

LATE Language Audits Tool for Europe

Language Policy



LATE: Language Audits – Tools for Europe Executive Summary

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

The Language Audit – Tools for Europe project appears to have concentrated on ESP training, so it deals with one aspect of multilingualism.

The current LATE website states that 'in 2005 new courses will be given in various countries in Europe', but no further information is available. However, the LATE project inspired the setting up of EAPLA, whose Members exchange information about language auditing, both as to practical aspects (sharing questionnaires, examples of actual audits, answers to frequently asked questions, etc.) and as to theoretical aspects (such as research on language training to professionals, bibliographies, etc.)

2. Includes incentives to enhance & sustain language learner motivation & employment

Language auditing (also called "linguistic auditing") offers methods for the systematic analysis by managers, training officers or language experts of the foreign language communication needs of organisations, large or small, in the private sector or public sector. It enables organisations to identify strengths in the language competence of current staff and any weaknesses in the organisations' entire system for communicating with foreign markets at the strategic level.

One of the products of the LATE project is a 260-page book, which sets the scene for language auditing, thus making it possible to create courses/workshops.:

Cor Koster (ed.) (2004). *A Handbook on Language Auditing*. Amsterdam: Editions De Werelt. ISBN 90-71317-18-8. € 15.

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

One of the products of the LATE project is a course-book: S.Blackwell et al. (eds) 2004). *European English: Texts and Exercises*. Amsterdam: Editions De Werelt. ISBN 90-71317-19-6. € 15.

This series of texts on EU affairs and the accompanying exercises are aimed at all those who want to better understand the kind of rather formal English that is used in "European documents" and "European issues". The texts can be used with students at an intermediate and advanced level in courses such as "European English" but are also suited for self-study. The printed texts and exercises are supplemented by additional texts and exercises on the CD going with the book on the same topics; they can be used as additional material or as material for homework or self-study. Each of the 11 Units in this book is built around three genuine texts concerning a

topic of importance to the ever-expanding European Union. The texts are graded so that Text 1 is always the shortest and simplest and Text 3 is the longest and most technical, often an extract from an actual EU Directive. Each text has exercises associated with it.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

No evidence of this project addressing this issue emerges from the information available on the LATE website.

5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

Language auditors carry out an investigation of the language needs of a particular organisation, resulting in a report outlining what action the organisation can undertake to increase the language competence of its staff members, thereby improving contacts with foreign stakeholders.

6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

EAPLA was founded in 2004 as an outcome of a Leonardo da Vinci project called LATE (Language Auditing – Tools for Europe). EAPLA is a partner in "A Common Framework of Reference for Professional Language and Communication Competencies", a Leonardo project coordinated by Helsinki Polytechnic, Finland.

7. Can be readily and usefully implemented

Membership of the Association is open to all persons and institutions engaged in any or all of the EAPLA's objectives or who assist those activities in any way. Membership is divided into the following categories:

1. **Professional**, i.e., for persons who are actively engaged in language consulting or who can - to the satisfaction of the Executive Committee - provide evidence that they are capable of being a language consultant or language auditor, for instance because they have attended a training preparing them for the profession;
2. **Ordinary**, i.e., for persons who are interested in any or all of the activities described in 1;
3. **Corporate**, i.e., for institutions, libraries, publishing houses, and societies.

8. Transferability assessment

No information available, apart from the fact that a number of workshops were held during 2002 and 2003 in four countries – Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Poland. But the training has obvious transferability value, if re-designed to reflect new learning platforms, specifically online ones.

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

The European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme aims to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the European Community as an advanced knowledge society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The Policy addresses lifelong learning as it:

- promotes a wider knowledge and use of all languages throughout the Union
- promotes lifelong learning and learner mobility
- ✓ seeks to improve the quality and efficiency of provisions and outcomes
- ✓ ensures the provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work

Relevant information on the following aspects:

- *which economic priority is driving this (make reference)*
One of the priorities was indicated as the improved communication ability of SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) as well as other organisations, including government organisations. These organisations increasingly come into contact with foreign people and foreign markets. There are quite a few indications that in many countries the level of foreign-language proficiency is not high enough to actually deal with all the requirements of an expanding “Europe” and a more international market. Only a language audit can reveal where the linguistic shortcomings are and its findings can inform decision makers and stakeholders on appropriate strategies, policies and funding priorities.

And secondly, with the increasing influence of “Europe”, organisations need to keep abreast of European rules and regulations. Consequently there is a need to be able to read what is published about them. Hence one of the objects was to develop teaching material on “EU English”. The theory and methodological guidelines established by the project can be transferable to other languages, but there is no indication as to whether this has been taken up.

