

**THE 2009 NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

**FISCHER INTERNATIONAL**

**MAY 8<sup>TH</sup> – 9<sup>TH</sup>, 2009**

***MULTILINGUIISM - EQUAL CHANCES FOR ALL  
EUROPEAN LANGUAGES***

Associate Professor Dr. Diana IONITA  
The University of Bucharest  
The Foreign Languages Center

Last spring, the rector of a prestigious European university paid a visit to our university.

Then, he shared with us some of the suggestions he makes when addressing his students. Thus, he recommends each and every student to imagine their CV before applying for a reliable job under the form of a pie-chart, each slice referring to one important aspect of their background: the major part of the pie-chart represents the BA diploma; another smaller slice shows his-/ her academic training in a foreign university, another slice represents work experience and a larger slice the European certification of language skills.

The conclusion is obvious: it is absolutely necessary for any European student to compare himself /herself with his/her peer, using common instruments of measurement.

One can easily notice that communication in a foreign language underlies this endeavour.

**Therefore European Language Certification becomes a must for any European citizen.**

**The main key areas of action underlying the European language Certification are:**

- The role languages play in developing mutual **understanding** in a multicultural society.
- How language skills **improve employability** and ensure a competitive edge for European businesses.
- What to do to encourage European citizens to **speak two languages** in addition to their mother tongue.
- How the **media and new technologies** can serve as a **bridge** between speakers of different languages.

**Multilinguism means nowadays at least 3 foreign languages spoken by any European citizen. The European policy promotes multilinguism not only in the educational system, but also in the economic sector, in legislation, in developing intercultural relationships.**

**ECL certification (European Consortium for the Certificate of Attainment in Modern Languages") offers such an instrument to any user within the European area.**

### **The Creator of the ECL Tests**

**After many years of professional preparatory work the Member States of the European Union established a consortium in 1992, with London as the centre. With the help of the ERASMUS and later the LINGUA programmes its task was to develop a uniform language test in the languages of the Member States of the European Union.**

**The professional responsibility of the "ECL" language tests –( ECL stands for "European Consortium for the Certificate of Attainment in Modern Languages") - was taken up by a prestigious university in the home country of each language that constructs the tests and evaluates the papers. On the basis of the uniform criteria established in the first phase of standardisation.**

**In 1999, the second stage of standardization took place , the HQ were transferred to pecs, and at present ECL exams can at present be taken in 16 languages which have equal chances, equal status and equal type of certification, throughout Europe.**

**In 2004, The University of Bucharest joined this Consortium as an equal partner and was awarded the copyright in designing , constructing and assessing the Romanian language tests.**

**As a result of the European multilingual policy, the Romanian language has now equal chances with the other major European languages.**

**The mission of ECL in Romania, which has the HQ in Sf Gheorghe, is to develop the ECL regional centers. The national board for ECL in Romania is represented by the Center Administrative Center in Sf gheorghe, by the University of Bucjharest, namely by the Foreign language Center that i coordinate and by the a representative of the Inspector's board in Bucharest.**

**At present, there are 35 such centeres placed throughout the Romanian map, underlying our policy of enabling canidates to apply for the ECL certification at the local level.**

**Language teaching institutions at universities, prestigious secondary schools and language schools are taking part in this process.**

**The activity of promoting ECL certification in Romania has included advertising campaingns at the level of universities, high-schools and gymnasiums from all regions, informative wrokshops for the alanguage teachers regarding the specificity of the ECL certificates, the examination techniques, a national project, in 2008, called – Multilinguism – an asset for Europe, as well as the organizing of an interschool contest , consisting in an essay written in English on a specific topic.**

### **Features of the Test 🏠**

**The content and overall validity of the tests have been established after extensive research by specialists and pilot tests on specific target groups. The ECLtests use the language of everyday discourse on practical, professional and personal topics at varying degrees of complexity.**

**For each of the 4 skills the maximum score is 25. Altogether 100 points can be obtained for the ECL language tests. The candidate is successful when he/she achieves an average of at least 60 % in each skill and overall.**

**The ECL certificates are issued in 2 languages, in English and in the language that has been evaluated.**

### **Tasks of the Test**

**The oral test takes place in front of a two-member board: the two candidates have a guided conversation about given topics followed by their own description and speech about a given picture or series of pictures. The oral exam takes place in the examination center. The assessment of the other three skills is performed in the country whose language has been required by the candidates.**

**The candidate is given two tasks for each of the four language skills, so he/she can prove throughout eight different topics that his or her knowledge corresponds to the requirements of the level that he/she has chosen.**

### **Comparability 🏠**

**Comparability is one of the important characteristics of the ECL tests. To ensure this, examinations as well as test materials and certificates are built on uniform principles. According to these uniform principles the parameters and criteria of evaluation and the types of tasks are the same in each language.**

### **Reliability**

**Each specialist member of the Consortium is responsible for test construction and marking in their own language. To ensure maximum reliability for the ECL tests, all items are pre-tested, test constructors and markers are trained before each session, and a system of double marking is used. A committee of specialists from each of the languages being examined monitors the standards of question-setting, marking and awarding to ensure equivalence between levels of achievement across the languages.**

### **ECL Exam Preparation**

**For ECL exam preparation it is advisable to use language books which concentrate on communicative skills. Mock exam papers are available on the website.**

## **Strengths**

**The specific advantages of the ECL certificates are as follows:**

- **They represent an open, practical system of language assessment;**
- **Offer the possibility of assessing language skills in 15 European languages**
- **They have unlimited validity**
- **Support the users' mobility within the entire European space**
- **They are acknowledged in the entire European space**
- **The tests are constructed according to the standards and descriptors recommended by the Common European Framework;**
- **They are part and whole of the package of documents necessary for any European citizen;**
- **They increase employability opportunities**
- **Each of the 4 skills is individually assessed**

