



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament d'Ensenyament

The assessment of speaking and the CEFR

Neus Figueras

The **action-oriented approach** to language use proposed in the **CEFR** (2001) reflected, to a considerable extent, the views of **spoken discourse** analysts, which described spoken language as a picture of “dynamism, fluidity, variability, mixing and negotiation” (McCarthy:1998). However, and despite the obvious impact of the **CEFR** in language policies after its publication, the **changes in the teaching, the learning and the assessment of the spoken language** are yet to be documented. This session will **revise and problematise** issues that may not yet have been addressed in the field of teaching and assessing speaking, and will explore possible ways of doing so.

The widespread movement to establish **educational standards** has led to a remarkable increase in efforts to **evaluate learner performance** through various types of objective testing procedures. At **universities**, it is the **CEFR** that has primarily set new standards in language teaching. In this context, language teachers are being increasingly confronted with the task of testing language accomplishments.

The 3rd Bremen Symposium 2011 will respond to the demand for information, dialogue and exchange on these issues. The symposium will be concerned with all aspects surrounding the central question of **which areas of language competence can be measured by which procedures** (as put into practice in language classrooms), as well as **which areas of language competence can be related to self-imposed or predetermined standards**.

- Language competence
- Learner performance

CEFR

Standards

University (context)

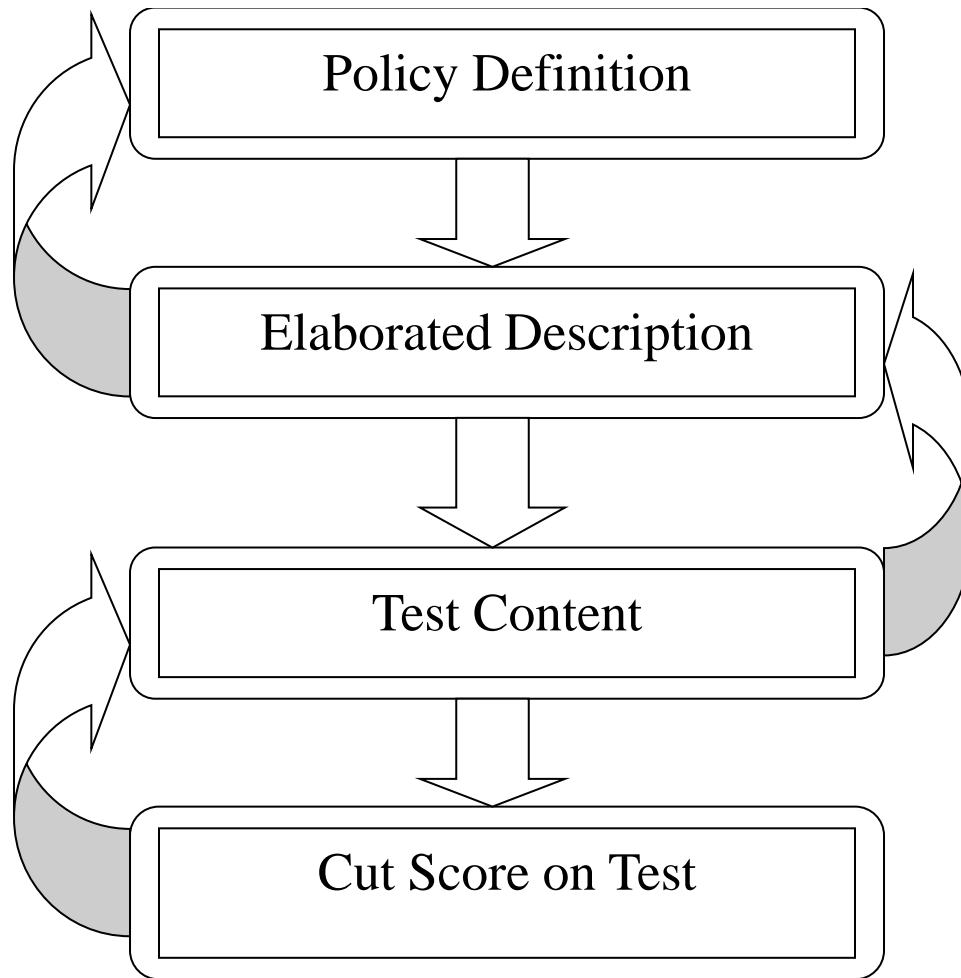
- Assessment constructs
- Assessment methods