- *which organisations are targeted for implementation of programmes*
The LATE project is concerned with establishing parameters for training auditors to carry out Language Auditing (also called “linguistic auditing”), usually in private or public organisations, in order to map out available language training needs and identify gaps when training can be provided to fill such gaps.

This offers methods for the systematic analysis by managers, training officers or language experts of the foreign language communication needs of organisations, large or small, in the private sector or public sector. It enables organisations to

identify strengths in the language competence of current staff and any weaknesses in the organisations' entire system for communicating with foreign markets at strategic level.

However, The Language Audit – Tools for Europe project appears to have concentrated on ESP training only, at least from the scarce and not updated information that is available on the LATE web site and on the EAPLA website, so it deals with one aspect of multilingualism.

- *whether it is sector-driven and, if so, which sectors*
There were economic priorities the project was meant to address, and its targets were both private and public organisations. Therefore the project is not necessarily sector driven, although its main users are likely to be organisations which operate in a multilingual framework, either internal or external, both formal, non formal and informal.
- *impact of the programme*
Impact can be seen through the establishment in 2004 of EAPLA, the European Association of Professional Language Auditors, as a tangible outcome of the Leonardo LATE project. Language auditors carry out an investigation of the language needs of a particular organisation, resulting in a report outlining what action the organisation can undertake to increase the language competence of its staff members, thereby improving contacts with foreign stakeholders.

Further impact is provided by the courses on carrying out language audits held during 2002 and 2003 in four countries – Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Poland – for teachers of English with an interest in, and preferably some experience of, teaching adults working in business or government organisations. The course lasted two days for the initial training followed, some six months later, by a one-day refresher session. In the six months in between, students were expected to carry out a number of assignments, one being an actual language audit.

2. Includes incentives to enhance and sustain language learner motivation and employment benefits

Relevant data on outcomes for current employment context are clearly identified & responded to. This can include the following:

- *Details of specific incentives to encourage uptake of language learning*

The set up of EAPLA has got a special focus on encouraging uptake of language learning. The aims of EAPLA are:

1. To undertake, commission and disseminate research on language consulting, including language auditing;
2. To publish information relating to the perceived or unperceived needs of organisations as to the use of foreign languages;
3. To advise on the formulation of policy and development of best practice based on impartial and objective research and collective know-how;
4. To accredit individuals and organisations in the field of language consulting, including language auditing;

5. To bring together people involved in language consulting in Europe and elsewhere and promote interaction between experts from different disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, sociology and business studies, and professionals in the fields of language teaching and language training, translation, interpreting, e-learning, and management;
 6. To hold conferences at appropriate intervals.
- *Channels to be used to deliver messages*
One of the products of the LATE project is a 260-page book, which sets the scene for language auditing, thus making it possible to create courses/workshops.: Cor Koster (ed.) (2004). A Handbook on Language Auditing. Amsterdam: Editions De Werelt. ISBN 90-71317-18-8. € 15.

The current LATE website also states that 'in 2005 new courses will be given in various countries in Europe', but no further information is available.

- *Awards and other recognition of investment in language training*
An accreditation scheme has been established to:
 - Set quality standards for language auditing
 - Provide all individuals and organisations interested in foreign language learning with a choice of institutions committed to professional excellence
 - Encourage language auditing and teaching institutions to aspire to the highest levels of quality and efficiency
 - Promote a wider knowledge of accredited language auditing institutions worldwide.

The status of an accredited member brings a set of benefits to the accredited institution:

- Accredited institutions become recognized as reliable institutions whose services meet high international standards
- Your status as an EAPLA accredited member will allow you to join a premium community of language service providers that deserve the recognition of achievement.
- You can communicate your credibility and expertise among other organisations operating in the language sector.
- You add value to your brand and gain positive image as a truly professional institution in the eyes of your current and prospective customers.

Any organisation that wishes to receive EAPLA Corporate Accreditation is requested to make an initial application to the EAPLA Office. The applicant will be sent the EAPLA Corporate Accreditation form, which must be completed and sent back to us together with additionally required documents. These include:

- one example of full language audit performed by the Applicant within the last 6 months preceding the date of submitting the application
- language needs analysis tools applied by the Applicant
- one example of teacher evaluation sheet
- Articles of Association

Upon receiving the documents, EAPLA will review the applicant documentation for accreditation. Provided that EAPLA is satisfied with the findings, the applying organisation is granted accreditation for a period of five years, with the option of

further extension. Should there be any deficiencies, these must be removed within a period of 12 months by taking any corrective measures considered appropriate. The corrective actions will be reviewed by EAPLA. The applicant institution will be notified of the decision and the relevant certificate will be issued.

