

Le test de connaissance du français (TCF): Un regard critique/A Critical Perspective

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Joseph Dicks, PhD
Director, Second Language Research Institute of Canada
University of New Brunswick



What is the TCF?

- ◆ A comprehensive French language test of the ministry of education of France for non-native speakers of French
- ◆ Assesses competency in four skills – L,S,R,W
- ◆ Graded according to the six levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (A1,A2; B1,B2; C1,C2)
- ◆ Four versions (General, French university bound students, International institutions, Quebec*)

How does the TCF relate to the DELF and DALF

- ◆ The DELF (Diplôme d'études en langue française) and DALF (Diplôme approfondi de langue française) are similar but are designed for learners at particular levels of competency
- ◆ DELF only goes to the B2 level
- ◆ DALF extends the DELF to C2
- ◆ School-based version of DELF (B2) and junior version (A1)

What does the TCF look like?

- ◆ Three compulsory subtests: Listening, Reading, Language Structures : 1h30m
- ◆ Two optional subtests: Speaking*, Writing : 2h
- ◆ Results reported for individual subtests and overall (A1 – C2)
- ◆ <http://www.ciep.fr/en/tcf/tcf.php>

L₂RIC and TCF

- ◆ Students entering B.Ed in FSL must have a level of Advanced on the New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale
- ◆ Currently no **formal** assessment of reading and writing skills – done through assessment of preliminary class assignments
- ◆ Interest in exploring TCF as a replacement for or complement to the OPI

Research Study

- ◆ **Two main questions:**
 - ◆ Is the oral subtest of the TCF a potential replacement for the OPI?
 - ◆ Could the listening, reading and writing subtests of the TCF be used to formally assess students' competency in these skill areas?
- ◆ 17 participants: 13 FSL education students (2 Francophones), 1 grade 12 high school student, 3 Anglophone FSL instructors
- ◆ Instrument: a survey containing 13 questions about each of the subtests as well as a comparison of the oral TCF subtest to the OPI
- ◆ Qualitative analysis: emergent themes from participant comments
- ◆ Quantitative analysis: correlation of students' rating on the OPI with their rating on the oral subtest of the TCF, using Vandergrift's (2006) concordance

Three Major Emergent Themes

- ◆ Generally positive reactions to the reading and writing tests
- ◆ Generally negative or uncertain reactions to the oral TCF tests (listening and speaking) as compared to the OPI
- ◆ Concerns regarding time and fatigue
- ◆ Concerns regarding cultural bias

The reading and writing tests

- ◆ 21 comments were made indicating that the the presence of writing and grammatical components was an important aspect of a language competency test and that these were well designed - 4 participants commented on the clear progression from easier to more difficult items
- ◆ **Lecture:** *J' ai trouvé que le niveau de difficulté augmentait avec chacune des questions et que les dernières quatre ou cinq questions demandaient beaucoup plus de réflexion. Il y avait aussi une variété de niveau de langue dans les textes. Les questions faisaient appel à différentes stratégies (synthese, etc.) et niveau de compréhension. l'ai trouve les 4-5 derrieres questions de cette partie assez difficiles*
- ◆ **Grammaire:** *Excellente mesure et je pense que c'est tres important. Il y avait quelques-uns que je questionnais mais ce sont celles que j'ai besoin de reviser*

Reactions to the oral TCF test as compared to the OPI

- ◆ Generally participants felt the OPI was a more valid measure of oral competency
 - ◆ *Je pense que l'échantillon de langue produit sera plus détaillé et plus personnalisé avec l'OPI. (instructor)*
 - ◆ *L'OPI nous donne plus l'opportunité de nous exprimer. Les questions du TCF étaient limitées plus dans les réponses.*
 - ◆ *J'aime qu'il y a plusieurs questions (dans le TCF) mais vraiment la qualité des questions n'était pas superbe parce qu'il n'y avait pas de contexte à suivre.*
 - ◆ *Je ne crois pas qu'on peut évaluer bien la langue parlé dans les questions limitées en 15 minutes.*
- ◆ However, a strong positive correlation between TCF oral and OPI:
 - ◆ $r = .72$ ($p = .001$)
 - ◆ 9/16 scores were perfectly correlated
 - ◆ 7/16 scores were off by 1 half-level (4 higher on OPI, 3 higher on TCF)

Time and Fatigue and Inattention

- ◆ Inattention especially for the listening test:
 - ◆ *Je le trouvais difficile à cause qu'il fallait être attentif.*
 - ◆ *Le test exige que le participant se force à bien écouter.*
 - ◆ *Un bref moment d'inattention s'avère souvent critique.*
- ◆ C'est un peu trop long.
- ◆ C'est long!

L'accent et le vocabulaire français

- ◆ *J'ai trouve que l'accent français et la prononciation de certains mots rendaient ma compréhension un peu plus difficile, mais en général, les questions n' étaient ni faciles, ni difficiles. Le vocabulaire « technique » de certaines questions posait aussi quelques difficultes.*
- ◆ *Je pense que c'est une bonne mesure sauf que c'etait un peu difficile avec l'accent français ainsi qu'avec des mots qu'ils utilisaient. Peut-etre ça devrait être un Français plus standard ou même québécois.*
- ◆ *Je trouve qu'il y a certains accents et certains mots de vocabulaire qui causeraient des problèmes pour les gens de NB*
- ◆ *Je crois que le test exige que le participant se force it bien ecouter, non seulement pour pouvoir reussir mais aussi pour bien comprendre l'accent, que l'on n'entend pas toujours de façon quotidienne.*



