

## **TOOLS FOR PLANNING LANGUAGE TRAINING**

*Guide for the development of Language Education Policies in Europe  
From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*

### **Reference Study**

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## Preface

This text, part of a series published by the *Language Policy Division*, is clearly significant in its own right because it deals with certain influential factors in the organisation and sociolinguistic foundations of language teaching and in the linguistic ideologies at work in problems related to the languages of Europe. It is however part of a larger project since it is one element of a collection of publications focused on the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*.

This *Guide* is both a descriptive and programmatic document whose purpose is to demonstrate the complexity of the questions involved in language teaching, often dealt with in a simplistic manner. It aims to describe the processes and conceptual tools needed for the analysis of educational contexts with respect to languages and for the organisation of language learning and teaching according to the principles of the Council of Europe.

There are several versions of this *Guide* for different audiences, but the 'main version' deals with a number of complex questions, albeit in a limited framework. It seemed necessary to illustrate these questions with case studies, syntheses and studies of specific sectors of language teaching, dealing in monographic form with questions only touched upon in the *Guide*. These *Reference Studies* provide a context for the *Guide*, showing its theoretical bases, sources of further information, areas of research and the themes which underlie it.

The *Modern Languages Division*, now the *Language Policy Division*, demonstrates through this collection of publications its new phase of activity, which is a continuation of previous activities. The *Division* disseminated through the *Threshold Levels* of the 1970s, a language teaching methodology more focused upon communication and mobility within Europe. It then developed on the basis of a shared educational culture, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (published in its final version in 2001). This is a document which is not concerned with the nature of the contents of language teaching but rather with the form of curricula and syllabi for language teaching. The *Framework* proposes explicit referential levels for identifying degrees of language competence, and thus provides the basis for differentiated management of courses so that opportunities for the teaching of more languages in schools and in lifelong learning are created. This recognition of the intrinsic value of plurilingualism has simultaneously led to the development of an instrument which allows each learner to become aware of and to describe their language repertoire, namely the *European Language Portfolio*. Versions of this are increasingly being developed in member States and were at the heart of the European Year of Languages (2001).

Plurilingualism has been identified in numerous *Recommendations* of the Council of Europe as the principle and the aim of language education policies, and must be valued at the individual level as well as being accepted collectively by

educational institutions. The *Guide* and the *Reference Studies* provide the link



between teaching methods and educational issues on the one hand and policy on the other, and have the function of making explicit this political principle and of describing concrete measures for implementation.

In this text, Marjatta Huhta demonstrates the importance of careful planning for language education before policies are developed in detail and implemented. She defines and describes the different stages of planning and presents processes from a range of language learning situations. Education policy-makers concerned with mainstream compulsory education are invited to consider what can be learnt from the world of business and commerce where the analysis of needs is crucial to decision-making. This study provides practical examples of tools used in language auditing, analysis and planning with case studies to illuminate the issues in detail.

This specific aspect of the problems of language education policies in Europe gives a perspective on the general view taken in the *Guide* but nonetheless this text is a part of the fundamental project of the *Language Policy Division*: to create through reflection and exchange of experience and expertise, the consensus necessary for European societies, characterised by their differences and the transcultural currents which create 'globalised nations', not to become lost in the search for the 'perfect' language or languages valued at the expense of others. They should rather recognise the plurality of the languages of Europe and the plurilingualism, actual or potential, of all those who live in this space, as a condition for collective creativity and for development, a component of democratic citizenship through linguistic tolerance, and therefore as a fundamental value of their actions in languages and language teaching.

Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram



## 1. Introduction

This article discusses what tools organizations, whether private or public, could use in order to improve the language competencies of their personnel. Often, those of us who deal with training in-company personnel wonder why some of the learners have not previously studied some of the needed languages. Predicting is hard; therefore public authorities and decision-makers need to be convinced that it is vital to introduce languages – even small doses of them – early in life when the child’s memory is active, capacity high and motivation easily caught. With only a little background in a language, educational institutions and workplace training can work wonders with well-targeted language training programs. Research on language needs can help public authorities and decision-makers when developing a national language scheme. The same applies to personnel working for various sectors of administration, education and services.

Several companies, governments and organizations in contemporary multilingual Europe have identified language as a crucial element of workplace communication. The language issue can be approached by constructive measures that improve communication in the organization. The objective is clear: purposeful, unambiguous communication with external interest groups as well as internal contacts, despite barriers of language. In this context language is understood as the interaction system for communicating messages at work, whether verbal, non-verbal or cultural. Messages will be communicated over a variety of channels such as notes, documents, telephone, e-mail, face-to-face or combinations of these. Workplace communication can be sophisticated in the native language; plain and clear in other languages. Thoughtful organizations define language and communication as a key competence area, which needs to be in line with the organizations’ values and strategies.