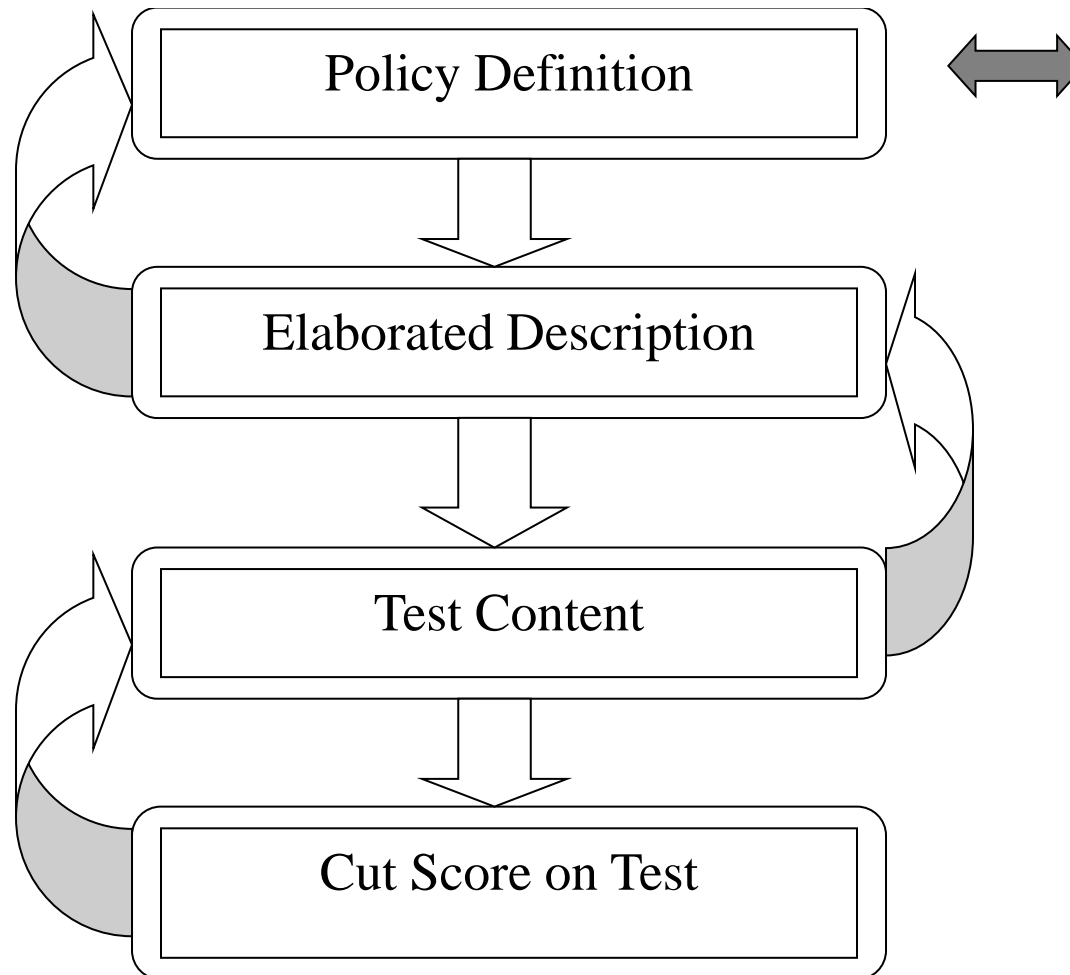
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Language assessment (speaking) and the CEFR, ten years later.

Neus Figueras



Reckase 2008



Reckase 2008

Revisiting issues

- The nature of speaking*
- Teaching and learning speaking
- Assessing speaking
- Standards and cutscores

What is speaking?

From Austin (1955) ...

To say something is in the full normal sense to “do” something,

To Bachman (1990) ...

language competence (organisational, pragmatic)

strategic competence (assessment, planning, execution)

psychophysiological mechanisms

To the CEFR (2001)...

views users and learners of a language primarily as “social agents”, i.e. members of society who have tasks to accomplish (not exclusively target-related) in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action.

The CEFR action oriented approach

4.1. Context of use

4.2. Communication themes

4.3. Communicative tasks and purposes

4.4. Communicative language activities and strategies

4.5. Communicative language processes

4.6. Texts

Oral production

Sustained monologue
Public announcements
Addressing audiences

Oral interaction

Understanding a native speaker interlocutor
Conversation
Informal discussion
Formal discussion and meetings
Goal-oriented cooperation
Transactions to obtain goods and services
Information exchange
Interviewing and being interviewed

Interaction strategies

Turntaking
Co-operating
Asking for clarification

Production strategies

Planning
Compensating
Monitoring and repair

Mediation*

No illustrative scales are yet available

Teaching and learning speaking

(Speaking) is the vehicle par excellence of social solidarity, of social ranking, of professional advancement and of business. It is also a medium through which much language is learnt, and which for many is particularly conducive for learning. Perhaps, then, the teaching of speaking merits more thought.

Bygate, 1987

.. And the car driver analogy:

*The job we do when we speak is similar: we do not merely know how to assemble sentences in the abstract: we have to produce them and adapt them to the circumstances. This means **making decisions rapidly, implementing them smoothly, and adjusting our conversation as unexpected problems appear in our path.***

*It is the feeling that things are still out of kilter with regard to our ambitions to teach “real language”, “language for communication” and “spoken skills” on the one hand, and **our readiness** (or otherwise) **to accept revised descriptions of target languages based on what their speakers actually say** on the other hand*

McCarthy, 1998

McCarthy's proposal

“What should and can be taught in the spoken language”
(1988:2):

The three I's

Illustration

Interaction

Induction

Tensions



Assessment specifications

(Luoma, 2004)

Construct specification

Task specification

Assessment specification

- Assessment of learning
- Assessment as learning
- Assessment for learning

(Assessment Reform Group, 2002)

WHAT, WHY, HOW

- Assessment as learning
- Assessment as learning
- Assessment for learning

(Assessment Reform Group, 2002)

Effective test development

(Downing and Haladyna 2006)

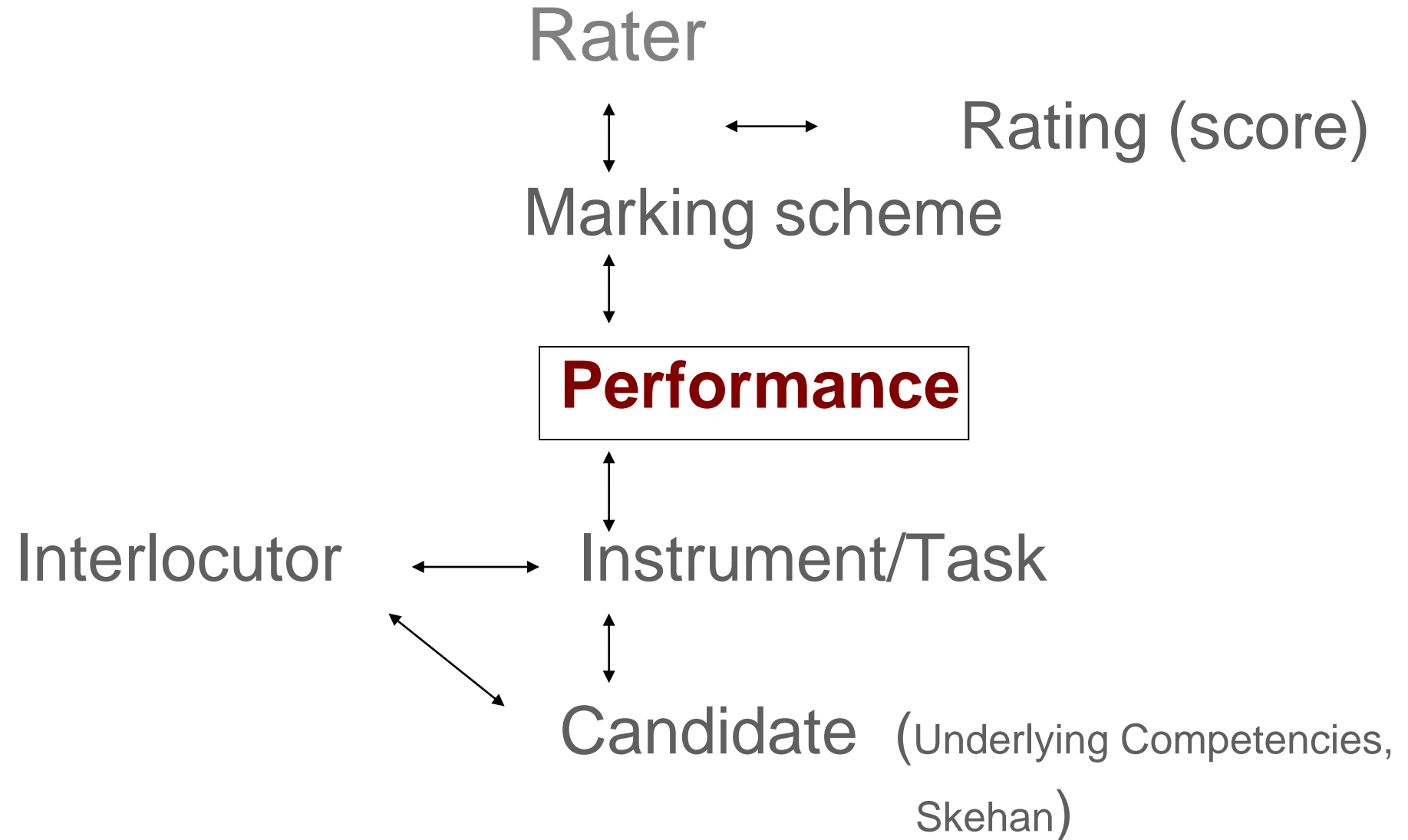
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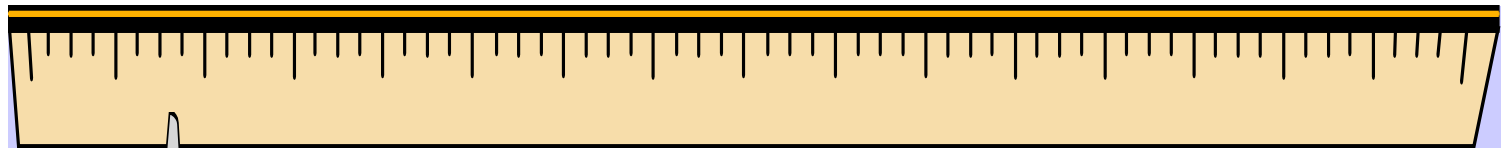
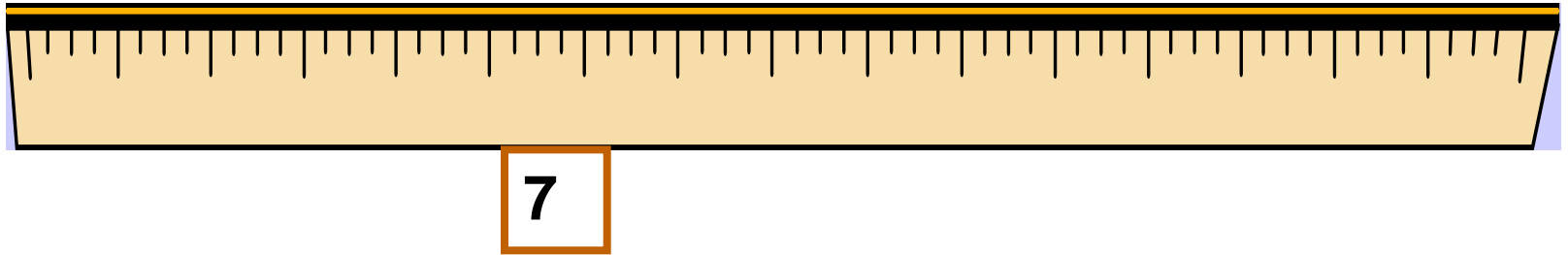
1. Overall plan
2. Content definition
3. Test specifications
4. Item development
5. Test design and assembly
6. Test production
7. Test administration
8. Scoring test responses
9. Passing scores
10. Reporting test results
11. Item banking
12. Test technical report



McNamara's Model 1996



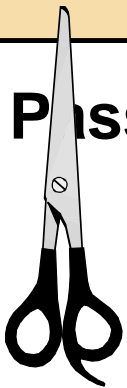
- A **score** is a number or a letter that represents how well an examinee performs along a continuum.
- A **standard** is a statement about whether an examination performance is good enough for a particular purpose.
 - The special score that serves as the boundary between passing and failing
 - The numerical answer to the question “How much is enough?”

