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# Language tests for access, integration and citizenship: an outline for policymakers from the ALTE perspective

**Abstract:** This paper is presented on behalf of the Language and Migration Special Interest Group (LAMI SIG) of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). Our position paper aims to clarify the role of assessment in the context of migration. It focuses on the ethical use of assessments and test results. We contextualize this position by considering evidence of assessment requirements across Europe, such as language and knowledge-of-society tests, and our concerns over assessment use as a barrier to entry and integration.

**Résumé :** Cet article est présenté pour le compte du *Language and Migration Special Interest Group* (LAMI SIG / Groupe d'intérêt sur Langue et Migration) d'ALTE (*Association of Language Testers in Europe / Association des organismes certificateurs en Europe*). Dans notre document de fond, nous nous proposons de clarifier la place de l'évaluation dans le contexte de la migration. Se concentrant sur l'utilisation éthique des évaluations et des résultats des tests, il est contextualisé par l'analyse des preuves des exigences d'évaluation en Europe, tels que les tests de langue et de « connaissance de la société », ainsi que par nos préoccupations quant à l'utilisation de l'évaluation pour faire barrage à l'entrée et à l'intégration des migrants.

## 1 ALTE

The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) is an international non-governmental organisation with participatory status in the Council of Europe. It is an association of institutions within Europe, each of which produces examinations and certification for language learners. Each member provides examinations in the language which is spoken as a mother tongue in their own country or region. ALTE was formed in 1990, with eight founder members. There are now more than 30 full members, and two associate members, representing 26 lan-

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guages. ALTE's aims are to establish common levels of language proficiency in order to promote transnational recognition of certification in Europe, to establish common standards for all stages of the language testing process, and to exchange expertise in the field of language testing.

## 2 LAMI Publications for the CoE

The Language and Migration (LAMI) Special Interest Group within ALTE explores the use of tests in a political context, and advises the Council of Europe (via the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants, or LIAM, project) on issues of language exam content, purpose and quality. Its work involves collecting data on language exam requirements and knowledge-of-society tests across Europe, with reference to the following types and purposes of entry: initial entry, family reunion, employment, study, permanent residence, and citizenship.

The ongoing data collection by members of the LAMI group was done via questionnaires, and collated into tables and posters. It also resulted in the completion of a booklet, at the request of the Council of Europe. This booklet formed the basis of *Language tests for social cohesion and citizenship – an outline for policymakers* (Balch et al. 2008). A second edition of the booklet, now greatly expanded in terms of advice and content, was produced in 2016 (ALTE 2016), and its contents and ethos formed the core of this presentation at the symposium.

The presentation gave an overview of the seven main sections of the updated booklet (“Background”, “Formal entry requirements”, “Concepts in assessment”, “Levels and profiles”, “Deciding what to test”, “The test production cycle”, and “Conclusion”), which are explained in more detail in the booklet introduction, reproduced below. The aims of the updated booklet are to support policy makers, to make the complex area of language assessment accessible to a non-specialist audience, and to focus on practical advice and current information. Our recommendation for the future is that language policy should help to promote multilingualism and work towards the best outcome for all stakeholders.

## 3 Future collaboration

Moving forward, ALTE has an online edition of the booklet available on its website (<http://www.alte.org/resources>) and hopes to have it also available on the LIAM website, both versions of which can be regularly updated to reflect current

policy. ALTE, as part of its commitment to multilingualism, intends to translate the complete booklet into the languages of all its members. As a first step, the introduction of the booklet is included after this brief summary of the presentation, in English and French.

In addition to presenting the new booklet, the presentation contextualized the work of the LAMI group by outlining two collaborative projects, a multinational research project on the use of language by migrants in the workplace in Germany, Portugal, and Italy, and the development of a national test for migration purposes, which was the result of collaboration between two German ALTE members, namely the Goethe-Institut and telc.

In terms of upcoming work for the LAMI group, we plan to continue the political discussion, and contribute by supporting the Council of Europe in its development of a toolkit for volunteer teachers of refugees. We shall also continue to collect data on current assessment practices and policies, produce valid and reliable language exams, and develop exams specifically for migrants.

## References

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## Appendix

### **A: Introduction to the booklet *Language tests for access, integration and citizenship: An outline for policymakers***

This booklet is an expanded and detailed second edition of a previous publication on the use of assessment in the migration context. The aim of this booklet is to support policy makers by enabling them to make informed decisions in the area of language policy and language testing policy. The booklet presents an overview of key issues, concepts and processes in language testing and the relat-

ed fields of language learning and language competence, with particular reference to the context of migration. For ease of reference it is divided into sections.

The first section, “Background”, explains the involvement and relationship between the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), the Language Assessment for Migration and Integration (LAMI) Group and the Council of Europe (CoE). It discusses the assessment work carried out by ALTE and the LAMI Group, and in broad terms, how test results should be used, and for what purposes.

The second section, “Formal entry requirements”, gives an overview of the current situation across Europe in terms of different types of language requirements for the purposes of entry, residence and citizenship, and how these have changed over time. It describes tests which assess knowledge of society. It illustrates why different types of planning and policies are necessary for different types of migrant or different circumstances. It ends with a discussion of the importance of plurilingualism and the linguistic repertoire of the migrant.

