



Council of Europe
Language Policy Unit
DGII – Education Department
www.coe.int/lang-migrants

Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants



Languages for work - Learning the language of the host country for professional or vocational purposes

When it comes to the integration of migrants, command of the host country's language is usually deemed essential for access to employment or the exercise of an occupation of any kind, from the lowest level of responsibility to the highest. Work-related language training is therefore recommended when the need for communication in a work environment has been established. Nevertheless, the difficulties begin once the learner has signed up for this type of training, as it is necessary to devise specific courses similar to tailor-made courses. Another difficulty is that work-related language training often suffers because of confusion with courses for low-skill workers (basic knowledge and key competences) on the one hand and general language training provided for foreigners on the other. While courses in basic knowledge and key competences may well be suitable for low-skill, non-native speaker employees of foreign origin, the same is not true of skilled non-native speakers. Similarly, non-native speakers with work communication needs will probably derive little benefit from general language training that is not suited to their specific needs.

Communication in the workplace and the needs issue

When designing course programmes for the occupational context, there are two opposing approaches, depending on whether one starts out from language teaching and moves towards the relevant occupational activity or, on the contrary, from holistic analysis of the work environment and moves towards the training intervention. The needs issue is fundamental in both approaches: communication needs, language needs and resulting training needs. To determine the type of language needs that have to be taken into account for the training, the TRIM project (Training for the Integration of Migrant and Ethnic Workers into the Labour Market and Local Community, 2005) refers to analysis of in-house communication (systemic analysis), set against analysis of conventional training needs. The latter model centres on the individual's linguistic deficits in the workplace which must be made good through training. Conversely, the TRIM Project envisages the language training process as an integral part of vocational training, in the context of health and safety training modules provided for employees, for instance.

Language competences in the workplace

The Council of Europe has developed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages whose descriptors have been used as a basis for the elaboration of Reference Level Descriptions by language (for a certain number of languages). General competences are listed for the educational, professional/employment, public and personal fields. If we now consider the infinite range of language competences required in occupational contexts which themselves are infinitely varied, a distinction has to be made between several types of competences: general, specialised, transversal cutting across several trades, and bound up with situations of occupational communication, etc. There are also competence bases, basic

Please cite this text as

“Council of Europe / Language Policy Unit (Strasbourg) - Project LIAM: www.coe.int/lang-migrants”

competences and key competences within the meaning of the European Parliament and Council Recommendation of 2006 and the Canadian “essential competences”.

Which language competences are required for any given occupation? Alongside an approach based on “language first and occupational matters afterwards or elsewhere”, we find teaching approaches linking up the linguistic dimension with the occupational dimension from the first levels of command of language. In short, language teaching for professional and/or employment-related purposes may consider the occupation in a very broad manner or, on the contrary, with regard to specific occupations (the medical profession, the cleaning sector, etc), or even specific posts within a given occupation. The teaching situation also varies depending on whether the training takes place upstream of employment or in direct relation to a job, or in the workplace itself. A distinction can therefore be made between training courses providing access to employment (for job-seekers), training courses for retaining one’s job (for changing jobs requiring adaptation) and training courses aimed at career progression.

Language competence frames of reference

Some frames of reference for language competence in the workplace, that are drawn up as a basis for designing a training scheme, describe specific competences rather than just the general skills provided for under general language teaching. In France, for example, such frames of reference exist for posts in the local and regional civil service and in the construction and civil engineering sectors.

In Germany (Land of North Rhine-Westphalia), professional qualification schemes combine care for elderly persons with language training. In the United Kingdom, assessment of the specific communication skills required of staff in the personal healthcare sector puts the spotlight on language competences. Finally, in Canada, a language dimension is included in the general – and therefore cross-disciplinary – skills required in different areas of professional activity.

Further information on these questions, and in particular details of the examples given above, may be found in the study *Learning the language of the host country for professional purposes...*

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Related Resources

- *Learning the language of the host country for professional purposes - Outline of issues and educational approaches*, 2012, Claire Extramiana
- *The linguistic integration of adult migrants and the ‘Common European Framework of Reference for Languages’*, 2012, (David Little)
- *Tailoring language provision and requirements to the needs and capacities of adult migrants* - Hans-Jürgen Krumm / Verena Plutzer, 2008
- *Integration of Adult Migrants and Education: Extracts from Conventions, Recommendations, Resolutions and Reports* (Council of Europe).