Law enforcement English language examination system (LforS), future dimensions

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Abstract

Aim: Introduction to the – unique at European level - law enforcement language examination system, comparing to other general and special language examination systems, accredited in Hungary. Presentation of the assessment descriptors, divided into language skills on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (KER). Possible roles of the law enforcement language examination system in different fields at national and international level.
Methodology: The study demonstrates the language examination system from a linguistic and law enforcement point of view, provides a conformity analysis of the content, validity, and measurement methods of the examination, and explores options for its future developments through needs assessment and analysis.
Findings: The law enforcement language examination also fills a gap in Europe and world-wide. The theme of the examination covers all the law enforcement – broadly defined – fields, the level system matches the descriptors of the Common European Framework as regards the four language skills. The measurements methods are in line with the Accreditation Manuals, either published by the Council of Europe or by the Accreditation Centre for Foreign Language Examinations of Educational Authority in Hungary. Due to an appropriate articulation with the language knowledge level classification accepted and applied in Europe and the monolingualism of the language examination, makes that particularly suitable for use in other countries as well.
Value: As in Hungary, only a limited number of the population as a whole – hence included law enforcement employees – can speak foreign languages compared

to other European countries, presence of a law enforcement language examination system, which is suitable for measuring the level of the language knowledge, standardisation and learning of law enforcement terms, and motivating to improve the language knowledge, might be of great importance. Cross-border crime, organized crime, migration, and other law enforcement related fields at international level are requiring the communication between law enforcement authorities at both bilateral and multilateral levels, with it being essential a common language, appropriate law enforcement language knowledge.

Keywords: law enforcement language, language testing, international cooperation, international communication

Introduction

As part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding, the European Union (EU) has made language learning an important priority. The EU considers multilingualism to be an important element of European competitiveness. A key objective of EU language policy is to ensure that all EU citizens learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue. Hungary can only participate effectively in law enforcement, economic, cultural and other international organisations if it has a sufficient number of foreign language speakers.

The most widely accepted tool for measuring language proficiency worldwide is the language examination. It is also important for Hungary to meet international and European standards in this area, i.e. to have a standardised language assessment tool that is known, recognised and accepted at least at European level.

The Council of Europe (2006) has developed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to promote coherence, transparency and consistency in the learning and teaching of modern languages and in the measurement of language proficiency. The CEFR was officially published in 2001 with the aim of providing a basis for the development of language curricula, textbooks, qualifications and examinations in European countries (URL1; Alderson, 2002).

In December 2004, the Council of Europe published the Level Alignment Methodology Guide (URL2) to facilitate the alignment of language examinations to the CEFR, which has been used by the Educational Authority Accreditation Centre for Foreign Languages (hereinafter: NYAK) in Hungary since 2006, and as a methodological basis for accreditation procedures and the development of language examination systems.

The CEFR provides a framework for six language proficiency levels. However, the Council of Europe explicitly recommends that any material on language teaching and learning should take into account national customs and traditions. The NYAK decided to continue to divide the examination systems into the three levels (basic, intermediate and advanced) used in Hungary, by mapping them to three of the six levels of the KER, thus creating the new level designations B1, B2 and C1, which are used today and are understood and recognised in Europe (Európai Parlament Belső Politikák Főigazgatósága, 2013).

The CEFR basically provides a description of the general language levels at six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), divided into four and five language skills per level. The four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension) are used in the so-called monolingual exams (tasks and task descriptions and instructions are given only in the target language), while the bilingual exams include a fifth skill, called *'mediation'*, which essentially refers to the ability to switch between communication in the mother tongue (source language) and in the foreign language (target language) (Bárdos, 2002).

In addition to general language examinations, there is also a strong demand for language examinations that include specialised language, which, in addition to general language knowledge, test the knowledge of specialised vocabulary and terminology related to the given profession to the extent expected at the given level. In Hungary, the first language examinations to appear were, understandably, economic, business and tourism-related, but later on, other specialised fields were also required to measure professional language skills, as globalisation and the increasing desire for international cooperation have made it essential in all fields to have foreign language skills and knowledge of the specialised language of the field in question (Dévény & Loch, 2005).

Thus, accredited language examination systems (URL3) related to a specific field (e.g. medical, legal, technical, military) gradually appeared on the language examination *'market'*, while no accredited language examination system for law enforcement officers was available in the country or even internationally.