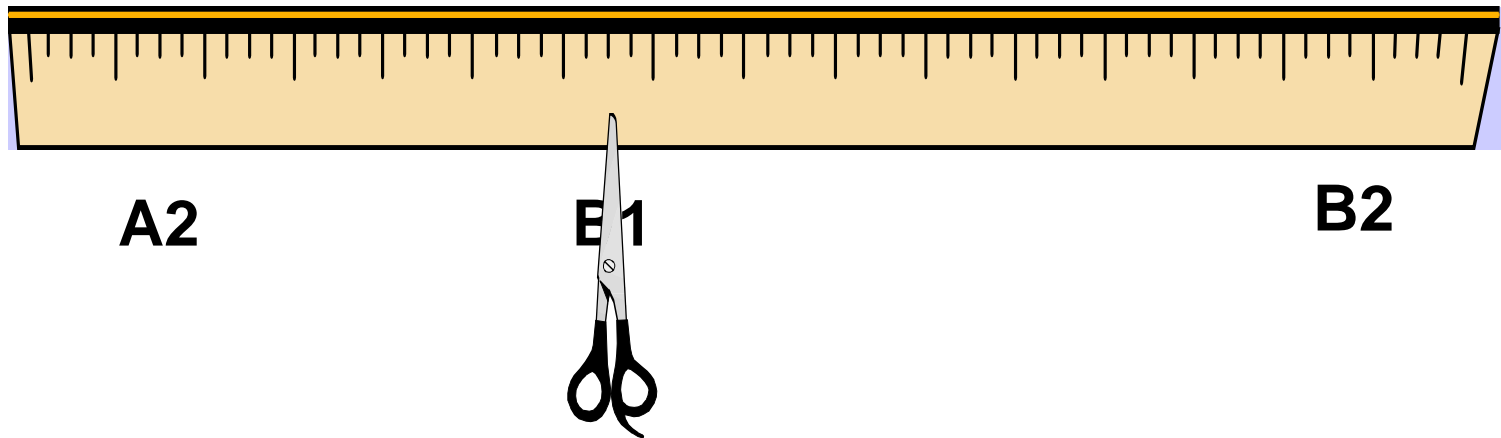


Pass

Good

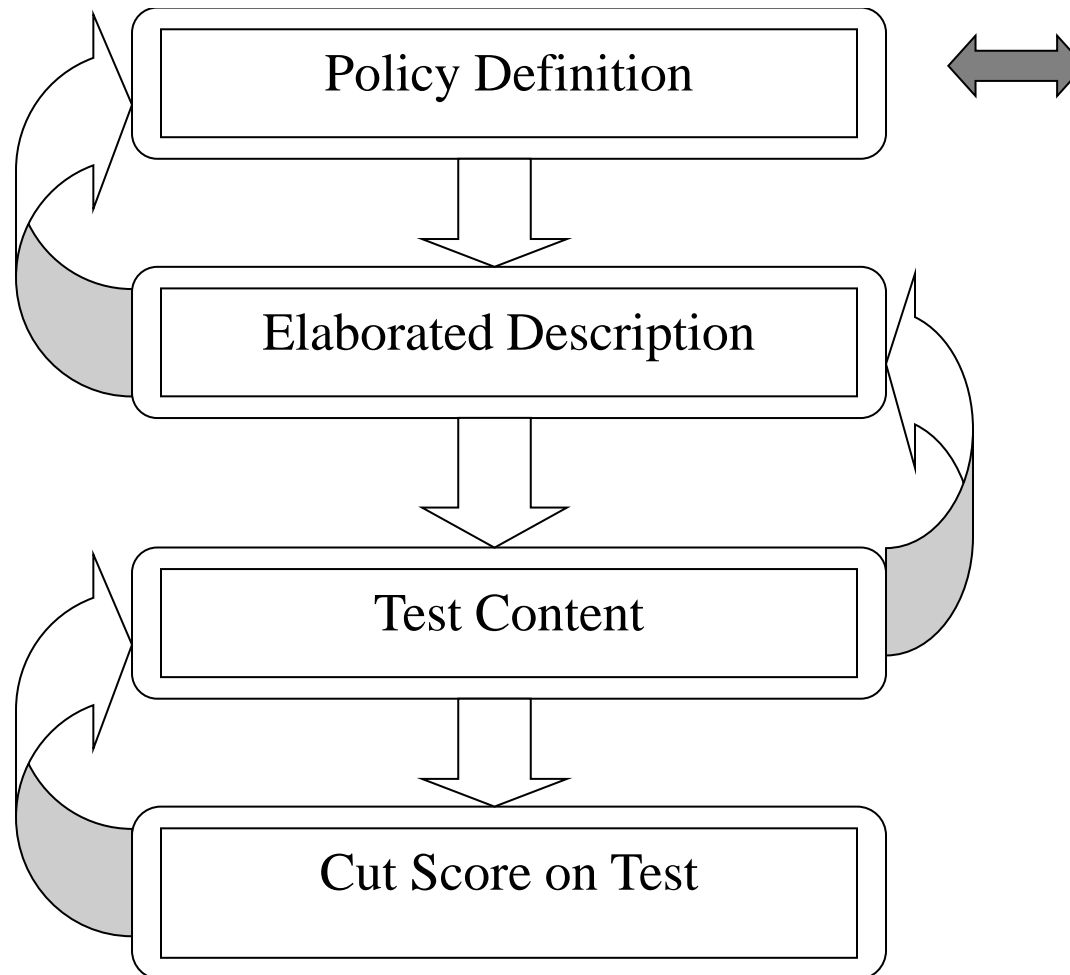
Distinction





What is your standard?

How do I know that my B1 is your B1?



