant for a multilingual region such as South Tyrol.

The scale of the Companion Volume that seems most relevant to describe the particular skills targeted by this section of the exam is the one about 'building on plurilingual repertoire' defined as the 'practical functional ability to exploit plurilingualism'. The descriptors are especially applicable to high-level candidates, who are expected to 'alternate between languages flexibly to facilitate communication in a multilingual context', summarise information, gloss, explain and clarify concepts in both Italian and German, responding 'spontaneously' to the change of language initiated by one of the interlocutors, and 'catering to the needs and linguistic skills of the interlocutors' or more simply to their preferences (Council of Europe 2018:162, from the descriptors for Levels C1 and B2). Achieving this level of flexibility seems to suggest that what candidates do goes beyond code-switching, defined as 'the act of switching between two languages' (Coronel-Molina and Samuelson 2017) and moves quite comfortably into the area of translanguaging, where both languages belong to the same linguistic repertoire that a speaker can creatively exploit by selecting the language or language features that best allow them to take part effectively in an interaction.

A brief review of some sample tasks across different levels of the CEFR shows how the structure of the exam remains the same, as exemplified by Figures 6 and 7. Interestingly, the handouts for the speaking exams are completely bilingual, which offers a rich input that candidates can use to their advantage in the short preparation time they have available.

However, the cognitive complexity, target domain and richness of the input varies significantly, from the graph used as input for the presentation in task 1 at C1 level (see Figure 6), to the simple personal questions used for Level A2 at the other end of the spectrum (see Figure 7). Considering the difference in level between the dominant language and the other one, candidates at lower levels are not expected to have the same level of flexibility asked of candidates at B2 and C1 levels, but merely to respond to the different interlocutors in the same language they have used to ask their questions.

### **Outline of the study in progress**

The study is now looking at how test takers prepare for the exam and what strategies they adopt during the exam itself, to analyse whether the particular construct and the multilingual approach are having an impact on teaching and learning. Data will be collected through short questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with candidates of different levels and teachers who deliver language courses in preparation for the exam of bilingualism. Due to the lockdown of schools and public offices and the limits imposed to international travel by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, interviews have been postponed and moved online (to be conducted in Italian or German) to accommodate the respondent's preference. Anecdotal evidence collected before the lockdown would seem to suggest that not all candidates have reflected on the distinguishing features of this particular exam, which might lead to an approach that works exclusively on the weaker language (e.g. Italian for candidates whose native language is German, and German for candidates whose native language is Italian), instead of practising extensively all the tasks involving translanguaging and flexible use of all linguistic resources. However, the lockdown and the cancellation of exams and courses have badly affected the recruitment of research participants, and the project was put on hold until the end of the summer 2020 (when hopefully exams and courses will resume).

<p><b>Aufgabenblatt für die mündliche Zweisprachigkeitsprüfung C1</b></p> <p>Vorbereitungszeit: 15 Minuten</p> <p>Die mündliche Prüfung besteht aus zwei Teilen. Sie erhalten zwei Aufgaben, von denen Sie eine in deutscher Sprache und eine in italienischer Sprache ausführen. Die Reihenfolge der Aufgaben ist vorgegeben, die Wahl der Sprache ist frei. Im Anschluss an jede Aufgabe stellt Ihnen die Kommission zwei Fragen: eine in deutscher Sprache und eine in italienischer Sprache. Sie beantworten die deutsche Frage auf Deutsch und die italienische auf Italienisch.</p> <p><b>Aufgabe 1: Kurzreferat (2-3 Minuten)</b></p> <p>Internet: Welche Rolle spielt das Internet in unserer Gesellschaft? Zufriedenheit der Südtiroler und Südtirolerinnen. Wofür verwendet man das Internet? Nehmen Sie in Ihrem Kurzreferat auch Bezug auf beiliegende Grafik.</p>	<p><b>Consegna per la prova orale dell'esame di bilinguismo C1</b></p> <p>Tempo a disposizione per prepararsi alla prova orale: 15 minuti</p> <p>La prova orale consiste di due parti; una parte dovrà essere svolta in lingua italiana, una parte in lingua tedesca. L'ordine delle consegne deve essere rispettato, le lingue sono a scelta libera.</p> <p>Dopo la prima e dopo la seconda parte della prova orale la commissione porrà due domande: una in lingua tedesca e una in lingua italiana; risponda alla domanda in lingua tedesca in tedesco e alla domanda in lingua italiana in italiano.</p> <p><b>Consegna 1: Breve relazione (2-3 minuti)</b></p> <p>Internet: Che ruolo ha Internet nella nostra società? La soddisfazione delle persone in Alto Adige. Per che cosa si usa Internet? Nella Sua breve relazione faccia riferimento al grafico allegato.</p>																			
<table border="1"> <caption>Internetnutzung nach Art der Tätigkeit - 2012</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Art der Tätigkeit</th> <th>Ja (%)</th> <th>Nein/Nei (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>E-Mail</td> <td>79,7</td> <td>20,3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Suche von Informationen über Waren und Dienstleistungen</td> <td>74,3</td> <td>25,7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neuigkeiten oder Nachrichten von Bekannten</td> <td>50,4</td> <td>49,6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nachrichten in Chatrooms, sozialen Netzwerken</td> <td>40,1</td> <td>59,9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nutzung von Bilderkonten über Internet</td> <td>39,3</td> <td>60,7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Art der Tätigkeit	Ja (%)	Nein/Nei (%)	E-Mail	79,7	20,3	Suche von Informationen über Waren und Dienstleistungen	74,3	25,7	Neuigkeiten oder Nachrichten von Bekannten	50,4	49,6	Nachrichten in Chatrooms, sozialen Netzwerken	40,1	59,9	Nutzung von Bilderkonten über Internet	39,3	60,7	<p><b>Aufgabe 2: Persönliche Meinung (2-3 Minuten)</b></p> <p>Sprechen Sie kurz über die Vor- und Nachteile der Kommunikation per E-Mail. Folgende Stichwörter können Ihnen dabei helfen: - Studium/Arbeit - Freunde in der Welt - Stress</p>	<p><b>Consegna 2: Opinione personale (2-3 minuti)</b></p> <p>Illustri brevemente i vantaggi e gli svantaggi della comunicazione via email. Le seguenti parole chiave possono esserLe d'aiuto: - studio/lavoro - amici in tutto il mondo - stress</p>
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Figure 6: Sample task for the speaking component of the exam, Level C1, available online: [www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/downloads/Beispiel\\_1\\_C1\\_Muendliche\\_Pruefung.pdf](http://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/downloads/Beispiel_1_C1_Muendliche_Pruefung.pdf)