Language audits can help in devising a functional language plan. Based on the result of a language audit, the organization can formulate its language strategy, and, if and when they decide to include language training, a language training policy. This is a starting point for the planning of a language programme, for which quite an amount of information is needed. This information can be collected through needs analyses.

This process could be illustrated as in the following way:



strategy. Language audits can also be organized to evaluate the quality of a degree programme or a subject of an educational sector or institution.

A **language strategy** is a statement of intent for dealing with the challenges of a company's or institution's multilingual environment. The statement can declare the use of monolingualism or bilingualism as the recommended communication convention. The organization can alternately declare the use of language training for increasing communication skills for selected positions or recommend the use of subsidiaries and agencies for translation services. The statement can describe special programs for assisting staff with intercultural contacts. The strategy can select certain departments or sections to deal with contacts involving foreign languages. If the strategy includes the establishing of a language programme, a language training policy is needed.

**Language training policy** defines the principles of how the organization plans to support and develop the language competence of its personnel. The policy can include which languages the organization will promote and whether some background level is required before getting support. The support is defined. Sometimes personnel are allowed to use work time for language study, sometimes only perhaps 50%, sometimes 0%, depending on language, level and need, which are defined in the policy. Language training policy often sets language competence requirements for different personnel groups, selected positions or departments and may define how language/ communication competencies are considered in recruitment. The policy defines the support or reward the organization offers for skills improvement or participation in training. The principles of application, participation and recognition are described. It is also important to include the principles of co-operating with language trainers and consultants. For structured development it is necessary to determine whether progress reports, attendance reports and result records are needed, and when and how they are due.

**Language planning** involves the developing of a language programme based on the results of a language audit. The plan includes:

1. *Language Training Policy*
2. *Language Programme*

The language training policy is based on the strategies of the company and will remain the same over a period, until organizational strategy changes. A language programme is the annual implementation of language training, which is bound to change on a regular basis (often annually). The annual changes become necessary after the feedback of learners, course evaluation and learner reports have been analysed and new needs for the following period have been identified.

**Needs analyses** are practical tools, used in language planning, for finding out the current level and profile of a person's language skills and general language background. The person who wishes to participate in language training gives an estimate of his/her language skills and language needs on some agreed scale, for

example 1-5, 1-9. Through needs analyses organizers find out the communication situations where the learner needs the language. Needs analysis can concern one person alone, complete departments or the whole personnel. The level of competence can also be diagnosed through language testing. A questionnaire, an interview, a diagnostic test or combinations of these can function as a needs analysis.

The results of needs analysis are built into a **language programme**. It describes the language training options offered for the term/year/period. The courses are described in detail so that contents, level requirement, extent, timing and group size are included for enrolment. The programme describes the procedures of application and participation. It is important to include attendance requirements and progress reporting procedures. In case of dropping out for work or other reasons, a system for replacement or paying back can be explained. The programme also describes the reward for completion of certain levels. The language programme also includes descriptions of assessment scales used and how the training courses can be evaluated.

If the organization decides to outsource all of its language training, the programme includes the recommended language schools and procedures for applying to their courses. A contact person for reporting back to the workplace is necessary for giving employees an opportunity to influence the decision-making for the following year.

### **3. Why is language education planning worth doing?**

Planning is necessary to give language learners a fair chance to succeed in their learning project. Both underestimation and overestimation of language learning are harmful to realistic approaches to language.

Language learning is an area where every citizen can be considered an expert. Being a common experience, language learning is associated with a number of mythical beliefs, which can block the understanding of language learning in ways that can stop people from taking up on languages. An example are language consultants who like to advertise quick fix courses or the Sole Method, which promises to solve the learner's communication problems at an instant. Regular consumers do not attribute their evident disappointments to unethical marketing or unrealistic learning plans. Instead, a conventional impression gets confirmation: language learning is hard.