Reckase 2008

***Common European Framework
of Reference for Languages:
Learning, teaching, assessment***



Modern Languages Division, Strasbourg

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



January 2009

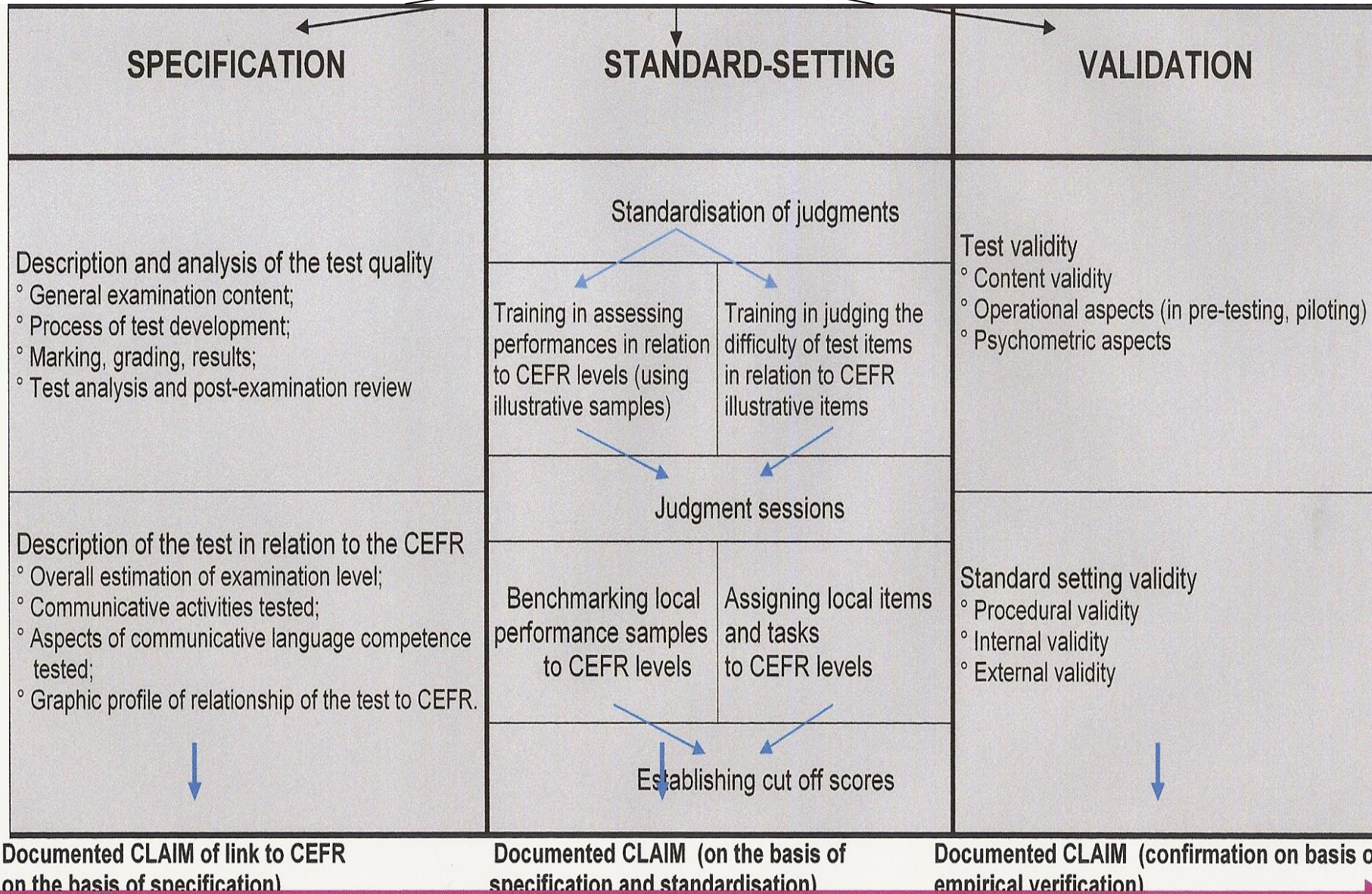
**Relating Language Examinations to the Common
European Framework of Reference for Languages:
Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)**

A Manual

Language Policy Division, Strasbourg

Building an argument

Familiarisation with the CEFR





“Linking of a test to the CEFR cannot be valid unless the examination or test that is the subject of the linking can demonstrate validity in its own right”...

“A test that is not appropriate to context will not be made more appropriate by linking to the CEFR; “

“An examination that has no procedures for ensuring that standards applied by interviewers or markers are equivalent in severity, or that successive forms of tests administered in different sessions are equivalent, cannot make credible claims of any linkage of its standard(s) to the CEFR because it cannot demonstrate Internal consistency in the operationalisation of Its standard(s).” (2009:7)

Where to start?





The 3rd Bremen Symposium on Foreign Language Teaching and Learning at Universities – March 4-5, 2011



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What is Specification?

- Content analysis of an examination
- Relating to the CEFR content and scales
- Profiling to CEFR levels
- Claim of linkage

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“The emphasis in the procedures presented in this chapter lies on both **process** and **outcome**. Users are encouraged to go through a process of content analysing and linking. It is strongly advised to reconsider every interim claim that has been made during the process. It is quite possible that the initial estimation of the relationship to the CEFR that was given in Form A8 will need to be revised. The user should revisit the analysis and make a considered judgement. The estimation (Form A8) is confirmed or corrected in Form A24.” (2009:41)

What is standard-setting?

“The **process** of establishing one or more cut scores on examinations. The cut scores divide the distribution of examinee’s test performances into two or more categories”

“...it is perhaps the branch of psychometrics that blends more artistic, political, and cultural ingredients into the mix of its products than any other”