<p><b>Aufgabenblatt für die mündliche Zweisprachigkeitsprüfung A2</b></p> <p>Vorbereitungszeit: 10 Minuten</p> <p>Die mündliche Prüfung besteht aus zwei Teilen. Sie erhalten zwei Aufgaben, von denen Sie eine in deutscher Sprache und eine in italienischer Sprache ausführen. Die Reihenfolge der Aufgaben ist vorgegeben, die Wahl der Sprache ist frei.</p> <p>Im Anschluss an jede Aufgabe stellt Ihnen die Kommission zwei Fragen: eine in deutscher Sprache und eine in italienischer Sprache. Sie beantworten die deutsche Frage auf Deutsch und die italienische auf Italienisch.</p> <p><b>Aufgabe 1: Sprechen Sie kurz über folgendes Thema (max. 2 Minuten)</b></p> <p>Sprechen Sie kurz über Ihren Beruf/Ihre Arbeit.</p> <p>Was sind Sie von Beruf? Was sind Ihre Aufgaben? Wie sieht Ihr Arbeitstag aus? Gefällt Ihnen Ihre Arbeit?</p> <p><b>Aufgabe 2: Persönliche Meinung (max. 2 Minuten)</b></p> <p>Was machen Sie gerne in Ihrer Freizeit? Hobbys? Familie?</p>	<p><b>Consegna per la prova orale dell'esame di bilinguismo A2</b></p> <p>Tempo a disposizione per prepararsi alla prova orale: 10 minuti</p> <p>La prova orale consiste di due parti. Una parte dovrà essere svolta in lingua italiana, una parte in lingua tedesca, l'ordine delle consegne deve essere rispettato, le lingue sono a scelta libera.</p> <p>Dopo la prima e dopo la seconda parte della prova orale la commissione porrà due domande: una in lingua tedesca e una in lingua italiana, risponda alla domanda in lingua tedesca in tedesco e alla domanda in lingua italiana in italiano.</p> <p><b>Consegna 1: Parli brevemente del seguente argomento (max. 2 minuti)</b></p> <p>Parli brevemente della Sua professione/del Suo lavoro</p> <p>Qual è il Suo lavoro? Quali sono i Suoi compiti? Come è una Sua giornata tipo? Le piace il Suo lavoro?</p> <p><b>Consegna 2: Opinione personale (max. 2 minuti)</b></p> <p>Cosa Le piace fare nel Suo tempo libero? Hobby? Famiglia?</p>
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Figure 7: Sample task for the speaking component of the exam, Level A2, available online: [www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/downloads/Beispiel\\_1\\_A2\\_Muendliche\\_Pruefung.pdf](http://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/downloads/Beispiel_1_A2_Muendliche_Pruefung.pdf)

## Conclusion

The multilingual construct behind this exam seems very relevant to the local situation, valuing pluralism and multilingualism as assets for South Tyrol and its people, potentially realising what Dendrinos (2009, 2013) describes as a 'glocal' model. Such a model could potentially attract the interest of bilingual test takers outside of South Tyrol, who want to have their skills in Italian and German certified, and also of other multilingual communities and exam boards, who want to adopt a new approach including tasks that target mediation and use of plurilingual resources in communicative situations.

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# Functional use of multilingualism in assessment: Opportunities and challenges

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s we have witnessed an increase in mobility. This mobility – among other factors – impacts linguistic and socio-cultural diversity in schools and universities. Providing equal opportunities for all learners and raising their language proficiency is a major challenge for many teachers and administrators in educational institutions. A number of disconnects can be observed between the plurilingual competences of students and current monolingual (language) testing practices. Is it possible to put diversity to effective use when we address these disconnects?

In countries like Belgium, students with an immigrant background score lower on all PISA tests. Compared to non-immigrant learners, the gap is especially large. When considering the role of the language(s) spoken at home in a context of assessment, it is clear that not speaking the language of assessment at home is an additional barrier to attaining high scores in standardised tests (OECD 2019). The stakes for these groups of students are high, as they are often assigned to inappropriate curriculum tracks, have poorer graduation rates, are disproportionately referred to special education trajectories (Counts, Katsiyannis and Whitford 2018, Vantieghem, Van Avermaet, Groenez and Lambert 2018) and run a higher risk of drop-out (Garcia, Kleifgen and Falchi 2008, Groenez, Nicaise and De Rick 2009). Because testing plays a major role in processes of transition, one of the ways to address these issues is the removal of construct-irrelevant barriers in testing. This is essential in any kind of testing, and particularly in ensuring fairness and validity, because when linguistic complexity unnecessarily interferes with pupils' ability to demonstrate their knowledge, this poses a serious validity concern (Wolf et al 2008).

## Assessment accommodations

Our Flemish research project, *Multilingual Assessment in Education* (MulAE), highlighted the importance of considering plurilingual competences of students regardless of the subject matter of the test (language or other content). The central aim of this project was to explore how multilingual children who are not yet proficient in the language of schooling can be assessed in a fair and valid way in content-related areas. This is one way to begin addressing the question of how diversity can be an asset in contexts of assessment. We empirically investigated the *assessment accommodations* for multilingual pupils and the stakeholders' perceptions about them. A testing accommodation is defined as 'any change to standardised testing conditions intended to make the test more fair and accessible for an individual or subgroup that does not change the construct being measured' (Educational Testing Service 2009). There are different possible accommodations, e.g. glossaries, dictionaries, bilingual tests, extra time, linguistic simplification etc. In the MulAE project, three possible accommodations were explored: bilingual tests (see Figure 1), read-aloud accommodations in the language of schooling, and read alouds in the home language of the students.

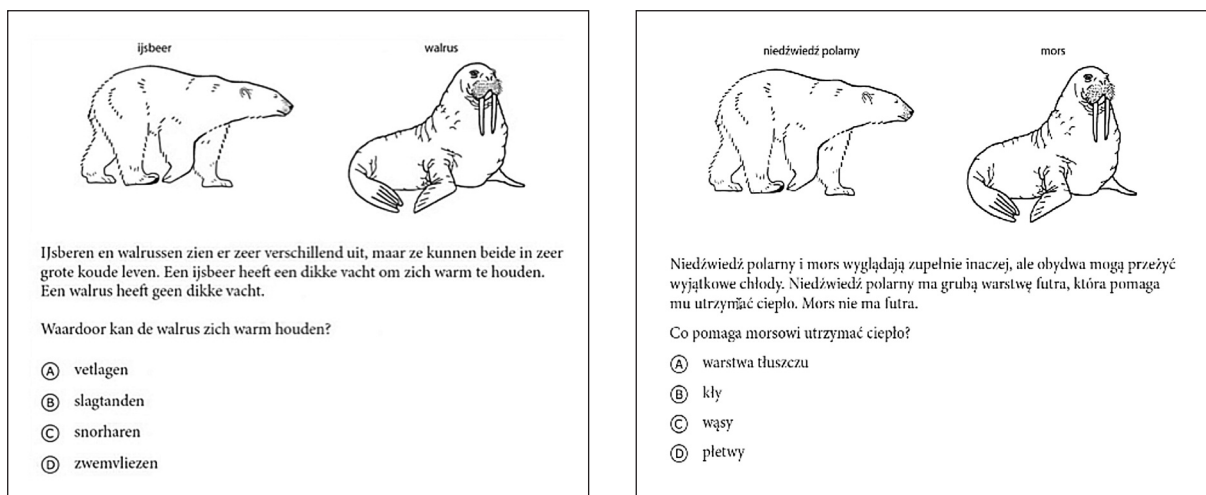


Figure 1: Example of a test item in the bilingual test (based on TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)-released science items 2011)

The MulAE project concluded that multilingual assessment has potential to be useful and helpful for many pupils, but that familiarity with the accommodations and multilingual learners' heterogeneity are two important factors to consider (De Backer, Van Avermaet and Slembrouck 2017). There is no 'quick and easy fix' for the issues concerned with multilingual assessment. There is a strong need for teachers and test designers to differentiate because populations of multilingual learners are heterogeneous and, while some accommodations may be more beneficial for some students, this won't be the case for others. This makes it difficult to draw generalising conclusions on the assignment of particular accommodations for particular user profiles (De Backer, Baele, Slembrouck and Van Avermaet 2019). The MulAE project also indicates that pupils' multilingual repertoires can be used as a scaffold, also in assessment, although the results equally urge us to be cautious, because for pupils with lower levels of proficiency in the L1, exploiting their multilingual repertoire in assessment seems not the best way to make the assessment more fair and valid. For pupils with limited proficiency in their L1 and in the language of schooling, the accommodations explored in the project were unsuccessful in making the assessment more valid and fairer. For pupils with low L1 proficiency who made limited use of the read-aloud accommodations in the L1, the accommodations turned out to be more of a distractor than an aid in demonstrating their competences on the content (De Backer, Slembrouck and Van Avermaet forthcoming) as illustrated in Figure 2. Possible explanations for this effect are that in some cases, read alouds might work as a distraction to the task at hand or might heighten confusion among pupils. It would be especially interesting for future research to explore why this punitive effect appears among students who used the read alouds only in a limited way, while for students who used the read alouds extensively this effect does not appear. When compared to pupils who did not use the read alouds at all or used them extensively, perhaps these students are more easily distracted. It is perhaps more difficult for them to remain focused for an extended period of time, or they are more easily overwhelmed by large amounts of information.



Figure 2: Illustration of how differential use of read-aloud accommodations in the pupils' L1 impacts the effectiveness of the accommodation (©Peam Burapa)

For each condition in the research project, pupils were interviewed about their testing experience, including their decisions (not) to make use of particular accommodations. Results indicate that pupils in general perceived the accommodations as helpful. The strategies they used depended on personal preferences, language proficiency and literacy in both languages, the content attended to and the complexity of the test item (De Backer, Baele et al 2019).

Implementing assessment accommodations without thoroughly considering the heterogeneity of pupil characteristics could in some cases come with a new and added risk of widening the achievement gap even further, making the assessment for some pupils less fair instead of increasing fairness for all test takers. Therefore, accommodations must be implemented and monitored carefully and managed well, and the adoption of one specific learner profile is a decision not to be taken lightly.

However, although assessment accommodations are one way to differentiate between students, the point of departure in the majority of the cases continues to be that of a standardised test; and in such a sociolinguistic universe, languages continue to be considered exclusively as separate and separable constructs. We will consider both points in what follows.

## A transition on two axes

The shaping of a learning environment that provides fair and valid assessments for multilingual learners, in our view, requires a transition on two axes, as represented in Figure 3.

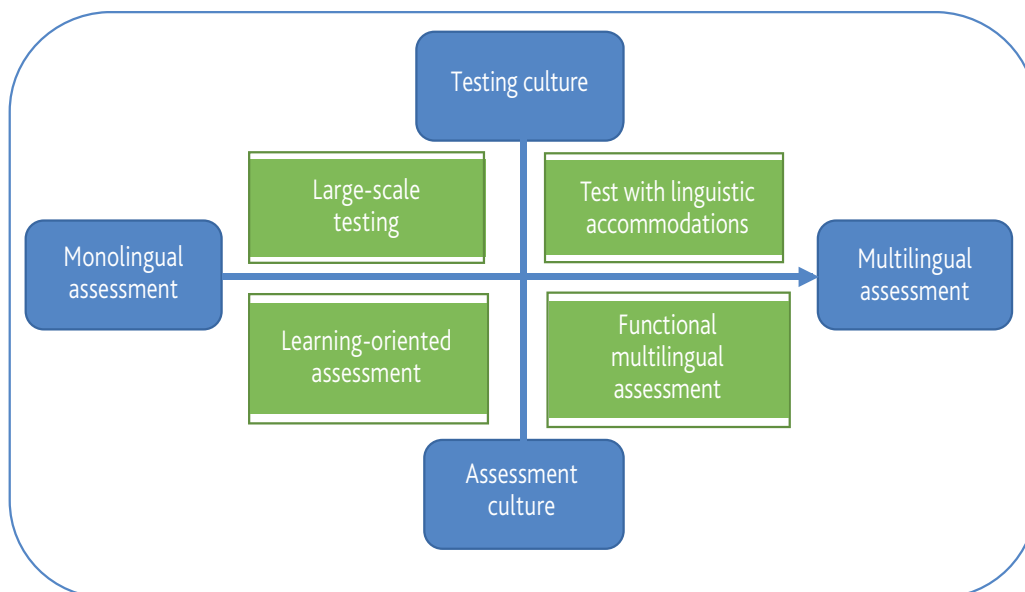


Figure 3: Functional multilingual assessment: sliding on two axes

### Towards an assessment culture

On the vertical axis, we suggest a shift from a testing culture towards an assessment culture (Gipps 1994). Here we note the paradigm shift that has been developing since the 1990s, implying a movement from an exclusive focus on psychometric properties of testing towards a broader model of educational assessment (Birenbaum 2016, Dierick and Dochy 2001, Gipps 1994, Ysenbaert, Van Avermaet and Van Houtte 2017). Different movements have operationalised this idea, such as the classroom-based assessment movement in the US, the Assessment Reform

Group's promotion of formative assessment or Assessment for Learning in the UK, and the learning-oriented approach to assessment developed by Cambridge Assessment English (Cambridge English 2019). The main idea is that we develop a systemic view in which both the macro level (the frame of educational goals and evaluating outcomes) and the micro level (individual learning interactions) are taken into account. All levels of assessment can contribute to better learning and a richer interpretation of learning outcomes (Jones and Saville 2016).

The purpose of 'assessment' is to provide feedback to students and to make instructional decisions (Ysenbaert et al 2017). From the interviews with learners reported in the MuLAE project we learned how much pupils are in need of more feedback (De Backer 2020). They spontaneously point out their desire to learn from their teacher what they can do to improve in their work. Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe, in their widely cited conceptual analysis of feedback, its potentially powerful impact on the learning achievement of pupils. They define feedback as a 'consequence of performance' (2007:81). Feedback can be information provided by a parent, a peer, a book, a teacher, a learner or any other kind of information. In their synthesis of over 50 meta-analyses, Hattie, Biggs and Purdie (1996) report the effect sizes of various influences on the achievement of pupils. The average effect size of feedback on the 12 meta-analyses that included feedback in classrooms was 0.79, which was in the top five to 10 highest influences. This indicates the potential power which feedback has on the learning of all pupils. Feedback is equally a very usable strategy when it comes to the assessment of multilingual pupils. By giving feedback to these learners when we assess them in a language they are not (yet) familiar with, they are more likely to be working in their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) proposed the use of ZPD to render a more complete picture of what a pupil can actually do. It is not unthinkable that when we assess pupils in a language they have not yet sufficiently mastered, we require them to perform outside of their ZPD. When we provide some support or scaffolds for multilingual pupils, it is more likely that they can work inside their ZPD. Providing them with the necessary information on where they are at in their learning process and what the asset of exploiting their multilingual repertoire is, is likely to increase the efficiency of their learning but also their motivation.

### Translanguaging

For multilingual learners, however, this shift alone is not enough. There needs to be a shift down a second axis: from assessing a learner in only the school language towards an assessment where a learner can use all of their multilingual repertoire to demonstrate their knowledge and competences. It is argued that assessment accommodations still consider languages as separate(d) constructs, while critical voices such as Shohamy (2006) and Heller (2007) state today's language labels and the way the category of a specific language is commonly understood are by and large an invention of the 19th century and a construct in support of a Eurocentric, geo-political ideal of 'one people, one state, one culture, one language' (see also Makoni and Pennycook 2007 and Cook and Wei 2016). Scholars such as Canagarajah (2006) call for a more fluid approach to our understanding of language use, in which meaning and boundary count as constructions, at times negotiated, and in which hybridity and lack of clear-cut boundaries are recognised. Such a recognition is both an aspect of contemporary (metropolitan, urban, migration-affected) sociolinguistic experiences and also part of how we need to rethink the histories of recognised languages worldwide (Slembrouck and Rosiers 2018). In such an approach, boundaries are often less strictly defined, and attention must be given to the specific dynamics of non-native language varieties, as well as established uses in contexts of migration which defy a straightforward categorisation in terms of recognised languages. Linguistic fluidity – however understood – has not yet been taken into account in research on assessment accommodations. It is also in this context that the expanding use and promotion of 'translanguaging' as a concept and as a model of practice has been gaining currency.