Another example of underestimation is the most common language course arrangement: a language course one hour a week. Research on course types has shown that language consultants prefer to offer the weekly courses and organisations like to realise them, because little planning is needed, the course is inexpensive and 'at least we can say we offered language training', as one personnel manager put it (Huhta, 1997). Research also indicates that a one hour a week course cannot really improve a learner's language skills; it can only prevent

the skills from deteriorating further - unless the course is supported by frequent contacts with a target language communication. The convenient system of weekly teaching appears to have minimal problems: declining attendance, turnover of teachers and minimal learning. But as soon as the real urge of organisations for efficient communication becomes a necessity in the multi-cultural, multi-language business environment, companies will have to reconsider how to invest their training resources in a more productive way.”(Huhta, 1997: 131-35). Much more than an hour a week is needed for improving language skills, as will be seen later. These kinds of examples illustrate how language schools themselves contribute to the underestimation of language learning.

How much time, in realistic terms, is then needed for learning a language? It is important to consider this, because it is the key question in the planning of a language programme in a realistic way.

Several companies have adopted a common scale of 1-5 for work purposes. The system is similar to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), except the lowest level, level A1, which has been left out as an insufficient level for communicating at work. The definitions of levels are also slightly different, for work purposes; for example, technical or commercial positions for middle management level. In such circumstances, some definitions such as ‘will understand literary prose’ do not apply; the relevance of skills is measured in terms of interaction skills and of being able to read and produce work documents. The scale is simple enough for non-linguists to understand, without differentiating to sub-skills such as oral and written. On this kind of scale, tailored for work purposes, how long will it take to gain one more level?

The answer depends naturally on several factors: the particular language, the learner’s motivation, previous experience in languages, methods of learning/teaching, access to the language while studying, materials, the nature of language needs (limited/extensive), the learner’s ability and age. Several researchers have, however, tried to approximate the number of hours necessary for reaching a specific level. Hammerly (1985: 56-59) estimates 250-300 hours for beginner level, 200-250 for intermediate level, 150-200 for the advanced level and 150-200 to a very advanced level, totalling an estimate up to 750-950 hours. These American figures are low in comparison to the estimates of Takala (1997) for the 1-9 Finnish scale for general language education. He estimates 150-200 hours/level on levels 1-3, 300-350 hours/level levels 4 and 5, and 500-600 hours for levels 6-7. Level 8 requires additionally thousands of hours of study and active use. Thus the minimal input for levels 1-7 would involve 2350 hours of study. Similarly, high figures for language learning have been mentioned by Stern (1992), who considers 3000-5000 hours as ‘large amounts’ of language study. Based on this information we can say that the wider the general proficiency spectrum in language learners are aiming for, the higher the work input needs to be and the more time it takes to reach significant levels.

If the learners are happy with levels which allow them to cope well in work communication and are willing to compromise with sophistication, the high estimates are an over-estimation. Business language consultancies have managed to produce functional language skills with significantly lower teaching/learning input than the ones described above for general education. This is done by narrowing down learning contents for identified purposes. In corporate training and adult education (Sartoneva, 1998) the use of the scale 1-5 has been in common use. The needs for simplification are obvious: language needs are often viewed as part of overall competence development and parties that are conducting training needs analyses in companies are often not linguistic specialists. Scales which are too detailed, complicate the simplicity of questionnaires, not to mention classifications into sub-skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

*Simplified scale for professional language training use*

The move from one level to the next in a language would require around 5-6 hours a week for a year at the minimum, thinking of an annual study year of 32 weeks. A personal language project is thus a major "time waster" from the point of view of a non-linguist. Therefore all procedures for limiting the project and targeting the learning to the point is useful. Consequently, long visits/stays in the target country (without a native speaker friend) or frequent access to the language, help to limit the number of hours required. However, endless listening to incomprehensible input is not helpful. There are numerous examples of immigrants in foreign countries who have succeeded in not learning the target language after 20 years of immigration. Listening must go hand in hand with finding out more, studying more and structuring one's understanding, preferable through all the senses, listening, writing, speaking and experiencing.

Over-estimation of the difficulty of language learning is no better than under-estimation. There are educational bodies who may approach language learning in an intricately scholarly manner. Language is introduced in many

dimensions: morphology, phonology, etymology, to mention a few. Learning a language (pedagogy, didactics), a skill itself, is analysed into sectors such as listening, speaking, reading and writing and all of them are dealt with through different methodologies. As a result, a complex battery of teaching materials and tests are imposed on the learner. In this process the learner may sink into despair trying to formulate some useful communication practices for his/her practical use, blindfolded by the nuts and bolts of a language. Without a holistic grip on language at work learning a language becomes to a non-linguist a desert with no end.