Cizek and Bunch 2007:5

- Standardisation of judgements

Receptive skills

Productive skills

- Judgement sessions

Tasks and items

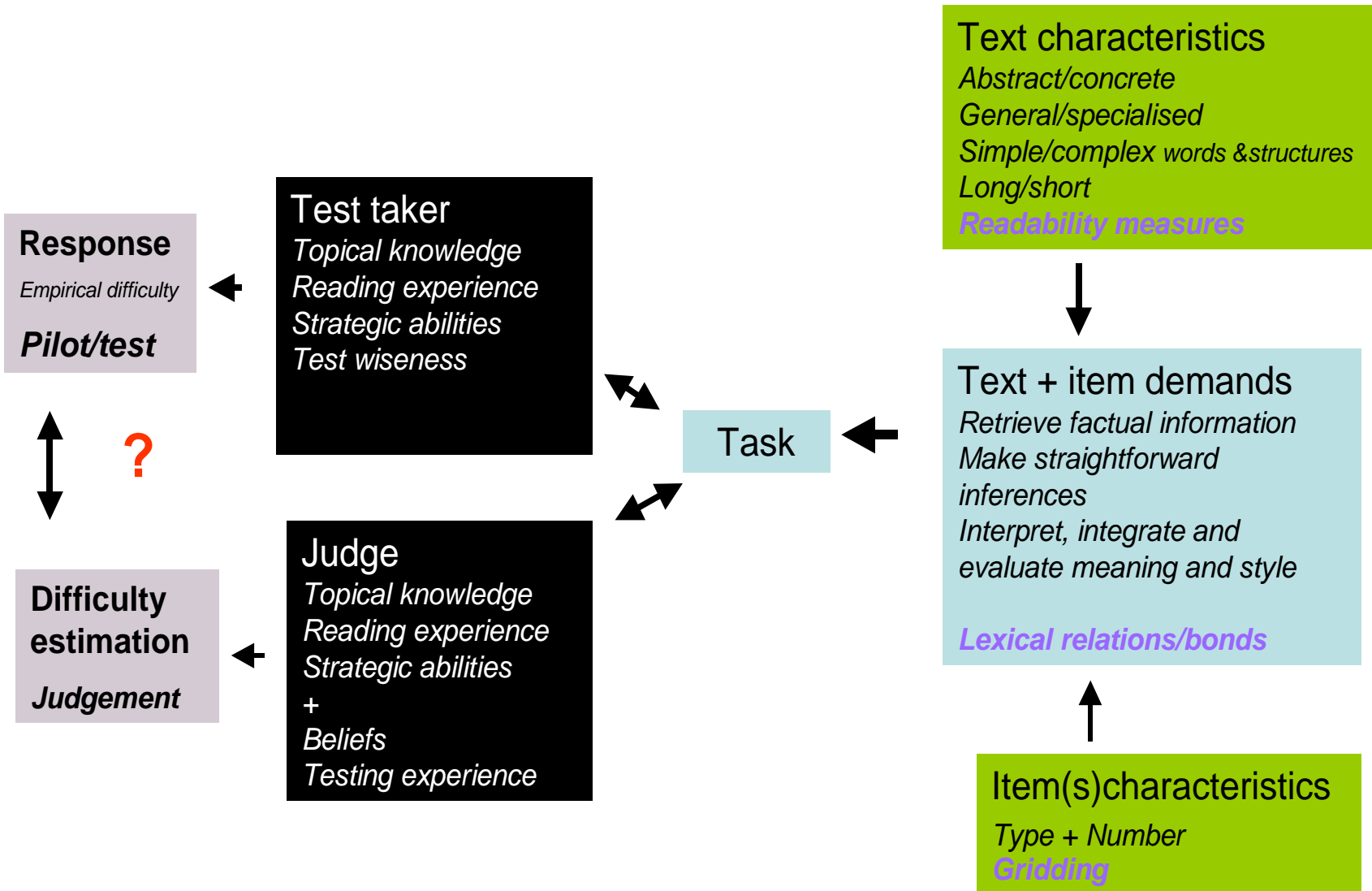
Scripts and Performances

- Setting cutscores

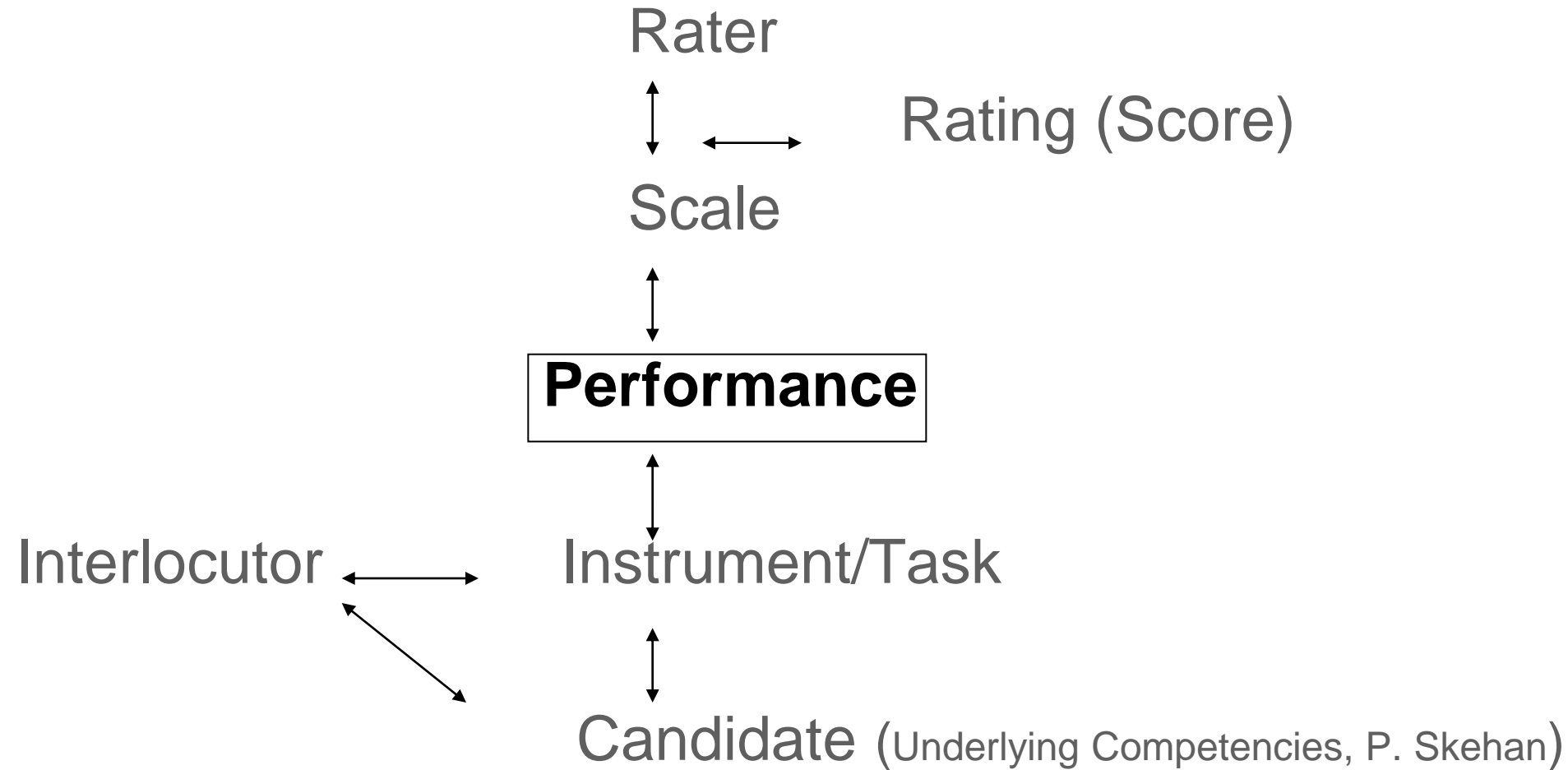
How good is good enough



The 3rd Bremen Symposium on Foreign Language Teaching and Learning at Universities – March 4-5, 2011