The mobilising appeal of the notion of 'translanguaging' has its origins in important sociolinguistic, pragmatic linguistic and language educational observations about the nature of contemporary (migration-affected, post-colonial, etc.) experiences of bi/multilingualism. However, how might one understand a concept of



'translanguaging' in a context of (multilingual) testing and assessment? While the idea(l) of 'translanguaging' has been flourishing almost to the point of becoming a panacea solution, researchers have been much less explicit about the conceptual and empirical limitations of the concept, especially also whether the necessary critique of binarism and linguistic discreteness justifies the abandonment of boundary and category altogether. Unless one succumbs to the atomism of the individual idiolect, it is hard to conceive of language repertoires in terms devoid of perceptual categories with boundaries and labels – however volatile and situation-specific experiences may be. We need to move beyond the two points where the critical exercise has taken us so far, i.e. we have noted the detrimental effects of a one-sidedly vertical understanding of languages as separated entities in standardised writing, educational institutions and national language use, and we have stressed the need to recognise the horizontal dimensions of porousness and fluidity in much language use on the ground. In a context of educational policy and practice, we need to bring together and 'mix' the horizontal and vertical understandings, and dare to open up the question of functionally relevant multilingual repertoires to the complexities of horizontally experienced and vertically defined practices, goals and outcomes (Heugh 2015). By going beyond the binaries, we must grant children the integrity of their specific multilingual repertoires; we should not deny the legitimacy of, and facilitate access to, 'Dutch C1' at the end of one of their educational trajectories. At the same time, it is naïve to assume that practices of naming languages and articulating boundaries is not a characteristic of the horizontal sociolinguistic experience. Nor should we restrict the use of the term 'translanguaging' to practices understood as 'mixed' or 'hybrid'.

### Functional multilingual learning

In the remainder of this article, we argue that *functional multilingual learning* (FML, Sierens and Van Avermaet 2014) – a pedagogical approach in which the multilingual repertoires of students are invoked to increase opportunities for learning in the classroom – holds promise to be applied in assessment for multilingual learners purposely directed towards higher proficiency in the language of schooling.

As Shohamy (2011:427) stated in her proposal for multilingual assessment, when assessment is 'used for diagnostic feedback, and learning purposes beyond the narrow view of testing as it is used in large-scale tests, then any multilingual pedagogical strategy can be used as an assessment procedure'. Shohamy's advocacy is to allow pupils to mix languages so that they can express the ideas which they are inhibited to express in one language. This is in line with what Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014) propose with their concept of FML. They describe this as what lies between the concept of raising language awareness on one side of the continuum and multilingual education on the other side. It is a pedagogical approach in which the multilingual repertoires of pupils are actively used to raise and enhance opportunities for learning. Linguistic repertoires form part of the capital that pupils bring to the classroom and use as a scaffold, as didactic capital for learning. This will not only support learners to master the language of schooling, but also the content of the instruction.

Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014) gave an example of a physics lesson in which the teacher gave some objects to groups of three pupils, along with some short texts in the language of schooling with pictures and drawings of levers, and a web page with online experiments. The pupils' assignment was to discover the function of the levers. Pupils in this class were allowed to speak any language or language variety they wanted. There was a group with three Turkish-speaking pupils and one of the team members did not understand all the words in the Dutch text the teacher gave them, so another group member translated some words for him. The teacher checked regularly to see if the pupils were making progress in their assignment and gave them feedback in Dutch. When pupil A explained something to pupil B in Turkish and then explained it in Dutch to the teacher, this appeared to strengthen the concepts the pupils gained in both Turkish and in Dutch. This was an example of FML because pupils learned about levers through different linguistic means and the acquisition of academic language proficiency in both Turkish and Dutch was being supported.

## Functional multilingual assessment

While the concept of FML is being explored more and more in recent research (e.g. Ramaut et al 2013, Rosiers 2016, Slembrouck and Rosiers 2018, Van Houtte et al 2016) as a pedagogical strategy, the link with assessment has not been made explicit. To address this challenge, let us take the above-discussed group work. Suppose that the teacher wants to assess this group work. There are many possible ways in which such an assessment could be given form. Here we present one example as a hypothetical sequel to the case described above. When the teacher gives the instruction for the assignment, they could also tell the pupils that they will be presenting their work to each other afterwards and that they will be evaluating themselves and their peers. Before starting, the teacher and the pupils could discuss what would be good criteria on which to base their evaluation of both the group work and their presentation. For example, the teachers and the pupils could come to an agreement on five criteria they find important, two with respect to working in a group, two with presentation skills, and one with correct content. After doing their group work as described above, the groups could present their work in front of the class. Suppose that in the presentation, one of the Turkish pupils cannot find the right word in Dutch but gets some help from another pupil. The pupil could then demonstrate to his classmates that he gained knowledge through the assignment on the subject – he knows the working of a lever – but just could not exploit all of the words in the language of schooling. This helps the pupils who are not yet as proficient in the language of schooling to step forward and dare to speak in front of the class. In this proposed 'experiment', enough space is to be left on the evaluation sheet for written feedback. The pupils could be allowed to use any language for this. This would of course mean that the teacher gives the pupils confidence to take their responsibility of giving feedback seriously.

## Conclusion

When we see learning and assessment as inseparable, the idea of learning-oriented assessment can be connected seamlessly to the concept of FML. So, when we shift on both axes – as shown in Figure 3 – we arrive at functional multilingual assessment. It was argued in this article that functional multilingual assessment holds potential to overcome some of the critical issues concerning the assessment of multilingual learners. Research on the assessment of multilingual learners has been focusing mainly on standardised tests with (linguistic) accommodations. The idea of functional multilingual assessment will be further explored in future research projects.

In order to be able to do so, however, we will need to broaden our scope of teacher assessment literacy. Assessment is an inherent part of the educational process and a powerful tool for both teachers and pupils to get more insight into the competences of the students. However, teachers are not always sufficiently aware of the potential strength of assessment. Moreover, the literacy of the teachers to make valid claims about pupils' competences is threatened when teachers are not sufficiently aware of the potential benefits and pitfalls of accommodations. In the explorative research in this project, it appeared that teachers do recognise the language barrier that multilingual students face but the idea is prevalent that it is not fair to attend to this unless pupils have a 'label'. Moreover, the prevailing idea is that differentiation is worth exploring in instruction, but not in assessment (De Backer, De Cooman, Slembrouck and Van Avermaet 2019). We need to address the concerns that teachers have about feasibility, fairness, comparability of test results and the importance of not lowering the educational level. We need to work on awareness-raising and enhance self-efficacy by validating research in practice in order to increase teacher assessment literacy.

