

The European Survey on Language Competences is a major initiative by the European Commission to support the development of language learning policies across Europe.

About the survey

The European Commission outlined a detailed strategic approach for the creation of a European Survey on Language Competences in 2005. The Survey is to provide participating countries with comparable data on foreign language competence and knowledge about good practice in language learning. It is also intended to be an indicator to measure progress towards the objectives of improving foreign language learning. SurveyLang, a group of eight expert organisations in the fields of language assessment, questionnaire design, sampling, translation processes, and psychometrics, was awarded the contract to carry out this survey in February 2008.

What will the survey do?

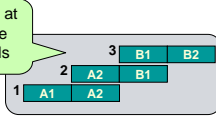
The survey will test the two most widely taught European languages (from English, French, German, Italian and Spanish) in each country from a representative sample of pupils in their final year of lower secondary education. The survey will assess students' proficiency in listening, reading and writing, on a sample of approximately 1,500 students per language tested, per country.

Schools will be sampled systematically to ensure the test is representative of the whole student body at the final year of lower secondary education or the second year of upper secondary education, for each country. In addition, students will complete a questionnaire about their language learning and other background factors. This will provide information on how demographic, social, economic and educational variables affect language proficiency across the member states.

Test results will be related to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Establishing links to the CEFR has been a key focus of recent work and research for the language testing members of SurveyLang.



Targeted testing



Because of the wide range of ability to be tested we needed a targeted approach where students take a test at one of three overlapping levels. That means identifying the approximate level of every sampled student. Students do in real time on computer, but to accommodate both paper-based and CB tests it was necessary to do a separate routing test in advance of the actual survey. Logistically quite complex! We shall study Field Trial results to see if there is an alternative process for allocating sampled students to levels.

Language	Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
English	A1-A2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
French	A1-A2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
German	A1-A2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Italian	A1-A2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Spanish	A1-A2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	B2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

For a survey the test tasks must be inserted in test forms (booklets) in a design which eliminates position effects. Each student sees only a subset of the total test material. For the ESLC the design is complicated by the targeted testing. The design shown is for Writing over the three levels. Booklets are in columns and tasks in rows. The test assembly tool constructs PB and CB tests to this design and allocates them to individual students according to the sample design.

Alignment across languages and to CEFR

Achieving comparability of standards across the five ESLC languages demands a coherent, collaborative working method. Test specifications and item writer guidelines are not sufficient on their own to ensure quality and comparability of standards. The approach developed for the ESLC also included:

A shared, collaborative **item development process**, including pretesting;

Frequent **face-to-face and web meetings**;

Cross-language vetting, i.e. mutual evaluation of tasks against an explicit checklist, with suggestions for improvements;

Task adaptation, i.e. rendering a listening or reading text, or a writing prompt, into another language in a way that preserves the authenticity of the task and enables similar functional skills to be tested.

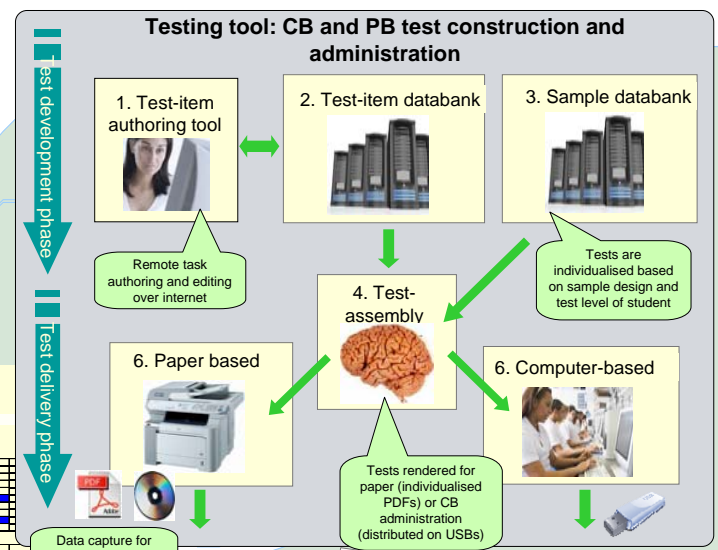
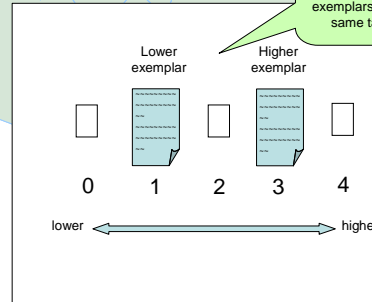
This approach ensures broad comparability of construct and test materials and also contributes evidence for more precise alignment of standards. For Writing, a single set of tasks were rendered into all five languages, which should enable rather direct alignment of standards across languages. For Reading and Listening a proportion of tasks were adapted. Pretest data suggest that a text adapted across languages tends to retain a similar overall level of difficulty at the task level. This constitutes a useful starting assumption which can be challenged by other quantitative or qualitative evidence.

Sixteen Can Do statements included in the Student Questionnaire may provide additional data supporting alignment of objectively-marked tests across languages.

The broad link to CEFR levels builds on the partners' experience of constructing exams at a range of CEFR levels. Final standard-setting to CEFR levels will use a range of approaches

Marking of Writing: a ranking approach

Each country is responsible for marking its own Writing scripts. To avoid systematic differences in severity an approach is adopted whereby markers simply judge the **ranking** of a script relative to one or more **exemplar scripts**. Exemplars have been selected for each of the 20 Writing tasks. A1-A2 tasks have a single exemplar, hence three possible rankings. They are marked on just two criteria: *Task fulfilment and Linguistic organisation/accuracy*. B1-B2 tasks have two exemplars, hence five possible rankings. They are marked on four criteria: *Task fulfilment, Communicative command, Discourse and Linguistic accuracy*.



2008	Launch date & country participation	Inception report	Appointment of National Research Coordinators
	Interim Report		
	Language test & Questionnaire development		
2009	Language test pretesting analysis, test construction	FIELD TRIAL	Analysis
	Analysis		
2010	Analysis	Analysis	Final report
	Analysis		
2011	Analysis	Analysis	Final report
	Analysis		
2012	Final report	Release of database	Release of database
	Release of database		

Who is SurveyLang?

Name	Expertise	Country	Website
Centre international d'études pédagogiques (CIEP)	Language testing (French)	France	www.ciep.fr
Gallup Europe	Sampling, computer-based software systems, translation	Belgium, Hungary	www.gallup-europe.be
Goethe-Institut	Language testing (German)	Germany	www.goethe.de
Instituto Cervantes	Language testing (Spanish)	Spain	www.cervantes.es
National Institute for Educational Measurement (Cito)	Analysis and questionnaires	The Netherlands	www.cito.nl
University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations	Language testing (English), Programme management and Field Operations	UK	www.cambridgeesol.org
Universidad de Salamanca	Language testing (Spanish)	Spain	www.usal.es
Università per Stranieri di Perugia	Language testing (Italian)	Italy	www.cvucl.it

PB familiarisation material with explanation in questionnaire language, test in target language

CB drag-and-drop matching task with rubric in target language, navigation in questionnaire language

Writing marked by ranking a script against two exemplars of the same task