



Cambridge Research Update

A quarterly digest from Cambridge ESOL

No 5, Quarter II 2010



Dr Nick Saville

Linking exams to frameworks

While many organisations claim their assessment is mapped to a framework such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it is not always transparent how this is done, or whether the assessments themselves are based on well-defined constructs. Cambridge ESOL is publishing four Construct Volumes in its *Studies in Language Testing (SiLT)* series, taking a detailed look at our approach to this area of validation. Two volumes are already published, Vol. 26, *Examining Writing*, and Vol. 29 *Examining Reading*. Both focus on one language skill and how frameworks are used to validate the assessment of that skill. They also provide accessible and systematic descriptions of the key criteria differentiating one proficiency level from another. Volumes scheduled for publication in 2011 include *Examining Speaking* and *Examining Listening*. A fifth volume, Vol. 33 *Aligning Tests with the CEFR*, features a selection of case studies from a number of organisations' alignment projects which were originally presented at the Cambridge Colloquium in 2007. Find out more at: www.CambridgeESOL.org/SiLT

Events and presentations

Recent Cambridge ESOL presentations at conferences and other educational events.

Event	Date	Location	Speaker	Subject
European Association for Language Testing and Assessment	June 2010	The Hague, The Netherlands	Evelina Galaczi	Using statistics and expert judgement in rater training/standardisation materials
Teaching and Learning Corpora Conference	June 2010	Brno, Czech Republic	Angeliki Salamoura & Evelina Galaczi	Using learner corpora to illustrate the CEFR levels: findings from the English Profile Programme
Council of Europe	June 2010	Brussels, Belgium	Evelina Galaczi & Sharon Jordan	Computer-based assessment of speaking
ACTFL CEFR Alignment Conference	June 2010	Leipzig	Nick Saville	Opening plenary: The CEFR: An evolving framework of reference
ACTFL CEFR Alignment Conference	June 2010	Leipzig	Angeliki Salamoura	CEFR Familiarization: An introduction to the scale and how to use it to evaluate speaking proficiency
International Test Commission	July 2010	Hong Kong	Ardeshir Geranpayeh	International trends in test security

Validity

Reliability of computer-based BULATS put to test

The reliability of the computer-based version of *Business Language Testing Service (BULATS)* was scrutinised in a recent study by Laura Cope. The performance of 1,407 candidates who took the English variant of computer-based BULATS Version 6.1 in 2006 was analysed using a Rasch reliability estimate. Not only did this show a very high rate of reliability, with the reliability coefficient for the overall test being 0.94, but analysis of subsets of candidates also showed interesting results.

One of the concerns around the reliability of computer-based tests lies in the use of adaptive algorithms to create tests that become progressively harder or easier until the candidate's level is established.

This can lead to candidates of different abilities completing differing numbers of items.

Cont.

For a computer-based test to be reliable, it needs to perform accurately for higher-performing candidates who answer more items correctly and complete the test by answering fewer items. Dividing candidates into subsets (those who had completed more than 57 items and those who had completed fewer) showed that the mean abilities and standard deviations were very close. This indicates that answering fewer items does not compromise the validity of a candidate's score.

CB BULATS: Examining the reliability of a computer-based test, was published in Research Notes: issue 38, November 2009. It can be downloaded from: www.CambridgeESOL.org/rs_notes

Putting the case for English for Special Purposes in the International Legal English Certificate

The *International Legal English Certificate (ILEC)* was introduced in 2006 to provide a test of English in international legal contexts. Ensuring the validity of tests featuring English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requires a careful balance: the test must contain some coverage of the subject content to provide a test of communicative language ability in a specific context, but must not be so heavily embedded in subject content that successful performance on the test depends predominantly on knowledge of the subject, rather than language ability. Evelina D. Galaczi and Ivana Vidaković have used the example of the *ILEC* speaking test to show how the law-related content embedded in the test enhances context validity, while the purpose, discourse mode and functions underpinning the range of tasks ensure that the test remains one of English and not legal knowledge.

Testing Legal English: Insights from the International Legal English Test is published in Professional and Academic English, the Journal of the IATEFL English for Specific Purposes Special Interest Group, Winter 2009 - Spring 2010 Issue 35. Garnet Education, Reading.

Frameworks

Mapping assessment criteria to the CEFR

A recent article has shown how the CEFR can be used in early development stages of new exams. *Using the CEFR to Inform Assessment Criteria Development for Online BULATS Speaking and Writing*, gives an example of how the CEFR was integrated into performance assessment criteria during the development of online speaking and writing tests for *BULATS*. When the tests were being constructed, new performance scales were developed to cover the full spectrum of the CEFR, using descriptors which were mapped to the CEFR levels. This was then assessed by an independent consultant. Each phrase from the *BULATS* descriptors was matched against CEFR descriptors for each level and skill. This led to further fine-tuning of the *BULATS* descriptors so that phrasing of the descriptors permitted a closer alignment with the CEFR. The article gives a full description of the CEFR grids and subscales used for the mapping process.

This article, written by Lucy Chambers, can be found in Research Notes 38, November 2009. It can be downloaded from: www.CambridgeESOL.org/rs_notes

Partnerships

Proceedings of ALTE 2008 now available

In 2008 the University of Cambridge was host to the 3rd international conference of the Association of Language Testers in Europe. The subject, *The Social and Educational Impact of Assessment*, was timely – not just because 2008 was the International Year of Languages, but because of the increasing role that language was playing in debates on migration, citizenship and employment. ALTE 2008 was one of the largest language testing conferences ever held, with over 150 papers presented. This important event has now been officially recorded in the *SiLT* series of volumes. *SiLT Vol. 31* features a full listing of all the presentations made at ALTE 2008 and 20 edited papers based on key presentations.

Find out more about the Studies in Language Testing series at: www.CambridgeESOL.org/SiLT