5 – Mastery level <i>CICERO</i>	Fluent, precise, well constructed, confident communication for varied professional purposes.	“I understand complex professional writing; I understand native speakers' fast speech, including common accents; I take the initiative in conversation and can express my ideas fluently in professional conversation”	180-460h
4 – Active level <i>LUIKERO</i>	Confident skills for normal professional exchanges, without much obvious searching.	“I understand professional texts; I understand native speakers' normal conversation; given time I can express my views well in conversation”	180-460h
3 – Manageable level <i>PUIKKERO</i>	Manages to participate; needs clever techniques to substitute for shortcomings in common professional exchanges.	“I can understand easy texts and clear speech on common topics; I can manage daily situations and many professional ones without much help”	180-360h
2 – Limited level <i>KANKERO</i>	Manages situations through passive participation; uses simplified language; typically, delays in reactions and understanding.	“ I understand parts of texts and many common conversations; I can deal with a number of ordinary daily situations; I can understand common topics with help”	180-360h
1 – Basic level <i>TANKERO</i>	Concentrates on listening and understanding; exchanges common phrases.	“I know some basics and can understand a number of familiar elements in conversation, but I miss out on most conversations; I cannot use the language except for some phrases exchanged in frequent situations.”	180-360h
Total			900-2000h

We need to emphasize here that only specialist linguists need to know a language at a sophisticated level. For work purposes, less will do. Just as we (practically) all learn to drive a car, we can learn to speak a foreign language, not perfectly, but enough to cope. Non-linguists need morphology as little as drivers need to know about the structure of a four-stroke engine. Therefore practical learners can concentrate on learning how to drive - in a word, use a foreign language effectively at work.

Limiting the language project is therefore essential. Let us take an example of a public broadcasting company, who had to comply with a recent law and be ready to broadcast an announcement if any chemical emission should happen in the environment, 24 hours/day, in both the domestic languages, Finnish and Swedish. There were technicians on duty at night who had little or no background in Swedish. The gap between their existing skills level and a public speaking/text-producing skills was enormous: years of study. It was clear that a full training scheme was unrealistic.

A closer study of the language needs showed that the announcement to be read on public radio was a fairly limited text, with changing variables, such as figures for wind speed, descriptions of directions (south/west...) and names of chemicals. The targeted plan was to help the staff to read out the text, with no wider plan for improving their general language skills. A tailored training course was designed for the dozen technicians. A tape was produced with pronunciation practice on the text and rehearsal of the varying elements of the text for self-study. The technicians practised the tape in their on-call shifts and came for a couple of sessions for contact with a teacher, to make sure their performance was clear enough to be read on the radio. This is an example of how a huge language project can become a limited task, as soon as the designers know enough about the actual language needs and have the skills for meeting the order.

Language learning can thus become a limited project (not that we would like to deny some people the fun of studying and enjoying language study for the rest of their lives). The more we know about the need, the more we can limit the extent of time. The same applies to developing a language programme: the better we know the procedure, the easier it becomes to get a solid language programme running.

#### **4. Language auditing and language programme planning**

Language auditing is the first step diagnosing language challenges and analyzing the potential of the staff on a strategic level. To this aim an organisation can conduct negotiations with senior management. A detailed description of the procedure in business companies can be found in Reeves and Wright (1996: 10-25). As the procedure for companies is well documented we concentrate in this article on the questions of how an audit of an educational institution could be designed. The core message is that the organization needs to identify their communication environment and its needs, by asking key questions.



***Does our language strategy meet the needs of communication in our organization?***

*Identification of aims for a language strategy*

What are the plans of the organisation for global operation? What intercultural challenges do the plans involve? What are our key contacts in our activity? What languages, areas and cultures are essential for us? To what extent? Which groups of personnel are concerned?

What are our core competencies in communication now? How are our core competencies included in the personnel development plans?

How are interactive communication, public speaking skills, and professional documentation in relevant languages and intercultural competence included in our strategies?

What are our aims for improved communication competencies? What means are we going to use to meet these challenges? (Translation, IT and Web resources, interpretation, use of overseas agencies, subsidiaries, cultural training, languages / communication training, use of external consultants...)

What volumes of training will give us a satisfactory situation in a reasonable time frame?

*Analysis of language training policy*

To what extent does the prevailing training system serve the identified communication aims? Have we recognized the aims? What are they?

What are the present language/communication skills of the personnel? Of key groups at least? Should we conduct a needs analysis? For which groups of personnel?

Where are the communication problems? How are they different for different groups of personnel?

Have the contents of the courses been designed to concentrate on identified skills areas? How have we secured this?

How are we organizing the language planning? What can be done internally? What should be done externally?

What should the aims and objectives of language training be? Do we want to have language study with

a 'social function' and have no result expectations?  
Is this important for reasons of morale?