McNamara's model, 1996



A2



B1



B2



C1



Steps

- Selecting the Panel
- Familiarisation
- Selection of approach
- Completion of procedures
- Reporting, documentation and dissemination

Who and How Many

What

How

How much

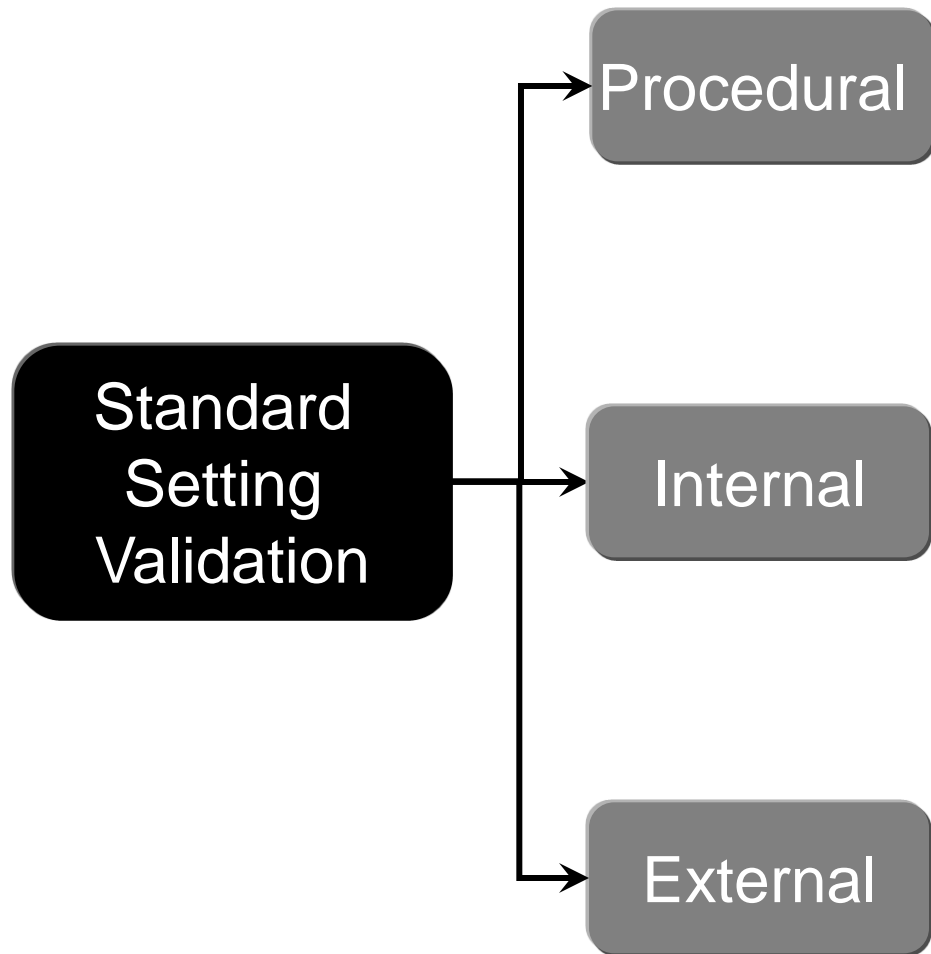
What is validation?

Validation concerns the body of evidence put forward to convince the test users that the whole process and its outcomes are trustworthy.