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# The challenge of assessing plurilingual repertoires: The EVAL-IC project

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## Introduction

The promotion of multilingualism has long been a priority of European language policy (see Council of Europe 2018). However, plurilingualism is making slow inroads across various levels of the educational system and it is almost completely neglected in the field of assessment.

An innovative solution for plurilingual assessment has been developed in the area of intercomprehension (IC), a pluralist approach that promotes plurilingual and multicultural education as it adopts an integrated language teaching model, where different languages are considered simultaneously (Candelier et al 2007). The peculiarity of the IC is linked to the mode of plurilingual communication: those who participate in the communicative event understand the language of others and express themselves in the language they know. This is a common and often spontaneous practice for millions of speakers, especially of related languages.<sup>1</sup>

This practice can be seen as a key to plurilingualism (Escudé and Janin 2010:28); however, although IC to date is infrequently found in schools, it has gathered some institutional recognition in universities (see Bonvino and Jamet (Eds) 2016). With regard to the latter, numerous IC courses have been held, for example, at the Language Centre of the University of Roma Tre (Italy), which have seen the participation of hundreds of students from different degree courses. The University of Salamanca (Spain) also offers IC courses in two degree courses of the Faculty of Philology, recording great success among Erasmus students too.

In this article, we reflect on the viability of plurilingual assessment. We will start with a brief introduction on the notion of plurilingual competence and then outline the general guidelines for a plurilingual assessment.

Furthermore, the *Évaluation des compétences en intercompréhension* (EVAL-IC) project and its innovative test for plurilingual assessment of IC are presented. Lastly, we will analyse the comments and reflections of a sample of students who participated in the EVAL-IC test, showing the adherence of this test to the principles of learning-oriented assessment (Jones and Saville 2016).

## Defining and assessing plurilingual competence: The EVAL-IC project

The new Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2018:28) defines the competence of the plurilingual speaker as 'the ability to call flexibly upon an inter-related, uneven, plurilinguistic repertoire' to accomplish tasks, such as express oneself in one language and understand a person speaking a different one. From a similar perspective, Coste, Moore and Zarate (2009:5) describe plurilingual and pluricultural competence as a global and multiple competence made up of linguistic, cultural and identity aspects: they underline the potential links among languages, which cannot be considered separate entities.

1. However, communication is possible also between speakers of languages of different families by using a *bridge language*, that is a foreign language known to the speaker and belonging to another family of languages (Meissner, Meissner, Klein and Stegman 2004).

In order to describe plurilingual and pluricultural competence, a series of documents with different objectives and points of view have been elaborated: the CARAP (Candelier et al 2007)<sup>2</sup>; the MAGICC project<sup>3</sup>; the REFIC<sup>4</sup>; the EVAL-IC project (discussed below)<sup>5</sup>; and the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2018). These documents allow the identification of reference levels and descriptors which are the basis of the assessment.

The object of the plurilingual evaluation is a series of 'know-hows' that involve the activation of a plurilingual repertoire, allowing the language user to draw on 'available knowledge of all kinds from previous language learning in order to understand texts in genetically related languages (intercomprehension, e. g. between Romance, Slavic, Germanic languages)' (Lenz and Berthele 2010:303). Despite the interest in these skills in our increasingly multilingual society, many of these do not fall within a traditional framework of assessable skills. The innovative EVAL-IC project shows that a plurilingual assessment is possible.

## The EVAL-IC project and its plurilingual test

The EVAL-IC project was coordinated by Ollivier and co-coordinated by Bonvino and Capucho<sup>6</sup>. It proposes a system of assessment of plurilingual competences in IC, is aimed at an audience of university students, and intends to provide them with a certificate in IC. Within the project, an assessment instrument has been developed and tested with the aim of formally recognising the communicative competences acquired (not necessarily after a course) by the individuals, in relation to the IC among the five Romance languages of the project (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French and Romanian)<sup>7</sup>.

Starting from the description and the levels of IC competences, an assessment protocol has been elaborated. This protocol defines the relationships between the dimensions of plurilingual and pluricultural communication (linguistic, paraverbal and non-verbal, intercultural and pragmatic), the assessment criteria (availability, adequacy, extent), the observable indicators and the levels of IC. It resulted in the elaboration of an assessment scenario and of evaluation grids. The analysis of the scientific literature<sup>8</sup> allowed the authors to distinguish and define three IC competences and six levels of IC:

- a) Receptive IC<sup>9</sup>, which is the competence of comprehension (written and spoken) in several languages. It is essentially based on a transfer of knowledge and skills between languages.
- b) Interactive IC<sup>10</sup>, defined as a communicative process in which speakers express themselves in the language they prefer and understand the language of their interlocutors.
- c) Interproduction<sup>11</sup>, defined as a communicative process which allows speakers to be understood (in the language they prefer) by interlocutors who do not know or have little knowledge of the respective language. The speakers try to reduce possible problems of comprehension by adapting spoken production to the repertoires in contact.

This distinction is aimed at identifying observable competences and should not suggest a fragmented conception of competence in IC. On the contrary, in the EVAL-IC project, this competence is considered an integrated,

2. [carap.ecml.at](http://carap.ecml.at)

3. [unil.ch/magicc/home.html](http://unil.ch/magicc/home.html)

4. [miriadi.net/en/refic](http://miriadi.net/en/refic)

5. [www.evalic.eu](http://www.evalic.eu)

6. Christian Ollivier (Université de La Réunion), Elisabetta Bonvino (Università Roma Tre) and Filomena Capucho (Universidade Católica Portuguesa).

