



# Cambridge Research Update

*A quarterly digest from Cambridge ESOL*

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## Validity

### *Learner corpora and LSP*

*Exploring unity and diversity within non-native English using learner corpora* takes a look at the relatively recent development of learner corpora, with its implications for studying Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). Using the Cambridge Learner Corpus and the International Corpus of Learner English, some of their key uses to date are examined. Corpora such as these are being used to investigate various phenomena related to LSP using contrastive and other approaches, for example providing insights into the acquisition of the lexicon and exploring domain-specific lexical categories. The unifying features of learner corpora and the diverse language domains which they represent are explored, together with a view of how effective they have been in informing LSP research.

***Fiona Barker presented her plenary paper at GERAS 2009, Rennes in March: for further information, visit: <http://www2.scelva.univ-rennes1.fr/geras2009/anglais/index.htm>***

### *What do teachers need to know?*

Cambridge ESOL's assessments for teachers have evolved over the years to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse professional community. The need for examinations relevant to the evolving needs of the teaching profession has led to the TKT suite of tests, which comprise five modules each with a focus on a different aspect of teaching knowledge. A paper by Evelina Galaczi and Mick Ashton looks at the conception and development of TKT, taking an overview of how educational reforms brought about a need for flexibility and accessibility in assessments for teachers. The paper outlines the knowledge-for-teaching constructs underlying the TKT suite, the development phase of the exam modules and also findings from the test's trialling/validation phase.

***Developing tests for teachers: Insights from the TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) suite of examinations was presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics conference 2009, Colorado in March.***

### *Chinese learners' use of verb+noun forms*

*Creativity in the use of verb + noun combinations by Chinese learners of English* (Cross and Papp 2008), examines difference between Chinese L2 learners of English and European counterparts. Evidence indicates that Chinese students' poor use of verb+noun forms may be partially due to L1 and cultural factors, but also seem to point to issues in teaching methodology.

***This paper can be found in the volume: Gilquin, G., Sz. Papp, and M.B. Díez Bedmar (Eds.) (2008) Linking up Contrastive and Learner Corpus Research. Language and Computers – Studies in Practical Linguistics Volume 66. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.***

## Frameworks

### *Frameworks for specific purposes*

A recent paper by Ivana Vidaković and Hugh Bateman examines how frameworks for test development and validation that take account of the social environment can be used to test Speaking skills in English for Specific Purposes tests. The International Legal English Certificate (ILEC) has been developed for prospective law students and legal professionals. The paper outlines the quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in the validation of the scales for ILEC and also examines other means of ensuring scoring validity.

***ILEC: testing Speaking in a legal context was presented at the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes conference in April.***

## Impact

### *Positive dimension of washback*

A paper delivered at TESOL Arabia in March examines the social and educational consequences of assessment with the concept of washback (as the effect of testing on teaching and learning). Hanan Khalifa's paper *Assessment as washback tool: beneficial or harmful?* examines the concept of washback as perceived by Watanabe and explores how it can be viewed on a continuum moving from negative through neutral and into a positive

dimension, presenting washback as an integral part of a framework for developing and validating tests. [www.tesolarabia.org/conference/](http://www.tesolarabia.org/conference/)

### **Research Notes 35 focuses on impact**

Research Notes 35 is the second of two issues continuing the theme of the ALTE 2008 conference – the social and educational impact of language assessment – and it contains contributions from Cambridge ESOL staff and external authors. The first three articles discuss the concept of washback: Khaled El-ebyary reports on an study of how washback is linked to formative assessment; Dina Tsagari investigates the washback effect of the First Certificate in English on teaching methods and contents and participants' attitudes in private language schools in Greece; finally Nkechi Christopher describes the position of English language assessment in Nigeria within the wider context of education. The washback effects of tests of other languages in various contexts is explored in the next two articles: Waldemar Martyniuk examines the impact of the State Certificates in Polish as a Foreign Language on its stakeholders, while Anne Gallagher and Siuán Ní Mhaonaigh explore the social impact of tests of Irish for adults. Relating assessment to real-world issues is the focus of Szilvia Papp and Martin Robinson's report on using Cambridge ESOL's Skills for Life tests to exemplify a framework for assessing language proficiency for migration. The final article considers the impact of developing criteria for domain-specific language tests. Ivana Vidakovic and Evelina Galaczi explore how the rating scale for the International Legal English Certificate (ILEC) speaking test was revised to promote fairness.

**Research Notes 35 is available from [www.CambridgeESOL.org/researchnotes](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/researchnotes)**

## **Partnerships**

### **English Profile enters new phase**

The seventh English Profile Seminar: *Criteria Features Towards Reference Level Descriptions of English* took place at Hughes Hall, Cambridge in February. Presentation and discussion sessions updated work on the EP focus areas, research strands and projects, while the seminar achieved agreement among the partners on ways forward to a new phase of activity. This will include a previously unpublished work by John Trim on the Breakthrough (A1) level of language proficiency.

**A full report can be found on the English Profile website: [www.englishprofile.org](http://www.englishprofile.org)**

### **Assessment literacy**

A recent paper presented by Lynda Taylor, at the AAAL conference, Colorado in March, examines how the core knowledge, skills and experience needed for good quality assessment could be shared more widely by promoting a greater understanding of assessment principles and practice within education and society. The role of the language testing and assessment community, professional associations, academic institutions and commercial organisations in developing 'assessment literacy' is considered, as is the contribution of published materials and other types of training resource.

**A version of Test wiseness reconceptualised: developing 'assessment literacy' within the applied linguistics community will appear in the 2009 Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, published by CUP**

### **Collaborative approach to item development**

SurveyLang, the consortium led by Cambridge ESOL to deliver the European Survey on Language Competences, has submitted its Interim Report to the European Commission, completing a major milestone for the project. The report provides a complete overview of project tasks and activities performed to date and the language test development section focuses on how the results of a recent pilot study will feed into the development of the final testing instruments for use in the field trial in 2010 and in the main survey in 2011. A key focus of the pilot was on developing a collaborative approach to item development to ensure consistency and quality control across the English, French, German, Italian and Spanish assessments. **More information about SurveyLang can be found at: [www.SurveyLang.org](http://www.SurveyLang.org)**

### **36<sup>th</sup> ALTE and conference day**

ALTE's 36th annual meeting was hosted by the Xunta de Galicia, Spain, in April. As in previous years, the first two days of meetings were for ALTE members and affiliates, and the final day was an open conference. Featured speakers included Professor Alan Davies, University of Edinburgh and Leonard Orban, EU Commissioner for Multilingualism. Dr Angeliki Salamoura, Cambridge ESOL and Cecilie Carlson, University of Bergen, presented two workshops: *Linking a learner corpus to the CEFR – challenges and advantages* at this event.

**Further information from [www.alte.org](http://www.alte.org)**