The need to develop a law enforcement language exam

The International Training Centre (hereinafter: ITC) has been providing foreign language training since its foundation in 1999. As the institution also hosts several international law enforcement academies whose working language is a foreign language (mostly English), it soon became clear that, in addition to improving general language skills, there was a great need to develop specialised

law enforcement language skills. This is why the introduction of law enforcement subjects, particularly in English and German, has been introduced into the language teaching curricula.

To transform the curriculum in this way, it was necessary to have law enforcement-related foreign language teaching materials, especially a course book. After extensive research on the international and Hungarian market, it became clear that there is no textbook that meets all the necessary criteria, i.e. that is precisely adapted to the levels accredited in Hungary and to the levels of the CEFR, that is suitable for the development of the language level, that contains the grammatical elements required at the given level, and that provides a consistent, systematic framework for the compilation of a curriculum for a language module.

The ITC management then decided to compile and publish its own family of law enforcement language books. This was realised: three course books were created in this way. The course books created fit exactly into the three language levels accepted in Hungary, they are suitable for the acquisition of law enforcement language at the given level, in addition to the general language knowledge, and the use of the book at the chosen level during a training module enables the participants to develop their language competences in a clearly defined way, i.e. to *'level jump'*, and they cover each of the four language skills described in the CEFR and measured in the language examinations in an appropriate proportion.

Following the development of language teaching in this way, there was a clear need for a perfectly adapted proficiency or rather a level-leap measurement tool, closely linked to the subject matter of the training, both for students and for language teachers. The so-called internal exam or final exam has not proved to be sufficient or satisfactory in our *'paper-based'* society: what is needed is an exam that is accepted (accredited) in Hungary, that proves language level, that is accepted in all contexts (workplace, admission requirements, etc.) where a certain level of language proficiency is required or is an advantage, and that is adapted to the training subject matter and measures the knowledge actually acquired during the training.

For this reason, the ITC has decided to look for a partner to set up its own law enforcement language examination system. There had been a very close cooperation with the Origó Language Centre (hereinafter: ONYC) before (ITC has been the examination centre of ONYC since 2006). ONYC and its predecessors have been a recognised and widely accepted language examination centre in the Hungarian market for many decades, and have sufficient experience in the development and accreditation of language examinations and examination systems, which is why they were chosen to establish a common law enforcement language examination system, which was accredited by NYAK in 2018 as LforS (URL6).

Introduction to the LforS language examination system

The target group

People in law enforcement and public security – broadly defined – working in law enforcement, secondary school students, university students, people interested in law enforcement and legal terminology, people preparing for peace-keeping missions, applicants to international law enforcement academies.

Level classification of the exam

The development of the examination system was preceded by a needs analysis, which highlighted that the aim of the examination should be to measure the listening, speaking, writing and reading skills required for work in law enforcement and related fields.

  Oral and written skills can be measured separately at threshold level (B1; basic), medium level (B2; intermediate) and upper level (C1; advanced). All three levels are standardised and aligned to CEFR level descriptions.

The role of the CEFR in the development of the LforS language examination measurement and assessment system

The CEFR is not an assessment tool in itself, but rather a set of benchmarks to be used as a reference point for the language test developers, the task designers and the people involved in the assessment and evaluation (examiners, revisers). The CEFR can be used in three areas of language assessment and evaluation: the development of content requirements for the examination, the definition of assessment criteria and the description of proficiency levels.

  Chapter 4 of the CEFR can serve as a good basis for defining the content requirements of the exam: it provides details on the language activities, which can serve as a basis for the choice of the type of tasks for the exam, as it describes in detail what each activity entails and indicates the possible objectives of the language user in carrying out each activity (URL4). Chapter 7 (URL5), which describes the domains and contexts of language use, helps to define the linguistic topics, while the description of how and to what extent certain factors - cognitive, affective and linguistic - influence the difficulty of the tasks can serve as a basis for the design of the tasks.

The complex language exam is divided into two main parts: oral and written, which can be selected separately. The oral part measures speaking and listening comprehension, while the written part measures reading and writing.

Speaking ability is measured in front of a panel of two, through three types of tasks. The first task is a guided discussion, in which the candidate talks to the examiner on two topics chosen at random from a pre-selected list of topics. The guided interview is essentially a semi-structured interview, which has the advantage over the language test that the examiner – who is not a law enforcement professional but has a language teaching qualification and is a qualified examiner – is given the questions in advance, but the candidate has the flexibility to answer the questions according to their own professional and general knowledge. The examiners, as in the exam as a whole, do not assess professional knowledge but score on the so-called communicative value and vocabulary.