Additionally:

- All accredited institutions must ensure constant development of the know-how related to language auditing among their staff
 - At least one member of the staff must possess the status of language auditor granted by the European Association of Professional Language Auditors
 - Accredited institution must have a set of defined criteria for personnel hire, including minimum requirements as to the educational background, credentials, necessary experience and foreign language competence
 - Accredited institutions are expected to conduct and store for further reference periodical evaluation of all staff involved in language teaching, auditing and methodology
- *Details of any planned informal learning contexts*
The European Association of Professional Language Auditors has been set up to encourage, stimulate and improve foreign language use in the workplace with special attention placed on proper recognition of existing language needs among persons and organisations undertaking the process of foreign language development.

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

Relevant information on the extent to which the language policy builds on overall regional:

- *Extent of support for small and medium-sized enterprises*
The practice enables organisations to identify strengths in the language competence of current staff and any weaknesses in the organisations' entire system for communicating with foreign markets at strategic level. This offers methods for the systematic analysis by managers, training officers or language experts of the foreign language communication needs of organisations, large or small, in the private sector or public sector.
- *Planned surveys of employer need, including details of questions to be asked and information targeted*
So far, little has been published on language auditing; only two books on the technique of carrying out language audits (Reeves and Wright, 1996; Huhta, 2002) and a relatively small number of books and articles reporting on foreign-language needs in business (Koster and Radnai, 1997; Schöpfer-Grabe and Weiss, 1998; Hagen, 1999; Huhta, 1999; Weber, Becker and Laue, 2000).

Nothing at all has been written on the process of translating the results of a needs analysis into specific recommendations, into teaching materials or teaching practices. No actual language audits have been published either, with the exception of a few audits carried out in Hungary (Koster and Radnai, 1997).

However, In the LATE project, a 40-item vocabulary test was developed as a test, which can be done in writing in seven minutes

Also, the LATE project collected data on the reliability of self-assessments, being especially interested in possible differences between various countries because they suspected not only that people in some countries are better at assessing their own proficiency in a foreign language than people in other countries, but also that there would be large differences between different individuals in the way they assessed themselves. This turned out to be the case. The overall conclusion one may draw is that self-assessment does give some indication of the respondent's proficiency level but that quite a few people either overestimate or underestimate their level.

- *Whether language-related skills are included on career-related surveys*
- *Whether a diverse range of languages is foreseen, and which languages are seen as a priority*

A professional auditor must be familiar with a wide variety of topics in order to be able to carry out an audit and make proper recommendations. He or she must also be able to answer questions from interested parties, in particular company managers who usually like to discuss the auditor's recommendations in great detail and who have their own pet ideas about how to solve linguistic problems. An auditor must also know enough about language, language teaching and the provision of language services in order to be able to judge whether a particular representative of the language industry and its product – a language school, a foreign language course book, an interpreter, a piece of software, a translation – is any good at all.

- *Whether funding or similar support for language training is an output of the policy*
The project does not envisage direct support for companies neither does it provide financial support for training. However, it does provide a comprehensive framework for policy makers. What is missing is the link with such policymakers, who do not appear to have been brought into the fray. Therefore there is no evidence of a buy in by business representatives and brokering organizations, such as national and international Chambers of Commerce, which could have been instrumental in promoting language audits and even training for staff with language skills to develop a language strategy for the company.

- *Development of resources for careers advisors and business skills brokers highlighting the benefits of language & culture skills*

A handbook for training language auditors has been published. The Table of Contents is very useful in understanding the direction of the training. It includes the following topics:

- Language auditing: an introduction, carrying out a language audit,
- Areas of competence of a language auditor,
- When are language courses 'successful'?,
- Certifying the language trade – an impossible task?,
- Using technologies for self-study – Practice and exercises in English on the World Wide Web,
- Electronic Learning Environments (ELEs) and the new role of 'teachers' and learners in Language Learning,
- From the in-company shop floor – ESL in practice, Intercultural skills: can they be learned?,

- LATE Audit Courses – introducing the audits in the following chapters,
- Case studies of language audits in a Polish financial and legal consultancy, language audits in selected petrol stations located along the national borders of Poland, language audits in a pharmaceutical company in Hungary, language audits in an electronics and telecommunications company in Bulgaria.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

No evidence of this project addressing this issue emerges from the information available on the LATE or the EAPLA website. Although presumably the Language Audit would be able to identify minority languages spoken within a company, both as native speakers and as learners. It is not clear what recommendations would have emerged from such Language Audits.