Cultural Concerns

- 17 comments related in some way to cultural differences or difficulties:
 - 7 related to accent and vocabulary
 - 10 related to unfamiliar cultural references, contexts, and idiomatic expressions

Cultural References & Context

- ◆ *(Il y avait) quelques expressions idiomatiques qu'on utilise pas ici.*
- ◆ *Cette partie m'a causé le plus de difficultés car les textes étaient parfois obscurs.*
- ◆ *Mes champs d'expérience n'ont pas inclus quelques aspects de ces travaux.*
- ◆ *Certains référents culturels rendent la lecture hardue.**
- ◆ *Références culturelles variées.*
- ◆ *Nos expériences sont différents alors notre langue est différent. Ce n'est pas qu'on ne parle pas français ici. C'est qu'on parle Canadien. C'est comme l'article ... C'est parti de notre identité.*
- ◆ *Il y a certains aspects culturels qui nuisent à la compréhension des textes. Cela peut être au niveau de la géographie et au niveau du contexte social de l'Europe et ses institutions.*
- ◆ *Le problème avec le TCF est le contexte. Même qu'on l'appelle un test internationale, je le trouve très "français". Un test semblable mais mis dans le contexte canadien pourrait fonctionner.*

Conclusion

- ◆ TCF in general has potential for use in the Canadian context
- ◆ Reading and writing subtests in particular appear to be appreciated by the participants taking the test, with some concerns about culturally unfamiliar references
- ◆ The accent and cultural references detract from what otherwise may be an effective oral comprehension test
- ◆ The oral TCF correlates positively with the OPI but suffers from “face validity” – participants did not feel it was authentic and seemed de-contextualized compared to the more “natural” OPI experience

Recommendation

- ◆ Just as we are adapting the European Language Portfolio for the Canadian context, I propose that the TCF and similar tests be adapted for use the Canadian context with particular attention to:
 - ◆ French Canadian accents
 - ◆ North American cultural context and references
 - ◆ Vocabulary and expressions more common to Canadian French

NEW BRUNSWICK SECOND LANGUAGE ORAL PROFICIENCY SCALE PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTIONS		COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY
<p>NOVICE Able to satisfy immediate needs using rehearsed phrases. No real autonomy of expression, flexibility, or spontaneity. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy but only with memorized phrases. Vocabulary is very limited.</p>		<p><i>A1</i> <i>Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.</i></p>
<p>BASIC Able to create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements. Can satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple face-to-face interaction with native speakers accustomed to dealing with second language learners. Almost every utterance contains fractured syntax and grammatical errors. Vocabulary is adequate to express most elementary needs.</p>		
<p>BASIC PLUS Able to initiate and maintain predictable face-to-face conversations and satisfy limited social demands. Shows some spontaneity in language production, but fluency is very uneven. There is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description, but range and control of language structures are limited.</p>		<p><i>A2</i> <i>Can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations and short conversations, provided the other person helps if necessary. Can manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort; can ask and answer questions and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations.</i></p> <p><i>Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.</i></p>
<p>INTERMEDIATE Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited requirements in school/work settings. Can provide information and give explanations with some degree of accuracy, but language is awkward. Can handle most common social situations, including introductions and casual conversations about events in school and community; able to provide autobiographical information in some detail. Can give directions from one place to another; can give accurate instructions in a field of personal expertise. Has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to converse simply, with some paraphrasing. Accent, though often quite faulty, is intelligible. Uses high frequency language structures accurately, but does not have a thorough or confident control of grammar. In certain situations, diction would probably distract a native speaker.</p>		

<p>INTERMEDIATE PLUS Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. Can discuss concrete topics relating to special fields of competence as well as subjects of current public interest. Normally does not have to grope for words. Often shows a significant degree of fluency and ease in speaking, yet, under pressure, may experience language breakdown. May exhibit good control of language structures, but be limited in overall language production; or, conversely, may demonstrate ample speech production, but have uneven control of structures. Some misunderstandings will still occur.</p>	<p>B1 <i>Can communicate with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field. Can exchange, check and confirm information, deal with less routine situations and explain why something is a problem. Can express thoughts on more abstract, cultural topics such as films, books, music etc.</i></p> <p><i>Can exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling. Can enter unprepared into conversation of familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).</i></p>
<p>ADVANCED Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal, and in all informal conversations, on practical, social, and academic or work-related topics. Can describe in detail and narrate accurately. Can discuss abstract topics and ideas as well as events; can support opinions and hypothesize. Accent may be obvious but never interferes with understanding. Control of grammar is good and speech is fluent. Sporadic errors still occur, but they would not distract a native speaker or interfere with communication.</p>	<p>B2 <i>Can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas. Can communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control without much sign of having to restrict what he/she wants to say, adopting a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances.</i></p> <p><i>Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustained relationships with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party. Can highlight the personal significance of events and experiences, account for and sustain views clearly by providing relevant explanations and arguments.</i></p>
<p>ADVANCED PLUS Able to speak the language with sufficient structural and lexical accuracy that participation in conversations in all areas poses no problem. Accent may be noticeable and the speaker occasionally exhibits hesitancy which indicates some uncertainty in vocabulary or structure.</p>	<p>C1 <i>Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.</i></p>
<p>SUPERIOR Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to personal situation (academic, social, work-related). Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of personal experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary. Accent is good, but the speaker would not necessarily be taken for a native speaker.</p>	<p>C2 <i>Has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning. Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices. Can backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.</i></p>