The second task in the speaking test is to express a topic on the basis of a picture of your choice, formally based on a visual stimulus. The picture is always on a law enforcement theme, but it measures the candidate's productive verbal skills in English, not their expertise, and assesses their ability to produce a well-structured, coherent text and to express their ideas in monologue form, appropriate to the level of the exam. In addition to the content, he or she can also express their relationship to what is being said and compare what they have seen with their own professional experience.

The third type of task is the situational dialogue, in which the candidate draws a situation with a law enforcement theme. These are law enforcement situations that can occur in everyday life, but unlike in the general language examination, the candidate is always the one taking action, the one acting, the one competent, the examiner is either a colleague or, in most cases, the *'person subject to measures*.

In the oral test, the candidate's performance is assessed during or shortly after the test on a separate score sheet, using scales that are adapted to the levels of the CEFR, and the scores are then compared, thus forming a consensus (not averaged) score, again using the scales.

The oral exam includes a listening test, although this takes place at a separate time and in a separate room from the speaking test. The candidate has to solve problems based on spoken text, which hears through a headset, and solves the problems on a test sheet. The first task in the listening test is a so-called eye-objective task, in which the candidate has to answer open-ended questions (to be completed) based on the text they hear. The text may be listened to twice, with

the use of a printed dictionary, either bilingual or monolingual, in the interval between the two listening sessions, but the use of thematic dictionaries is not allowed. In all cases, the spoken text must be monologue on a law enforcement theme, and it is an important requirement for the task to be designed as a spoken text.

The second listening task is an objective task in which the candidate has to decide whether a given statement is true, false or not included in the spoken text, which is usually a dialogue, and the statements written on the test sheet and presented in a table. The double listening and the use of a dictionary during the break between texts also apply.

The two texts should be different in content and subject matter within the law enforcement theme. As the exam is monolingual, the task descriptions, questions and statements in both tasks are in English, but it is important that the word and sentence structure of the tasks differ from the spoken text.

Types of questions for the written part of the LforS language exam

The written part of the monolingual language test measures two of the language skills defined in the CEFR: reading and writing. In addition to these two skills, it measures, of course, the correctness and use of language, i.e. the extent to which the candidate has a command of the law enforcement vocabulary appropriate to their level, and is able to apply grammatical structures and spelling rules without errors or mistakes that hinder comprehension, and in a way that is appropriate to their level.

The first task was called *Use of English*, which is a gap-fill task on a law enforcement topic, in which the candidate has to choose the missing words and phrases from three options. The test measures the candidate's lexical and grammatical knowledge in an objective way, but since the aim of modern language teaching and assessment is primarily to measure the development and level of communication skills, the maximum score for this task represents only a very small proportion of the total score for the written part.

As described in the *'Accreditation Manual'*, each of the skills defined in the CEFR must be assessed in the language test through at least two types of tasks, including reading (reading comprehension). The first type of task is an open question or note-taking. The questions are content-oriented, textually explicit questions based on an English text, with English language questions to be answered in English. The marking of this task is relatively subjective and therefore requires a high degree of care on the part of the task setter: the answer key must give the marker comprehensive guidance, key words that must be included in

the answer to the question, answers and lexical items that are not fully valid but may be worth a partial mark. Despite the best efforts of the teacher, the marker may have to accept a solution which is not in the answer key. Despite its relatively subjective nature, this type of task is the most suitable for measuring understanding of the written text.

The second task, which measures reading ability, is an objective task – to counterbalance the relative subjectivity inherent in the assessment of the first task – of filling in a gap in the text on the basis of the answers given. In a text in law enforcement terminology, ten terms or phrases are missing, the task setter gives the candidate 12 options, ten of which he must insert in the text and two of which he must omit, thus reducing the role of luck in the answer. Despite the fact that the *'cloze procedure'* has been the subject of heated debate among linguists since its inception as a tool for measuring foreign language reading skill (Darnell, 1968), and its reliability and validity have been the subject of much research and debate, its objectivity is beyond doubt and is one of the most important, if not the most important, requirements of an accredited language examination paper.

Writing skills are also measured with two types of tasks, as expected above: writing an e-mail or report based on given criteria (guided drafting) and expressing an opinion based on a given statement.

Since the target group for the law-enforcement language examination is quite heterogeneous, it cannot be expected that, in addition to an adequate level of English, there will also be a knowledge of the genre criteria for professional texts. For this reason, both the description of the task and the precise definition of the criteria will allow a valid and reliable assessment of the level of language proficiency of candidates from any field of law enforcement. One of the most important aspects of the task is the creation of a writing task on a law enforcement topic which does not require specific law enforcement knowledge on the part of the candidate.