This is followed by an overview of terms in “Concepts in assessment”, which highlights the fundamental importance of needs analysis. It includes a discussion of how good testing practice underpins test fairness, a glossary of common terms in assessment, and an overview of how the test validation process is used to provide evidence that tests are fit for purpose.

Section 4, “Levels and profiles”, outlines how policy makers and assessment professionals can work together to decide on the relevant level and skills profile to target for different migrant groups. It discusses issues of literacy and how migrants are likely to progress through different levels and profiles, and what factors may affect this.

Section 5, “Deciding what to test”, describes how a needs analysis can establish the real-life linguistic demands on migrants and inform what should be included in a valid test, and how these demands can be translated into the design of the test in terms of linguistic requirements and tasks. It discusses different types of assessment and tasks, and how to decide which are appropriate to different contexts and test takers.

Section 6, “The test production cycle”, presents an overview of the test production cycle, followed by more detailed information about each of the main stages, such as producing test specifications, item writing, pre-testing, exam administration, inclusion of candidates with special requirements, marking, monitoring, and conducting impact research.

The final section, “Conclusion”, acknowledges the complexity of assessing language use for the purposes of entry, residency, integration and citizenship, and the burden of responsibility placed on policy makers. It concludes with a summary of how policy makers and test providers can work together to shape

a language testing policy and assessment system that is valid, reliable, practical and fair.

## **B : Introduction (en français)**

Ce livret est la seconde édition, revue et augmentée, d'une publication relative à l'utilisation de l'évaluation dans un contexte d'immigration. L'objectif de ce livret est d'assister les décideurs institutionnels dans leurs prises de décision en matière de politiques langagières et des politiques d'évaluation en langue. Le livret présente une vue d'ensemble des problématiques, concepts et processus clés de l'évaluation en langue ainsi que des champs associés de l'apprentissage des langues et de la compétence langagière, en focalisant sur le contexte de l'immigration. Il est subdivisé en plusieurs parties.

La première partie, « Background », décrit les relations entre l'Association ALTE (Association des centres d'évaluation en langue en Europe, le *LAMI group* (groupe de travail sur l'évaluation en langue pour l'immigration et l'intégration) et le Conseil de l'Europe. Elle évoque le travail d'évaluation mené par ALTE et le LAMI group et, dans les grandes lignes, la façon dont les résultats aux tests devraient être utilisés et dans quel but.

La deuxième partie, « Formal entry requirements », donne une vue d'ensemble de la situation actuelle à travers l'Europe, en termes de types d'exigences langagières requises à des fins d'accès au territoire, de résidence et de citoyenneté, et de la manière dont ces dernières ont évolué dans le temps. Elle évoque également l'existence de tests de connaissance de la société. Elle illustre en quoi différents types d'organisation et de politiques sont nécessaires selon les différentes catégories de migrants et des circonstances de leur présence. Elle exprime enfin l'importance d'une prise en considération du plurilinguisme et du répertoire linguistique du migrant.

S'ensuit une vue d'ensemble des principales notions dans la partie « Concepts in assessment », qui met en évidence l'importance fondamentale d'une analyse des besoins. Elle met en évidence la manière dont les bonnes pratiques d'évaluation renforcent l'équité des tests, propose un glossaire des termes courants de l'évaluation et donne un aperçu de la façon dont le processus de validation des tests permet d'apporter des preuves de leur adéquation à l'usage prévu.

La partie 4, « Levels and profiles », souligne la façon dont les décideurs institutionnels et les professionnels de l'évaluation peuvent travailler de concert pour décider du niveau pertinent et du profil langagier cible pour différents groupes de migrants. Elle aborde les questions relatives à la littératie, la façon

dont les migrants sont susceptibles de progresser à travers les niveaux et les profils, et les facteurs susceptibles d'affecter cette progression.

La partie 5, « Deciding what to test », décrit comment une analyse des besoins permet d'établir des exigences linguistiques de la vie réelle pour les migrants, de renseigner sur ce qui devrait figurer dans un test valide, et comment ces exigences peuvent être transcrites dans l'élaboration du test en termes d'exigences linguistiques et de tâches. Elle présente différents types d'évaluations et de tâches en donnant des indications pour déterminer lesquels sont adaptés aux différents contextes et aux différents candidats.

La partie 6, « The test production cycle », présente une vue d'ensemble du cycle de production d'un test, puis des informations détaillées concernant chacune des principales étapes, comme la rédaction des spécifications du test, la conception d'items, le pré-testage, l'administration des tests, la prise en considération des candidats ayant des besoins particuliers, la notation, le monitoring et la conduite d'une recherche d'impact.

La dernière partie, « Conclusion », reconnaît la complexité de l'évaluation de la langue d'usage à des fins d'accès au territoire, de résidence, d'intégration et de citoyenneté, et la lourde responsabilité qui pèse sur les décideurs institutionnels. Elle conclut en rappelant comment les décideurs institutionnels et les concepteurs de tests peuvent travailler ensemble pour modeler une politique d'évaluation et un dispositif d'évaluation qui soit valide, fidèle, faisable et équitable.