5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

The Practice includes an aspect that provides for international networking through:

- *Details of established international networks*
The LATE project inspired the setting up of European Association of Professional Language Auditors (EAPLA), whose Members exchange information about language auditing, both as to practical aspects (sharing questionnaires, examples of actual audits, answers to frequently asked questions, etc.) and as to theoretical aspects (such as research on language training to professionals, bibliographies, etc.)

Language auditors carry out an investigation of the language needs of a particular organisation, resulting in a report outlining what action the organisation can undertake to increase the language competence of its staff members, thereby improving contacts with foreign stakeholders.

The basic question to be answered in a language audit is: can the organisation deal adequately with its foreign-language requirements, now and in the future? And, if not, what can be done about it? An audit may take place in and for a company as a whole, or for one or more departments within a company. It may be done for a department of a government organisation, a city district, a humanitarian NGO, in short, for any organisation where staff come into contact with speakers of another language.

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6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

Relevant information on outputs of the programmes developed as a result of the policy and its relation to the issues of qualifications, of credit and other qualifications-related systems and transparent levels for target qualifications.

- *Levels of target qualifications*

There is a lot of discussion on the issues of validity and reliability. The main point here is that developing one's own test is not recommended because of validity and reliability issues. Test design is very much a specialist's job. The suggestion in Chapter 3 of Cor Koster book is:

“Yet sometimes it makes sense to have a quick placement test which gives at least some indication of people's proficiency. In the LATE project, a 40-item vocabulary test was developed as a test, which can be done in writing in seven minutes. Details can be found in Appendix A. Various other options for conducting a test are discussed by Shotlekov (Chapter 6.4.1 this volume), who refers among other things to computer-adaptive tests such as DIALANG and PhonePass, and by Hristova and Dragostinova (Chapter 8.3 this volume) who mention some websites devoted to language testing.

Because validity and reliability are such important concepts, a language auditor needs to be familiar with them.

A test has validity when it tests what it wants to test. This seems rather trivial, but it is often quite difficult to be sure that a test does indeed assess what it is meant to test. An example: a reading test may claim to measure the reading skill of one's students, but what it may measure is perhaps just knowledge of vocabulary or, even worse, knowledge of the world. It is customary to distinguish at least four kinds of validity.

Face validity refers to the way the test 'looks' to both tester and testee and basically answers the question whether the test looks right. It may not look right if, for instance, it is too short.

Content validity refers to the question whether the material in the test is a representative sample of what is to be tested or of what has been taught or learned.

Construct validity is concerned with the question whether a test is a good operationalization of those aspects of a theory one wants to test.

Criterion-related validity, finally, is a concept that is mainly used with language aptitude tests or, in general, tests that predict future performance. It gives an indication how well the results on a particular test correlate with another criterion, i.e. another test.

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement. In principle, and all other things being equal, students should receive the same score on a test if the test is administered an infinite number of times. If on Monday most student get a score of 60 or so on a 100-item test, and a score of 40 or so on the same test a week later, something is likely to be wrong. The reliability of a test is affected by a

number of factors: test length (the longer a test, the more reliable it is). the composition of the group taking the test (if all students have virtually the same knowledge, are equally smart and score about the same, reliability will be low). the time available for the test (on the whole, if students do not have enough time to take the test, reliability will be low) homogeneity of items (if items test the same aspect, the reliability will be higher than when they do not). the discrimination index of items (if items discriminate well between good and poor students, reliability will be higher than when that is not the case). "(Cor Koster (ed.) (2004). *A Handbook on Language Auditing.*)

7. Can be readily & usefully implemented

Relevant information on whether the policy can be realistically implemented, and should show linkages between recent employer surveys and planned implementation of activity.

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2. Ordinary, i.e., for persons who are interested in any or all of the activities described in 1;
3. Corporate, i.e., for institutions, libraries, publishing houses, and societies.

However, the site also states that only one organisation has so far been accredited (in Bulgaria).

8. Transferability assessment

8.1. Evidence of transfer

Information on whether the policy or training has already been transferred to other places or sectors. It can include the following information:

No information available, apart from the fact that a number of workshops were held during 2002 and 2003 in four countries – Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Poland.

8.2. Innovation

The innovative element is the formalisation of the training parameters and methodology for language audits. The true innovative dimension would be establishing an online training package.

8.3. Dependence on political context

The Language Auditing training as set up by LATE and its outcome, EAPLA, is not country specific and is transferable, though it does not look at though it has been. What would be very useful is to create a web based toolkit to deliver such training.

