

A case study related to the migration context within the Italian scenario

The European scenario

As the **figure 1** shows, over the years there has been an increase in requirements – including language, as well as Knowledge of Society (KoS) tests – for access, integration and citizenship (Pochon – Berger & Lenz: 2014; Pulinx & Van Avermaet; 2015).

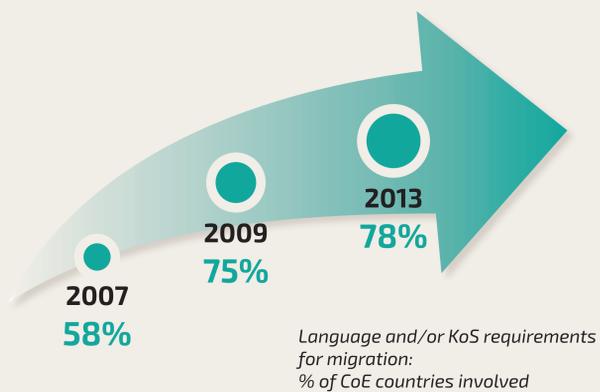
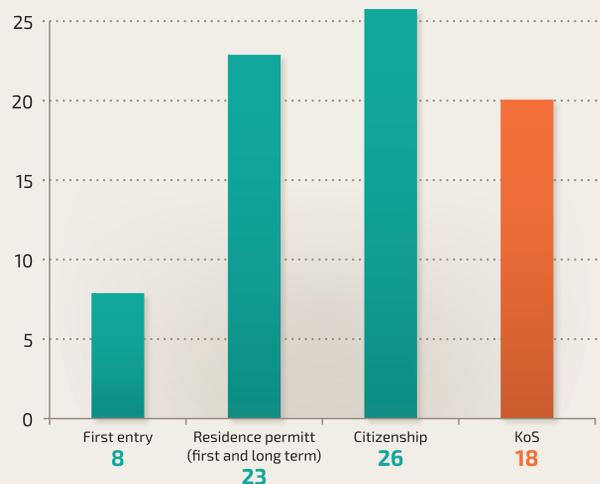


Figure 1 - Council of Europe (survey: 2014 - corpus of 36 countries)



Graph 1 - Council of Europe (survey: 2014)

According to the macro scenario the **graph 1** presents 4 columns:

- In 8 countries a first entry is required: an A1 CEFR level is needed at the arrival.
- In 23 countries the language requirements are related to the migrants' request of the residence permit and/or of the long term residence permit (CE Chart): mainly the A2 level is compulsory.
- In 26 countries again the A2 level (often B1) is requested in order to obtain the citizenship.
- 50% of the corpus require also KoS test: everywhere the civic competence is investigated through closed techniques (often computer based multiple choices) with the exception represented by the Italian case where a speaking exam is provided by law.

One of the hypothesis of this case study is that the Italian approach to KoS test is more in line with the position of the Parliamentary Assembly: "[Formal] test should not be the only method. Rather than or in addition to tests, one should consider other ways [...], such as interviews with trained personnel to ensure fairness". (CoE, Parliamentary Assembly, Recommendation 2034: 2014).

The Italian context

- More than 5,000,000 migrants live nowadays in Italy.
- 8.4 is the percentage of migrants in relation to the overall population (ISTAT: 2015).

Many public schools are involved in adult education: more than 6,000 teachers from public and private institutions provide tuition, always optional and usually free of charge.

This seems to go in the direction hoped by the same CoE Recommendation: "Rather than promoting testing, offering language courses [...] may offer greater advantages without running the risk of excluding migrants". Nevertheless 2 issues need to be outlined:

1. The low percentage of adult migrants involved: only 5.3% of the overall foreign population
2. The scarce homogeneity in terms of contents (syllabus, teachers' materials, etc.), despite the fact that in 2012 the Ministry of education published guidelines concerning band A (no specifications are provided both for the bands B - C or for people with no literacy skills).

Despite the low percentage of migrants involved in language courses a higher percentage registered for compulsory tests (17%): to pass the exam is perceived as more important than to attend a course. The test is a tool to fulfill an obligation, implying a negative impact (Shohamy: 2007) of the laws.

Language and KoS: the Italian policies

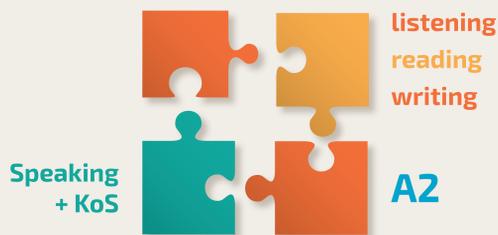


Figure 2 - A2 required in Italy: a jigsaw of skills

As the **Figure 2** shows, there are 2 different requirements:

1. the residence permit (*Integration Agreement* - DPR 179/2011): newcomers (not EU/ more than 16 years old, exclusion of family reunion, Asylum seekers and refugees) have to attain the A2 (speaking), demonstrating civic competence.
2. the long term residence permit (Law by decree - Dlgs 4/6/2010): migrants (not EU/ more than 16 years old) who have lived in Italy at least 5 years have to attain the A2 (reading, listening and writing).

Testing related to the Integration agreement: implications for CVCL

Taking into account the characteristics of the migrants, particularly their literacy profiles (Rocca: 2015), the KoS test in Italy, according to the National Guidelines (MIUR: 2014) is represented by a A2 spoken test. The oral interaction plays a crucial role for the linguistic integration. In addition, from a practical point of view: both language and civic requirements are assessed at the same time.