Where should language training be placed in the organization of the organisation for best service?

Are the most efficient course types in use? If not, who/what team has the capacity to establish a network of developers from inside and outside the organisation? How are we to find suitable partners?

What should our system of language training be? Shall we concentrate on a couple of well-tailored programs or diversify to many course forms (Huhta, 1997: 173-93)?

#### *Information*

How is our language training system visible and accessible for employees? How can we develop a functional monitoring system to the workload reasonable but gain sufficient information on skills potential?

How can the database of language skills profiles be drawn up so that it serves the interests of strategic development work?

These are some of the questions organizations can ask themselves for formulating a functional language strategy and language training policy for their personnel.

## **5. Language auditing in the educational sector**

Language audits and benchmarking procedures are common ways of improving educational activity in the public sector. Nationwide audits have been implemented for example for the whole vocational sector or for adult education. There are no exclusive guidelines of how to conduct a language/communication audit in an educational institution; the focus depends on the objectives the institution sets for itself.

A current example comes from an audit of two newly merged educational institutions, which decided to organize a language audit. The target of the language audit is to go through the language education of all the sectors and identify the status quo at the moment. The two organizations have decided to do this, as both have interests in improving their language training systems.

The parties invited to participate in the auditing procedure can be the following:

1. management (interests: quality improvement, effective operations, potential synergies, cost savings, improvement of choices for students)

2. language educators/project managers (interests: improvement of procedures, quality improvement, increase of resources, clearer organization, collaboration with educators of specialist subjects and degree programs)
3. educators of specialist subjects and administrators of degree programs (interests: smooth running of language courses, specialist language help for students, on-demand language courses, integration of languages into specialist subjects)
4. external auditors/advisors/specialists (interests: quality improvement, comparison with functional systems, benchmarking, suggesting alternatives)
5. representatives of work environments (interests: high quality employees in the future, application of workplace procedures to institutional language audits)
6. Ministry of Education and their representatives (interests: quality improvement, organizational synergies)
7. Students (interests: giving feedback, looking for reforms, updating of systems)
8. Representatives of quality improvement systems in the universities (interests: continuous improvement)

The language auditing process is designed over one calendar year, including a preliminary planning stage, planning stage, internal evaluation, external audit and reporting stage. The two universities establish a steering committee, with members of interest groups, listed above.

The preliminary planning stage includes the planning of the audit, negotiations with all parties, planning of the stages of the project and budgeting. The steering committee approves the plan and assigns amendments and improvements.

The planning stage includes involvement and training of language instructors for self-evaluation. External advisors are consulted. Project managers search for alternate auditing tools. The planning committee devises and improves suggestions from language instructors, external consultants and management. After the steering group's approval, the procedures of the self evaluation and auditing tools are presented to the language instructors, who conduct the self-evaluation in collaboration with the degree programs.

The self-evaluation of degree programs takes place in two phases.

1. *Teams for degree programs*

The discussions concern the evaluation of languages in a degree programme: organization, resources, contents of courses, implementation, development work in languages, development of language instructor competencies. All the questions are open, for maximal discussion, which is reported and delivered for external auditing.

2. *Student teams*

The student questionnaire concerns the implementation of language training. The questions describe the practices and evaluate how well the procedures serve the need.

Student evaluation is conducted through cross-evaluation: the students fill in one questionnaire, the team of language instructors of all obligatory languages another. A compromise reply is created through a discussion between both parties. All versions are delivered for external auditing.

External evaluation involves all parties. The results of three or four degree programs per institution are studied and good practices are searched for. At the reporting stage the Evaluation Council of the Ministry of Education publishes the audit report.

The project searches for replies to a selection of categories:

*Describing and evaluating language teaching in the educational sector*

<p><i>Resources and organization</i></p>	<p>How are resources for language training decided on? Is this the best method for?</p> <p>How are language resources suited to the goals of (e.g. engineering) education?</p> <p>How are the resources in balance with the need in the students' future workplace?</p> <p>What other skills do students learn in language courses besides language?</p> <p>How is information given about language training visible and understandable in the organization?</p> <p>Are contents in language courses linked with skills required at the workplace?</p> <p>How does language teaching take into consideration students' background in languages and differences in ability?</p>
<p><i>Development of language training</i></p>	<p>How is language training currently being developed?</p> <p>Which parties should be involved in the development process?</p> <p>How have the reforms suggested by instructors/students progressed in the organization?</p> <p>How is auditing information collected? How are feedback systems developed?</p>
<p><i>Language trainers' competence development</i></p>	<p>How are new language instructors helped to enter the profession?</p> <p>How does language instructors' workload allow for developing quality teaching?</p> <p>To what extent is the trainers' special expertise utilized?</p> <p>How are language instructors' professional development and training supported by the institutions? What are their training needs?</p>
<p><i>Implementation of language teaching</i></p>	<p>How do the contents of language courses compare with the curriculum?</p> <p>How is the timing suitable for studying the language of the students' specialist field?</p> <p>How are the methods suitable for the skills required at work? Is there space for improvements? What kind?</p> <p>How satisfactory is the evaluation of students' performance? Are both oral and written performance evaluated? How? Is this satisfactory? Can assessment be characterized as neutral?</p> <p>How well do students prepare for classes? How does</p>

	this influence class activity?
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These are some categories exemplified. The categories can differ, depending on the defined purpose of the language audit.

Another example is a language auditing project, which was conducted using the method of benchmarking. A group of four polytechnics and the Language Centre of a university chose different categories for evaluation (Löfström, 2000). Other ideas for dimensions to be evaluated are introduced in the Quality Guide, published by the European Commission, DGXXII (Lasnier et al., 2000).

What are the benefits of an auditing process in educational institutions? There are several, all in the same effort: raising the level of self-awareness, conscious efforts to look at the activity from a neutral point of view, views of all interest groups in a systematic way, specialist views from outside the organization. If there are two or more organizations auditing at the same time, there are benefits of comparison: the audit provides information of several ways of answering similar questions. If both have found different answers to the same questions, a discussion of benefits and problems of different solutions can help both to find best ways of developing their activity.

The discussion created around the answers can also function as a basis for decisions made on the strategic level. At the best the audit can help the organizations to revise their whole language training system. Perhaps there is a need to reorganize the system. The audit can help the whole system to function better.

An essential point to bear in mind about language audits is that they are based on self-initiative and free will. The audit should not be conducted by parties who are unwilling to participate; worse yet, by questions given by an external body. An audit, at its best, is a willing effort on the part of active developers to steer the language training process in the right direction and search for the commitment of all those who participate, including management.

The results of audits are described in a report. This report includes a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and a series of recommendations for future work.

If the audit concerns the development of personnel in the organization, the management formulate their Language Strategy and Language Training Policy. Sometimes more details are needed; therefore a needs analysis may need to be conducted.

## **6. Language needs analyses**

Needs analysis is the key to a tailored approach in language learning, because it provides detailed information on training needs. Needs analysis is a tool for language planning for finding out

- the current level of a participant's language skills, by own estimation
- current language needs and their urgency judged by the participant and/or his/her superior
- information on communication situations the person needs to be competent in
- priorities of languages/position/occupation
- the participant's language background
- wishes for suitable course types and times
- the learner's timetable wishes for the current period.

Needs analyses can take place through questionnaires, interviews, diagnostic tests, discussions or combinations of these. The analyses can concern one single person, complete departments or the whole personnel. Language testing can also be used to diagnose present skills, but it is a more costly option than self-evaluation, which is fairly reliable on a 1-5 scale. The error margin is normally less than one level in one or the other direction. In tailored language training the level requirement in a group seems to be fairly flexible. Successful language training has been organized in groups which have been put together by some common denominator: the same task, the same position, the same profession, the same department, the same company or the same language level (Huhta, 1997: 122).

The results of needs analyses can be used in course design for setting realistic goals, limited, specified contents, shorter training times and learning methods. The results of needs analyses can be built into a functional language programme.

Analyzing language needs through questionnaires is an older method than language auditing. In Finland language needs analysis was taken into use in the 1970s, concentrating on groups in industry and business. Several fields have been studied since then using different sets of questions. Complete sectors have been researched, besides using needs analyses as a training tool. Some examples of sectional surveys could be service industry (Chosen, Roininen 1973), correspondents (Kurtén 1971), engineers and engineering companies (Berggren 1975, 1982, 1986), industry, trade, Helsinki City personnel, communal administration (Mehtäläinen 1987a and 1987b, 1988, 1989, Raulas 1986). Other examples may be state administration (Nieminen 1985, Yli-Renko 1988), academic personnel (Ventola and Mauranen 1992), large industrial companies (Huhta 1989, 1994, 1997) and small and medium-sized companies (Koskinen 1994) - all cited and described in Sinkkonen (1998). Recent results of European needs analyses for business personnel can be found in the Elucidate study, which also gives an example of a needs analysis (Hagen, 1999). Recent information on language training by German companies is introduced in Schöppel-Grabe and Weiss (1998). Another approach, a discourse-centered needs analysis, is introduced in Weber, Becker and Laue (2000). Other examples of needs analyses for personnel and their superiors can be found in Huhta (1997) and (1999), which focus on detailing the communication needs of industry and business.