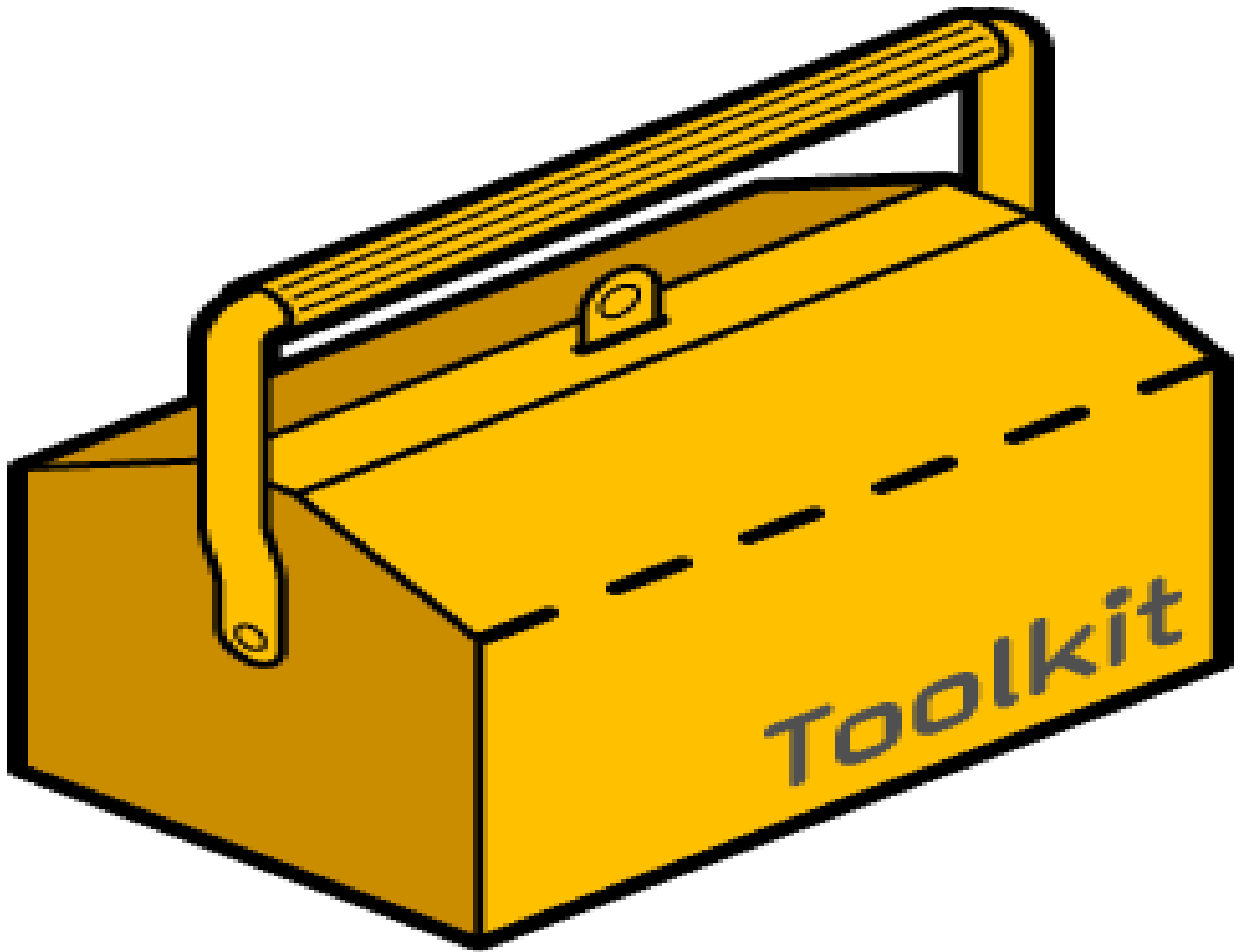
- Test
- Standard setting

Auditor's
veracity
opinion
containing
statements
report
section
financial
annual

Standard Setting Validation



(Cizek & Bunch, 2007:60)





Available literature

- Council of Europe Manual and Reference supplement
- Cizek, G.J. and M.B.Bunch, Standard Setting. A guide to establishing and evaluating performance standards on tests. Sage
- Figueras, N. and Noijons, J. (eds) (2008) Linking to the CEFR Levels: Research perspectives. Council of Europe – CITO. Available on line www.ealta.eu.org
- Martinyuk, W. (ed) (2010) Aligning tests to the CEFR. Studies in language testing. CUP

Available exemplar items & performances

- Council of Europe item CD
- Ceftrain

<http://www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.35.html>

- Dutch CEFR construct project

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/grid/>

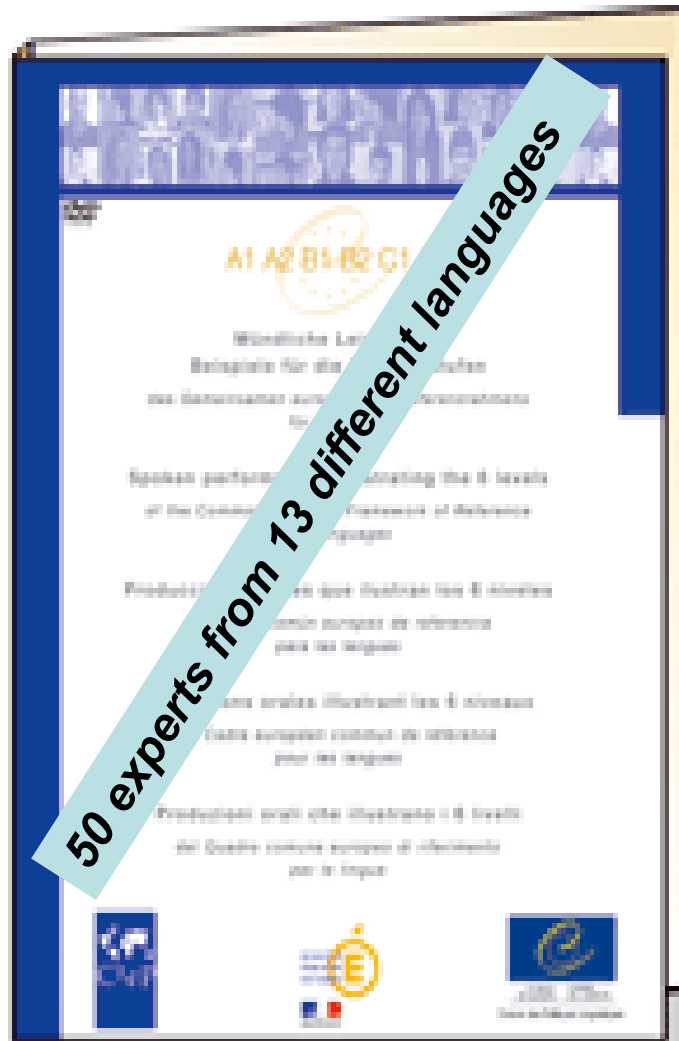
- Council of Europe scripts

www.coe.int

- CIEP performances

www.ciep.fr

"Spoken performances illustrating the six levels of the CEFR" (www.ciep.fr)



Examples of oral productions of young people from 13 to 18 years, illustrating in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish the 6 levels of the CEFR.

Product of a seminar organized in 2008 by CIEP with the assistance of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe with Cambridge ESOL, Cervantes Institute, Eurocentres Foundation, Goethe Institute, University of Perugia

Conclusions?

- A system is available (Manual, relevant literature, toolkit)
- Guidelines (EALTA, ILTA, ALTE,...)
- Hard work is needed
- No easy answers
- Systematicity
- Documentation
- On going process



BLOOD SWEAT TEARS



AND, HOPEFULLY, SOME FUN!



Thank you for your attention!