7. All products created within the framework of the EVAL-IC project are transferable to other language families.

8. See Ollivier, Capucho and Araújo (2019) and Bonvino, Cortés Velásquez and Fiorenza (2018) for further details.

9. See CARAP, MAGICC and REFIC.

10. See Capucho (2011), Degache (2009) and Araújo, de Carlo and Melo-Pfeifer (2014).

11. See Balboni (2009) and Capucho (2011).

global, plurilingual and communicative construct (Ollivier et al 2019). The various languages taken into consideration are not evaluated in isolation – rather, the aim is to provide an overall assessment of plurilingual repertoire management.

The test created by the EVAL-IC team consists of seven tasks (written and oral)<sup>12</sup> that require the activation of a plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire. The proposed activities are independent from each other, although linked by a scenario-based macro-situation (see Purpura 2016) allowing participants to experience real-life communicative situations in which they are required to deal with various Romance languages. The scenario requires the candidates to actively participate in an international conference on sustainable development, involving some European universities and held in five Romance languages, using the language of their choice (usually their L1). Candidates are evaluated according to the levels, indicators, criteria and evaluation grids produced within the project.<sup>13</sup>

## Participant reactions to the test

A short questionnaire was designed to ascertain the participants' evaluation of the test. It was completed by 58 students from the University of Roma Tre, all Italian speakers, on paper or on online without time limits.

In the following analysis we will consider the answers given by the students with regard to three items:

1. 'Briefly explain how you found the EVAL-IC test experience.'
2. 'Indicate with a score from 0 (none) to 5 (very much) your understanding of the single videos. Write a short comment below.'<sup>14</sup>
3. 'Indicate with a score from 0 (very easy) to 5 (very difficult) how difficult you found activity 3A'<sup>15</sup>. Write a short comment below.'

Firstly, the analysis aims to show the effects of the EVAL-IC test in terms of reflection on (a) the plurilingual test, (b) the aural task and the processes/strategies involved, (c) the languages of the participants' plurilingual repertoire (including the target languages), and (d) the IC approach. Secondly, the analysis aims also to highlight the learning orientation of this test, in line with the three principles of learning-oriented assessment (Carless 2007:59):

1. Assessment tasks as learning tasks.
2. Student involvement in assessment as self-evaluators.
3. Feedback as feedforward<sup>16</sup>.

A qualitative approach was adopted to capture the complexities of the phenomenon. Below is a summary and some significant extracts from the students' comments.

12. For a detailed description of the tasks, visit: [evalic.eu/productions/produits](http://evalic.eu/productions/produits).

13. For example, for written IC, the highest level refers to individuals who can: 'understand the global and detailed sense of a great diversity of types of written text, varying according to the communicative objective; leverage their personal resources and the potential of the IC to overcome difficulties in understanding; establish interlinguistic and intercultural links in a systematic and appropriate way; mobilise their in-depth knowledge of several (related) languages' (our translation of the original Italian version, available at [evalic.eu/productions/produits](http://evalic.eu/productions/produits)).

14. This refers to the listening task 3A, where candidates were asked to collect information by taking notes from a series of authentic videos in the five languages of the project.

15. See previous note.

16. As stated in Carless (2007:59): 'for assessment to promote learning, students need to receive appropriate feedback which they can use to 'feedforward' into future work. Feedback in itself may not promote learning, unless students engage with it and act upon it'.

### Comments about the plurilingual test

The overall response to the test was very positive. Although tiring for some, taking the test was highly appreciated and recommended by all participants, mainly because it was a challenge to prove their language proficiency for themselves.

The scenario-based approach was successful because it was anchored to the students' reality for various reasons: first of all, it allowed students to enrich their knowledge on the current topic of sustainable development (see Example 1a); many students considered the test useful for their career as students of languages and/or of didactics of modern languages, stating their interest for the dynamics of understanding and learning foreign languages (FLs) in a context of multilingualism (see Example 1b). Finally, some students appreciated the expendability of a certificate in a professional context. (Please note all comments from students are unedited to maintain authenticity.)

Example 1a: 'The experience was very interesting ... as it allowed me to test my language comprehension skills through a series of exercises on a contemporary and important topic'.

Example 1b: 'I found [it] useful and inherent to our course of studies (Languages and Cultural-Linguistic Mediation)'.

### Comments about oral IC processes and strategies

The results shown in Figure 1 indicate that more than half of the respondents (N = 39) found the test medium too difficult (values 3 and 4).

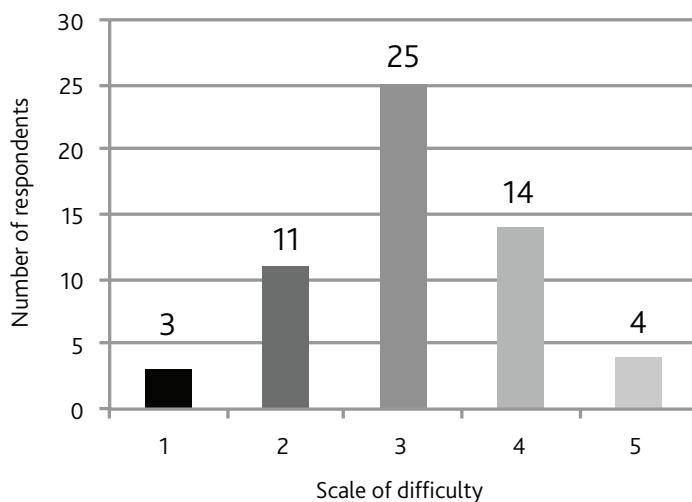


Figure 1: Level of perceived difficulty in completing aural task 3A (1 'very easy' to 5 'very difficult')

A common view amongst candidates was that listening comprehension requires a lot of concentration, even in one's own L1 (see Example 2a), and that it is more difficult if there is a complete lack of visual aids and previous knowledge on the subject, and if one cannot manage audio playback (for example, stopping it). Portuguese was often perceived as the most opaque (see Example 2b).