A needs analysis gives an organization an overview of the language potential in the organization. It also provides information on specific improvement areas. Management gets information on realistic goals for one single year. The language instructor gets an overview of the skills of the group and specific language needs on which to base the curriculum. Needs analysis also helps the instructor to plan material suitable for the needs of the group. The instructor gains knowledge of what needs to be included in the testing. The learner gains information on his/her level and how long it can approximately take to reach the desired goal. The learners' motivation improves as they study areas central for their work.

There are many kinds of needs analyses, depending on the purpose they are used for. The information received depends on the questions we ask.

***Types of language needs analyses***

<i>Interest group</i>	Purpose of needs analysis	Focus on:
<i>Management</i>	A. Overview of all competencies; language included > Language competencies often secondary, if noted at all	Competence profile data, easily comparable, easily filed and found.
<i>Human Resources departments</i>	B. Overview of training needs of all development areas, including language Keeping a log of personnel profiles and their development in all competencies; language often included > Language competence often marked by school assessment, if noted	The same as above; additionally, systems to follow up various competencies, preferably in quantitative, short form. Demand for similar feedback systems for all competence development schemes.
<i>Language coordinator</i>	C. Interested in developments in all languages > Sufficient for identifying which languages and which skills are needed	Identifies assessment level and skills demand in all foreign languages. Therefore cannot focus on the details of one language alone.
<i>Language trainer, instructor of a language</i>	D. Language needs/ language specified. Levels specified. Special wishes recorded. > Sufficient for designing tailored courses.	Identifies assessment level and skills demand in one language, and therefore can get detailed information on the needs in one language, the desired communication



		situations; strengths and weaknesses and wishes of course type, trainer, method, timing etc.
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The best way, perhaps, is to look at one needs analysis, created for purposes C and D, language coordinators and trainers, and see what help we can get for designing a course.

### ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE NEEDS

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Department \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Native language: \_\_\_\_\_

What languages have you studied besides your native language?

	Have you studied? Yes/No	How many years?	Your estimate of your level (use the scale below)	Your target level
Language 2				
Language 3				
Language 4				

- 5 **Mastery level** - I understand complex professional writing; I understand native speakers' fast speech, including regular accents; I take the initiative in conversation and can express my ideas fluently in professional conversation.
- 4 **Active level** – I understand professional texts; I understand native speakers' normal conversation; given time I can express my views well in conversation.
- 3 **Manageable level** – I can understand easy texts and clear speech on common topics; I can manage daily situations and many professional ones without much help.
- 2 **Limited level** - I understand parts of texts and many common conversations; I can deal with a number of ordinary daily situations; I can understand common topics with help.

- 1        **Basic level** - I know some basic texts and can understand some familiar elements in conversation, but I miss out on most conversations; I cannot use the language except for some phrases exchanged in frequent situations.

Which language would you like to learn in the first place? \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary? \_\_\_\_\_

How urgently do you need this language in your work? Free time?

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How much time will you be able to spend on this course per week, besides contact

time? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of course would serve you best? (Please tick the first two best options as 1 and 2)

Intensive course (3-5 days, more than 6 hours per day) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Block teaching (1-3 days training, pause or self study period, 1-3 days...)

\_\_\_\_\_ Distance/multimedia study (1-2 days training, guided work and assignments, 1-2 days etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Private lessons \_\_\_\_\_

Guided self study \_\_\_\_\_

Courses abroad \_\_\_\_\_

Weekly classes (1-2 hours per week) \_\_\_\_\_

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

What are your expectations for the course?

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What are some of your strengths and weaknesses in this language? Tick the options that describe your skills best.

