

Designing or evaluating Vergleichsarbeiten

41. BAG Englisch an Gesamtschulen 30. April – 3. Mai 2003
Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung Hamburg
Protokoll zum Thema der Arbeitsgruppe
(Keith Morrow et al. s.u.)

(This is developed from the discussions of a working group at the 41st BAG meeting. KM)

1. Focus of Vergleichsarbeiten

- **should be** on what learners can **do** at this level.
- **should not be** on whether they have learnt **particular bits of language** which may have been taught in a particular class this year.

2. Content

- Should be **tests of the four skill areas**, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. (The Common European Framework also suggests “mediation” but this cannot be tested until / unless it forms a regular part of the teaching programme.) Note the inclusion of speaking and listening. Despite the obvious practical difficulties, a language assessment which ignores these is incomplete and distorted.
- Note the absence of specific grammar / vocabulary tests. The group felt that the best way to assess these is through the four skills tests.
- As well as individual tests in the four skill areas, the Vergleichsarbeit should include a brief (non-assessed) “Opening field of awareness” task to help the learners to engage with the topic(s) covered in the skills tests.

3. Listening / Reading Tests

- Texts
 - ❖ must deal with a topic which is interesting and meaningful to the learners
 - ❖ must be appropriate in level (length / “difficulty”) related to “Stufenprofile”
 - ❖ must be capable of supporting interesting / relevant tasks
- Tasks
 - ❖ Should involve a range of reading / listening skills appropriate to the level. See Common European framework descriptors for reading / listening in 3.4 Table 2 (page 26 / 27 English version).

See also the following Common European framework references:

- ❖ 4.4.2.1 In **aural reception (listening)** activities the language user as listener receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers. Listening activities include:
 - listening to public announcements (information, instructions, warnings, etc.);
 - listening to media (radio, TV, recordings, cinema);
 - listening as a member of a live audience (theatre, public meetings, public lectures, entertainments, etc.);
 - listening to overheard conversations, etc.

In each case the user may be listening:

- for gist;
- for specific information;
- for detailed understanding;
- for implications, etc.

Illustrative scales are provided for:

- Overall listening comprehension;
- Understanding interaction between native speakers;
- Listening as a member of a live audience;
- Listening to announcements and instructions;
- Listening to audio media and recordings.

4.4.2.2 In **visual reception (reading)** activities the user as reader receives and processes as input written texts produced by one or more writers. Examples of reading activities include:

- reading for general orientation;
- reading for information, e.g. using reference works;
- reading and following instructions;
- reading for pleasure.

The language user may read:

- for gist;
- for specific information;
- for detailed understanding;
- for implications, etc.

Illustrative scales are provided for:

- Overall reading comprehension;
- Reading correspondence;
- Reading for orientation;
- Reading for information and argument;
- Reading instructions.

- **Formats**

- ❖ It is important that formats do not unintentionally involve a mixture of skills. Asking students to provide written answers in English to listening / reading questions involves testing their writing as well.
- ❖ Formats with no language output include:
 - True / false / not in the text
 - Matching
 - Put into the right order
 - Add/draw things into the picture
- ❖ Traditional multiple choice questions are not recommended for teacher-produced tests because valid and reliable items are so difficult to create and need extensive pre-testing to ensure reliability.
- ❖ Ideas for possible formats can be found in the published sample materials for the Cambridge exams (see *Resources* section at the end).
- ❖ There was heated discussion in the BAG group about the value / desirability of using German instead of English in the questions/tasks which the students are asked to do. It was felt that there might be at least three advantages:
 - a) it would mean that more challenging / interesting tasks questions might be set
 - b) psychologically it would be more authentic for German-speaking students to deal with tasks / questions set in German.
 - c) it would mean that students could not derive their responses from keywords in the questions

- Differentiation
 - ❖ There are two main approaches to differentiation in the assessment of listening / reading:
 - a) differentiation by text in terms of its length or complexity
 - b) differentiation by task
 - ❖ In a) “weaker” students are presented with “simpler” texts. There are lots of problems in defining exactly what “simpler” means but it is likely to be a mixture of: length / vocabulary load / grammatical complexity / style / familiarity with the topic. In listening texts, there are in addition factors of: the number of speakers / the speed of delivery / the amount of “redundancy” (saying the same thing in different ways) and or repetition/ accent.
 - ❖ In b) students may be presented with questions / tasks that involve a range of different skills, e.g. (from the lists above).
The language user may read:
 - for gist;
 - for specific information;
 - for detailed understanding;
 - for implications, etc.
 - ❖ Recommended good practice from the BAG group is to use texts that are appropriate for the average learner in the group, but to include some questions (perhaps as an “extension task”) which require more sophisticated / detailed understanding of the text for the higher level students.

4. Writing tests

- Texts
 - ❖ The students must be asked to write about a topic which is interesting and meaningful to them.
 - ❖ The task should enable the student to write an authentic “text” from his / her personal point of view and/or a fictional creative “text”.
 - ❖ This topic should be related to a theme from either the listening or the reading test.
 - ❖ The task must involve writing a “text” to a definite addressee (i.e. for a definite audience) and must be set in an appropriate context.
 - ❖ There must be a definite “purpose” for the text.
 - ❖ Key content points to be included should be specified in order to assist reliable marking.

These points are illustrated in this sample task:

You receive a letter from an English-speaking friend. Here is part of the letter:

...and so I shall be staying in your town with my parents for about three months later in the year. They want to get a flat. Where do you think is a good place for us to live?

That's all for now. Write to me soon.