**The specific features of this type of certification are as follows:**

1. **they use only 4 out of the 6 levels used in the Common European Framework, namely levels A2 to C1, since the first and the last levels ( A1 and C2) represent the extremes of the language competence.**

**Level 'A' can be achieved after about a 300-350 hour intense language course. The level 'B' tests basic knowledge and level 'C' intermediate knowledge of the foreign language. The fourth level 'D' requires a language proficiency close to that of native speakers.**

2. **they cover an area which exceeds that of Europe, since there are ECL branches in the USA as well as in Australia.**

**A parallel between ECL and ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) would show even better the usefulness of these two instruments. In fact we all know that at present any European citizen should be knowledgeable in three main areas: IT, foreign languages and his /her vocational domain.**

**The ECL certificates bridge the gap between multilingualism and plurilingualism. Theoretically speaking, the former refers to the speaker's ability to use everyday phrases under ordinary**

circumstances as a tourist or a visitor in the particular country; the latter refers to speaker's ability to grasp the cultural and social characteristics of that particular language and civilization.

In 2007 at the National conference of ECI in Romania, hosted by the University of Bucharest, The European Commissioner for multilingualism Leonard Orban was invited and, on that occasion, he outlined the necessity for any citizen to possess a European certification for at least three languages. He encouraged our efforts for expanding the ECL network, as well as the construction of unique Romanian tests for all candidates willing to evaluate their skills in this language.

By using the communicative-functional approach, the ECL tests transcend the language barriers, allowing their users to perform communicative tasks and activities in the most diverse contexts of social life.

We start from the hypothesis according to which the learner becomes an experienced and competent user.

The focus lies on the communicative approach: the use of standard language on familiar topics regarding family, work, environment, globalization, leisure activities, etc.

Thus, communication becomes part and whole of the tasks along which the candidates have to perform activities of interaction, reception, production, comprehension, mediation etc.

The beauty of this type of tests is that they use the same linguistic principles, focus on the same linguistic realities, they use similar audio-visual aids, have identical lengths, etc.

In fact, this is the very ingredient which confers the ECL tests consistency: they are homogenous, coherent, uniform.

The type of discourse, the structure of the discourse, the material conditions, the length of the texts, the time for response, all these are to be found in all types of tests, for each language.

The tests constructors accurately determine:

- the principles of selecting the 'authentic and pedagogical' materials, tuning them to different concrete learning situations;

- the selection criteria for adequate and relevant tasks that can ensure the candidate's maximum involvement and which allow for different interpretations and results;
- the tuning between the candidate's competence and performance when facing different tasks;

I think that it is worth mentioning that the Romanian tests constructors for the Consortium are also the assessors for all the candidates enlisted for the ECL exam sessions. For example, in for the session in April 2009, we assessed 69 papers from candidates, especially from Hungary and Romania.

The Common European Framework confers an equal unit of measurement. The scales offer information in constructing the marking system, whereas the descriptors contribute to establish the assessment criteria.

**Objectivity is the key word in language skill assessment.**

Even in the case of oral evaluation, the illustrative scales contain several major categories conferring objectivity here as well; Speaking strategies, precision, cooperation strategies, sociolinguistic competence, fluency, vocabulary input, coherence, vocabulary command, topic diversification.

Each package of tests contains standardized procedures, accurate system of marking, double assessment as well as a feedback type of analysis of the results after each session in order to check the validity and the flexibility of those tests.

As regards the Romanian language tests, our constructors, prestigious professors from the Faculty of Letters, were invited at Pecs, the present General Board of ECL for Europe, where they met the HQ coordinators for all languages, so that, after the first two exam sessions, there were no more discrepancies between them and the other tests for the other languages.

I come back to the European rector's words and I must confess that I had a similar message to my students at the academic year opening in autumn 2008.

Moreover, in 2008, the senate of Bucharest University passed two important rules: all those willing to be accepted in the doctoral school of our 17 faculties have to include a language certificate

with B2 level in their file, ECL certification being accepted together with other similar diplomas.

Secondly, in October 2008, it was established that all non-philological students of our university should get a language certification (B1 level is required) in order to take the graduation exam.

ECL policy is that of defending the national languages and of emphasizing the importance of European language certification in ensuring equal chances to all their users.

### Who Chooses the ECL exam 📌

Among those who decide to take an ECL exam are a growing number of students, researchers and representatives from different areas of professional life who want to work or continue their studies abroad.

At our Foreign Language Center, of the University of Bucharest, we have discovered that most of the candidates are citizens, of all ages and from different social strata, in important positions willing to coordinate European projects or programmes and who are supposed to introduce such a certification in their application file.

The higher the position these candidates have, the higher the level of language skill is required.

With the growing tendency towards international mobility, the ECL certificate, which is obtainable in most of the European languages, represents an important addition to their passport.

The European character of such certificates ensures any beneficiary an instrument in order to migrate, to adjust, to hold major positions, to coordinate projects or to obtain higher positions within the European Union and international institutions.

What differentiates the ECL certificate from the other types of certifications is that it can assess most European languages, not just one.

What differentiates the ECL certifications from the European Portfolio and Passport is that by having branches in Australia and the USA, it exceeds the European boundaries.



**The number of ECL exam centers is likely to grow every year, since two further actions are being taken nowadays:**

- **Romanian ECL network is represented at the Educational Fair, organised these days between May 7 May 10;**
- **According to the new strategy adopted by the ECL board in Romania we have in mind a project underlying the language teachers' participation in a training programme regarding the specificity of the ECL exams . The participants can become examiners in the ECL system of certification.**