	Weakness	Strength	Comments
Professional terminology	_____	_____	_____
Oral skills	_____	_____	_____
Grammar and correctness	_____	_____	_____
Understanding of texts	_____	_____	_____
Writing (reports etc.)	_____	_____	_____
Understanding speech	_____	_____	_____
Other, please explain	_____	_____	_____

Please tick the language situations that need to be included in the course:

**Communication Situations in Positions with Polytechnic Background**

	The situation is important at work for x % of employees	The level you aim at in your occupation (see scale 1-5)	Important to include this in our course. Please include 3. A lot 2. Some degree 1. Very little 0. None at all
<i>Example situation: writing contracts</i>	4%	0%	4
1. Talking about yourself and your work	62		
2. Travel	82		
3. Socializing (e.g. introductions, small talk)	88		
4. Routine telephone calls (e.g.	87		

taking messages, answering inquiries, making arrangements)			
5. Client contacts (e.g. customer service, exhibitions, complaints by telephone, face-to-face)	76		
6. Hosting visitors	68		
7. Solving computer problems	31		
8. Explaining a process or a (working) method	59		
9. Discussions concerning deliveries, installations, maintenance	51		
10. Fault analysis, solving problems	50		
11. Tutoring a new employee	23		
12. Reading manuals, instructions, professional literature	70		
13. Reading companies' documentation (memos, quotations etc.)	66		
14. Writing e-mail messages, faxes; taking notes in a meeting	77		
15. Writing memos, reports, documents	61		
16. Giving a presentation (e.g. company profile, product presentation)	45		
17. Meetings, negotiations	62		
18. Other, please specify	6		

(n=128 persons/1358 situations) Source: Prolang Report, Finland 1999

Date .....Signature .....

*Applicant*

I find the applicant's foreign language skills relevant for the job.

Yes \_\_\_No\_\_\_

Please suggest a language programme suitable for the applicant.

Date.....Signature .....

*Manager*

## 7. From needs analysis to a language programme

As soon as the results of needs analyses are available the designers have sufficient information for setting up a language programme.

This information includes:

- how many people are interested in improving their language skills short-term/long-term

- how urgent the development needs are
- what languages the language programme needs to include
- what levels need to be taught in the assigned courses
- which contents the courses must concentrate on
- what types of courses are possible
- what self-study expectations can be made.

It is also important to give feedback to employees whose language skills have been analysed, as the normal expectation on the part of those who replied to the questionnaire is that some courses will be arranged. Frequently, there are those who will not be able to participate. The reasons vary from unrealistic goals to a managerial decision not to send too many of the departmental staff to language training in one go.

The organizer of a language programme should prepare a suggestion to management outlining the options and estimating the prices of different solutions. The proposal should include:

- report on needs analyses: language potential of the staff, development areas in the light of language policy
- proposal for training: short term and long-term plan, including price and plan for reporting for results through training.

With a language strategy, a language training policy and this information the management can take a decision on the implementation of the language programme.

The organizer can evaluate the outcome of the language programme by asking some questions:

### ***Evaluating the outcome of a language programme***

<i>Goals of courses</i>	What proportion of the learning contents should be based on the needs analysis and how much of the core competence elements of the company strategy should be included in this course?
<i>Purpose of course</i>	How could the contents be specified and limited so that the course meets its most important aims?
<i>Target group</i>	Around what common element(s) can a well functioning learner group best be set up?
<i>Course type</i>	Thinking of the initial level, the aims, the realistic learner input and scheduling opportunities, which course type would work best for these specific needs? Are we realistic in matching the length of course with goals for the level of these learners?
<i>Trainer</i>	How can we ensure that the trainer is a

specialist, who uses learner-centered methodology and involves all the learners? How could we support effective, continuous learning? How can learner input be realistic but maximal to ensure results?

<i>Focus of teaching</i>	How can we ensure that the teacher focuses on practical communication skills and does not concentrate on teaching the code of the language?
<i>Expert knowledge</i>	How can we co-operate with the network in order to strengthen our know-how in our core competence area? Are we getting the material developed for specialist courses? How can we contribute to developing a competitive advantage, difficult to copy?
<i>Testing</i>	Do we have an adequate system for keeping track of the results achieved through language training? Do we need the statistics? Can we do with a simpler recognition system, which does not involve assessment testing?

## **8. Final remarks**

Language auditing is a powerful tool for improving communication competence in an organization. In the process, the language/communication resources of personnel are identified and matched against the strategic goals of the operation. The next phase in the procedure is to discuss the mismatches of status quo with the existing resources and state the solutions for dealing with a multi-language environment in a language strategy. If language training is suggested in the strategy, a language training policy must be formulated, including guidelines for a training plan, possible outsourcing arrangements and information on the resource arrangements.

A language programme can best be set up if the linguistic needs of target learner groups are clear. Linguistic needs analyses can help in identifying the current situation and by tailoring the training to specific purposes. Professional, well-targeted training serves organizations well, as the to-the-point training brings forth desired skills on efficient and decreases training times. As a consequence, an expensive element of cost can become a well-placed investment in effective communication.

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