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THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING LANGUAGE EXAM AND ITS INFLUENCE OVER THE STATE CERTIFICATION EXAMINATIONS IN POLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Poland is a country with great outlooks in Europe and is prospering economically, what enhance foreigners to settle down there. The interest in learning Polish is also growing, more and more frequently foreigners want to certify their language level. The article deals with the procedure of language test preparation in detail to show the importance of the state certification in Poland. There is a wide range of different options, but also lack of Language for Specific Purposes test, what should be done in the nearest future. In the article two publications of ALTE association were analyzed and compared in order to show the complexity of preparation and the role of new bodies that should be taken into account before. In the end of the article, after analyzing all the general process of test preparation in the great part of the text, the special role of content and subject expert were shown. LSP test is a challenge to be met in the future. This proposition will meet the needs of foreigners, who come to Poland and want to work in the specific field.

Key words: certification, developing tests, ALTE, language for Specific Purposes.

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ПРОЦЕС СТВОРЕННЯ МОВНОГО ІСПИТУ І ЙОГО ВПЛИВ НА ДЕРЖАВНИЙ СЕРТИФІКАЦІЙНИЙ ЕКЗАМЕН З ПОЛЬСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ

У статті детально обговорено процедуру приготування мовного тесту. Польща є державою, котра динамічно розвивається, а економіка знаходиться у стадії розквіту, що сприяє приїзду іноземців. Зацікавлення вивченням польської мови також збіль-шується, велика кількість іноземців бажають підтвердити свій рівень польської за допомогою державного екзамену. Можна знайти багато мовних тестів, однак досі бракує тестів професійного спрямування. У статті послідовно викладено створення мовного тесту, а в кінці показано додаткові ролі, котрі потрібно створити для сертифікації мови професійного спрямування, що надалі є викликом для полоністичної глоттодидактики.

Ключові слова: сертифікація, створення тестів, тести професійного спрямування, ALTE (Європейська асоціація екзамена-ційних рад з іноземних мов).

Polish is becoming a language of increasing importance in European background. It is, among others, a consequence of booming economy and international relations. In European Commission's annual report at the very beginning we may read: "Labour market situation is the best in recent history; yet, getting more people to work would ease labour shortages" [5:5]. The cited fragment describes the situation in 2018, but in previous documents the economic position of Poland is good in comparison to other European countries. Bad economic situation, growing unemployment among young people and financial crisis is the current situation in some European Union's countries. It is the main factor that enhance foreigners to settle down in Poland, especially because there are many international companies, which invest their founds in Poland in particular. There are other reasons for choosing Poland as a destination country, for example discovering the country of origin of their ancestors, planning to study in Poland or binational marriages with Polish citizens [4].

The consequence of all factors mentioned in the previous paragraph is the growing interest in learning Polish language. Universities and private schools offer wide range of different courses, which are becoming more and more popular. It is worth mentioning that employers who hire foreign workers quite often provide them with lessons during or after work hours [3]. The current interest in learning Polish is also reflected in the number of candidates who accede the exam to obtain a certificate of proficiency in Polish as a foreign language. First certificate exams took place in 2004, this is also the year when Poland became a member country in European Union. If we have a look on statistics, the number of candidates is increasing year by year. The breakthrough year was 2012, because of the new law about the citizenship, where we can find the part about the obligation to have a certificate of proficiency in Polish as a foreign language at least in B1 level, in order to obtain the citizenship [7]. It has to be mentioned that in the moment of writing the cited article, the situation with levels was different than now. Before that just three of them were available: B1, B2, C2 (http://certyfikatpolski.pl/). Now we can find all levels from Common European Framework of References for Languages [6] published by Council of Europe. In Figure 1 levels of proficiency were pointed out in order to show how the division of language levels correspond with practice.
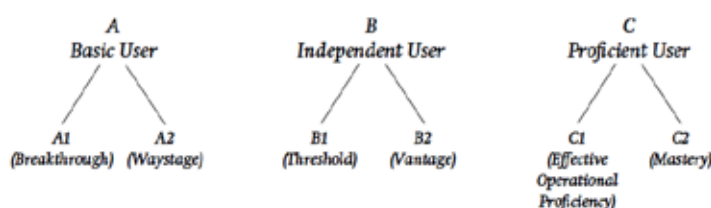

Figure 1: Broad levels of proficiency [6:23].