The same applies to the second writing task, the expression of an opinion: the statement cannot be specific to a particular branch of law enforcement, but any candidate with the appropriate level of knowledge and basic general language skills should be able to solve the task to an acceptable level.

Content of the exam

The topics of the examination were taken from different areas of law enforcement – interpreted in a very broad way – by the authors of the examination specification, always keeping in mind the very heterogeneous target group, taking

care that none of the examination parts or tasks require special professional knowledge, skills or competence.

The choice of texts for the written and oral comprehension sections is not particularly difficult: texts on law enforcement issues, newspaper articles and reports written or spoken to a civilian audience in everyday life are perfectly suited to this purpose. In addition to the choice of texts, the task of the task-maker is to adapt the linguistic elements of the text to the linguistic level and the type of task.

The situation is more complicated when it comes to compiling a task bank of speaking skills. Most of the law enforcement images used for captioning are protected by copyright, but this issue was relatively easy to overcome with the help of the press departments of the various law enforcement agencies, who provided thousands of images free of charge, free of copyright.

The situation was even more difficult for the third type of speaking task, the *'situational'* task. Professionals from all areas of law enforcement were asked to describe situations and interactive situations in their field, especially dialogical situations in which the dialogue takes place in a foreign language with a foreigner. While it is a legitimate requirement for the language examination system that the bank of tasks should contain all the tasks in each subject area for each type of task, and in approximately the same number, not all subjects require the same degree of interaction with citizens. The imagination and creativity of the task designers was very much needed when compiling the situational task bank.

Preparation for the LforS language exam

Preparation for the LforS Law Enforcement Language Examination is supported by a range of study materials and textbooks. The ITC has developed English law enforcement language course books and exam preparation books at the same time as, and prior to, the development of the LforS language examination system. Each of the three course books prepares students for one level of the language examination: the first prepares students from beginner level to B1 (basic), the second from B1 to B2 (intermediate) and the third from B2 to C1 (advanced). In addition to the law enforcement topics, it also includes general language topics, making it an excellent tool not only for developing competence in the field of law enforcement, but also for learning the general language. The exam preparation booklet contains written and oral sample tests, exercises and a law enforcement glossary based on the exam material at all three levels.

Long term plans

For now, the LforS exam can only be taken twice a year in Budapest, at the ITC as the ONYC examination centre. If the number of candidates increases, it would be possible to take the exam several times a year and there might be interest in this possibility elsewhere in the country. So far, one examination centre in Nyíregyháza has indicated its intention to organise a law enforcement examination at its headquarters.

The monolingual nature of the exam makes it an excellent way to organise LforS exams in other countries, under licence, tailored to their needs. This is also our aim in the design of the exam and the development of the study materials: both the exam and the study materials are suitable for use in any country in Europe with the tried and tested training programme and examination system we have introduced.

Summary

Accredited in 2018 and proven successful since then, the English for Law Enforcement language examination system with its associated teaching materials would be an excellent tool that could be easily adapted for use in law enforcement education and higher education, in addition to adult education. Our aim is to promote the examination system in the educational departments of law enforcement agencies, in secondary schools that also teach law enforcement, and at the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the Ludovica University of Public Service. In our country, this is where we encounter the greatest difficulty: rather inflexible systems have developed in both education and public administration, including law enforcement, which are difficult to tolerate any changes.

We are convinced that a system of law enforcement language examinations and related language training could help to reform the language training in any field of law enforcement, which is cited as a deficiency in all international audits and in all national and European statistics.

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Online links in the article

URL1: *Közös Európai Referenciakeret 2002.* [Common European Framework of Reference 2002] http://www.nyak.hu/nyat/doc/ker_2002.asp

URL2: *Szintillesztési módszertani segédlet.* [Level fitting methodology guide.] https://nyak.oh.gov.hu/nyat/doc/modszertani_segedlet.pdf

URL3: *Magyarországon akkreditált nyelvvizsgarendszerek.* [Language examination systems accredited in Hungary.] https://nyak.oh.gov.hu/doc/akk_vizsgarendszer.asp

URL4: *Nyelvhasználat és nyelvhaszánló/nyelvtanuló.* [Language use and language user/learner.] https://nyak.oh.gov.hu/nyat/doc/KER_2002/4%20fejezet_2.pdf

URL5: *Feladatok és szerepük a nyelvtanításban.* [Tasks and their role in language teaching.] https://nyak.oh.gov.hu/nyat/doc/KER_2002/7%20fejezet_2.pdf

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