Example 2a: 'I had to concentrate so that I did not make the mistake of underestimating the importance of listening ... especially in Italian, which is my mother tongue'.

Example 2b: 'For Portuguese I found a higher level of difficulty than I expected knowing Spanish, but in the end, after playing the video several times, I understood the necessary information'.



The theme of the importance of being more aware of comprehension processes and strategies recurred throughout the dataset. Students reflected on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies they used to understand unknown languages, highlighting in particular that they often used inference, context information and transfer (see Example 2c). A further and very encouraging element is the fact that many students perceived a greater awareness of IC strategies (see example 2d), also confirming a gradual automation of sound recognition processes through exposure (see example 2e).

Example 2c: 'I could see the effectiveness of some strategies applied in a conscious way (text segmentation, expectancy grammar)'.

Example 2d: '[This test] not only enriches our knowledge but also makes us more aware of the skills and gaps we have'.

Example 2e: 'After the initial difficulties in understanding (especially for the Portuguese and Romanian videos) I started to perceive more and more information, almost as if my ear was getting used to them'.

### Comments about languages

Five broad themes emerged from the analysis. Firstly, the languages perceived as less distant from Italian are Spanish, followed by French, Portuguese and Romanian (see Figure 2). The second fact that emerged is the positive aspect of understanding something of new languages, such as Romanian and Portuguese (see Example 3a). This is also connected to an opening towards what is 'foreign' (languages, cultures). Thirdly, many students have expressed the desire to deepen their understanding of some languages, in particular Portuguese. The fourth theme concerns the support deriving from knowledge of other languages, including non-Romance languages (see Example 3b). Finally, participants expressed their awareness of the centrality of vocabulary and listening skills, often associated with the desire to deepen the latter.

Example 3a: 'The test was a great opportunity to come into contact with new languages (such as Portuguese and Romanian)'.

Example 3b: 'My language skills in English and German have been of great help'.



Figure 2: Self-assessed comprehension levels of the languages during activity 3A by the Italian candidates (N=57) (PT: Portuguese; ES: Spanish; FR: French; RO: Romanian; 1 'none' to 5 'very much')

## Comments about IC

A variety of perspectives were expressed in relation to the experience of IC. The most recurrent theme was the enthusiasm for having personally participated in a real-life experience that showed them the similarity between languages in a direct way (see Example 4a). Participants were positively surprised to have discovered the richness of their plurilingual and strategic repertoires, and to have been able to do what was required by reconstructing the global meaning of the texts even from a partial understanding (see Example 4b). Many students expressed their willingness to deepen the dynamics of IC, highlighting the importance of its spread also outside language classes (see Example 4c).

Example 4a: 'I found the activity interesting and ... enlightening as we were given the opportunity to observe and experience the intercomprehension by actively participating in it'.

Example 4b: 'It was surprising to be confronted with languages never studied before but still be able to understand the essential notions'.

Example 4c: 'Future teaching of multilingualism ... could be useful not only for language learners but also for all those who have to work in areas where intercomprehension is strictly necessary, such as medical, administrative and judicial fields'.

## Conclusions

The development and implementation of a plurilingual test is a real innovation in the field of language teaching. The test proposed in the EVAL-IC project allows the assessment of plurilingual competences through complex communicative sub-tasks, while working on several languages simultaneously.

The data presented confirm that this type of test is a useful assessment instrument not only for those involved in language assessment in multilingual contexts, but also for students taking part in the test. In this regard, the EVAL-IC test emphasises the learning aspects of assessment, embodying the learning-oriented assessment principles already mentioned above (Carless 2007, Jones and Saville 2016) in these terms:

### 1. Assessment tasks as learning tasks

Thanks to the scenario-based approach of the test, participants simulated a real-life situation in which they gathered and organised information from several languages of which they had various degrees of expertise, taking advantage of the richness of their plurilingual repertoire. We believe that the test 'mirror[s] real-world applications of the subject matter' (Carless 2007:59) for two reasons that emerged in the students' comments: first of all, it represents a possible situation for participants, so the learning aspect concerns acquiring information on sustainable development from multiple language sources, as can happen in real life. Secondly, most of the participants studied foreign language (FL) and/or FL teaching and therefore had an interest in this type of FL-related activity. For all of them, the test was also a tool to see how much they understood about languages never studied before and to reflect on their comprehension processes and strategies to 'set in motion' and possibly expand their plurilingual repertoire. In this regard, it is important to note that the test was carried out mainly with students of Romance languages and studying FL and/or FL teaching<sup>17</sup>; therefore further research is needed for other language groups and disciplines.

17. Outside Italy, the test has also been tested with students from other faculties, in various locations across Europe (for further information, see [evalic.eu/productions/publications](http://evalic.eu/productions/publications)).

## 2. Student involvement in assessment as self-evaluators

The EVAL-IC test stimulated students' self-reflection and self-assessment skills on various aspects: their experience of the plurilingual test, their IC skills in terms of repertoire composition (partial language competences, etc.), their comprehension and learning processes and strategies (and their evolution during the test), and the characteristics of the languages (not only the target languages) and their perceived distance.

In this regard, we believe that an IC assessment would also be useful for speakers of non-Romance languages, especially students with English in their repertoire (as L1 or L2/L3 etc.), for several reasons: first of all because they could realise the enormous lexical and morphosyntactic closeness of English with French and use English as a bridge language for a Romance language (Robert 2011:242). Moreover, this test stimulates reflection 'beyond' language families, leading participants to consider not only the specific characteristics of languages (already known or target languages), but also the functioning of languages as a system. Ultimately, it should be noted that the test structure itself could be adapted with materials of other language families (Germanic languages, etc.).

## 3. Feedback as feedforward

Students' self-assessments and the assessments that students will receive from teachers (in progress) are useful elements to promote work on the development of plurilingual skills (e.g. motivation towards IC practices; willingness to deepen the study of FL) and discussion on FL learning/teaching in multilingual contexts.

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