

# The Manual – some benefits and challenges

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# The Manual offers

Procedures for

- test validation
- standard setting
- linking of tests to the CEFR

A lot of useful information on different aspects of validation

# The Manual/Reference supplement lacks

- A quantitative approach to linking content aspects of language examinations to the CEFR (see Kaftanjieva 2007)

# Main focus

Two areas which might be further explored:

- whether certain types of items/questions could be said to be "more suitable" for measuring language competence at specific CEFR levels
- how to ensure that our interpretation of CEFR levels are comparable to interpretations elsewhere

# Developing reading standards

- The item writers / standard setting judges are familiar with the CEFR levels (untrained assistants/teachers who start working with us receive training)
- Test specifications (description of the test & content analysis)
- Piloting of items
- Standard setting
  - test centred methods
  - examinee centred methods

# Standard setting methods

- Modified Angoff
- Contrasting group method
- Borderline method
- Beuk's method
- (Bookmark method)

# Large scale piloting

- Items with varying degrees of difficulty (e.g. A1 – B1)
- Students with different levels of competence (e.g. A1 – B1)

# Standard setting - problems encountered

- Judges have problems predicting item difficulty
- Judges do not agree when assigning items to Framework levels
- With examinee centred standard setting methods, we have to rely on the assessment of one judge (the teacher)
- Some items intended for one CEFR level are assigned to another level in standard setting

# Testing reading – easy questions

Questions are easy if:

- the texts are structured in a way which makes the correct answer easy to spot.
- the answer is located close to the beginning of the text.
- the same wording is used in the question and the text, making the correct answer easy to spot.
- the answers can be "lifted" (word for word) directly from the text.

# Testing reading – difficult questions

Questions are difficult if:

- candidates are required to draw inferences.
- there is a lot of information to consider.
- there is information competing for the reader's attention.
- the vocabulary in general or single words make the text/question/item difficult to understand.

# The Manual states:

- "It is essential to consider both the question of the level of the source text and the difficulty of the individual item(s) associated with it. A text does not have a "level". It is the competence of the test takers as demonstrated by their responses to the items that can be related to a CEF level. The most that can be said about a text is that it is suitable for inclusion in a test aimed at a particular level." (The Manual 5.5.2 p 84)

# So.....

- Test takers' competence may be assigned to a CEFR level.
- A text may be deemed "suitable" for testing a CEFR level.
- One must then ask: "What about the levels of the questions/items?" Could certain types of questions/items be more "suitable" for certain CEFR levels?

# Standard setting methods - speaking and writing

- Checking that criteria and tasks match the descriptions of the level tested
- Benchmarking

# On the one hand side...

- Several different examinations can thus be linked to each other through the common scale provided by the Common Reference Levels without any two examinations being claimed to be exact equivalences of each other. Each examination will tend to focus on different aspects – but the coverage of each can be profiled. Given profiling at a reasonable level of detail, it can be expected to be the case that, in the same way that no two learners at Level B2 are at Level B2 for the same reason, no two examinations at Level B2 would have identical profiles. This does not detract from the fact that both examinations could accurately be described as Level B2. (The Manual 2.3,p 20)

# On the other hand side

- To make linking to the CEF credible throughout Europe we must develop procedures such that a B1 for English in Sweden means the same thing as a B1 for French in Portugal. It is this aspect of comparability of CEF levels across instruction languages and target languages which makes it necessary to verify the standard-setting undertaken.  
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- Is the interpretation of the CEF levels [in one place] comparable to interpretations elsewhere? (The Manual 6.1 p 101)

# Problems encountered

- Different interpretations of CEFR level requirements within the Nordic countries

# C1

- “can write a clear, well-structured text of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.”

# Writing task, B2/C1

## Private schools

*More and more organizations, institutions and companies apply for permission to start private schools in Norway, at all levels. Many people fear that the private schools will weaken the public schools.*

## Task:

Present possible reasons why a lot of Norwegian parents want to send their children to private schools. Discuss how the authorities should relate to this matter.

About 350 words, 2 hours

# The Nordic Alte group's view:

- Following procedures in the Manual is not enough to ensure that "my B1 is your B1".
- Collaboration with colleagues from other institutions is necessary.