Best wishes

Chris

Write a letter to Chris. In your letter

- thank Chris for the letter
- ask for the exact dates
- give some information about a possible place to live
- say how you feel about Chris's visit

- ❖ As for reading / listening tasks, there was heated discussion in the BAG group about the value / desirability of using German instead of English to set this task. It was felt that there might be at least two advantages:
 - a) it would minimise the reading focus in a writing test,
 - b) it would mean that the students could not "lift" parts of the instructions and incorporate them directly into their letter (see the example above).
- Tasks
 - ❖ Should involve a range of writing skills appropriate to the level. See Common European framework descriptors for writing in 3.4 Table 2 (page 26 / 27 English version).
 - ❖ See also the following Common European framework references:
 - 4.4.1.2 In **written production (writing)** activities the language user as writer produces a written text which is received by a readership of one or more readers.

Examples of writing activities include:

- completing forms and questionnaires;
- writing articles for magazines, newspapers, newsletters, etc.;
- producing posters for display;
- writing reports, memoranda, etc.;
- making notes for future reference;
- taking down messages from dictation, etc.;
- creative and imaginative writing;
- writing personal or business letters, etc.

Illustrative scales are provided for:

- Overall written production;
- Creative writing;
- Reports and essays.

- Differentiation
 - ❖ There are two ways in which differentiation can influence tests of written performance:
 - a) by task / text type
 - b) by output
 - c) by the amount of help (e.g. half finished sentences, prompts, pictures)
 - ❖ In a) “weaker” students are given simpler tasks/texts which lead to the production of simpler text types (see the Common European Framework descriptors for writing in 3.4 Table 2 for examples).
 - ❖ In b) more advanced students are expected to produce “better” / “more sophisticated” texts in response to a given task. For example, it is easy to imagine how the letter-writing task set out above could be carried out at a relatively simple level or at a higher / more sophisticated level.
 - ❖ Recommended good practice from the BAG group is to set tasks which can be answered simply by weaker students but which allow scope for higher level students to answer them using more sophisticated language.
- Assessment

Assessment of written performance must be linked to descriptors. Simply counting up grammatical errors / mistakes gives a very simplistic and distorted view of the student’s performance.

The descriptors for overall written production from the Common European

	OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION
C2	<i>Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.</i>
C1	<i>Can write clear, well-structured texts 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.</i>
B2	<i>Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.</i>
B1	<i>Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.</i>
A2	<i>Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘because’.</i>
A1	<i>Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.</i>

Framework are reproduced here (See CEF 4.4.1.2). These need to be supplemented by more descriptors of qualitative aspects of written production similar to the descriptors of spoken production in CEF Table 3 (page 28 in the English version). The development of these descriptors in relation to *Vergleichsarbeiten* would be a valuable BAG project. Meanwhile some descriptors are available in the handbooks for the Cambridge examinations (see *Resources*).

5. Speaking tests

In the time available, it was not possible to develop guidelines for speaking tests for this context. This is an urgent priority. However, the following were noted in the Common European framework:

- ❖ The descriptors in the Common Scale of Reference (Table 2) page 26 in the English version for Spoken interaction and Spoken production
- ❖ The descriptors of qualitative aspects of spoken production in CEF Table 3 (page 28 in the English version).
- ❖ The specification of oral activity types

4.4.1.1 In **oral production (speaking)** activities the language user produces an oral text which is received by an audience of one or more listeners.

Examples of speaking activities include:

- public address (information, instructions, etc.)
- addressing audiences (speeches at public meetings, university lectures, sermons, entertainment, sports commentaries, sales presentations, etc.).

They may involve, for example:

- reading a written text aloud;
- speaking from notes, or from a written text or visual aids (diagrams, pictures, charts, etc.);
- acting out a rehearsed role;
- speaking spontaneously;
- singing.

❖ The illustrative scales

Illustrative scales are provided for:

- Overall spoken production
- Sustained monologue: describing experience
- Sustained monologue: putting a case (e.g. in debate)
- Public announcements
- Addressing audiences

	OVERALL ORAL PRODUCTION
C2	<i>Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.</i>
C1	<i>Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</i>
B2	<i>Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.</i>
	<i>Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.</i>
B1	<i>Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.</i>
A2	<i>Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.</i>
A1	<i>Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.</i>

Some possible formats for oral tests are contained in the handbooks for the Cambridge examinations. See *Resources* below.

6. Resources

The Framework

Europarat 2001. Gemeinsamer europäischer Referenzrahmen für Sprachen. Lernen – Lehren – Beurteilen. München u.a.: Langenscheidt. (Englische Fassung: Council of Europe 2001. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. (Strasbourg 1996), Cambridge University Press.

The handbooks for the different Cambridge examinations contain specifications, sample papers, and mark schemes. There are five exams in the “main suite”:

KET (Key English test) (CEF A2)

PET (Preliminary English Test)

FCE (First Certificate in English)

CAE (Certificate in Advanced English)

CPE (Certificate of proficiency in English) (CEF C1/2)

The URL is <http://www.cambridge-efl.org/support/downloads/index.cfm>

Zu Stufenprofilen:

Hans-Eberhard Piepho: *Stufenprofile als verbindliche Etappen erfolgreichen fremdsprachlichen Wachstums* in: Ch. Edelhoff (Hrsg.) 2001. *Neue Wege im Fremdsprachenunterricht*, Hannover (Schroedel = Reihe Perspektiven)

Nic Underhill: *Testing Spoken Language. A handbook of oral testing techniques*. Cambridge 1995 (9)

Christoph Edelhoff (ed.) et al.: *Notting Hill Gate. Lehrwerk für den Englischunterricht. Teacher's Manual 5A/B, 6A/B*, Frankfurt am Main 1998ff.

Keith Morrow, Norwich

And group: Dr. Christof Arnold, Otfried Börner, Thomas Döscher, Dr. Dieter Krohn, Colin Oakley, Sanja Wagner.