Language Support for Migrants
A Council of Europe Toolkit

# Tool 18 – Being aware and taking account of the uneven linguistic profiles of migrants

Aim: **To offer guidance on acknowledging and exploring heterogeneous linguistic profiles within groups of migrants when providing language support.**

We do not all necessarily have the same level of proficiency in the various languages we know, and this is true of each language in our repertoire (see Tool 8 - *Creating a plurilingual self-portrait: a reflective task for you*). Traditionally, language competence is thought of in holistic terms, and very often it is defined in terms of levels, e.g., "S/he has a good level of competence in French". Although a definition based on levels is useful, it is important to remember that levels are a necessary simplification, as levels of proficiency vary even in our first language. Language users do not normally perform equally well across the different language skills. For example, many people's receptive skills (reading and listening) are more advanced than their productive skills (writing and speaking). In other words, we all have distinct **linguistic profiles** depending on our background, educational experience, personal interests, or professional orientation.

As regards learners of an additional language, those with little prior schooling and a low level of literacy generally find oral modes of communication easier than written modes. More specifically, in the spoken language, a person may well be more competent in interaction (e.g., conversation, discussion) that in oral production (e.g. monologue, presentation), and in addition they are likely to find activities related to the personal domain of language use easier than those in occupational settings.

A way of visualizing language profiles

The table below offers a way of showing language profiles using curved lines, somewhat like spaghetti.
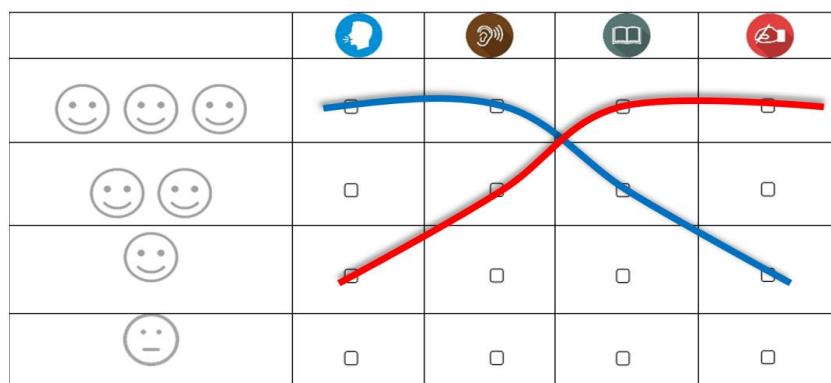
In the table, the symbols at the top indicate speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Two fictitious examples are shown:

- The red curve represents the competence of a person who for work reasons is asked on a daily basis to read and write emails in a language that is part of their plurilingual repertoire but is not their language of origin.
- The blue line illustrates the competence of a migrant who has lived in the host country for some years and has acquired a good competence in the spoken language through daily use, mainly in spoken interaction.

Try to use the table below to illustrate your own differentiated profile in one or more of the languages in your own plurilingual repertoire.

A table like this can be used in a language support activity to illustrate the heterogeneity of your learners' profiles. To do this, follow these steps:

1. Show learners an example such as the one above or use the one that describes your own profile in a given language. Tell them the meaning of the symbols and ask them to 'explain' the example.

2. Give them copies of the table below and ask them to try to draw their own profiles in up to three of the languages they know apart from their home language, including the language of the host country. If possible, get them to use different colours for each language.

3. Get them in pairs to ask simple questions, e.g. is your Arabic better than your Spanish? In Turkish, is it easier for you to speak to someone or write a message? etc. Then they can compare their profile illustrations.

Even if in some cases you disagree with learners' depictions of their profiles in the host community language, such an activity can help you to better define your learners' profiles and to tailor your language support to their needs. It can also be useful to you and the learners when deciding about appropriate learning goals which build on their existing capabilities. In addition, it is a valuable self-assessment activity which can help migrant learners to reflect on their language learning and the value of the language repertoire that they already have.

(For a more detailed self-assessment grid, see also the table: https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/self-assessment-grid, available in 34 languages).

A note on different learning preferences

People may have preferences about how they like to learn, particularly if they have had previous experience of formal learning. For example, some people may prefer to hear an instruction, others to read it on the board and others to follow instructions in a diagram. Using a wide range of different activities and resources will maximise the impact of learning opportunities, help to engage people in learning, and reduce any possible barriers.

Using the Toolkit to plan

This toolkit offers a variety of approaches which will help you to choose activities. See the section called _Preparing and planning language support_.