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# Assessing Young Learners' Language Competences - Introduction

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# Who we are and what we do

Foreign Language Section (Pracownia Języków Obcych)

at

the Educational Research Institute (IBE)

Project „Teaching Quality and school effectiveness – building tools for research”

This systems project is financed by the European Social Fund within the Priority III framework of the 'Operational Programme Human Capital' - Quality of the education system and 3.1.1. Creating tools and the environment for monitoring, evaluation and research in the education system.

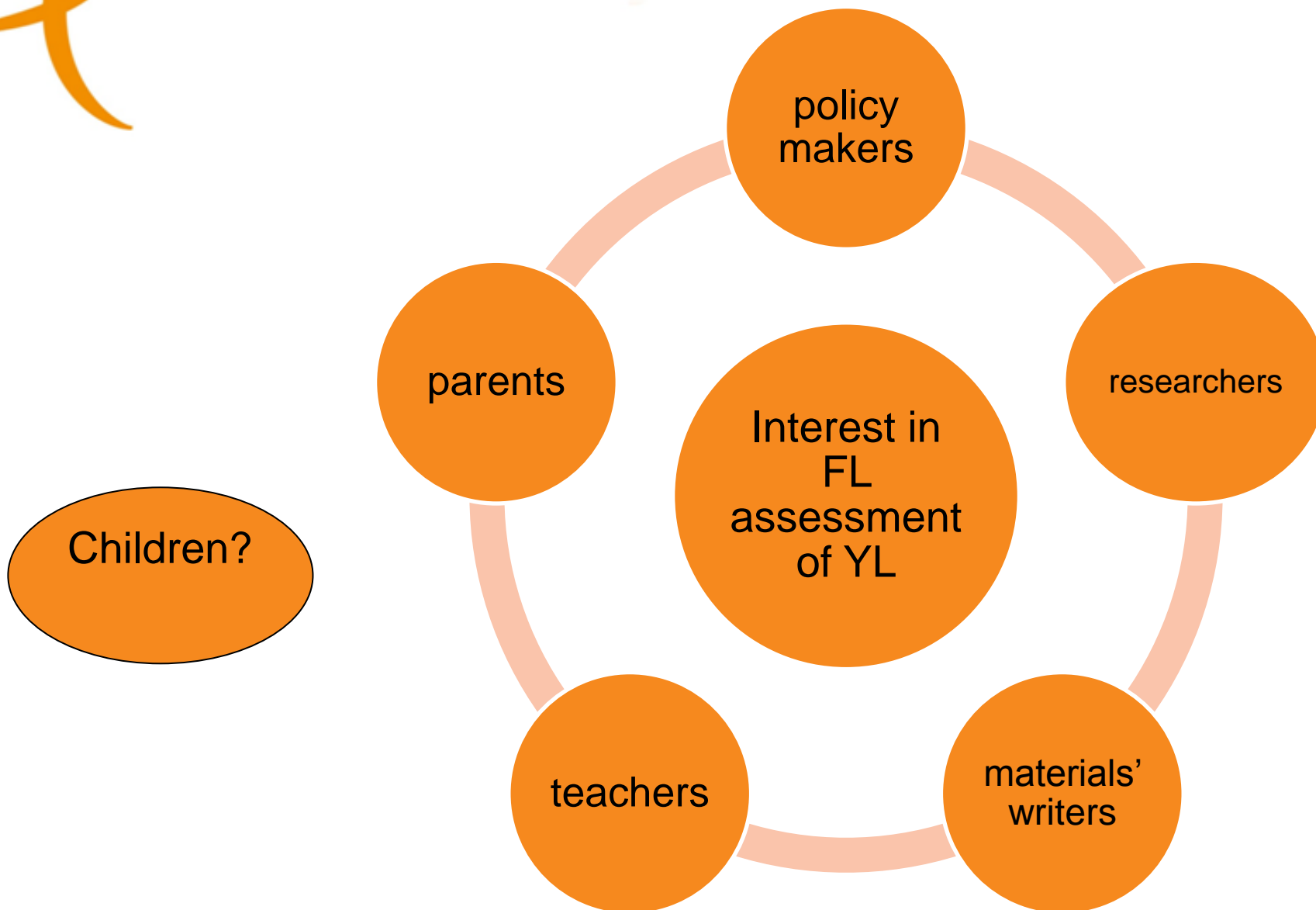



# Foreign Language Section

## Research projects:

- European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) (2011)  
[www.surveylang.org](http://www.surveylang.org)
- Testing Spoken English of 15-year-olds in Poland (2011-12)
- Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages in Lower Secondary Schools in Poland (2012-2015)
- Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages in Primary Schools in Poland (2011-2015)

