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Linguistic and cultural adaptation handbook

CITO PROJECT

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1. About the CITO project

The CITO project is an Erasmus+ Key Action 3 policy experimentation project in the fields of Education and Training led by high-level public authorities (<https://citoproject.eu/>).

The CITO project specifically addresses Step 1 of the European Commission's 2016 *Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways* to improve adults' literacy, numeracy and digital skills and assist adults with low basic skills to engage in accessible pathways (European Commission, 2016).

The overall aim of the CITO project is to assess the impact of the use of the **CITO Skills Checker**.

The CITO Skills Checker is a scalable self-assessment skills audit tool for adults with literacy, numeracy, and digital difficulties.

The learner-centred approach of the CITO Skills Checker aims to help learners feel confident and motivated to access further adult education. The CITO Skills Checker is designed to help adults identify their skills and strengths and find adult education options to improve their skills and learn new ones.

The CITO Skills Checker has already been adapted into three different languages – English, Maltese and Norwegian throughout the project period. Also, as a result of the project, the CITO Skills Checker is already in practical use in the three partner countries: Ireland, Malta, and Norway.

An important long-term goal with the CITO project is to promote and facilitate for the CITO Skills Checker to be spread to other European countries easily and efficiently.

This technical framework for this is ensured through the project's sustainability plan. The ongoing technical maintenance and diligence of all the digital tools necessary for the adaptation and operation of the CITO Skills Checker are ensured through the Ministry for Education in Malta.

As part of the CITO project, a complete toolkit has been developed with all necessary materials to adapt and promote the CITO Skills Checker to any new language/target groups. The toolkit includes brochures, materials for social media, general marketing materials, instructional and promotional videos, etc.

Everything necessary to adapt and operate the CITO Skills Checker in new countries is easily accessible and free for use.

2. Handbook overview

This handbook aims to provide stakeholders of national or regional institutions, adult learning centres or adult learner institutions with a tool to help them to adapt the CITO Skills Checker to a new country/language.

Operational samples of the CITO Skills Checker – including the materials in the toolkit - are already available in three languages: English (Plain English), Maltese and Norwegian (Bokmål.) The purpose of this manual is to motivate and facilitate new stakeholders for further adaptation to any other language.

This is an explanatory handbook emphasizing the important consideration of **linguistic and cultural adaptation** when translating the CITO Skills Checker to a new language and a new cultural context.

For most countries, it will be natural to use the English version as the starting point. However, for some Scandinavian countries, it may be more natural to start with the Norwegian version. The content of this handbook is developed based on the experiences of the consortium especially the Maltese and Norwegian organisations, and the guidelines of the European Commission.

The handbook is focusing on two focal considerations in the adaptation of the CITO Skills Checker: cultural and linguistic, and the purpose of the handbook is to provide concrete and practical guidance before and during the process of adaptation.

In this way, the handbook attempts to meet two goals: the first is to serve as a primer for adapters to consider when using the CITO Skills Checker originally designed for a different culture/language. The second is to provide users assistance in selection, using and interpreting adapted tools when necessary.

The cultural considerations are divided into five sections:

1. Examine whether and how the purpose of the CITO Skills Checker aligns with the general cultural and political values.
2. Examine how the purpose of the CITO Skills Checker aligns with the common policy and prioritisation of adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and/or digital needs.
3. Consider and pinpoint the national target group for the use of the CITO Skills Checker.
4. Examine the instructions and database for the CITO Skills Checker and change the instructions and content if necessary to ensure appropriateness for cultural norms and values of the target group.
5. Examine and ensure relevant and proper national links to relevant Learning Opportunities Databases.

The linguistic considerations are divided into four sections:

1. Examine the use of language in accordance with the language of the target group.
2. Focus on using a good, adapted translation taking into consideration local words and sociolect rather than translating each item word for word from English/Norwegian.
3. Use simple words and phrases to ensure that users and teachers/coaches understand each item.
4. Consider using additional illustrations, videos and text blocks to reflect the country's cultural context.

It also includes a step-by-step flowchart on how to translate the CITO skills checker.

3. Cultural Considerations

Cultural differences are the various beliefs, behaviours, languages, practices and expressions considered unique to members of a specific ethnicity, race or national origin.

It is important to consider the culture of the adapting country. The need for cultural considerations for the animations, content, etc. Where possible we have already tried to make the scenarios and animations as generic as possible so that they could be applicable across Europe. For example, in one of the animations, we had to remove the mountains from the background as Malta does not have similar mountains.

Another example was the cultural consideration we took into account when translating the English videos into Norwegian. After careful review and use of test groups, we agreed that we could use the original versions of the videos with Norwegian voice-over and text although the videos appeared to be very “English” in their expression (use of English posters, books, etc. in the background.)

Another issue can be the translation of content where one may translate an item from its original language and maintain the item’s cultural value but may lose the connotation or level of difficulty of the construct of interest being measured. (Hambleton, Merenda & Spielberger (2005); Krach, McCreery. & Guarar (2016).

Value differences may also make it difficult to translate the actual meaning of certain words. For example, translating a rating scale item of “I feel blue” from English does not allow for a direct word-for-word translation. Instead, the item must be translated as “I feel sad”, which is similar to the same construct but does not hold the same value. (Ren, Amick, Zhou & Gandek, 1998).

And, finally, certain activities are valued differently for different groups. For example, a rating-scale item stating, “My child prepares a simple meal” may produce dramatically different answers depending on the cultural group to which it is administered. This is because, in some countries, children start preparing food at an earlier age than others, thereby changing the age-expectation value of the task.

In other countries and cultures, only women prepare the meals, thereby changing the gender expectation of the task. Finally, the idea that preparing food is a solitary experience and not performed as a group or family can also be culturally loaded.

Given all these considerations, the term “translation” is too narrow a description for the modern process. Instead, the term “adaptation” is more appropriate. Adaptation includes all considerations of the cultural-linguistic transfer of the tool from one group to another instead of the singular aspect of simple translation.

It is also important to emphasise that the linguistic aspect and the cultural aspect are closely linked. It is therefore always important to see the linguistic aspect in connection with the cultural one and to think holistically.

3.1. Examine whether – and how - the purpose of the CITO Skills Checker aligns with the general cultural and political values

Although the focus on the need to strengthen and improve adults' basic skills is a major theme in many European countries, there are large national differences in terms of financial and organisational support, facilitation, and priorities.

It may be easier to implement the CITO Skills Checker in a new country if it is possible to link the use of the tool to already-existing national political processes, national priorities or national strategies related to strengthening basic skills training for adults. Each of the three partner countries has already had valuable experience with this in their adaptation to Ireland, Malta and Norway. For more elaboration on this, it may be useful to consult the CITO Policy Impact Evaluation Report.

Taking these matters into close consideration will be an important first issue when considering adapting the CITO Skills Checker to be used in a new country.

3.2. Examine how the purpose of the CITO Skills Checker aligns with the common policy and prioritisation of adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and/or digital needs

To fully examine how the purpose of the CITO Skills Checker aligns with the common policy and prioritisation in the new country, it is important to explore and evaluate the following issues:

- What is the common policy and prioritisation regarding adults with low basic skills which can support and strengthen implementation of the CITO Skills Checker in this country?
- Pinpoint the most important and relevant policies and find out how the CITO Skills Checker can supplement these in a good way.
- Are there any national strategies towards specific target groups that could be more important and relevant for the implementation of the CITO Skills Checker in this country? Give particular consideration to how the implementation of the Skills Checker can be aimed towards narrow and/or very specific target groups.
- Are there already other similar tools available in the country?
- What qualitative differences/improvements does the use of the CITO Skills Checker offer in this country?
- Which are the relevant national institutions on national and/or regional policy levels that can be partners and/or co-partners in the implementation of the CITO Skills Checker?
- Which are the most important and relevant providers of adult education/training that can be partners and/or co-partners in the implementation of the CITO Skills Checker?

Which learning databases exist that can be relevant for linking the CITO Skills Checker to adult education options.

3.3. Consider and pinpoint the national target group for the use of the CITO Skills Checker

The main target group for the CITO Skills Checker is adults with literacy, numeracy and digital difficulties.

However, when adapting the CITO Skills Checker to a new country, it is important to consider that the specific target group can be different in some concerns– for example, more limited or more specific.

One of the advantages of the CITO Skills Checker is that it is a flexible tool and therefore can easily be adapted to different target groups.

It is important to consider that the area of use for CITO Skills Checker in a new country may be different from that in other countries. Thus, it is important to consider that the tool can be used very broadly or more limitedly to a specific target group.

For example, in Norway the Norwegian Work and Welfare Administration considers the Skills Checker to be used for guiding unemployed people with a lack of formal competencies towards formal VET courses.

In Norway also, national providers of adult learning are planning to implement the CITO Skills Checker as a specific tool for their participants in basic skills adult learning for company employees.

Such a narrow use by specific target groups is completely in line with the aim and purpose of the CITO Skills Checker but poses special challenges concerning adapting to the new target group that must be included as an important part of the planning process when adapting to a new country.

3.4. Examine the instructions and database for the CITO Skills Checker and change the instructions and content if necessary to ensure appropriateness for cultural norms and values of the target group.

We have already explained how the specific target group for the use of the CITO Skills Checker may differ from country to country and that it is also possible to think that one user of the CITO Skills Checker has a specific target group in mind when adapting the new national skills checker. It is also important to consider how specific cultural norms and values will be of importance for this specific target group.

Items to consider include whether the relevant target group is mostly involved in working life or social life. Is the target group migrants or locals, what gender and/or age group are we

talking about and what specific cultural norms and values of the specific target group must be reflected in the adaptation?

For example, in Norway, one of the major target groups for the CITO Skills Checker includes people in Permanently Adapted Work Programmes (VTA).

VTA is a state-oriented and work-oriented measure that provides a job offer in a sheltered enterprise to people with different forms of disabilities, and who have problems finding work within ordinary working life. For this group, we had to take very special consideration both in terms of language and the use of practical examples that were familiar to them.

3.5. Examine and ensure relevant and proper national links to Learning Opportunities Database

An important goal of the CITO Skills Checker is to guide the participants towards relevant and concrete learning opportunities. This should be in the form of courses and/or institutionalised basic-skills training for adults available in the current country.

Before adapting the CITO Skills Checker, it is therefore important to map out which national or regional databases of educational courses exist, and which will most be relevant for the participants to connect to. One should seek to implement databases that are free of charge and open to all.

In this process, it is important to map both formal and informal training. It is also important to examine what kind of relevant national suppliers and providers of adult learning are available, so that their contact points may also be implemented as part of the skills checker.

Remember also that the CITO Skills Checker could be adapted at the national level, but also by a singular organisation or provider. For example, NALA in Ireland will use the Skills Checker and link it to their website to direct learners to their courses. Indeed, the flexibility of the Skills Checker allows any provider to link it to their specific courses or learning platforms and said provider does not necessarily have to link it just to national databases. For example, in Norway, we are aiming at linking the CITO Skills Checker both to the official Norwegian national education and career database www.utdanning.no, as well as to different regional and local adult learning providers, especially those who work actively in the Basic Skills in Working Life programme (i.e., SkillsPlus).

No matter which models you want to use, it is important to inform everyone who is linked as contact points in the database both to avoid misunderstandings, ensure sustainable technical connection and prepare them for any inquiries they might receive from users of the Skills Checker.

It is also important to inform about the purpose and relevancy of the CITO Skills Checker before linking. This is to ensure a positive understanding and cooperation regarding the use of the CITO Skills Checker. This is also important from a marketing point of view so that

national databases or providers can promote and provide information regarding the CITO Skills Checker on their respective websites.

4. Linguistic Considerations

Languages change and words can shift in popularity. Words may be lost because they no longer serve a current purpose. Each language can be presumed to change at a rapid rate, therefore translation between two languages can at times prove to be a difficult challenge. Difficulty with translation and not having identical concepts in different languages can be an obstacle as well as languages changing in vocabulary, with words falling in and out of use.

For example, if the goal is to measure reading ability, then translated items should have the same number of phonemes. If they do not (e.g. as happens when changing the one-syllable English word “car” to the two-syllable Spanish word “*corche*“,) then this changes the word’s difficulty level. This same translation may also subtly change the value of the task.

4.1. Examine the use of language in accordance with the language of the target group

A clear, distinct and target group-adapted language should be the norm when you translate the text in the CITO Skills Checker to a new language.

Clear language is not primarily about correct or incorrect language, but more about being language-conscious and always choosing the most user-friendly formulations. It is important to always have the target group in mind!

Be clear about who you are writing for and how and why the recipient should receive the text. When you have a clear picture of the recipient, it is easier to adapt the text to them.

4.2. Focus on using a good, adapted translation taking into consideration local words and sociolect rather than translating each item word for word from

It is important to ensure that the target group feels “at home” with the language in the CITO Skills Checker.

The flexible design of the tool offers a unique opportunity to tailor the translated content to the actual target group. This can be achieved, for example, by the conscious use of special words or expressions (sociolects) that make the Skills Checker more relevant to the target group in question.

A good example would be if the new translation was aiming at NEETs as a specific target group (Young people outside of education or working life). Conscious use of words and expressions that are typical of this target group would undoubtedly have helped to

strengthen their positive perception that the CITO Skills Checker was adapted as a tool “for them”.

4.3. Use simple words and phrases to ensure that users and coaches understand each item

A general piece of advice when translating the CITO Skills Checker is to be aware of who you are writing to. It is important to adapt the content and wording of the translation to suit the recipient.

The main rule is to try to use simple language that is adapted to the target group. It is important to think about the target group’s prior knowledge and experience and adapt the text according to that.

4.4. Consider using additional illustrations, videos, and text blocks to reflect the country’s cultural context

The CITO Skills Checker offer a complete toolkit of illustrations, videos, banner layouts, text files for social media, etc. Everything in the toolkit is free for use and might be adapted into any new language. Most of the material is editable directly as it is in the toolkit. The videos can be adapted with sub-text and/or voiceover.

When you use elements from the toolkit to adapt it to a new language/country, it is important to take into consideration how the visual elements (pictures and videos) reflect the cultural context of the new language/country.

For example, when Fønix in Norway adapted the videos to Norwegian, they engaged a panel of respondents reflecting on the extent to which the “English” expression in the original films was lost in a direct translation into Norwegian. Thus, they used the original versions of the videos with Norwegian text and voiceover - although they do appear to be very “English” in their origin. This might not be the same case in another country and must be taken into careful consideration.

5. Summary: Seven steps for adaptation

As a summary and concretisation, we have prepared a guide for adaptation to a new language in seven steps.



1. Choose original text

The original text in the CITO Skills Checker has already been translated and adapted into three different languages – English, Norwegian and Maltese. The development of the final text in each of those languages is based on thorough preparation and testing in different target groups in each of the three partner countries.

All the text needed for the translation of the Skills Checker into a new language is available as an appendix to this guide, but also as part of a complete toolkit with all the necessary items needed for a full adaptation and presentation of the Skills Checker to a new language area.

You can choose which of the three translations is the best starting point for your new translation. For most countries, the English version will be a natural starting point, but for Scandinavian countries, for example, it will be easier to start with the Norwegian version.

No matter which language you choose, it is important to take the original text as a starting point when translating and adapting to a new language. It is also important to follow the advice in this handbook. We strongly believe that this is the best prerequisite for a successful adaptation to a new language area.

2. Translate the text

Before you translate the text, it is important to take into consideration the target group.

Remember that the CITO Skills Checker can be adapted for both general or more specific target groups. What you are aiming at will have consequences for the translation. For example, it would be different if the translation is aimed at adults with low basic skills in general as a target group or for migrants with a different mother tongue.

In general, it is important to ensure that the translator is qualified and fluent in both languages (translated from/to) – but also that the translator has the necessary experience with the target group and its specific language. For example, when in Norway we translated the text in the Skills Checker for migrants with a lower level of Norwegian language skills, we consulted with teachers specialised in Norwegian as a second language.

We have also experienced that a word-for-word translation is not effective. Instead, it is better to consider the whole paragraphs of the text. It is a little bit like using Google translate; the words are correct but the meaning of the paragraph or the entire text is changed.

3. Review the text

During translation, it is important to review the text closely before posting it as a new version of the Skills Checker.

It is important to involve more people in the writing process. The best way to do this is to let participants from the target group read through the text together with some teachers/trainers. This is to ensure that the translated text is fully understandable in the new language and not subject to misunderstandings.

The translated version should be evaluated and adapted according to the reviews from the target group and the teacher/trainers. Remove and change words and expressions that are not equivalent culturally or linguistically in accordance with the target group. Review again after alterations.

The way you write must be adapted to the situation and the message, and we must try to understand what the recipient is thinking and feeling.

4. Alterations

After review and implementation of adapted text, we recommend that you let some new participants in the target group do a pilot testing of the final text as it will appear in the digital version of the Skills Checker.

Here it is important that the text now appears as it will in the final version of the Skills Checker. That is, not like the text on paper but as paragraphs of text like it will appear in the final digital version.

Pay special attention to the answer options that are included as important parts of the Skills Checker. Are they logical and understandable? Are they providing us with the answers we need?

5. Validations

Pay strong attention to using reliable and valid data – especially in the translation of the questionnaires that are the foundation of the Skills Checker test itself.

What input data you use will have a strong impact on the results and hence the result and guidelines the users will receive after completing the test.

Especially in this part of the translation, remember it is not just a matter of pure translation, but even more a question of using normative and correct data to ensure a valid outcome.

6. Publication

Ensure that you have everything in order before publication.

Run the necessary tests on all material and systems before you go live.

All materials available for adapting the CITO Skills Checker is easily accessible and free for use. However, even as the CITO Skills Checker is not limited under any patented rights or any other limitations for new users, it is important to emphasise the use of the material in a way that safeguards both the content and visual expression in the best possible way.

Not even the name “CITO Skills Checker” is protected in any way. For example, in the Norwegian translation, we use the Norwegian word “*Ferdighetskartleggeren*” in the same combination as in the CITO Skills Checker – “*CITO Ferdighetskartleggeren*”.

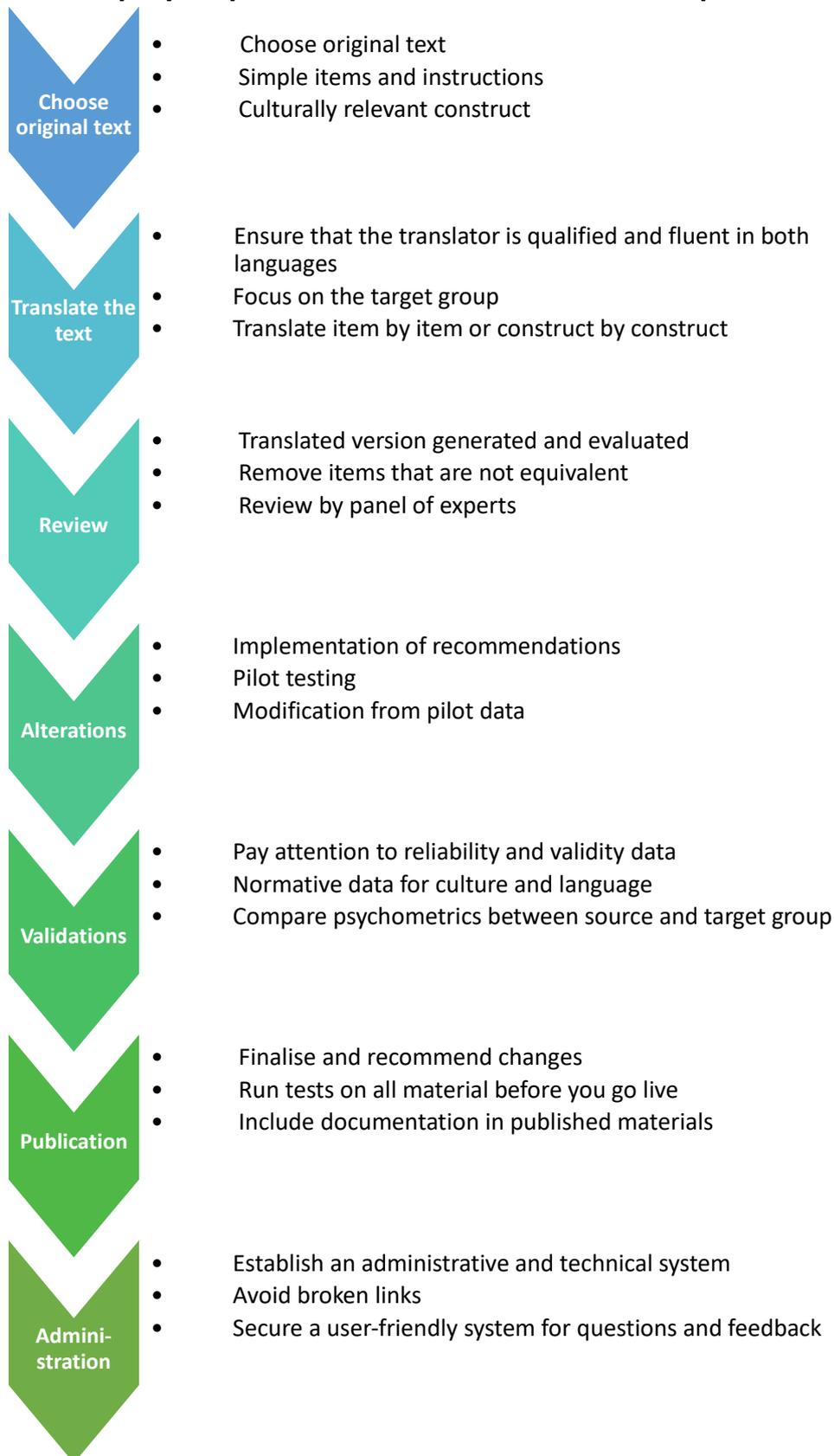


7. Administration

Remember that the CITO Skills Checker is a digital tool and that you must establish an administrative and technical system that will ensure that the systems will continue to run without problems after you have published the CITO Skills Checker online and made it available to the public in your country.

Nothing is worse than broken links to learning opportunities or a helpdesk system that never answers questions or returns feedback from the users.

6. A step-by-step flowchart for translation and adaptation



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