As written above, level B1 belongs to the second part of the grid and is named *Independent user*. Later in the document we can find specifications what are the requirements for each level in particular. According to the authors of the document, there are two most important features that distinguish *Treshold* level: "The first feature is the ability to maintain interaction and get across what you want to, in the range of context […]. The second feature is the ability to cope flexibly with problems in everyday life[…]" [6:34]. The level which is considered as the one to be the base of citizenship includes all the indicators for previous levels (A1, A2) and those which were cited before. It means that someone who has proved B1 level with the state certificate is ready to function in everyday life in Poland.

It was mentioned before that currently certificates in all levels described in CEFR are available. It includes also the special version dedicated and adapted for children, which has the same structure, but vary with topics. These ones are built on the texts with topics which are closer and more approachable for children. As it was proved, Polish certification is developing fast and more and more tests are available. However, there is lack of one type of certificate which is available in more powerful languages. We are talking about the Language for Specific Purposes test. In English, which nowadays is considered as lingua franca, there are available different kinds of LSP exams, for example English for Medical Purposes or English for Business Purposes. Such kind of a test differ from the standard one, because is dedicated to narrow target group with different needs.

Preparing LSP tests is different than standard ones, because the features of specific register of the language are more narrowed. The difference will be pointed out later, after describing all the steps of test preparation.
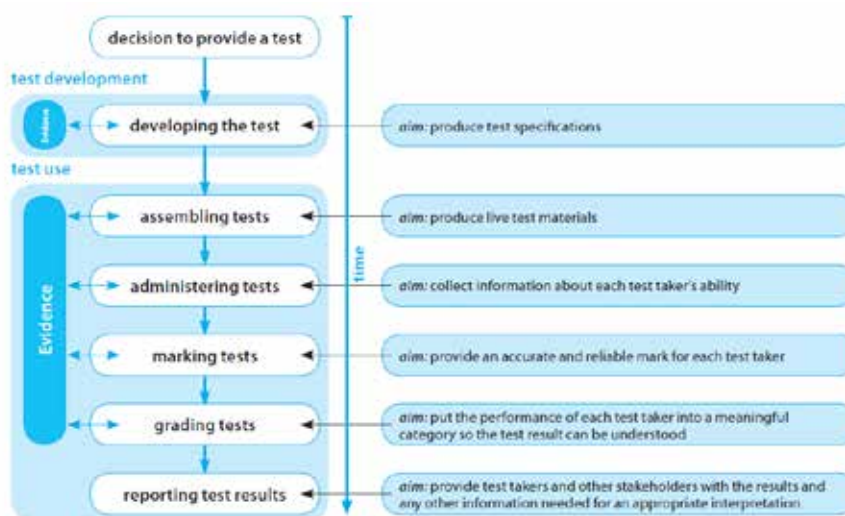

Figure 2. The basic testing cycle [1:18].

The first step of general test formation is **developing the test**. There are some 'substeps' here, which are planning, design, try out and informing stakeholders. **Planning**, so gathering possible information and deal with some basic questions about the number of possible test takers, their profile, the purpose and the real impact, how it should be administrated, who is responsible for each next part of preparation etc. The second step is **designing**, where the most important issue is to describe the overall structure and content. More specifically, test developers should set such issues as text types, topics, skills to be tested in particular, the criteria to assess production and reception tasks, test duration, the number of tasks for each section etc. While developing, is crucial to remember about the most important features of tests, which are validity, reliability and feasibility. What is validity then? "A test or assessment procedure can be said to have validity to the degree that it can be demonstrated that what is actually assessed (the construct) is what, in the context concerned, should be assessed, and that the information gained is an accurate representation of the proficiency of the candidate(s) concerned" [6:177]. Validity is not easy to obtain, because it happens, that the exam will not only test what was meant to test, but also another skills, what is an issue for developing specific purpose exam. Test developers should have in mind that the exam which they are preparing should reflect specific abilities which were set before. The other feature of the test is reliability, which is defined as "the extent to which the same rank order of candidates is replicated in two separate (real or stimulated) administrations of the same assessment" [6:55]. If the test will be conducted in two different groups and each of them will have similar results, that means that the test is reliable. The last feature is feasibility, which means the ability of the test taker to handle the rules, that is performance part. If the test construction will fulfill all mentioned features, it can be considered as good one from technical point of view [6].

 The step of developing the test is called **try out**, which is supposed to verify in practice the constructed test. It can be done in different ways, for example piloting, consulting colleagues or consulting other stakeholders. If the first option is taken into consideration, then the tested group should be similar to the final, target group. It should be done under similar test condition, such as limited time or the same procedures. This is recommended especially if it comes to oral exam, because it may help to make mark schemes and outline the most desired answers. The whole section ends with informing stakeholders, what means to announce test specifications and provide them with sample materials to let them check the structure of the future exam. It is an important step, because it concerns the external part, and let stakeholders familiarize with the structure and expected answers.