# Why assessment?





# Assessing young learners

Dynamic spread of ELL has increased interest in testing YL's proficiency and progress. (McKay, 2006)

But

„Testing must be in line with assessment constructs along with the language-content program continuum, particularly within the current integrated or embedded models in YL classrooms given the current status and use in diverse contexts” (Inbar-Lourie and Shohamy, 2009: 93)



# Issues addressed in the seminar

Assessment and self-assessment for learning

Internal assessment in schools

External assessment – large scale tests

Assessment for research - measuring the rate and order of language acquisition



## Seminar aims:

- to focus on tasks which are used for language assessment and language testing purposes with young and teenage learners
- to collect experiences of developing language assessment and self-assessment procedures
- to reflect on classroom assessment developments stimulated by research
- to learn from research on first language acquisition



## As researchers, teachers, materials' writers:

It is of our concern that tasks, procedures and conditions of assessment and testing of young learners are learner-friendly:

-cognitively appropriate – at the right level of challenge

-stimulating and involving to perform – evoking curiosity at the beginning and later the sense of achievement

tasks that are designed so that „ (...) they give an ‘internal purpose’ and are (...) „associated with the topics being discussed” (Hasselgreen 2004: 47).





# As researchers, teachers, materials' writers:

We are aware of the strong **washback effect** of any assessment or testing, either internal or external, on the teaching practice in schools and on the learners' self-esteem and confidence.

We recognize the fact that reporting on the assessment results should be:

- ethical (research - anonymity)
- intelligible/ informative for teachers
- formative for learners



## Task usefulness (Bachman and Palmer, 1996)

Ensuring that assessment tasks and procedures provide 'useful evidence'.

Every child receives a score that most closely represents his or her abilities.

About assessment tasks. To what extent:

1. are the results reliable? (another examiner – same results)
2. is there construct validity? (are the interpretations meaningful and appropriate)
3. is the task authentic? (reflects language use in the classroom)
4. is the task interactive? (is the child's language ability involved in doing the task)
5. is the assessment practical? (sufficient resources for the task to work)
6. Is the impact of assessment positive? (on the learners, teachers, society)



# Testing young language learners



## Testing young learners

Testing YL has manifold challenges (Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic. 2011) :

-low proficiency levels need to be defined and described along a continuum in small steps to document relatively slow development (CEFR often insufficient)

-parents, teachers and children need to know they are making progress

-four language skills cannot be tested from the beginning (typical for older learners)

-assessment may impact YL's attitudes, motivation and anxiety more than in the case of older learners



# Large scale standardized testing – McKay's (2006) concern



## Large scale standardized testing – McKay's (2006) concern

- no immediate feedback for learning (teachers and students)
- it is best to assess language use ability in a natural setting
- YL mature at different rates – progress best monitored with reference to broadly expected developmental norms, not comparison with others
- discrete-point items don't reflect the construct we want to assess – language use.
- children may not give the test necessary attention – if unfamiliar with the procedure
- children cannot concentrate for very long - it may affect the score



# Challenges in ELLiE study

- Choice of tasks that are useful (Palmer and Bachman, 1996):
  - elicit language and reflect teaching procedures (few 'listen and do' or interactive tasks in class, focus on repeating)
  - are familiar to children and reduce the element of novelty in the test (McKay, 2006).
- Developmental/ longitudinal (to capture growth):
  - listening - anchoring items last only for a few years,
  - speaking - interactive skills at the age of 6-7?
- Administrative/ procedural (procedure resembling classroom conditions)



# Experiences used in a new project -

„Teaching and learning FL in Polish primary schools”

- plan a ‘cognitive lab’ stage
- commission artists available for the period of test-item development and post-pilot revisions (content through picture)
- administer the pilot stage a few months before the main test
- ensure the procedure is transparent to children
- include individual interviews – an interviewer is a familiar person
- control contextual variables and follow development longitudinally





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**Enjoy the seminar!**

**„Badanie jakości i efektywności edukacji oraz instytucjonalizacja zaplecza badawczego”**

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