The following justification has been provided in one of the main project publications:

“At the end of the previous century, according to Eurobarometer 50 (1998),² some 45% of all EU inhabitants (*EU15*) spoke at least one foreign language. Of course, some countries have more: in Luxembourg, for example, just about every inhabitant speaks more than one language, while in the UK, the situation is pretty dire, with only 1 in 5 inhabitants being able to speak another language.

A few years on and the situation appears to have improved considerably. In a special issue of the Barometer, called *Europeans and Languages* (Eurobarometer report 54, 2001), the average has gone up from 45% to 53%. 53% of Europeans say that they can speak at least one European language in addition to their mother tongue. 26% say that they can speak two foreign languages. Besides their mother tongue, people in Europe tend to know English (41%), French (19%), German (10%), Spanish (7%) and Italian (3%). Overall, the language most often spoken as a first foreign language in Europe is English (32.6%) followed by French (9.5%).

Although the average of 45% or 53% for all EU countries appears to be pretty promising for European integration, this estimate is, according to some seasoned travellers, clearly too high because it would mean that ‘on average’ it should be possible to communicate with one out of every two people one meets abroad. And this, they say, is not the case in actual practice. The figures are based on self-assessments by respondents in the various countries, in answer to the question “Which languages can you speak well enough to take part in a conversation, apart from your mother tongue?”. It is quite likely that the ability to give a proper self-assessment is culture-bound, in the sense that some nationalities tend to underrate their proficiency while others overrate it. Indeed, in Appendix A we provide evidence that this is probably the case. There are also data about the language knowledge in the ‘new countries’, i.e. those that joined the EU in 2004 (Eurobarometer Candidate Countries, 2002).

The data given in the Eurobarometer about the number of people that do or do not speak a foreign language is only partially relevant to our subject, even though it is of great importance for language policy and/or language planning. This type of investigation can impact on decisions made at government level regarding education, such as deciding on how much time should be spent on what languages in which schools. To some extent the data are relevant for companies, too, if only to help them decide, for instance, in how many and in which languages their products should be labelled or packaged. But on the whole, these data have a place at the macro-level. For organisations such as SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) or local government institutions, these data will not help much in deciding how best to deal with everyday communication problems such as who will read foreign-language texts, who is to pick up the phone when there is a call from abroad, or how will employees manage when faced with having to communicate with new colleagues after a foreign take-over.

Over the last few decades, many studies have become available, providing data on the perceived needs of companies and other organisations with regards to the use of

foreign languages. However, much of this research, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, was done on a rather small scale, and much of it suffered from methodological shortcomings (Oud-de Glas, 1993). Notable exceptions are the projects associated with the names of Claessen (e.g. Claessen et al., 1978) and a few others (e.g. Koster and Radnai, 1997; Huhta, 1999; Weber et al., 2000)). The largest survey was carried out in the Netherlands between 1975 and 1978. It consisted of a series of three studies of foreign language needs in the Netherlands, with the research focusing on secondary education, on higher education and on a number of social sectors (public administration, trade and industry).

Information about various EU countries is readily available in ELISE, a project on 'European Language and International Strategy Development in SMEs', carried out in 1999/2000 in Denmark, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden. The website also contains data on foreign language needs as obtained in the ELUCIDATE study, which surveyed SMEs in certain regions of the UK, France, Germany and Spain. Thus, for the 'old' EU countries, quite a few data are available.

The situation is less clear for the 'new' EU countries, with the exception of Hungary, where research has been carried out by Teemant et al. (1993) and Koster and Radnai (1997). For example, German and English are the most frequently used languages in Hungary." (Cor Koster (ed.) (2004). A Handbook on Language Auditing.)

8.4. Flexibility

The training is certainly transferable. But It would be necessary to establish a multi-cultural working group which brings in employers and their representative organisations, as well as training organisations. The point is that such training programme should have the buy in of Chambers of Commerce, of Employers organisations, and if possible of Unions. In England, the Regional Language Networks (present in most regions) have been for the past 10 years working very closely with employers to define their language strategy and training needs and to provide support to meet such needs. They are therefore the most likely organisations to have developed the specific expertise on employers language needs. It would therefore be sensible to bring them into a working group to develop an updated language audit – tools for Europe strategic and operational plan, to deliver the internationalisation agenda that Europe 2020 has adopted

8.5. Multi-region transfer

There are no obvious limitations to multiple regions transferability, apart from financial constraints. If a multiple regions working group is established, led by the expertise gained by the Regional Language Networks in the UK, there are no obvious barriers to a Europe wide delivery. But the programme of redesign and implementation would need robust drivers, and this can only be achieved if appropriate long term funding is made available.