



**HOW LTAU RATES
TRANSLATION
EXAMS**

Topics

- ILR-based FBI Translation Exams (TEs)
 - Description
 - Format
 - Rating
- Demonstration

ILR-Based Tests

- The ILR SLDs prescribe the tasks/texts appropriate for each level in a given language skill.
- Tasks/texts become more challenging as the levels progress from lower to higher on the 0 to 5 scale.
- ILR-based tests use the prescribed tasks/texts as stimuli for examinee production.
- An ILR score on the 0 to 5 ILR scale is assigned to match the highest level at which the examinee proves able to handle successfully the prescribed tasks/tests for that level.
- ILR scores are not based on “discrete points,” meaning that errors are not subtracted from a total number of points or that only a certain number of errors is allowed.

TE Description

- 4 short passages/4 topics
- All passages are authentic
- Difficulty levels: 2, 2+, 3, 4
- Passages represent the text difficulty assigned to that level in the ILR Skill Level Descriptions *for translation performance*
- 2 parallel forms
- Test construct was validated

Level 2: Text Characteristics

- **CONTENT:** straightforward narration, description, directions, instructions, simple explanation
- **PURPOSE:** to convey concrete information
- **LEXICON:** everyday usage; a minimum of words with more than one meaning
- **STRUCTURES:** basic, high-frequency complex, with few modifiers, without unusual stylistic devices

Level 2+: Text Characteristics

- CONTENT: more than direct exposition, including judgments and opinion, but no complicated concepts
- PURPOSE: to convey information
- LEXICON: no figurative language, but some terms may reflect source language conventions
- STRUCTURES: adjectives and adverbs, some embedded clauses, but syntax is generally uncomplicated

Level 3: Text Characteristics

- CONTENT: not only facts but abstract concepts
- PURPOSE: varied, including discussion, argumentation, evaluation of options, value judgments of a personal or institutional kind
- LEXICON: professional terminology, some culture-specific terms
- STRUCTURES: complex syntax, stylistic devices, nuanced expressions

Level 4: Text Characteristics

- CONTENT: highly abstract and idiomatic texts, including formal and informal writing
- PURPOSE: varied, such as argumentation and commentary reflecting a specific culture
- LEXICON: professional, colloquial, subtle, nuanced
- STRUCTURES: less frequent and highly complex, requiring decoding, item analysis

TE: Test Construct

- Test items in ILR-based tests are presented following the difficulty progression prescribed in the ILR SLD for Translation Performance.
- The TE follows that progression by using texts at difficulty levels 2, 2+, 3, and 4.
- Ideally, the examinee's performance follows that progression, e.g., typically, an examinee not able to translate successfully a Level 2 passage should not be able to translate a Level 4 passage successfully.
- The initial 15 TEs were subject to a study that validated the TE construct.

Validity Information

Original 15 TEs:

- Face validity
 - Passages submitted from authentic FBI assignments, not newspaper articles or other published sources
- Content validity
 - Range of topics and text difficulties represents typical FBI translator work
- Concurrent validity
 - No current valid translation exams
- Bias
 - Age, gender, and primary language showed no significant affect ($p < .05$) on test outcome.

Holistic Rating

Rating is based on the entirety of the examinee's production as compared to a set standard.

Two Independent Raters



Two independent raters

- Qualifications:
 - Preferably not proficient in the source language in order to:
 - replicate the knowledge of the end user
 - employ the Answer Keys as sole references
 - Must receive an ILR 3+ score on an English writing test
 - Attend a week-long training

Raters' Tools

- Idiomatic Answer Key: acceptable idiomatic translation of passage
- Literal (word-by-word) rendering of the source text
- Error Notation Key
 - Expression errors
 - Accuracy errors
- Definition of a “successful translation” for each level matching the ILR level
- A Profile Chart based on previous ratings

Rating the TEs

- Each passage is examined separately.
 - Errors are labeled according to error notation keys
 - Rater decides whether the examinee has produced a successful translation depending on whether it is consistent with the ILR description for that level.
- The final score is *not* based on the number of errors, but on whether the examinee's entire production has met the standard.
- The final score corresponds to the highest level passage that was successfully translated.

Steps to Rating (1)

1. Read examinee's translation of Passage #1
2. Note and label expression errors using the Error Notation Key for Expression
3. Review examinee's production for accuracy labeling errors according to the Error Notation Key for Accuracy
4. Label passage one according to the whether it matches the appropriate definition of a successful translation

Steps to Rating (2)

- 5. Repeat process for all passages that are at least 50% translated
- 6. Consult Profile Chart
- 7. Read the ILR Skill Level Description to establish a preliminary level
- 8. Read levels above and below
- 9. Apply ILR level to the complete test

Error Notation Key - Expression

- GR = Grammar
- SP = Spelling
- C/P Capitalization/Punctuation
- AWK = awkward
- RT = Register/Tone
- Cross Labeling (SP=MT)

Rating TEs

Expression considerations:

- Grammar errors that impact accuracy are noted and marked as mistranslations by cross labeling; e.g., SP = MT
- Grammar errors that do not impact accuracy are acceptable at the 2/2+ levels, less so at level 3 and unacceptable at level 4.

