

Standard Setting for Grammar Items at C1 Level

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HELLENIC AMERICAN UNION
An educational public charity

Advanced Level Certificate in English (ALCE) examination

- Aims at C1 level
- Administered bi-annually all over Greece
- Over 10,000 candidates
- Includes listening, grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and speaking sections
- Grammar section : 40 multiple choice items

Linking process to CEFR

- Familiarization phase
- Specification phase
- Standard setting phase

Standard Setting: Judges

- 20 judges
 - All practicing teachers of English
 - All experienced oral examiners
 - 10 with prior experience of standard setting
 - 9 experienced item writers for high stakes tests

Standard Setting: Method

- Modified Angoff Method
 - Familiarization
 - Taking the test
 - Three rounds:
 - Individual assessment
 - Group discussion
 - Empirical evidence presented

Grammatical competence in the CEFR

“Grammatical competence may be defined as knowledge of, and ability to use, the grammatical resources of a language...

Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognizing well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles (as opposed to memorizing and reproducing them as fixed formulae)”.
The text is centered on the slide.

(Council of Europe, 2001:112-113)

What is Grammar at C1 Level?

The CEFR Descriptors

- **Grammatical Accuracy:**
 - “Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot”. (Council of Europe, 2001:114)
- **Grammar viewed as integral to all language skills**

What is Grammar at C1 Level: DIALANG Structure Descriptors

- Learners can use many phrasal verbs and prepositional expressions naturally.
- Learners can produce complex expressions, such as relative clauses naturally and accurately.
- Learners may make occasional mistakes in rare or complex structures.

(in Alderson: 2005, 187)

What is grammatical knowledge?

“Generally speaking, grammatical knowledge is involved when examinees understand and produce utterances that are grammatically precise and contextually meaningful”.
(Purpura, 89).

Coding: Variance of Standard Setting to Candidate Performance

Variance	Code
0 – 3 percent	A
4 – 5 percent	B
6 – 10 percent	C
11 – 15 percent	D
16 – 20 percent	E
21 – 25 percent	F
26 + percent	G

Reading Part 2

ITEM	JUDGES' ASSESSMENT	CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE	CODE
1	52	52	A
2	48	48	A
3	57	60	A
4	44	41	A
5	49	46	A
6	53	51	A
7	54	53	A

Judges' Assessment: Reading Part 2

- Judges' predictions close to actual candidate performance (Code A)
- Detailed CEFR descriptors for familiarization phase

Degree of Accuracy in Estimation of Difficulty for Grammar Section

Variance	Code	No. of items	Percentage
0 - 3%	A	14	35%
4 - 5%	B	3	7.5%
6 - 10%	C	12	30%
11 - 15%	D	7	17.5%
16 - 20%	E	2	5%
21 - 25%	F	1	2.5%
26 + %	G	1	2.5%

Example Grammar Items

ITEM	JUDGES' ASSESSMENT	CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE	CODE
68	60	57	A
52	57	49	C
64	64	79	D
51	69	88	E

Code A Item: Form

Item 68:

The Chairperson, _____ the nomination for a second term in office, thanked her supporters.

- A. accepts
- B. accepted
- C. to accept
- D. accepting

Judges' assessment:	60
Candidates' performance:	57
Variance:	03

Code C Item

Item 52:

Health care spending will continue to increase in the developed world _____.

- A. as populations age
- B. since populations aged
- C. while populations have aged
- D. whose populations' age

Judges' assessment:	57
Candidates' performance:	49
Variance:	08

Code D Item

Item 64:

_____ the requirements of the course, the lecturer distributed books.

- A. As outlined
- B. Having to outline
- C. Having outlined
- D. Outlined

Judges' assessment:	64
Candidates' performance:	79
Variance:	15

Code E Item

Item 51:

Only _____ can archaeologists reconstruct human societies in prehistoric ages.

- A. by examining ruins
- B. examining the ruins
- C. the examination of ruins
- D. they examine the ruins

Judges assessment:	69
Candidates' performance:	88
Variance:	19

Conclusions

- Accurate predication of difficulty level more likely where detailed CEFR descriptors exist
- Some accurate prediction of difficulty level for grammar items when focus mostly on form
- Prediction of difficulty level problematic for grammar items where there is more emphasis on meaning, rather than purely on form

References

- Alderson, J. C. (2005). *Diagnosing Foreign Language Proficiency*. New York: Continuum
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Purpura, E. J. (2004) *Assessing Grammar (Cambridge Language Assessment Series)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rimmer, W. (2006) *Measuring grammatical complexity: the Gordian knot*. *Language Testing*, 23 (4), 497-519.

Thank You!