When the tests are developed, is time to **assembling** them. This stage contains producing materials, quality control and consulting tests. "The aim of the assembling tests stage is to provide live tests materials, made according to the test specifications and ready on time" (1: 26). This second step of preparation is also divided into some 'substeps' as producing materials, quality control and consulting tests. **Producing materials** is relatively time-consuming process, because it should be established exactly what kind of ma-

terials are required. This arrangements should be passed to item writers, who are supposed to meet the previously set deadline. Item writers have to collaborate with each other efficiently in order to avoid misunderstanding with the structure of the test. In this step the following things should be established: number of texts and tasks, mark scheme, test layout, copyrights of pictures used in tasks, numeration of pages etc. It is also about setting contracts and agreements for item writers and other people involved in this process.

Quality control is a step when all written tasks are verified. There is a working group of expert judgment who give a feedback to item writers after testing in practice all the test tasks in detail. "The very fist check should be that the materials conform to the test specifications and any other requirements set out when commissioned" [1:28-29]. As it was written in the cited fragment, the test is not only checked once, but more, preferably by different people. It would help to avoid such problems as the possibility to answer the question without reading or listening to the materials, finding more than one possible answer (if it is not written in instructions), unclear or badly constructed sentences. All the findings are openly discussed among the group and it turns to be constructive criticism, not to duplicate the same mistakes the next time. Some tasks may have potential, but need to be changed by the author himself. After this long procedure, there is time to constructing tests. It was said before that in previous step all the tasks were in preparation and in the end were accepted or rejected. All of them should meet quality standards before. It should be said now that between every part balance is required. For example, it cannot be too much similar task, they should vary if it comes to the topic and task construction. The level of difficulty is not only in reference to CEFR levels (ex. A1, B1, C2), but also whether the whole test becomes progressively difficult. This step serves also to do statistical analysis, which will lead to next steps of test preparation. Tests are printed out and send to external institutions, which are allowed to carry out examination.

When materials are delivered to proper institutions, starts new step, which is called **administering** the test. There is no more place for improving the test quality, which was supposed to be done before. Here all the organizational requirements should be provided. First of all, people who carry out exams should check if there are no negative factors, such as ambient noise, internal acoustics or other external factors. The important step is registering test takes in order to gather information about their profile. Apart from all the basic personal data, there is the time for test takers to report their disabilities, which may have influence to the final exam score. There are such disabilities as deafness or poor hearing, dyslexia, reduced mobility or deafness or poor hearing [1]. There are other optional pieces of information, as native language, age, educational background etc. Before starting the exam session it must be clearly explained how to behave, what in case someone must leave the room in meantime or what happens if someone will be caught out on cheating. When the exam finishes, tests and performance results must be send to the test providers.

The last steps are called **marking, grading and reporting** of results, so all assessment part.

Figure 3. The process of making, grading and reporting of results [1: 38].

Before starting this process some approach to marking should be set up by trained person. "Rater training aims at consistent and accurate marking. Standardization is the process of training rates to apply the intended standard" [1: 43]. This kind of language exams is called high-stake exam, what means that results will be officially recognized. This requires standardization and reference point in CEFR. Some kind of tasks does not have to be check by the person, but machine marking. It turns out to be useful when there is a big number of worksheets to be checked. The aim is to deliver the most objective and precise results to test takers as a feedback. It can be done by using simple answer or rather informative report.

The process of preparing tests is time-consuming and involve many people. Before the final live exam many steps should be considered and tasks checked few times. The process of assessment is also quite complex and require trained cadre. As it was said at the beginning, there is an increasing interest in certificates of proficiency in Polish as a foreign language, because of the reasons mentioned before. That is why the process was described here, to show the complexity. ALTE published also the supplement for the cited Manual, which is about preparing test for specific purposes. It is written that all the standard steps should be maintained, however "consult at the same time, the specific LSP test information" [2: 3]. Language for Specific Purposes vary from the standard version, but the process of preparing exams is quite similar. The most difficult part in preparing LSP tests is to draw the line between language knowledge and specific knowledge of the subject. That is why new roles are required: subject expert and content expert. Subject expert is a person who work with this particular environment and will deliver domain requirements. Content expert is most frequently the teacher who knows specific language needs in the workplace. In this kind of test it is important to remember about setting standards in assessment part before. Requirements should be explicitly specified in order to produce the test, which will have such features as validity and reliability. This is the next challenge and next step to be done in Polish certification system.

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