Error Notation Key - Accuracy

- MT = Mistranslation
- PMT = Partial mistranslation
- OM = Omission
- Add = Addition
- WC = Word Choice
- RT = Register/Tone
- DIST = Distortion
- UI = Unintelligible

Rating TEs

Emphasis is on accuracy

Mistranslations of the following items are considered most serious:

- Numbers (amounts, quantities)
- Directions (north, south, left, right)
- Time and Dates (accounting for source language conventions)
- Identification of persons and relationships (brother, nephew, etc.)
- Location (place names)
- Verb tense (if the error impacts accuracy)

Reviewing the Accuracy of the Translation

Decide the degree to which the translation of each passage matches the definition of a Successful Translation:

- SM - Successful Translation
- MM - Mostly matches
- IM - Intermittently matches
- RM - Rarely matches
- NT - Not translated (less than 50% of passage)

A Successful Translation

- Level 2
 - The translation conveys the meaning accurately, even though expression may be faulty, reflecting the word order and structure of the source language. Lexical choices may be awkward. Minor errors, omissions and/or additions do not impact negatively on *overall accuracy*.

A Successful Translation

- Level 2+
 - The translation reflects *some use of congruity judgment* and conveys the meaning accurately, even though expression may be faulty reflecting the word order and structure of the source language. Lexical choices may be awkward. Minor errors are permissible to include omissions and additions as long as they do not impact negatively on *key points or main ideas*.

A Successful Translation

- Level 3
 - The translation reflects *good use of congruity judgment* and conveys the meaning accurately. Expression *generally adheres to target language norms*, to include word order, structure and lexical choice. Some errors are permissible, to include omissions and/or additions if they rarely obscure meaning or do not negatively impact key points, main ideas *or important implications and nuances*.

A Successful Translation

- Passage 4
 - The translation reflects superior use of congruity judgment and conveys the meaning accurately.
Expression reflects native usage and consistent control of target language norms and conventions to include word order, structure, lexical choice, style and tone. Some errors are permissible to include omissions and/or additions as long as they do not negatively impact key points, main ideas, or important implications and nuances.

Sample Scores

Passage level				Possible Final score
2	2+	3	4	
SM	SM	MM	IM	2+/3
SM	IM	IM	NT	2
IM	IM	IM	IM	1+/2
MM	MM	IM	RM	2

Criterion

ILR Skill Level Descriptions
for *Translation Performance*

Raters Disagree



One Certifier



Certifier decides



Level 2 Passage

Answer Key

At approximately 1:30 p.m., day before yesterday, an explosion occurred in a warehouse near the train station. The explosion completely destroyed the warehouse. No one was in the building at the time, but seven people were injured by debris. All were taken to the hospital. Their injuries are not life threatening. Officials believe that the explosion was likely due to a gas leak and was not an act of terrorism. A thorough investigation will be conducted.

Examinee

An explosion happened day before yesterday at 1:30 p.m. in a storage building near the train stop. It destroyed the storage building completely. No one was inside, but some people were hurt by the rubbish and were sent to the hospital. The injuries did not threaten their lives. It is thought that the explosion was the result of escaping gas, not terrorists. Authorities will investigate.

Level 2+ passage

Answer Key

You may not engage in a financial transaction using confidential information or allow the use of such information to further your private interests or those of a third party. Non-public information is information you gain on the job and which has not been made available to the general public and is not authorized to be made available on request. There are also statutory prohibitions on the misuse of information involving national security.

Examinee

You should not take part in financial transactions using reserved information to promote your personal interests or those of a third. Reserved information is that which you got in your work and is not available to the public in general and cannot be given to answer a request. There are statutes that prohibit the incorrect use of information about national security.

Level 3 Passage

Answer Key

The focus of the debate surrounding the draft of the new fishing law is Title III, which addresses the fundamental issue of access to the fishing industry. In this regard the legal initiative guarantees freedom of fishing and stipulates that the only requirement for carrying out such activities is prior registration with the National Fishing Registry. It further specifies that if a fishing ground has become fully commercialized, it can be declared permanently subject to the Fishing License Bureau, at which time regulations regarding free fishing will cease to be in effect, and fishing licenses will be assigned according to a pre-established procedure to those who have routinely fished the species in question.

Examinee

The center of attention of the discussion in the new fishing law is Title II which deals with the basic issue of admission to the fishing business. The legal initiative establishes that there will be freedom to fish and the only requisite to develop these activities will be the previous inscription in a National Fishing Register. And then it adds that if a fishing zone would have reached a state of full exploitation, it can be declared permanently subject to the Regimen of Fishing Licenses, with which in this respect remains finished the regimen of freedom to fish, proceeding to assign fishing licenses, according to a method established before this to whom have habitually exploited the species in question.

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