



Cambridge Research Update

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Validity

Validating pre-entry German test

Ardeshir Geranpayeh and Sibylle Bolton (Goethe Institut) have written about the work carried out on validating the German Placement Test, a joint product of the Goethe-Institut and Cambridge ESOL, and relating it to the Common European Framework of Reference. The statistics reported for both computer-based and paper-based versions of the test indicate the accuracy of the placement test for its intended purpose – measuring German language proficiency prior to taking Goethe-Institut's language course. The research also indicated that an adaptive computer-based test could complement the paper-based test and provide a very accurate picture of a candidate's language ability while requiring only one test to be administered.

Validating a worldwide placement test for German, is published in Research Notes 36, May 2009.

Developing 'For Schools' exam materials

Cambridge ESOL has recently launched versions of the Key English Test and the Preliminary English Test with content developed for younger learners: KET for Schools and PET for Schools.

Considerable work has been carried out to ensure that while the content of the exams differs from KET and PET, they are pitched at exactly the same linguistic levels as the original versions and continue to reflect the corresponding CEFR levels (A2, B1). Part of the process of the production of these new exams included the development of Can Do statements appropriate to the 11-14 age group. Szilvia Papp describes how developing the Can Do statements for 11-14 year olds required surveying descriptions of the development and skills profiles of language learners of that age group and making comparisons with those of other age groups. This information was cross-referred to the CEFR levels with respect to the relevance to that age group of the situations, themes, topics and notions used. A total of 36 statements were developed to be trialled using self-assessment data from a sample of 827 candidates in the target age group. The responses

from these samples, matched against the candidates' actual performance in the exam, were able to validate the 36 Can Do statements for use in the KET and PET for Schools handbooks. Ed Hackett describes how existing KET and PET exam materials were adapted for younger learners. A small number of the functions, notions or topics used in KET and PET were found to be inappropriate for the younger candidates who are increasingly taking the exams. While the topics themselves were not necessarily unsuitable, a particular aspect of a topic might have an adult focus. For example: we would not expect younger candidates to pay the bills in restaurants or arrange dinner parties, but they will probably have experience of buying drinks and snacks, and be able to express their likes, dislikes and preferences. The article outlines how experienced item writers were commissioned to develop appropriate materials for pretesting and trialling ahead of test construction and question paper preparation activities. Objective tasks were pretested alongside anchor tasks common to both exam versions to ensure comparability in the difficulty of the two formats.

Development of Can Do statements for KET and PET for Schools, and Adapting testing materials for younger learners: Developing KET and PET for Schools exams are both published in Research Notes 36, May 2009.

Developing rating scales for speaking

Cambridge ESOL made a number of presentations at the recent Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC) event in Denver, Colorado in March 2009. One of those, *The role of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the development of rating scales for speaking*, presented by Evelina Galaczi, outlined the revision of Cambridge ESOL's rating scales for Speaking. The presentation argued for the need for triangulation of analytic approaches, in line with the CEFR, which advocates the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the design of performance assessment scales.

Frameworks

Formative assessment and the Common European Framework

The classroom and the Common European Framework: towards a model for formative assessment, by Neil Jones, considers the CEFR's impact on learning, teaching and assessment, through creating a framework of language ability that (through the use of tools such as Can Do statements) can describe language ability in terms which can exist beyond the classroom and have currency in the wider world.

Published in Research Notes 36, May 2009.

Examples of CEFR speaking levels online

The Cambridge ESOL website now has a page featuring video clips showing the performance of students taking the speaking test section of Cambridge ESOL exams at the following levels:

- Key English Test – A2
- Preliminary English Test – B1
- First Certificate in English – B2
- Certificate in Advanced English – C1
- Certificate of Proficiency in English – C2.

The video clips have been carefully selected to represent a typical performance at each level. Commentaries describe the performances at each level and explain how that performance makes it typical of that particular CEFR level. The page also has an overview of the development of the project, which will be of use to researchers.

The video clips can be found at:

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/what-we-do/research/speaking-performances.html>

Impact

Impact on immigration

Among papers Cambridge ESOL presented at the LTRC event in Denver, two had relevance to the impact of language testing on immigration: Nick Saville was one of the organisers and presenters of the symposium, *Investigating the impact of assessment for migration purposes*. Secondly, language learning and citizenship were also the focus of *Skills for Life: a micro-level impact study of the tests*, presented by Nick Saville and Szilvia Papp. Their paper reported on an impact study focusing on test takers who have taken the Cambridge ESOL Skills for Life tests in the context of applying for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) or citizenship in the UK.

Blended learning impact on materials

Linking learning and assessment: Cambridge ESOL's blended learning approach, by Reinhard Tenberg, considers the concept of blended learning and its impact on the provision of support materials and courses using the example of the new Cambridge Financial English course.

Published in Research Notes 36, May 2009.

Positive impact of blended learning

A study examining a new blended learning English course held at an Italian university has shown it to have a beneficial effect on both teachers and learners.

The impact study of the course developed for Ferrara University by Cambridge ESOL used interviews and questionnaires from teaching staff, students and administrators and also included direct observation of teaching.

The majority of students said that the course had helped them improve their English, with more than 77% saying they had improved 'a lot' or 'quite a lot', and 85% agreeing that the course had helped them self-assess their progress.

The teachers said it had been an enjoyable experience for both themselves and their students, but emphasised that the face-to-face element of the course was essential.

The B1 Online Blended Learning Course Impact Study: University of Ferrara, by Roger Hawkey and Nick Beresford-Knox, was published in Research Notes 36, May 2009.

Partnerships

ALTE launches new website

The ALTE website has been given a new look with clearer navigation and more news items and information about ALTE's work. The events section has details of forthcoming ALTE conferences, language testing courses and other activities.

www.ALTE.org

New English Profile resources online

The new English Profile website now has a range of additional features, including video clips of English Profile presentations at the recent IATEFL conference and the trial version of the English Profile wordlist. The wordlist will create an index of typical English lexis and word usage for each of the six levels of the CEFR.

www.EnglishProfile.org