The content refers to the following list of topics established by law:

- Basic principles of the Italian Constitution
- Basic information about the local government
- Detailed information concerning health, school, social services, labor and tax obligations

CVCL is one of the four Italian Centers officially recognized by the Government award certificates in Italian, the certificates provided by CVCL are called CELI.

The Ministry of Interior (Communication: 2015) recognized the CELI 1 - A2 for migrants as valid also in terms of KoS assessment, integrating the topic required by the law in the speaking component.

Consequently, CVCL changed the structure, the tasks, as well as the evaluation scale of the oral part in order to find answers to the question proposed in the **figure 3**.



Figure 3 - Is it possible to avoid this?

CELI 1 exam for migrants: the new speaking part

Toward a new construct?

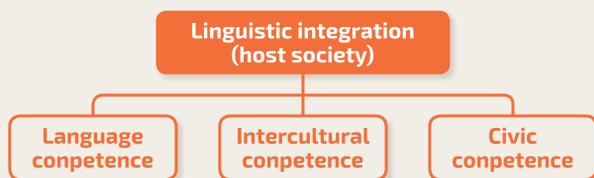


Diagram 1 - Competences related to linguistic integration (ALTE - LAMI: 2016)

The **diagram 1** "shows the competences related to linguistic integration in the host society. Linguistic integration requires not only a level of general language competence, but also awareness of the cultural norms of the host society, and how these relate to the migrants' own cultural background, as well as to their linguistic repertoire. [...] A needs analysis of how migrants are expected to in their target community will support the identification of relevant and useful test tasks, hopefully focused in particular on the public domain". (ALTE - LAMI, *Language tests for access, integration and citizenship. An outline for policy makers*: 2016)

According to what shared in the ALTE - LAMI (Language Assessment Migration and Integration) working group, CVCL considered the three competences represented in the diagram in writing the specifications of the new speaking component (Rocca: in press).

Format

It is a live test: each candidate interacts with one examiner. Another examiner plays the role of the observer. The test duration is around 8 minutes.

Structure

Tasks	Input	Competences	Functions
Guided presentation	Questions	Linguistic	Present him/her self
Description + interaction	Picture and questions	Linguistic + Civic	Describe + tell using the past
Description + interaction	Picture and questions	Linguistic + Intercultural	Describe + exchange information

Table 1 - Structure of the exam

The test consists of:

1. a presentation of the candidate, conducted by the examiner. During this part the observer selects the input for the following parts among a series of picture and related guided questions elaborated by CVCL. The observer has to take into account all the information that are emerging during the presentation. In fact, on the basis of these information, the aim is to choose input referred to the personal experience and background of the candidate, without generalizations or cultural, conceptual or speculative abstractions.
2. a simple description of 2 pictures related to the KoS topics provided by law:
 - after the first description the examiner uses specific questions to stimulate an interaction. The aim is to relate the civic aspect to the life experiences of the candidate, asking him/her to refer about them using the past.
 - after the second description the examiner uses specific questions to stimulate an interaction. The aim is to relate the intercultural aspect, asking the candidate to refer about differences/similarities between Italy and his/her country.

Evaluation scale

"The aims of the migrants is to get their meaning across and to understand the new world around them. Therefore in tests, the tasks should focus on meaning, not on form: passing a test should be determined by how much the candidates have understood the task and how appropriately they completed it; in other words, more attention to pragmatic aspects, and less to grammatical ones". (ALTE - LAMI: 2016)

"The lexical repertoire is necessarily limited and errors are inevitable. The priorities are others, summarized in the dual need to understand and be understood, remaining anchored to the social context and the communicative tasks that refer to it. The emphasis is on the realization of the task, on the do and not on the how" (A2 Syllabus in the migration context, the 4 Italian evaluation center: 2010)

Taking into account the quotations above, as well as the **figure 4**, CVCL considered 3 evaluation criteria:

1. Pragmatic competence within civic orientation
2. Grammatical and lexical orientation
3. Pronunciation and intonation

The descriptors of the scale aimed to weight more the criteria related to interaction, than the other two related to accuracy.

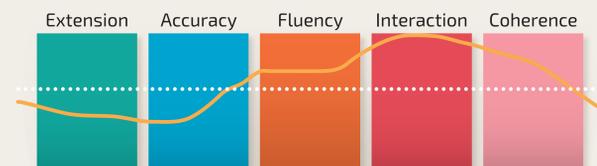
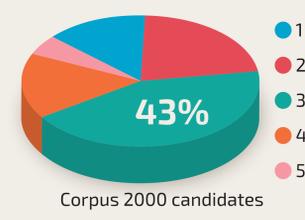


Figure 4 - The not homogenous profile in speaking (migration context)

Piloting, post test analysis and first results

Both the piloting (200 candidates/ 30 examiners) and the post test analysis were conducted on the basis of pre tested and validated tools, (Project *Italia-no, lingua nostra*: 2010, www.alte.org/attachments/files/lami_questionnaire.pdf: 2014).



Graph 2 - How was the exam from 1 to 5

The **graph 2** confirms that the speaking part was perceived as adequate: 43% of the respondents considered the test in the middle between 1 (very easy) and 5 (too difficult).

The perception is confirmed by the results after 1 year of administrations (May 2015 - May 2016), underlining also as the test is a high stake exam:

- more than 200 Test Centers involved in Italy
- 6 sessions
- 13.285 candidates
- 8.901 obtained the A2 level within KoS in the speaking component
- 67% passed / 33% failed

Related researches

A project carried out between 2015 and 2016 by the two Universities for Foreigners (Perugia and Siena) was aimed at designing KoS materials. (Machetti & Rocca 2015).

The materials consist in 24 video (1 hour in total/ downloadable for free) focused on the list of topics provided by law, accompanied by a text in 5 different languages (English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese).