

Aligning A-Level Mandarin Chinese to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

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Part 1

Introduction

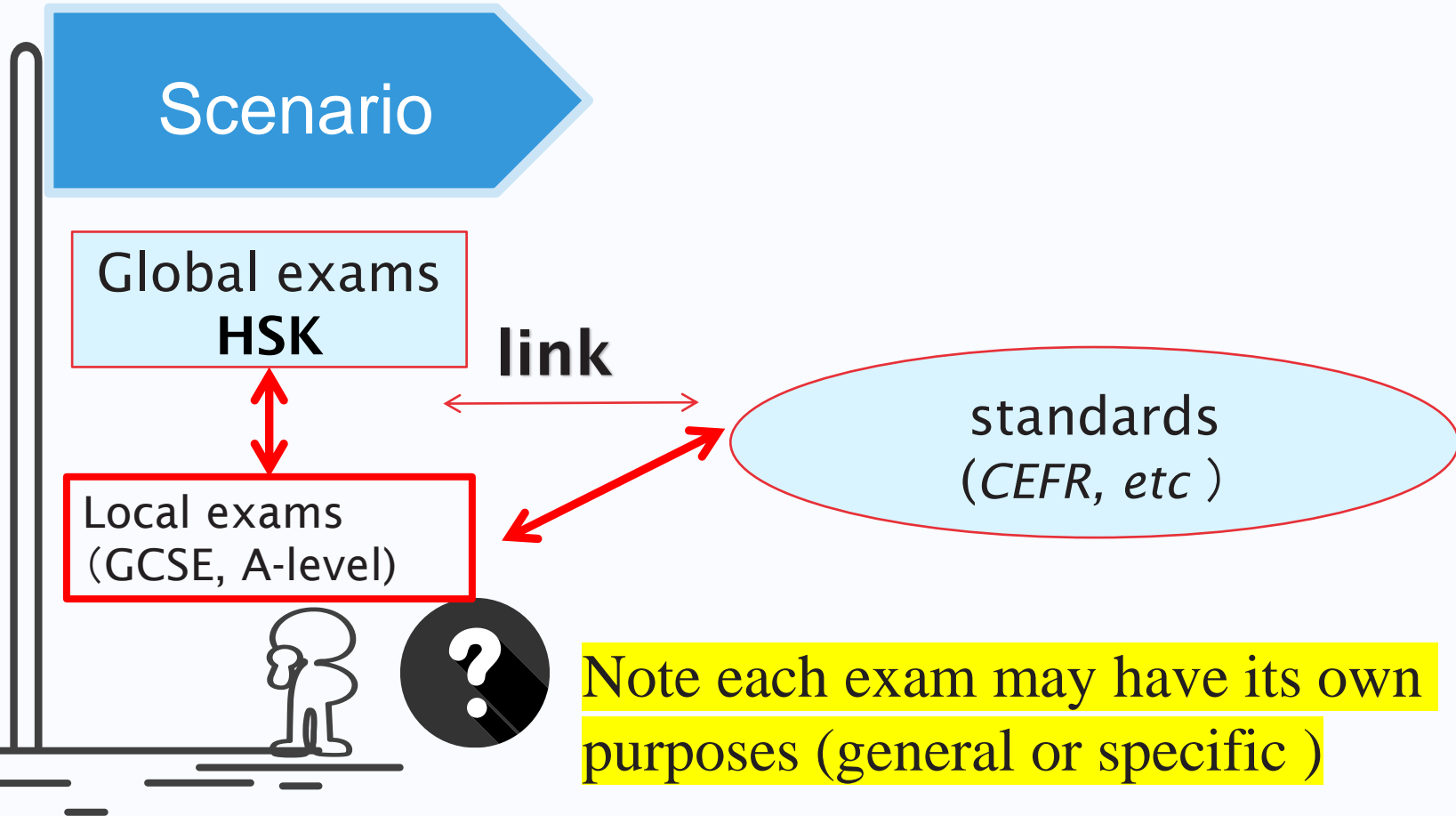
简介

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Why study testing/measurement/alignment?



A Level Modern Languages

Aims and objectives

3. AS and A level specifications in a modern language must enable students to:
 - enhance their **linguistic skills** and promote and develop their capacity for **critical thinking** on the basis of their knowledge and understanding of the **language, culture and society** of the country or countries where the language is spoken
 - develop control of the language system to convey meaning, using spoken and written skills, including an extended range of vocabulary, for both practical and intellectual purposes as increasingly confident, accurate and independent users of the language
 - develop their ability to interact effectively with users of the language in speech and in writing, including through online media
 - develop language learning skills and strategies, including communication strategies to sustain communication and build fluency and confidence
 - engage critically with **intellectually stimulating texts, films and other materials** in the original language, developing an appreciation of **sophisticated and creative uses of the language** and understanding them within their **cultural and social context**
 - develop knowledge about matters central to the society and culture, past and present, of the country or countries where the language is spoken
 - mediate between **cultures and between speakers of the language and speakers of English**



Common European Framework of Reference for Languages



A1
Breakthrough
or beginner

A2
Waystage or
elementary

B1
Intermediate

B2
Upper
intermediate

C1
Advanced

C2
Mastery or
proficiency

Basic

Independent

Proficient

Council of Europe

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/home>

Three parts of the project

- 1. Vocabulary** use of A-Level Chinese
- 2. A standard setting** exercise between A-Level Chinese and CEFR
- 3. Teachers' perspectives**

Acknowledgment:

Funded by the British Academy Mar 2022 to Feb 2023

Part 2

词汇效度

Lexical Validity 与HSK/CEFR对接

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***“ Without grammar very little can be
conveyed;
without vocabulary nothing can be
conveyed”***

(Wilkins, 1972)

Possible correspondence of A-level Chinese, HSK, and CEFR in terms of vocabulary size

HSK & A-level	HSK vocabulary (2010/2012)	CEFR correspondence reported by Hanban (Peng et al. 2021)	CEFR vocabulary size for other foreign languages (Bellassen, 2011)
HSK Level 1	150 words	A1	500 words
HSK Level 2	300 words	A2	1,000 words
HSK Level 3	600 words	B1	2,000 words
HSK Level 4 A-Level (Natzler 2022)	1,200 words	B2	(2,500-5,000)
HSK Level 5	2,500 lexical units	C1	(5,000-10,000)
HSK Level 6	Over 5,000 words	C2	(10,000-20,000)

➤ **Research Questions**

How does **A-level Chinese** correspond to

1) HSK 2) CEFR in terms of **vocabulary size**?

➤ **Methods of Analysis**

1) RQ1: Compare A Level vs **HSK** vocabulary

2) RQ2: An expert panel to determine **CEFR**
levels of A Level Vocabulary

➤ **Test papers**

Listening & reading from 2019 & 2020

➤ Rank the following

Vocabulary

- 1) 没意思 boring
- 2) 丢脸 losing face
- 3) 认识 know (sb)
- 4) 鸡蛋 egg
- 5) 一带一路 one belt one road

CEF	User
A1 A2	Basic
B1 B2	Independent
C1 C2	Proficient



➤ HSK & CEFR Correspondence

Vocabulary	HSK(1-6)	CEFR	SD
1) 没意思	没有 1 意思 2	A2	0.632
4) 鸡蛋	2	A2	0
3) 认识	1	B1	1.414
2) 丢脸	丢4 脸3	B2	0.753
5) 一带一路	-	C1	1.095

3) 认识 know sb

- HSK 1
- Panel judgment

B1 B1 B2 A2 C1 A1 => B1

SD (one of the highest): 1.414214

5) 一带一路 one belt one road

- Not on HSK

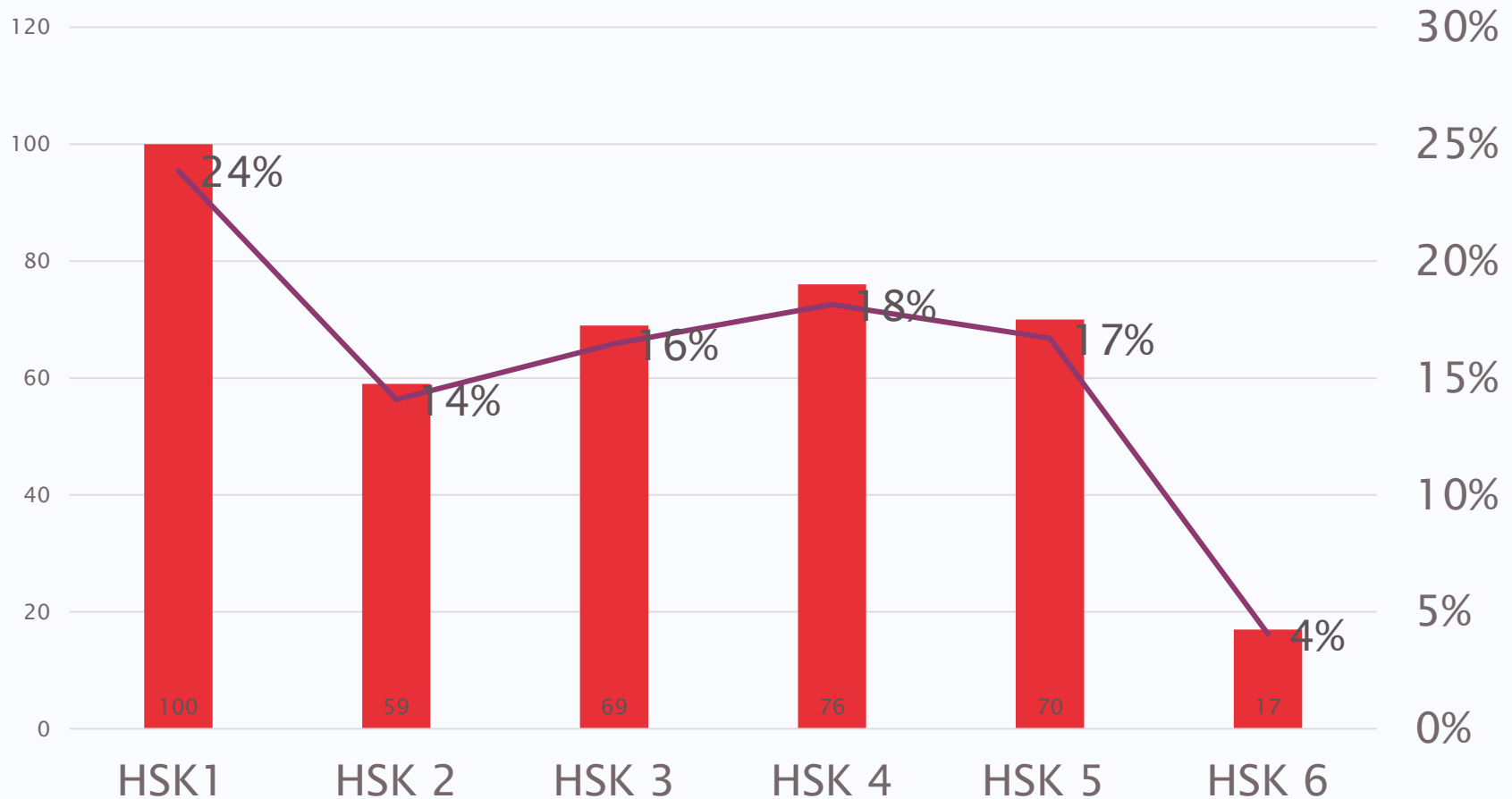
- Panel judgment

C2 C2 C1 C1 C1 B1 => C1

SD: 1.095445

RQ1: Mapping with HSK (A-level Reading = HSK5-6 21%)

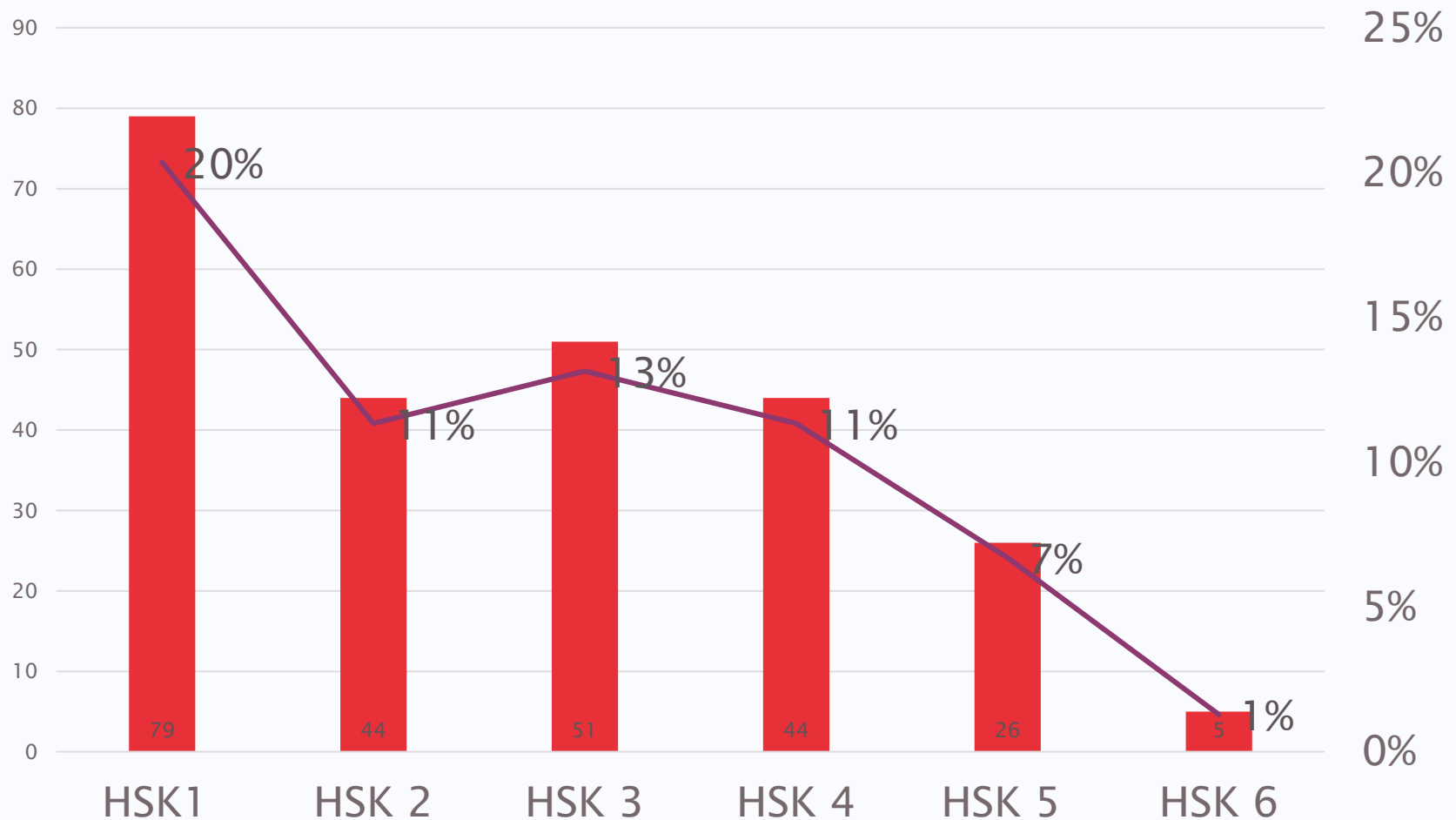
2019 Reading



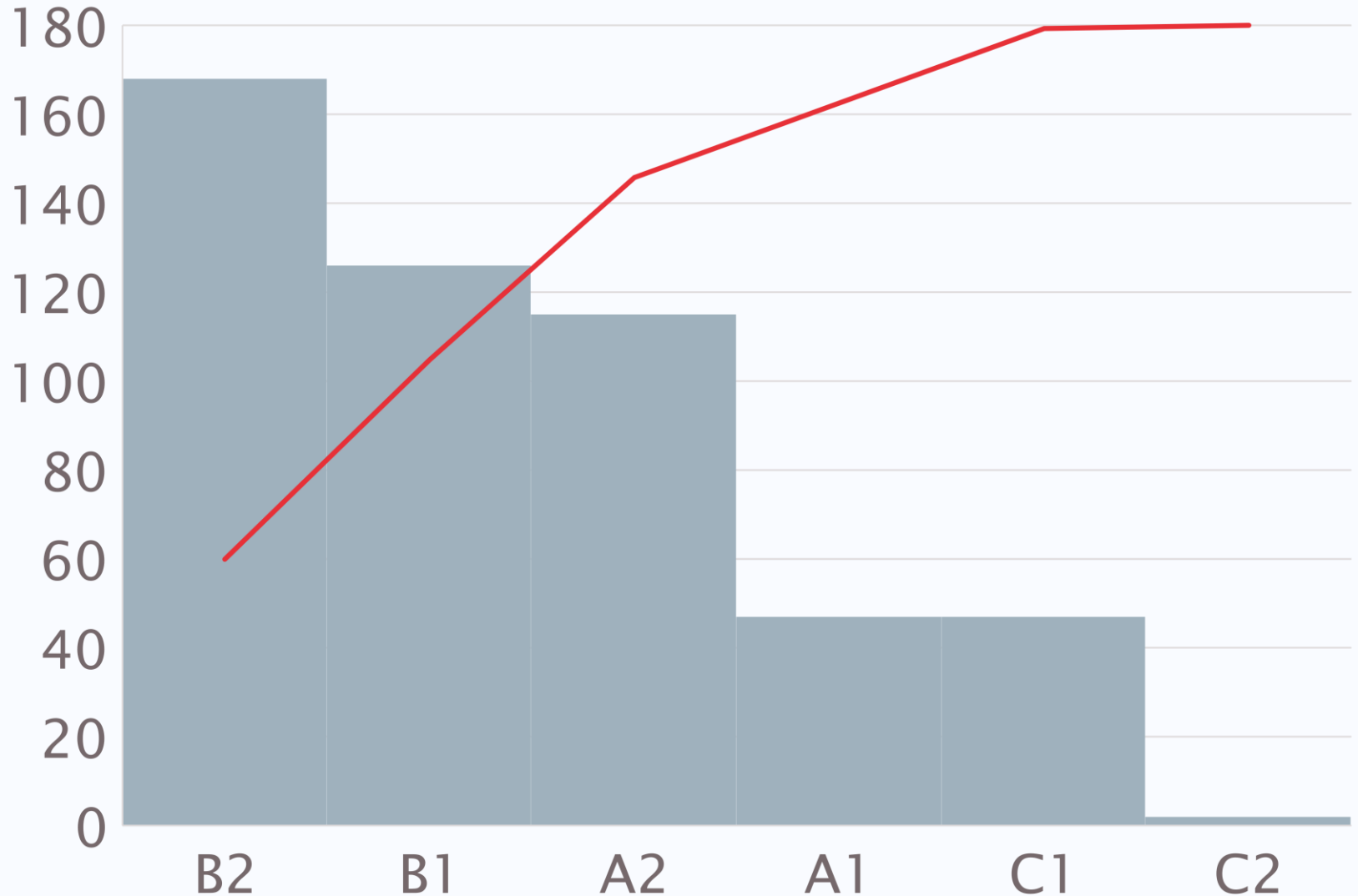
RQ1: Mapping with HSK

(A-level Listening = HSK5-6 8%)

2019 Listening



RQ2: CEFR judgement by experts (CEFR C1 - 9.3% + C2 - 0.4%: 9.7%)



Findings

- **To reach the thresholds of comprehension**
95% (listening) & 98% (reading) (e.g. Adolphs & Schmitt, 2003; Nation, 2006; Schmitt et al. 2011; van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013)
- **A Level vs. HSK**
 - Lexical coverage not reaching the thresholds -
Leaning towards **HSK 5/6**
 - **Note 1) different purposes of the tests 2)**
new standards 国际中文教育水平等级标准
- **A Level vs. CEFR: Leaning towards CEFR C1**

Part 3 Standard setting

A-Level 中文考试 标准设置的实证研究： 与CEFR对接

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What is ‘standard setting’?

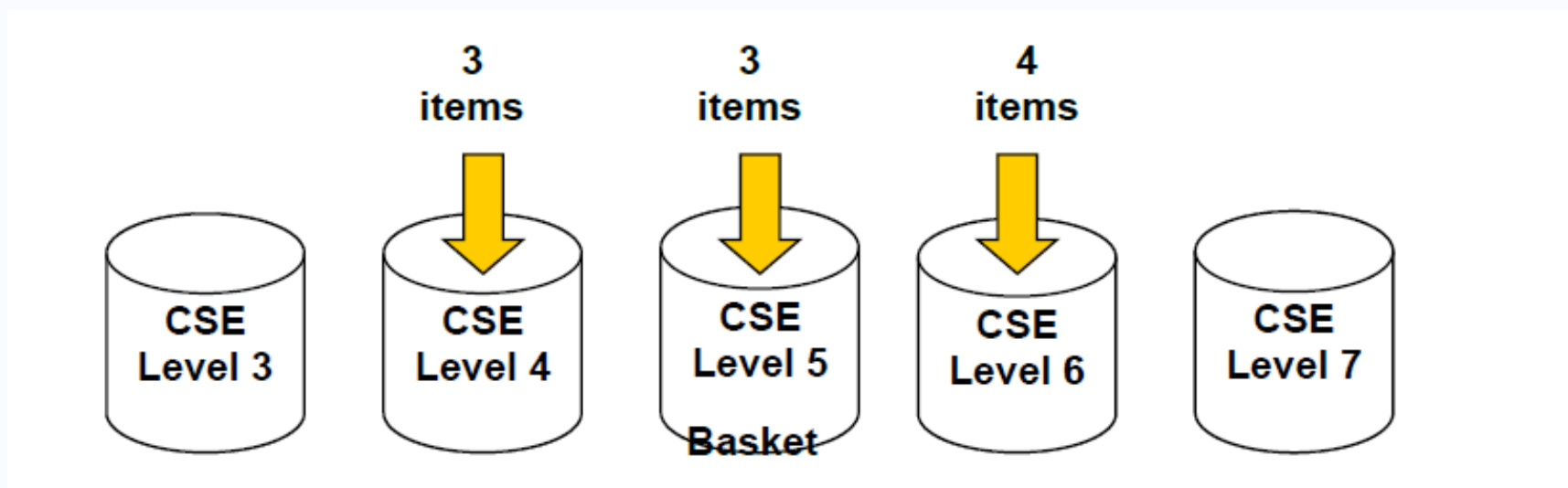
A group of panellists consider at what level in *the framework in question (CEFR in this case)*, a learner would first be able to complete the item successfully

Aim: to gather panel’s collective evaluation on the levels of the test (as compared to what exam boards claim)

What have been done in similar settings?

- Linking to CEFR, China Standards of English (CSE), Canadian Language Benchmarks (CBL)

Basket Method: an example



Basic question: *At what (CEFR) level can a test taker already answer the following item correctly?*

Panellists to put each item in a “basket” corresponding to one of the (CEFR) levels relevant to the test in question.

Source: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/validation/china-standards-english-cse-linking-uk-exams-cse>

Research questions

1. How do we interpret the Reading and Listening items in the A-level Chinese exam within the framework of CEFR?
2. What are the factors that the panellists took into consideration when rating the exam item difficulties?

Workshop activity 1: Reading Paper (2019)



4 阅读下面的文章，然后在正确的答案旁边打☒。

城市污染

有人认为人口多是造成空气污染的主要原因。然而，上海的人口高于北京，那里的空气却比北京好很多。这说明人口多少不是影响空气污染的主要原因。

北京空气不好的原因有多种。汽车多，市中心常常堵车，车速慢，这都会加大空气污染。同时，那里有很多大工厂，工业污染严重。还有，冬天风小，湿度大，容易造成大雾天气。

上海位于海边，虽然汽车也多，但空气好。而且上海通常用水发电，比较环保。上海气候多雨，再加上有很多花草树木，这不但让人们生活得更开心，而且对环境保护有帮助。这些都是上海比北京空气好的原因。

A	人口越多，空气越不好。
B	北京的空气和上海的一样好。
C	北京大工厂多。
D	大雾天气和风的大小有关。
E	北京的汽车比上海的少。
F	海风与空气污染有关。
G	上海只用水发电。
H	上海植物少。
I	气候影响空气污染。

	A2	A2+	B1	B1+	B2	B2+	C1
First-round...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Justification of your first-round rating for Reading 4 *

Your answer

Discussion

Thank you for submitting. Your response has been recorded.

[Edit your response](#)

[Submit another response](#)

Second-
round
rating

For Second-round rating only: If you have changed your rating, please give a reason.

Your answer

Workshop activity 2: Listening Paper (2019)



[Audio link](#)



Participant profile

Schools		Teaching experience in the UK		Gender	
State schools	6	Over 10 years	5	F	7
Independent schools	4	5-10 years	1		
		1-5 years	5	M	5
Higher education	2	Under 1 year	1		

CEFR numeric scale adopted in this study

A2	A2+	B1	B1+	B2	B2+	C1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

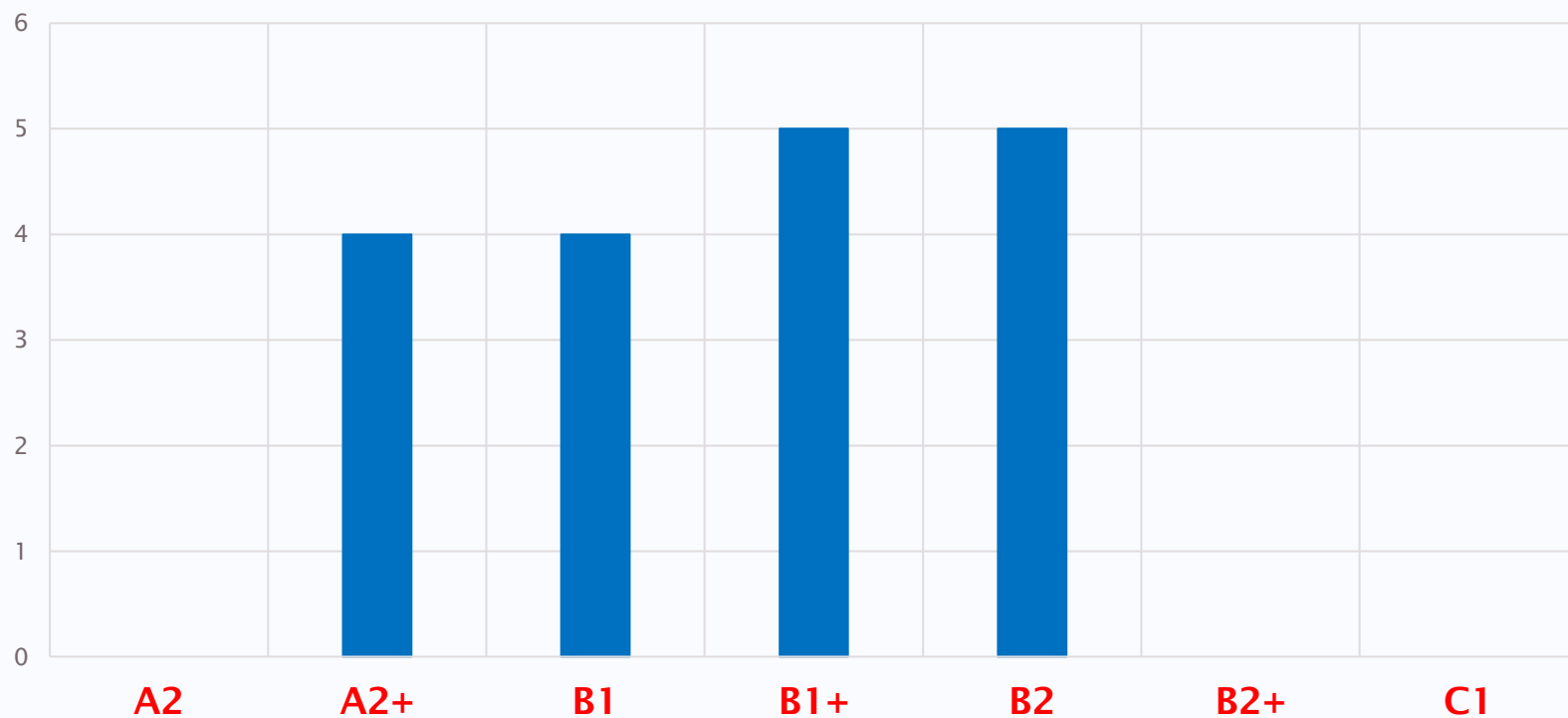
Reading and Listening ratings

	Reading items	Listening items
No of items	18	19
1 st round ratings	216 (18*12)	228 (19*12)
2 nd round ratings	216	228
Total # of ratings	432	456

Total:888

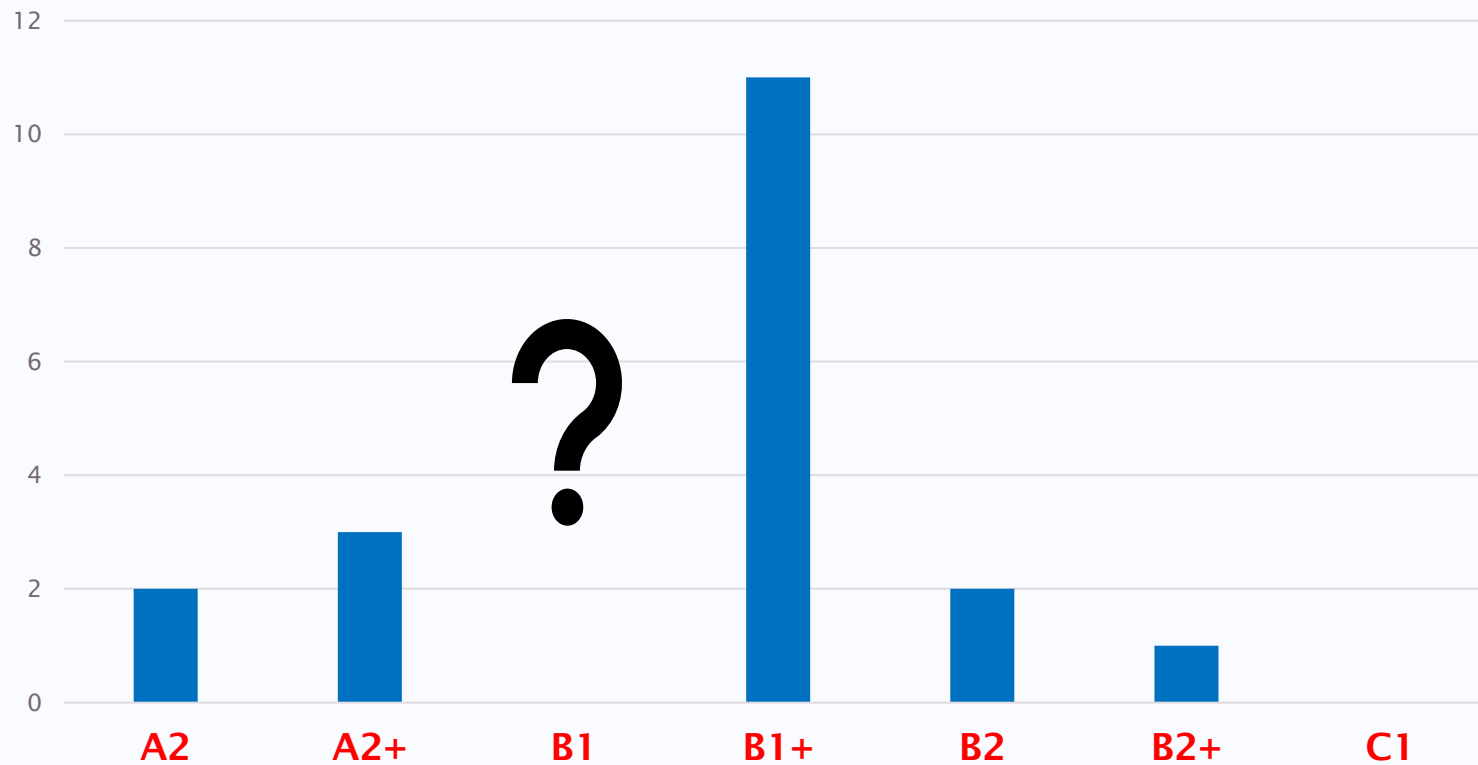
Reading paper CEFR distribution

Reading paper CEFR distribution



Listening paper CEFR distribution

Listening paper CEFR distribution



Panel discussion: factors influence rating

Theme One: test taker-level factors

- *Native vs Non-native speakers*
- *Test taking strategies*

Theme Two: test paper-level factors

- *Language features & cultural distance*
- *Cognitive demands & integrative skills*

Native vs Non-native speakers

“Students, particularly non-native speakers, will be very nervous” (T1)

“Despite the fact that students can control the audio file and the tempo is pretty slow, the pressure of writing characters is considerable” (T4)

The panel took learners’ characteristics into consideration when rating the A-level Chinese exam. Given that Edexcel A-level Chinese exam will replace Cambridge Pre-U in 2023 for more non-native students to take in England, it is important to discuss whether Edexcel A-level is fair for all test takers.

Test taking strategies

“Students can still figure out the phrases by identifying the keywords based on the sound. If they can locate the sounds, the answers can be identified” (T1)

“Students at this stage unconsciously and consciously use their existing knowledge to make guesses” (T2).

“We instruct students on how to answer the test questions, not necessarily on learning the language” (T1 & T2).

Test takers applied a range of test-taking strategies to get a higher score instead of improving language competency itself. Even if they may not meet the standard of a specific level, it is still possible that they could pass the exam by employing some good test-taking strategies.

Language features & cultural distance

“The language genres are sometimes different. Some are formal and some are close to colloquial, which could add another layer of difficulty for non-native students” (T1).

*“I think the jargons/terminologies used is sometimes challenging to understand. For example, students need to understand the phrases "**One Belt, One Road**" and "**China-Africa relationship**". Since they are very Mainland China oriented, it creates difficulty for the test takers in England” (T2).*

The complexity of Chinese language features and cultural distance are two factors that affect teachers’ judgement.

Cognitive demands & Integrative skills

“(For some questions), students need to read the text first, summarise it, then they need to process the information based on the summary before they can produce the answer. Some test items not only tests reading skill but also writing skill” (T3).

“Listening and writing should be separated because listening skill is unrelated to writing skill” (T5).

To what extent should exam items capture integrative nature of communicative language use?

Part 4 Teachers' Perspectives

A-Level 中文教师 问卷 & 访谈

李佳

Jia Li

Bohunt School & Sixth Form

Research Questions

What are teachers' perceptions of A-level Chinese?

What are the current needs of professional development for A-level Chinese teachers?

Methodology

- Mixed methods

- Questionnaire

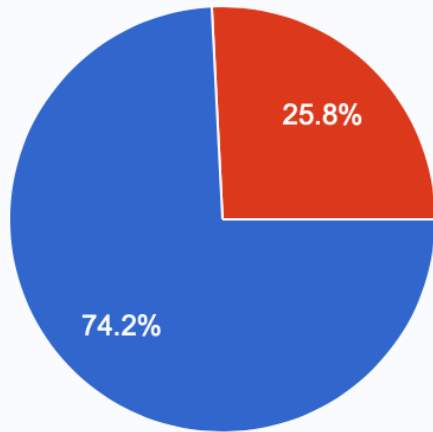
- Interview

- Recruitment & Participants

- MAXQDA  MAXQDA
The Art of Data Analysis

Online Teacher Survey

- Google Forms
- 50 qualified teachers from state schools and independent schools
- Aged from 20 to 60
- 74% have master's degree
- 74% Chinese native speakers
- 26% English native speakers



- ❑ 56% have over 7 years of Mandarin teaching experience.
- ❑ 30 teachers have A-level experience.
 - ❑ 74.2% have heritage students.
- ❑ 20 teachers have equivalent experiences.
- ❑ **9/50** opted in Zoom Interview.

Key Findings



Teachers' perceptions of A-level Chinese

1. Not the top choice for Mandarin teachers (Pre-U has been terminated, **MEP schools have IB pathway now but...**);
2. Vocabulary range mismatches;
3. Heritage students have the advantage in this exam (vs. local England students);

Key Findings



Teachers' perceptions of A-level Chinese

4. A huge gap between GCSE and A-level Chinese (10%);
5. Urgent needs for reform;
6. Positive attitude towards the future of Chinese.

Key Findings



Current needs of professional development for A-level Chinese teachers

1. Teaching resources are lacking (vs. other MFL);
2. Career professional development (e.g. teaching approaches & CEFR);
3. Experienced teachers should be involved with the design process of the test paper and research.

Current strategies

- Adapt resources from the online news channels
- **Teamwork to write handouts and slides.**
- Use figures and data.
- Encourage discussions and independent research
- Follow: characters –words—phrases—sentences—
paragraphs
- Use learning apps



春节有很多习俗，也有很多禁忌(jìn jì)。比如，正月

chǎn zǒng zhí GDP 国内生产总值

shì jiè mào yì zǔ zhī
加入世界贸易组织
WTO



区
区
差

Blue areas are claimed but not administered by the People's Republic of China.



- over 10%
- between 7-10%
- between 4-7%
- between 1-4%
- less than 1%



hōng tuō, set off

烘托_____的气

mái fú bǐ

埋伏笔 foreshadow



• P: 作者用表示动作快慢的词以及对比手法

• E: 比如“慢慢地”，“疯狂地”表现了Q1

• A: 作为读者，我们能感觉到身临其境，位

• P: 又_____又_____的环境描写给后边的情节发展

埋伏笔。

• E: 比如说“_____”

Conclusions, Issues and Implications

- The complexity of test taker characteristics, test taking strategies, language features, linguistic distance, perceived cognitive demands and integrative nature of the test item are some of the factors influencing teachers' judgement of A-level Chinese exam items.
- The majority of the teachers who participated in the panel discussion claimed that “A-level exam paper **does not match CEFR descriptors**”
- **As one of the foreign languages in the UK, the comparability and alignment situation of A-level Chinese exam merits more research.**

Consultations: Further Research Required

Outcomes of the Chinese and Japanese A Level Consultations

This update includes information regarding the outcomes of the Chinese and Japanese A level consultations.

Earlier in the year we wrote to let you know that the Department for Education and Ofqual were consulting on the subject content for Chinese and Japanese AS and A Level. This consultation has concluded and the outcomes are as follows:

- Questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks must be in English instead of the target language, unless writing skills are also intentionally being assessed.
- Questions about the literary works and films will be provided in both the target language and English. Students will still be required to respond in the target language to these questions.

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Manuscripts under review / in preparation

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